Meaning of God in Process Perspective

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I. Perspective

Meaningfulness of any theological statement for modern man is basically dependent upon the adequacy and contemporaneity of the conceptual framework used in formulating the giveness of faith. A conceptuality adequate enough to analyse, interpret and articulate the content of faith is inevitable for any relevant and meaningful theology. Hence every theologian is necessarily dependent upon some philosophy for conceptualizing his understanding of the New Testament message. No theologizing can really be adequate unless it is framed under the guidance of a precise philosophical clarification. For, the moment 'one starts to think about the meaning of the biblical symbols one is already in the midst of ontological problems'.[1]

· Attempts to divorce theology from philosophical thought— forms and conceptual models have led theologians into dead-ends in speaking of God. The radical theologies that deny the reality of God in our decade are partly due to the sharp distinction between theology and philosophical perspectives or models made by Karl Barth who claimed that 'even if we only lend our little finger to natural theology, there necessarily follows the denial of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ'.[2]

However, the moratorium on speaking of God declared by some in the late '60s has made clear at least two things:

(1) A Christian theology without a metaphysical or conceptual model is an illusion and will soon lead to a dead-end. Paul van Buren, who affirmed the cognitive meaninglessness of 'God-talk' a few years back, has in his *Theological Explorations* argued that every theology, at least in broad outlines, is a particular metaphysics and that it has its own *View of reality* and 'root metaphor'.[3] Of course, herein metaphysics is understood basically as the conceptual vision, model, of the world into

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[1] P. Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*, Chicago, 1955, p. 83.
[2] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics II:1*, Edinburgh, 1957, p. 173.
[3] P. van Buren, *Theological Explorations*, London, 1968, p. 65.

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which we are to fit all our experience together. As van Buren himself defines metaphysics, it is not some sort of super science which might provide us with new information about the universe or reality, but rather ' every metaphysics is a proposal, an invitation to see what we already know in a particular way '.[4] It is the needed ' grand hypothesis which gives order and meaning to the separate events of our lives '.[5] The question, therefore, is no longer whether a metaphysical model is necessary or not, but rather whether a particular conceptual vision is adequate and appropriate or not.

(2) Secondly, the new theologies have singularly exposed the utter inadequacy of the classical conceptual models of Plato and Aristotle that Christian theology has been using since the days of the early Greek apologists. The chief defining characteristics of classical metaphysics has been ' its separation of what is given in our experience into two quite different kinds of reality—one the Absolute, Unchangeable, Immutable and Eternal and the other relative, temporal, changing and imperfect. It is the metaphysical model that has been utilized by almost all of traditional theology in varied ways and degrees. But as van Buren says, the world in which we live is now ' in the late stages of a major socio-psychological shift '[6] that affects all our values, attitudes and patterns of thought. Van Buren rightly labels the change, ' The Dissolution of the Absolutes '.[7] The absolutistic world view is passing away and new patterns of thought, dynamic and processive, are replacing the old static habits of thought.

At this point in the history of man, if a doctrine of God has to have any meaning and relevance it should be formulated in terms of philosophic models, or conceptual forms born out of the contemporary experience of the world. One such conceptual vision is offered by the Process philosophy of A. N. Whitehead. A doctrine of God formulated in terms of the Whiteheadian conceptual vision can be relevant and meaningful for modern man.

II. Presupposition of Process Theology

Process Theology uses basically the conceptual model presented by the process philosophy of A. N. Whitehead. But major aspects of this vision of reality is shared by men like Teilhard de Chardin. A few traits of process categories can be seen even in the ' hope ' philosophy of Ernst Bloch. The scope of this paper will not allow me to bring out many of the rich categories in process philosophy that can be meaningfully utilized in a Christian

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[5] D. Emmet, quoted in B. Murchland (ed.), *The Meaning of the Death of God*, New York, 1967, p. 117.
[6] van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
[7] *Ibid.*

doctrine of God. I shall choose only five motifs that I consider to be the cornerstones of a process vision of reality.

(i) *A unitary view of the world:* Process theology affirms what Daniel Williams calls a 'one order theory of the world'[8], i.e., the view that the world is an integrated and inter-related web of spatio-temporal processes. This integrated view of reality strikes at the very root of the age-old problem of a mind-matter and natural-supernatural dualism. Every entity in the world is included in a single order of happenings. There is no exception, not even God. The philosopher Whitehead says:

> 'God is an actual entity and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. The final facts are all alike . . .'.[9]

Even though there are distinguishable and qualitative differences and varied ranks of importance among the actual entities, they can all be spoken of alike in many ways. Whitehead elsewhere adds that God as an actual entity must fulfil all metaphysical principles:

> In the first place, God is not treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.[10]

We are here calling for a doctrine of God in which genuine 'congruity' between God and his world is affirmed rather than a 'wholly-otherness' as in traditional theology.

This insight has an important theological consequence. For, John Cobb finds that the

> 'emphasis on the "wholly-otherness" of God invites the question whether the word "God" can have any meaning whatsoever'.[11]

If so, he further suggests that only some kind of 'univocal' affirmation of God' might bring new cognitive meaning of God for modern man. It is a manner of speaking about God as the 'Chief exemplification of all,' rather than 'the wholly-other' and 'infinite qualitative distinction' that can make God-talk meaningful again.

(ii) *All entities are di-polar:* While mind-matter dualism is denied by process conceptuality, all entities are conceived to be 'di-polar' in nature. Whitehead states that his concept of di-polar reality embodies a protest against the bifurcation of nature.

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[8] D. D. Williams, 'Christianity and Naturalism' in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XII (May 1959), p. 49.
[9] A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 28.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 521.
[11] J. B. Cobb, 'Speaking of God' in *Religion and Life*, XXXVI (1967), p. 30.

It embodies more than that: its protest is against the bifurcation of actualities.[12]

Dr. S. Wright, a biologist, also suggests that if mind and matter are coextensive, they may be looked upon as two aspects of the same reality.[13] Thus mind, matter, organic cells and inorganic molecules, in brief everything in the universe, can be said to be ultimately composed of bi-polar dimensions of reality. This means that there is nothing that can be classified as dead brute matter. Nor is there any that can be called only unquantifiably mental or only ' measurably material '. But the universe in this perspective is ' instinct with life in some form or another since notion of life (mind) and physical nature (matter) involve each other '.[14] Logical validity of the di-polar notion of all entities including God is validated in terms of the ' polar principle ' of Morris Cohen, the Logician. Cohen says in his *Preface to Logic* that ' the law of contradiction does not bar the presence of contrary determinations in the same entity, but only requires ... a distinction of aspects ... in which the contraries hold ... We must be on our guard against the universal tendency to simplify situations and to analyse them in terms of only one of such contrary tendencies '.[15]

This motif of di-polarity is a great conceptual tool in formulating an adequate and meaningful doctrine of God today. Traditional theology has conceived of God as simple, even absolutely simple, substance ; and tended to contrast the permanence of God with the flux of the universe. This vicious separation of the flux from the permanence has led to the concept of God as entirely static, self-contained and only in external relationship to the world. But process thought conceives of God in terms more complex than a mere opposition between change and permanence. Through its notion of di-polarity, it deals squarely with the problem of how the two could be related. The relevance of this motif for a modern doctrine of God is indicated later on in the paper.

(iii) *Reality as ' becoming ' and dynamic:* Process theology holds that dynamism and process are essential aspects of reality. In the place of the traditional metaphysical model that reigned ever since Aristotle, in which every entity consists of an ' Unchanging substance ' with ' changing attributes ', and also in the place of the atomist's view of reality as particles unchanging and only externally rearranged, process thought portrays reality as a continuous process of becoming. In this perspective, ' everywhere some process of self-realization which grows out of

[12] Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 443.
[13] Quoted by P. N. Hamilton, *The Living God and the Modern World*, Philadelphia, 1967, p. 55.
[14] L. V. Rajagopal, *The Philosophy of A. N. Whitehead*, Mysore, 1968, p. 221.
[15] Quoted by C. Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, New Haven, 1958.

previous processes and itself adds a new pulse of individuality and a new value to the world. Nothing that exists is passive and inert ... Reality and value lie in only emergent pulsations of individuality '.[16]

In brief, transition and activity are more fundamental than permanence and substance. As such, process conceptuality is better suited for the interpretation of the Christian message that proclaims the living God who constantly loves, acts, responds and redeems. It is often said that the Christian affirmation of God is one of active ' verbs ' rather than abstract ' nouns '. The static substance categories of traditional theology with its concern for pure and simple Being have stifled, for long, the dynamic gospel of a living God.

Teilhard de Chardin is convinced that ' evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow ' [17] and therefore has worked out a theology of becoming on a grand scale.

(iv) *Reality as organic and inter-related:* When once static substance is negated, and along with it a ' model of fixed parts associated mechanically and externally ', process thought takes up the ' model of mutually interdependent parts associated organically '. Nature, including both organic and inorganic entities, in this view, becomes a vast complex of interacting forces and therefore no longer is it the independent essence or substance of which an entity is constituted—but rather the interrelation of that entity with others that determines the nature and mode of its existence. Daniel Williams, Charles Hartshorne and others have called this view, ' a social view of reality '.[18] This feature is an asset for Christian theologians, for, in a time when there is a universal search for a genuinely social conception of man, and reality as a whole, he can speak of God in organic relation with the world. Its implications will be dealt with elsewhere in the paper.

(v) *Notion of freedom and self-determination:* Although process thought emphasizes the interdependence and organic relationship of all entities, it does not end up in a monism in which the parts are swallowed up in the whole. Every entity is a subject and it is on its own right with its own individuality. Every entity becomes what it is through a unique synthesis of all the influences on it, but it is what it is also because of its own self-determination, its own ' subjective aims '. Each has genuine freedom though the freedom cannot be conceived and exercised apart from its inter-relatedness. In other words, while all with

[16] V. Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead,* Baltimore, 1966, p. 16.
[17] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man,* p. 218.
[18] Shideler, in *Process and Divinity,* (ed. Freedman and Reese), Lasalles, 1964, p. 148.

which an entity relates provide the data for its becoming, the final outcome is determined by the subjective-determination of the becoming entity. The notion has significant implications in interpreting the problem of evil. Among many other possibilities is also the meaningful reformulation of the idea of God's omnipotence.

We have seen that in process perspective all reality is seen as belonging to a single order in such a way that from God to the smallest parton everything can be described in terms of the same categories. All entities are di-polar and becoming subject with subjective determination. They are all inter-related in such a way that one becomes (or is constituted) by its contemporary relationships, in which aspects of other entities are brought to bear upon it, and are received by the becoming entity positively or negatively. At the same time, each makes its own inevitable impact or impression on the environing entities. Meaning of God is also to be understood in terms of these perspectives.

III. Meaning of God in Process Perspective

In traditional theology God is conceived to be 'beyond' and 'wholly-other' from all that exists, and the nature of God is exempted from all metaphysical categories which apply to the individual things in the temporal order. Therefore, as the secular Philosopher, Whitehead rightly says, Christians had begun to 'look for reality behind the scene'[19] and also to 'appeal to a *Deus ex machina* who was capable of rising superior to the difficulties of metaphysics'.[20] The result of such a theology and piety is (*a*) an unreflected supernaturalism, (*b*) the assumption that God is wholly unaffected by the world and (*c*) the assumption that he is the sole determiner of all that happens in the world. These falsities are both revolting and meaningless for modern man and they can be avoided ; and a meaningful doctrine of God can be constructed if we start not with 'abstracting God from the historic universe' and not with maintaining that he is the wholly-other and self-sustaining, but rather by conceiving him as the chief exemplification. As Hartshorne repeatedly demonstrates in all his writings, it is only when God is conceived as the most pre-eminent entity, that he can be said to 'have social relations, *really* has and thus is constituted by relationships in a sense not provided by the traditional doctrine of a divine substance wholly non-relative toward the world'.[21]

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[19] Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, p. 216.
[20] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 217.
[21] Hartshorne, *op. cit.*, p. x. In process thought, within a univocal affirmation of metaphysical categories for God and all other entities, there are ways in which the distinction and uniqueness of God can be maintained ; but a detailed defence is not within the scope of this paper.

(1) *God as di-polar :* Process theology and philosophy affirm that ' the nature of God is di-polar '. Whitehead adds,

> ' He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. One side of God's ¡nature is constituted by His conceptual experience. This side of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient ... The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world and then acquires integration with the primordial side.'[22]

Thus Whitehead and the process theologians conceive God both as eternal and temporal, absolute and relative. Both the aspects are inseparably together. This vision of God exemplifies the basic Biblical tension in the experience of God both as transcendent and immanent. It can be affirmed, in brief, that while God in primordial nature moves the world *without* himself *being moved*, God in his consequent nature saves and stabilizes the world *by being moved*.

(a) *As primordial, God provides the ground of order* in the universe. God's conceptual nature is unchanged and as such he embodies within his conceptual nature the structural order of all possibilities. ' The inevitable ordering of things is conceptually realized in the nature of God.'

(b) *As primordial, God is also the ground of novelty :* From God's primordial nature comes the possibility of *novelty* in the universe, for it is from him ' each temporal concrescence receives the initial aim ' [23] from which one's becoming starts. God's unique function in the process of becoming an entity is that he elicits *novelty* by providing the ' *initial-aim* ' which is so essential for any new entity to emerge out of non-existence. Novelty is therefore possible in the world because God as the primordial being gives the necessary and specific aim for entities to become.

(c) *God's consequent nature and his absolute relatedness :* While God's primordial nature (which corresponds to an actual entity's mental pole) is absolute and changeless, by his consequent nature (that which corresponds to an entity's physical pole) God is related to the world and all happening. As with the physical pole of an entity which relates, grasps, takes into itself and in turn is affected by other entities, God also is related to the World ; he grasps all that goes on and takes them with his own consequent nature as objects and in so doing is affected by them. This is of momentous importance

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[22] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* p. 524.
[23] *Ibid.,* p. 375.

to a Christian doctrine of God. God is not, as tradi-
tional theologies have conceived, the absolute and self-
contained creator whose relation to the world is only
and always unilateral and on whom the actions, the
love, the pain and the like of his creatures have no
consequent effect. But rather, he prehends each
situation as it is presented to him, takes it into his very
self and in turn responds with his all surpassing and
supreme love.
While as primordial, God is the chief among the
causative agencies, he in his consequent nature is the
supremely consequential recipient. Thus, as S. Ogden
puts it, God is both ' the supreme effect' as well as the
' chief cause '.[24] As such, he receives and uses the
consequences of what happens in the world.

(d) *God's consequent nature and the freedom of God and
man :* Process motif of God's di-polar nature provides
genuine freedom both for God and man. There is a
genuinely real future whose issues are in no way pre-
determined or decided once and for all by an all-
sovereign omnipotent Lord. Though at each moment
the adequate providence is offered to the creature, it
can in its freedom determine the exact way in which
it would respond. Similarly, even though God is pre-
eminently related to the creatures, he is not at their
' mercy '. For he receives the creatures and responds
to them only in terms of his own subjective aim. Here
the freedom of God and man are safeguarded. At the
same time since the subjective aim of God is un-
changeable and derived from God's primordial nature,
his response will always be loving and toward unifica-
tion and harmony. D. D. Williams, commenting on
this point says,

' (God) never acts " only according to plan " for,
there is always more called for in any coherent and
loving response than any plan can include. Is it not
always the wisdom of love as we know it in ex-
perience to recognize this?' [25]

He immediately throws a challenge to those who think of
God as determining all that happens:

' Why should we drain love of its creative originality
just when we come to the doctrine of God?'

(e) *Consequent nature of God and his saving act :* Since
God in his consequent nature grasps and takes into

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[24] S. Ogden, quoted by N. Pittenger in ' The Doctrine of God in
Process Theology ' in *Religion and Life*, XL (Aug. 1971), p. 365.
[25] D. D. Williams, ' God and Time ' in *S.E. Asia Journal of Theo-
logy II* (Jan. 1961), p. 16.

himself the happenings in the world, both good and evil, and ' *prehends* ' them—makes them as his own, in accordance with his subjective aim ; and since his subjective aim is always and unchangeably toward integration and harmony, we can with Whitehead say that ' God *saves* the world by taking the world into the immediacy of his life '.[26] In other words, sin, shame, and misery as well as joys are taken by God, and in response to each of them he acts in love appropriately thus redeeming by his suffering the consequences. There is therefore suffering and tragedy in God though ultimately all are integrated with his eternal and unchanging primordial nature.

The act of salvation from ' mere wreckage ' is God's doing, and this he does by accepting every event with all its consequences into himself ; and thus ' the immediacy of sorrow and pain is transformed into an element of triumph '.[27]

There is no doubt that the biblical God, even the God of Jeremiah and Hosea, the God who acted supremely in Jesus of Nazareth is, in the words of Whitehead, ' the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands '. He adds that the

> Galilian origin of Christianity ... does not emphasize the ruling ceasar, the ruthless moralist or the unmoved mover. It slowly and quietly operates in love ... Love neither rules nor is it unmoved.[28]

It was precisely such a concept that Bonhoeffer was struggling to construct within his prison walls. In his quest he did discover that ' the Bible directs (man) to the powerlessness and suffering God ; only a suffering God can help ... the God of the Bible ... conquers power and space in the world by his weakness. This must be the starting point for our worldly Christianity '.[29] For process theology the cross is the epitome of deity, his consequent nature. Following this line of thinking, process philosopher Hartshorne concludes

> Either God really does love all being, that is, is really related to them by sympathetic union surpassing any human sympathy, or religion seems to be a vast fraud.[30]

(f) *Di-polar God and the doctrine of creation:* The conception of God in process theology has momentous significance for the doctrine of creation. But a detailed discussion is not possible within the limits of this paper. The traditional notion of God as creator is drastically

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[26] Whitehead, *ibid.,* p. 525.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 526.
[29] D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* p. 122.
[30] Hartshorne, *op. cit.,* p. 25.

modified though not totally repudiated. Process thought affirms with traditional theology that nothing new comes into being apart from God. But it will refuse to see the act of creation as an *absolute origination,* but rather will hold it to be a 'continuing response' of the creatures to God's creative activity. As C. Birch, an eminent Biologist, put it, 'The meaning of creation is the answer that the universe gives to the experience of God '.[31] This implies also that God is not the absolute originator or sole cause of all that is, and in the way that it is. For God provides the initial aim, and limits the environment of an emerging entity. While he makes himself available as the *'persuasive influence'* along with other data, the ultimate outcome is dependent upon the subjective grasping of the becoming entity.

(g) *Di-polar God and providence :* A few relevant insights of process perspective for a meaningful doctrine of providence, i.e. God's way of acting in the world—may be in order: (i) God in process categories is infinitely sensitive and supremely responsive to all that occurs, and hence he is ready and able to provide the necessary response according to the demand of each particular occasion. God's providence is situationally determined. He acts as the 'sympathetic participant' and his subjective aim is unchangeable towards love, harmony and integration. Hence there can be no arbitrariness in his act, and he can be trusted. (ii) Since God is not the 'only and absolute cause' of all that happens, the dilemma in traditional theology with respect to seeing evil either as brought about or allowed by God can be avoided. (iii) Since there is genuine freedom for creatures, God need not be pictured as 'supplanting the freedom of actual entities'. Neither does God intervene and do a totally and absolutely discontinuous thing. (iv) In the light of all these, God's omnipotence cannot mean that he can do whatever he wants at his will. This classical understanding of God's omnipotence made God into a 'supreme agency of compulsions' which is a 'barbaric and morally dangerous' conception. God's power is the power of love—power of persuasive love. It is a power that allows and engenders the maximum freedom on the part of the creature, and wins him not through coercive force but through persuasive love. Is not the Christian symbol of God's ultimate power the persuasive love on the cross that was undefeated even by death? Resurrection is the symbol that God's vulnerability in love for his creatures

[31] C. Birch, *Nature and God,* p. 106.

is *invulnerable* to anything beside himself. His love is absolutely constant and its power is relative to nothing outside God's will to love.

(2) *God and the process of becoming :* We have seen that flux and becoming are significant aspects of all entities—God is no exception. There is dynamism and movement in God. It is in God's consequent nature to be supremely relative and therefore involved in the process of becoming. As Whitehead put it,

> '...by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God's nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God. He shares with every new creation its actual world ; and the concrescent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God's objectification of that actual world ... his derivative nature is consequent upon the creative advance of the world.' [32]

This notion brings to light some important aspects of God's relationship to the universe and his own nature.

(i) All relations are really real to God. Because of his supreme sensitivity and pre-eminent and loving response to our every act, he is affected but *only* in terms of his subjective aim which is always positive for harmony and integration.

(ii) Eventfulness and history are real in his experience. We can speak of a ' before ' and ' after ' as meaningful notions in talking about God's experience of the world. In the words of S. Ogden we can legitimately talk about the ' temporality ' of God, though immediately we should qualify it as a ' primal ' and ' infinite ' temporality.[33]

(iii) Negatively, this implies a denial of God as ' complete ', absolute, immutable and unchangeable. Traditional theology has held that the whole relation of creaturely concerns can contribute nothing to God, for he already is and has everything that he could be. This idea is challenged, and in its place God (at least in certain respects, and possibly not in certain other respects) needs the world. This sensitivity, and adaptability in certain respects is in no way less perfect and less real than the static essence, impassibility and lack of dependence.

(iv) Affirmation of God's involvement in the process of becoming is the only way to maintain the freedom of God and man. For an ' absolute and unchangeable ' God must know all of time from the beginning itself. It implies that what happens now to a particular creature must have been known and determined by God from eternity. If this is so, then no decision that man makes in the here and now has any meaning or significance

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[32] Whitehead, *ibid.,* p. 488.
[33] S. M. Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays.*

whatsoever. The death-blow to any sort of human freedom is the inevitable result of such a conception of God, as exemplified in classical theology where God is conceived as 'complete' from eternity. The fatalism which follows such a conception is well exposed by Dante:

> 'Dante is fully in accordance with the orthodoxy of Augustinian and medieval Christianity when he sees inscribed over the gate of hell, " Justice moved my high maker ; Divine Power made me, Wisdom Supreme and Primal Love ... Leave all hope ye that enter ".' [34]

This dilemma in protestant theology is still with us today. Both in popular piety and orthodox theology this gross fatalism is spoken of as the 'divine mystery' of the unfathomable sovereignty of God. But if this fallacy is to be averted, then theological reconstruction of the doctrine of God must be undertaken with the notion of temporality and becoming of God in certain aspects as one of its corner-stones.

The significance of process perspective for a contemporary doctrine of God is great, and the treatment in this paper is only introductory, touching only some aspects. Charles Hartshorne is not exaggerating when he says,

> Had men not, over 2,000 years ago, fallen down and worshipped their own concept of the wholly absolute or immutable, had they taken instead, as the basis of theologizing, the manifest necessity of divine social relatedness to the world, and had they then sought the supreme excellence of deity in the universality, unfailingness ... of the divine social relativity or 'omnipassivity', they might long ago have found, in this unfailing adequacy ... the only absolute of which there is theoretical or practical, religious or philosophical, need.[35]

IV. God in Process Perspective and Modern Man

Finally, let us briefly consider the ways in which God in process perspective may be meaningful for modern man.

Of course, modern man has been described in various ways by various theologians. I shall select three dimensions of modernity affirmed by man today and try to show that a doctrine of God formulated in process categories could be meaningful in such a context.

1. First, modern man is secular and 'this-worldly' in his affirmations. The process of secularization has freed him from the shackles of all kinds of supernaturalism. As van Peursen

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[34] D. D. Williams, *The Spirit and Forms of Love,* New York, 1969, p. 97.

[35] Hartshorne, *op. cit.,* p. 155 f.

says, the whole process of secularization has led to a process of negation of all that is other-worldly and unrelated to the pursuits of worldly goals.

> In a secularized world there is no longer an ontological way of thinking, a thinking about a higher ... Now we are liberated from all the unreal supernatural entities ... Only that which is directly related to us is real. Things do not exist in themselves ... they exist in and for the sake of what they do with us and what we do with them.[36]

In such a context a theology that defends and describes ' things behind the scene ' is meaningless. Process perspective denies any being apart from any relation.

> There is no entity, no substance, not even God, which requires nothing but itself in order to exist.[37]

In other words, things in themselves simply do not exist. Furthermore, we have already seen that the process concept of a single order of reality squarely challenges any dichotomy between realities natural and supernatural.

A consequent emphasis in modern secular thrust is the refusal to accept any external cause for the happenings in the world of temporal eventfulness. To look for causes beyond the phenomenal world is an ' existential repugnance ' to modern man. ' Thinking from above ' has been given up for a ' thinking from below.'[38] In such a situation, if theologians still continue to repeat with John Calvin that,

> Not a drop of rain falls but at the express command of God

implying that God wills every event exactly as it happens, secular man today will refuse to listen. But a conceptuality that can enable us to express that God is not the absolute and sole cause for the actual state of affairs, that he does not act from beyond externally and that man's freedom does matter, then there is a chance of evoking some positive response from men today. As Whitehead said, ' God is in the world or he is nowhere '.

2. Secondly, modern man can be identified by his affirmation of his autonomy and worth or significance. As Schubert Ogden rightly recognizes,

> Secularity as such ... is simply the emphatic affirmation that man and the world are themselves of ultimate significance.

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[36] Quoted in Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, New York, 1965, p. 65.
[37] Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, p. 108.
[38] C. William, *Faith in a Secular Age*, London, 1966, p. 39.

True secularity as such is not opposed to Christian faith but to a kind of religion that totally denies any element of autonomy and worth for man and significance for his free decisions and actions. But traditionally as Bonhoeffer shows,

> Religious people speak of God when human perception ... is at an end, or human resources fail ... helping out human weakness or at the borders of existence. Of necessity, that can go on until men can, by their own strength push these borders a little further, so that God becomes superfluous as a *Deus ex machina*.[39]

Only a theology that challenges outright this notion of a God of the gaps and presents him, ' not on the borders of life ,' not at its weakest, but in its full strength and as the very ground of all human confidence, can attempt to speak of God to modern man in a relevant manner. Process concept of di-polarity attempts to do this. Only when modern man can see God as the very ground of his worth and not as one who stands over against his freedom and worth, he will respond to the call of such a God.

But to conceive God as the ground of man's free existence and autonomy, two important conditions are necessary.[40] First, God should be conceived in such a way that he has genuine relation with man and ' both ourselves and our various actions, all make a difference as to his actual being '. For, apart from such a real relatedness and the consequent relativity of both God and man, God cannot be the ground at all. But it should immediately be said that a merely relative being cannot be the ground. Hence his ' relatedness ' in itself should be relative to nothing, and ' to which therefore neither our own being and actions can ever make a difference as to his existence '.[41] It is precisely this twofold relatedness, i.e. a relativity which is supremely relative in its response to man, and yet whose capacity to relate is relative to nothing outside itself, which is maintained in the process vision of God both as primordial and consequent. In other words, while God's relatedness to us is so supreme and genuine that he is really affected by us, his act of relating is unchangeable and constant. As consequent, God is so pre-eminently related to us that all that we do has utmost significance to him. But as primordial, God fulfils the second condition of being unchangeable and absolute in his act of relating. His relativity is unrelated to anything outside God.

3. The third element I select to portray to a modern man is a growing concern for greater sociality and human solidarity. I do not pretend that it is there. But the concern for collective

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[39] Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
[40] For this interpretation I am indebted to S. Ogden (*Reality of God*, pp. 47 ff.).
[41] Hartshorne, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

togetherness is felt everywhere. Questions like, 'In what ways and forms of social existence can men avoid self-destruction and find ways for the fulfilment of collective human possibilities' haunt every serious thinker around the globe. In this context, only social conceptions of God, man and nature could be relevant and meaningful. Process perspective affirms that:

> The social structure is the ultimate structure of the universe.[41]

Whitehead himself warns that abstraction of one entity from its basic connectedness 'involves the omission of an essential factor in the fact considered. No fact is merely by itself,...[42] Process metaphysics is based on the fact that all entities interact with each other in such a way that each—God and man alike—is both a grasping and being grasped in the 'societal' universe. Therefore, this view challenges in a radical way the traditional notion of a 'monarchial' type of God who is self-contained. In its place it conceives of God as organically related to the world.

In the summing up, the meaning of God in process perspective could be expressed in a very brief reply of Whitehead to a query of Nels Ferré, while the latter was Whitehead's student at Harvard. To the question, 'What is God?' the religious philosopher replied,

> *It matters and it has consequences.*[43]

[42] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, p. 9.
[43] Quoted in N. Ferré, *Making Religion Real*, New York, 1955, p. 26.