

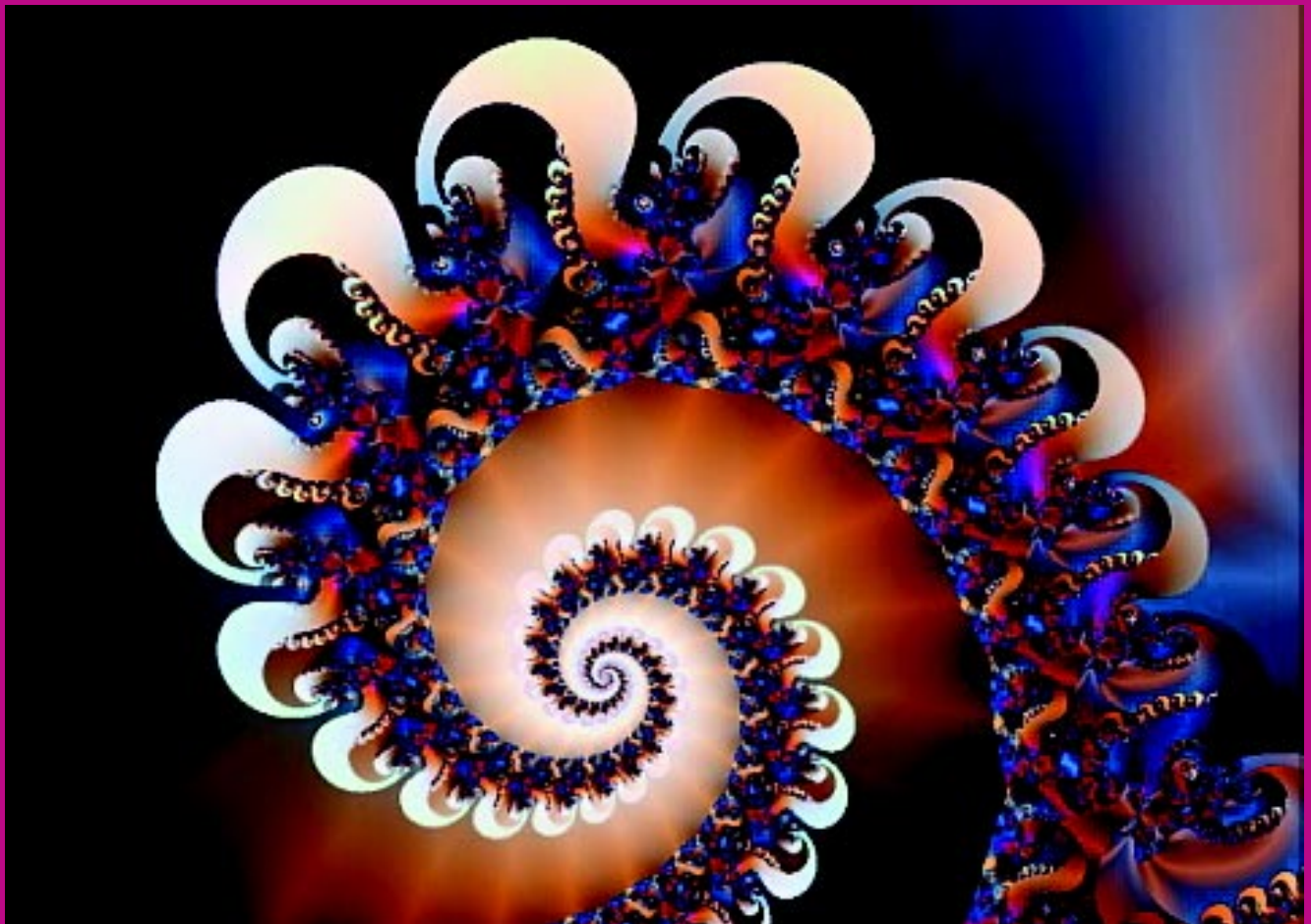
Creative **Transformation**

exploring the growing edge of religious life

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God's aim at beauty, intensity, order, and novelty gives birth to every moment of life.

A Publication of Process & Faith, based on a Relational Vision of Reality

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Making a Difference

Process & Faith News

New logo

We've got a new logo! It was designed by Christi Koop, a Southern California graphic designer. So far, it's on our letterhead, business cards, and the back cover of this issue. T-shirts or totebags, anyone?

Web redesign

By the end of August, P&F will launch its redesigned website, complete with a special members-only section. The password will be mailed to you this summer. If there are things you would especially like to see in this section, please let us know!

We gratefully acknowledge the pioneering work done by Nelson Stringer on the website. Nelson is not only responsible for getting us on the Internet, but for such popular pages as the lectionary commentary and Cobb's FAQs.

Hymn/liturgy project

In order to build a quality collection of process-related hymns and liturgies, P&F announces a contest, for which we are pleased to have nationally prominent judges. See page 33 for details. Our ultimate goal: a worship book of process-themed hymns and liturgies!

Launching P&F Press!

P&F proudly announces a new publishing venture. Our first book under the P&F imprint rolls off

the press this summer. Titled *Belonging Together: Politics and Faith in a Relational World*, the book is a collection of essays edited by Douglas Sturm. The book will be available from P&F for \$18/\$15 members. See page 32 for more details.

Summer process course a resounding success!

Twenty-nine people attended the summer course on process theology team-taught by John B. Cobb, Jr., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. The class took place June 23-27 in Claremont, CA, and included students from across the country. Missed it? Plans now underway for next year!

It's celebration time

This fall, Process & Faith celebrates the 20th anniversary of its founding. Festivities scheduled for October 5-7.

P&F Datebook

July 22: **Patricia Farmer** will lead a workshop in Santa Fe, NM. Contact Cheryl Young, cyoung@secadvisors.com.

September 2-5: **John Cobb** will lecture on spirituality at the Spiritual Leaders Summit conference at Asilomar, California; www.cnumc.org/spiritual_leaders.htm

September 19-21: **Marjorie Suchocki** will be at 1st United Methodist Church, Brenham TX.

September 21-23: **John Cobb** will be in Minnesota; at Luther Seminary in St. Paul on the 21st, in Rochester on the 22nd, and in Duluth on the 23rd. Contact Kirsten Mebust: 612.721.4090 or kirsten.mebust@cgu.edu.

September 24: **John Cobb** will speak at Drew University for its conference: *An American Empire? Globalization, War, and Religion*.

October 10-12: **Patricia Farmer** offers a program at a women's retreat sponsored by St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Tustin; at Temecula Inn in Temecula, CA. Contact deborahmilligan@cox.net

October 10-13, 2003; **John Cobb** will lecture and preach at First United Methodist Church in National City.

October 16-19: **John Cobb** will speak at the Conference of Canadian Society for Ecological Economics.

October 17-18: **Marjorie Suchocki** will be at Christ Church Cathedral, Houston TX.

October 20: **Patricia Farmer** will present a workshop for women at Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) General Assembly in Charlotte, NC. Contact: pbrown@cbp21.org

For more information

Contact Process & Faith.
Email: faith@ctr4process
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God of Compassion and Purpose

Charles Birch

Dr. Charles Birch has been an Emeritus Professor at University of Sydney, Australia since 1983. In 1961 he was honored as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, and as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1980. He became a member of the Club of Rome in 1980 and is an Honorary Life Fellow of the British Ecological Society. He is also an Honorary Life Member of the Ecological Society of America. The Eminent Ecologist Award was presented to him in 1988 and he was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1990. He has written 9 books and 60 publications on science, religion and human existence.



The world is a *mechanism*. So says a scientist. I beg to differ. The world is the work of *intelligent design*. So says a theologian. I beg to differ. Instead I suggest the image of the world as a *relationship*. The relationship is between a compassionate purposive God and a receptive creation. More particularly it is a threefold relationship which I call three laws of the universe. I am using the words ‘world’ and ‘universe’ as synonymous.

The first law is the presence of the compassionate God *in* the world.

The second law is the response of the world *to* the compassionate God.

The third law is the presence of the world *in* the compassionate God.

The presence of a compassionate God in the world

Charles Wesley’s hymn says it all—‘Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art.’ In every event we are addressed by God’s compassionate love. And not only we but the whole of creation. I think back in memory to my childish faith that God was omnipotent, absolute power, king and judge. *I can no longer believe in a*

God like that. Now I see God as always acting in the world as compassionate persuasive love, infinitely patient and never coercive, not needing us to prompt God into action by our puny prayers. There is a meaning in prayer. It is not causing God to act. It is causing us to act. God is always acting, never off duty.

This can be illustrated by contrasting the meanings of ‘intelligent design’ and ‘divine purpose.’ It is misleading to speak of an intelligent (divine) design behind the universe. Design has the connotation of a preconceived blueprint of the universe which is step by step built in the way a cathedral or office block is constructed. The creative possibilities of God are not in the form of a blueprint of the future. That is the concept of intelligent design. The concept of divine purpose is the more appropriate image, as nothing is so completely determined as the blueprint model suggests.

The future is open ended. One reason for this is that God is not the sole cause of happenings. It is not God alone who acts but every individual acts. God exercises causality always in relation to beings who have their own measure of self-determination. I take this meaning of purposive

action seriously as applying all the way from people down to protons and all entities in between. The world lives by the incarnation of God in itself and not by external intervention. God is internally related to the world (but not identified with it) in such a way that if God were withdrawn from the world it would collapse. This is the doctrine of God in all things.

Is there then any meaning to divine providence? I was taught that God had a pre-arranged plan for me. My task was to find out what it was. Then God would see me through. I now see providence differently. Divine providence means for me that there is a creative possibility in every situation which cannot be destroyed by any event, even an event as horrendous as September 11, 2001, in the US or the holocaust. Some survivors bore this out. So too did the psalmist:

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand will lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me
(Psalm 139:7-10).

The creative influence of God can meet me in any situation, however dire, as a new possibility transforming the present. God's

purposes are possibilities for the future worked out through persuasive love. God is never coercive. How little we trust the power of persuasion! I recall speaking to a group of Anglican bishops on evolution and creation. I made a case for creative evolution as responsive to the persuasive lure of God in the world. One of their number asked me—why can't we have it both ways? God as love yes, but

The world lives by the incarnation of God in itself and not by external intervention.

God also acting coercively by intervening from time to time. My problem about the latter is twofold. I find no evidence for such action in the world. If we understood the world better we would not invoke such activity. Most problems about God are problems about our understanding of the world. Secondly, the view of a manipulating, omnipotent, coercive God makes God malevolent. If God had power to prevent the holocaust and didn't, that God is malevolent. 'Auschwitz exists' said one of its victims, Primo Levi, 'therefore God does not exist.' How can one reconcile the horrors of Auschwitz with an all-powerful God? We can't because this is not

the way of a compassionate God.

Let me say as sharply as I can that God's use of persuasion is not a voluntary self-limitation as some claim. Does God choose from time to time to interfere coercively when things get bad, though mostly he doesn't? Does God put up special umbrellas to protect the faithful against disaster? Does God authorise particular disasters? I *can't believe in a God like that*. Some say to me you make God limited if he cannot have complete control of the world. But is God limited when he cannot work any nonsense in the world such as create a stone so heavy that he could not carry it? It makes more sense to propose that God works within the order of nature as we have to, and that God does not have to destroy his creation to do God's work.

But you respond—is then God powerless? The paradox of power is that in the end the only power that matters is persuasive love. That is the power of purpose. Persuasive love is a form of power that empathizes with others and empowers them.

The response of the world to the compassionate God

God acts by being felt by his creatures. 'In every event we are addressed by God' (Martin Buber). God confronts what is actual in the world with what is possible for it at that moment. These are God's ongoing purposes. God elicits a response from

Making a Difference

God's creatures. A note from a tuning fork can elicit a response from a piano because the piano has already in it a string tuned to that same note. So it is with God and all the entities of creation from protons to people. This is the incarnation of God in the world.

Since the councils of the fourth and fifth centuries traditional Christianity, the church, in its official formulations, has restricted the word incarnation to the presence of God in Jesus. Yet the Bible speaks of God as incarnate in all creation as witness to the God of 'all things' in Colossians 1, there repeated six times in five verses. It is the

idea that all things subsist in God and are subjects of God's persuasive love. What we know in human experience becomes the image for all creation from people to protons.

So far as humans are concerned the only adequate response to God's compassionate love is 'with all.' I take all to mean all and not nearly all, or to use Paul Tillich's powerful phrase 'with infinite passion.' Because Jesus knew God to be compassionate and forgiving he consorted with those most needing compassion and forgiveness. His unending compassion led to their finding new purposes in life that were transforming.

Jesus' message was simple. When you feed the hungry you feed me. When you give water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, comfort to the distressed, companionship to the rejected and imprisoned, you give to me. It is now, each moment, that we miss the pearl of great price, by not loving.

It is not only our fellow humans who need our compassion. We are called to a wider purpose of the redemption of a disfigured creation. The whole of creation is waiting for its liberation from its bondage and decay. It is all there in Romans 8:18-25. This passage makes it clear that this liberation is directly linked to the emergence

A Buddhist Call for Environmental Sustainability

Stephanie Kaza

Excerpted with the author's permission from a paper presented to the International Buddhist/Christian Theological Encounter Group meeting in Indianapolis, May 2003.

Individual churches, temples, mosques, or religious organizations can promote or participate in environmental sustainability by greening their immediate physical institutions. The Green Sanctuary Program, for example, has a number of institutions enrolled and is serving as a counterpart to the Campus Greening movement. Participat-

ing organizations take steps to reduce energy use and carbon emissions, enhance landscaping, conserve water, recycle paper, etc. One forward-thinking group, Episcopal Power and Light, started the Regeneration Project as a way for faith-based groups to buy renewable or green energy supplies. To support a culture of environmental responsibility, religious groups are also designing green liturgies for Earth Day and introducing sustainability themes into religious education curricula. Many are also joining state, regional, or national

religious greening networks such as the National Religious Partnership for Environment to strengthen local efforts.

Religious institutions or global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can support environmental sustainability by making public statements on behalf of their denomination or group and providing web and print publicity on their green positions. They can lobby political institutions within nation states or the United Nations to bring moral pressure to bear toward ecological

of God's 'new family' who are already experiencing 'the first fruits of the spirit.' Here is a mandate for action in our environmental crisis—to redirect the course of events away from the present suicidal disastrous course towards a livable future for all life. Here we are told that it is a redeemed community who are the key to the redemption of the creation. Why else would the writer picture creation as waiting 'in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed'? This passage links the redemption of nature with the redemption of human beings. It does not say, 'save people and that will automatically save the world.' Rather,

it implies that redeemed people have an obligation to save the world. We are to be compassionate as God is compassionate.

The presence of the world in the compassionate God

George Matheson, afflicted by blindness, wrote this first verse of his hymn:

O love that will not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in Thee;

I give Thee back the life I owe,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be.

The last three lines express the author's feeling that his life contributed to the ocean of God's life. This is the least understood aspect of the divine compassion—God's response to us and to the rest of the world. In the classical theistic view God is said to be loving but without anything like emotion, feeling or sensitivity to the feelings of others, including the whole of creation. Aristotle said it first: God is mover of all things, unmoved by any. The God of Aristotle is totally unaffected by what happens in the world. The same is true of the

sustainability in the face of globalization pressures. For example, the World Council of Churches is sponsoring a Global Climate Change program to lobby governments to work for beneficial climate policies. Institutions can also support seminaries in providing sustainability courses as part of ministerial training, and in hiring faculty with commitments to doing theology or ethics in an ecological context.

Compared with mainstream environmental groups, churches and temples are minor players in protecting biological diversity and taking up the greening challenge. Still, they can contribute to efforts to help restore locally damaged watersheds or woodlands. Zen Mountain Monastery in the Catskill Mountains of New

York has dedicated 80 percent of its 280 acres as "forever wild." Green Gulch Zen Center north of San Francisco has worked out land management arrangements with its neighbor, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Working with environmental groups provides an opportunity for applying institutional ethical practice and at the same time, lending spiritual strength to those on the front lines dealing with ecological damage.

The resources of the planet are the common heritage of all people, now and those to come in the future. We must heed our common call to serve as trustees in the interest of future generations, safeguarding the building blocks of life. Religious organizations have a crucial role to play in

promoting reflective dialogue and creative collaboration with others working toward environmental sustainability.

For further reading

Gardner, Gary. *Invoking the Spirit: Religion and Spirituality in the Quest for a Sustainable World*, Worldwatch Paper 164. Danvers: Worldwatch Institute, 2002.

Korten, David. *When Corporations Rule the World*. West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1995.

Schor, Juliet and Betsy Tayler, eds., *Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the 21st Century*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

Stepahnie Kazza is a Zen Buddhist and teaches at the University of Vermont.

*In every event we
are addressed by
God's compassion.*

*In every event we
are called to
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*In every event,
what we do and
what the creation
does make a
difference to God.*

God of Anselm, Thomas Aquinas and the God of the first of the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican prayer book. I *can't believe in a God like that*. Real love is twofold. Love that leaves the lover unaffected by the joys and sufferings of the one who is loved is not worthy of being called love at all.

There is an alternative vision. Whatever we do makes a difference to God. Whatever happens in the creation is registered by God. God experiences the world as the world is created in both its joys and its agonies from the big bang to September 11, 2001, and beyond. Did not God experience the suffering of the child at the firing wall at Auschwitz and the excruciating suffering of victims of the holocaust? And what of the tormentors? Let us too ask the difficult question of them—did God feel their feeling also; that is their sadistic satisfactions as tormentors? It is not blasphemous to reply—yes, but God was tormented (as were their victims) by their satisfactions. Here is the beginning of an answer to those who ask where was God at the holocaust. God was there, not as an intervening God, as Primo Levi might have wanted in his sufferings, but as fellow sufferer. The Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel says that the 'pathos of God' is the central idea of prophetic theology in the Bible. We find it also expressed in Romans 8. There God is not the playwright observing the play from the wings. God is on stage with the players 'feeling every

feeling in ways that words cannot express' (v.26). According to Jesus not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing (feeling). This is the doctrine of panentheism—meaning that all are in God.

These then are three rules of the universe in this vision of process theology:

- In every event we are addressed by God's compassion.
- In every event we are called to express God's compassion.
- In every event, what we do and what the creation does make a difference to God.

In this vision of the divine who is not the supreme autocrat but the universal agent of persuasion, whose power is the worship God inspires and who feels all the feelings of the world, I find not only a new way of understanding the world, but also a new way of facing the tasks of today in the human crisis and the environmental crisis.

What then is the promise? It is not that everything will come to a good end. Many things come to a bad end. It is the faith that nothing can prevent us from fulfilling the ultimate meaning of our existence, neither holocaust, nor poverty, neither principalities nor powers, neither dictators nor tyrants. It is a sense of belonging to a larger reality which contributes to one's life and the life of all creatures and which receives the contribution of that life.

Patricia's Ponderings

The Underdog Concerto

Patricia Adams Farmer

This is the secret of the union of Zest with Peace—That the suffering attains its end in a Harmony of Harmonies.

~A.N. Whitehead

It is 8:00 on a Saturday night, the night when wholly alive and fresh vibrations are about to be flung into the world for the very first time, in all their vulnerability. The L.A. Philharmonic warms up with that lovely, murmuring dissonance while we, the hearers, look for our seats and our reading glasses. We study the program notes as our own mental warm-up. The *L.A. Times* had called this world premiere work of William Kraft one of the “underdog concertos” because Kraft has a penchant for choosing the most unheralded instruments to play solo with the orchestra. This new work brings the humble English horn to center stage.

Ensnared in my seat and in an ambience of anticipation, the word “zest” springs to mind. Zest is that glorious word that A.N. Whitehead offers us throughout his works, but particularly in the last stirring beats of *Process and Reality*, and again as the finale in *Adventures of Ideas*. It seems fitting on a night of classical music, an art form in which tension (zest?) and release (peace?) define every movement: suffering issuing into a wider Harmony. Isn't that what we crave in music and in life?

I brought a luxurious red velvet cape to wear tonight because a world premiere of anything seems to invite such rare extravagance. Fiddling

nervously with the cape—trying to figure out how to drape this unfamiliar thing over my shoulders—I contemplate the next few minutes of my life. Time is precious. Why am I here? Modern music is supposed to be something I loathe. I have defined myself that way: I only resonate with the world of Vivaldi or Mozart or Brahms, and certainly nothing past Prokofiev. Okay, maybe Gershwin and Cole Porter. And Copland. But that's it. And surely nothing in the postmodern world with all its depressing, dissonant, deconstructive madness could possibly move me. Against this heaving burden of past disappointments, I am nevertheless preserving a little zesty slice of hope, all dressed up, ready for something to move me.

It begins. And with each unfolding, living tone, I can feel my tidy self-definition bleeding helplessly out of its borders. There's no way around it: it's good, richly colorful, ingenious really, the way the English horn finds her own voice. This always-the-bridesmaid-never-the-bride of the instruments now shines in round, sonorous, liquid tones within a triad of smaller groupings set up in front of the mass of symphonic instruments. First she glides into the spotlight against a backdrop of bells and soft percussion. Then she enchants with alto flute and guitar. Finally, she shows off her shimmering technique with support of a cello and violin. She, the wallflower of the orchestra, sings warmly and clearly in this tri-colored configuration of the orchestra.



Her moment has come: to be recognized, to be loved, to be so creatively positioned within the whole that she is finally heard. In a state of enchantment, I feel the opening up of hope for this postmodern mess of a world. For God is still singing and composers are still listening. Here tonight—in this living, breathing music—divinity offers us, the hearers, a moment of some new thing emerging, sprouting, blossoming. Zest is alive! New harmonies form, and here we all are, dressed up in cynicism and hope, caught unawares by this divine offering.

There are worlds of wallflowers—masses of things we need to escort to center stage, somehow, like turning down the blasting radio to hear a bird song. Fragile people or strange animals or long forgotten dreams may simply need a new set of relations. We, the lucky ones, must re-compose the world.

It's no fun being a wallflower—not because there are too many flowers, but because there are too many walls. And tonight, in this unveiling of creative musical justice, the walls tumble down like Jericho, inviting us to stand and applaud and be changed.

“[The Lord] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.” ~Luke 1:52

Process from Our Perspective

Unitarian Universalism and Process Thought: Some Natural and Historical Affinities

Jay Atkinson

Contemporary Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches tend to attract people who are looking for welcoming communities of spiritual nurture in a theologically open framework. Typically these newcomers to our churches have rejected much of traditional Western theology but still hunger for a sense of the sacred and some connection to a source of existential meaning in their lives. Some are comfortable with theistic language and others have left even that behind them. Nearly all are looking for a religious perspective that comports with and builds upon the naturalistic worldview that they have absorbed from our secular culture.

What these religious pilgrims hear from me in sermons and visitor classes is an affirmation of human religiosity as a lifelong process of experience, dialogue, and creative synthesis, pursued in a theologically diverse community that honors the questioning mind and loving heart in an atmosphere of interpersonal acceptance, spiritual nurture, ethical reflection, and commitment to social justice.

Framing religious life as a creative journey of the imagination in this way has obvious affinities with a fundamentally processive view of natural and human reality. In a broad sense, of course, the idea

of growth and evolutionary change lies at the very heart of the liberal tradition and strongly influenced the shape of Whitehead's thought. But more specific ways may be identified in which the Unitarian and Universalist sides of our tradition¹ have embodied, even anticipated, some important themes of process/relational thought.

Significant in the Unitarian tradition is a view of human understanding as fallible, incomplete, and progressive. For the antitrinitarian Polish Brethren of the 16th century (later called "Socinians"), this required ongoing examination of confessional statements to discover error and to move toward deeper understanding. Since free challenge of ideas was essential to such a process, the Brethren encouraged tolerance of a diversity of opinion and freedom of conscience as preconditions for constructive dialogue between differing views. This "mutually corrective pluralism"² may be understood as an early form of what the "empirical" school of theology would expound, nearly four centuries later and within the orbit of Whiteheadian thought, as a practice of "creative interchange."³

The questioning of received doctrines as well as growing

rationalism among the Polish Brethren led them to speculation on God's nature that was quite radical for its day. Charles Hartshorne was fond of citing the Socinian theologian Johann Krell on the subject of God's temporality.⁴ Krell's solution to the vexing combination of human free will and divine foreknowledge was to declare the future genuinely open and to define omniscience as God's knowledge of all that can possibly be known. This excludes detailed foreknowledge, however, because that would imply "denying freedom not only to man, but to God as well." It would be "impertinent and ill-behoving," argued Krell, "to deny that God possesses any degree of that quality which we consider his greatest gift [to us]."⁵ However novel this radical voluntarism was for its time, it anticipated the self-determining freedom that Whitehead would locate in the subjective satisfaction of each actual occasion.

Turning to the rise of Unitarianism in North America, we find a similar devotion to human freedom animating the growth of a liberal wing within New England's Congregational churches. This movement, which by 1820 would evolve into a distinctively Unitarian Christianity, began pulling away in the 1740s, not on

Christological grounds, but out of the same tensions between human freedom and Calvinist predestination that had prompted the earlier European movements. The Arminian theology of these liberals, with their ideas of meritorious salvation and progressive discernment of religious truth, would become a definitive focus in the decades to follow. This processive view of human nature and destiny was called the “characteristic emphasis of the Unitarians” by the leading 20th-century historian of this developmental period. It was vividly articulated in 1785 by one of the leading liberal ministers:

It is in consequence of this progressive capacity that we suppose . . . that all intelligent moral beings, in all worlds, are continually going on, while they suitably employ and improve their original faculties, from one degree of attainment to another; and, hereupon, from one degree of happiness to another, without end.⁶

Some sixty years later, well into the 19th century, Unitarian minister turned essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, would extend this processive understanding of human truth and development to the whole of the natural realm:

There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. . . Everything looks permanent until its secret is known.⁷

Early Universalist foreshadowing of process/relational ideas is less direct and explicit. By the 1930s, Universalists had formulated their faith in God’s all-inclusive love by affirming “the final harmony of all souls with God” and sometimes spoke of God “loving people into being.” While this falls short of explicit relational language, it lies very much in the spirit of Whitehead’s stress on divine power as loving and persuasive rather than coercive (*PR* 342ff.; *AI* 166f.).

More recently the relational quality of divine love and power has been explored by Bernard Loomer, another important process thinker, who affiliated with a UU church late in his life. His notions of “relational power” and “size”⁸ with their associated characteristics of mutuality and internal relatedness are exemplified in the theological diversity and openness that are affirmed in today’s UU congregations.

Looking back on the presence of process/relational themes in the Unitarian and Universalist traditions, it is not surprising that the ideas of Alfred North Whitehead and his scholarly disciples should have a natural appeal to Unitarian Universalists. Process metaphysics provides a fundamental basis for deeper understanding and integration of ideas that have long been held on experiential and intuitive grounds. The notion of a divine “lure” toward beauty and goodness and the option of “reenchantment without supernaturalism”⁹ offer an intellectually viable recovery of the sacred for many people in our churches today.

¹ The American Unitarian Association (founded 1825) and the Universalist Church of America (founded 1793) were organizationally independent until their merger in 1961 to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). In Transylvania and Poland, Unitarian movements arose in the 1560s as a part of the Radical Reformation.

² This apt phrase was first used by the 20th-century dean of Radical Reformation studies, George Huntston Williams, “From Freedom, Reason, and Tolerance: Toward a Liberal Christian Concept of Man and the World,” *Collegium Proceedings*, v. 1, ed. Peter Iver Kaufman (NP: Collegium, 1978), 9-59, at 35.

³ Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946), 58.

⁴ Hartshorne alludes favorably to this early anticipation of “neoclassical theism” in a variety of places, most completely in *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co, 1962), 42.

⁵ John Robert Andrew Mayer de Berncastle, “The Temporalistic Implications of the Socinian Doctrine of Divine Knowledge and Some of its Historical Anticipations,” Ph.D. diss. (Atlanta: Emory University, 1962), 58. The original work cited is Johannes Crellius, *Liber de Deo Ejusque Attributis* (Raków, 1630), repr. in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* (Amsterdam: post anno 1656), v. 5.

⁶ Charles Chauncy, cited in Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 139-40.

⁷ “Circles,” in *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (Boston: Random House, 1950), 279-91.

⁸ Bernard Loomer, “Two Conceptions of Power,” *Process Studies* 6 (Spring 1976), 5-32; and idem, “The Size of God,” *Am. J. Theol. & Phil.* 8 (1987): 20-51.

⁹ David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001).

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Process in Practice

A Sense of Timing: Reflections on Luke 10:38-42

Ronald L. Farmer

A family in Bakersfield, California, was debating about how to spend the sizable Christmas bonus the father received from his place of employment. The two teenaged sons thought it would be a great idea for the family to go skiing in Utah. The parents leaned to the more practical idea of remodeling the bathroom. The ski trip eventually won out because, as the father later said, “Looking down the years, I could hear my boys reflecting: ‘Wasn’t that a great ski trip we had?’ I couldn’t imagine them ever saying: ‘Wow! Didn’t we have a swell bathroom?’”

After his show window had been broken and the display case robbed, a jeweler put an advertisement in the local newspaper demonstrating that his good humor had not been stolen. The ad read: “Even burglars know good jewelry when they see it!”

J. J. Brown once remarked: “No one ever said on his or her deathbed: ‘Gee, if I’d only spent more time at the office.’”

What do these stories have in common? The ability to discern the best. Knowing what is best—or what is more important, or what should take priority—is a value judgment not all readily see

or appreciate. This is precisely the issue in Luke 10:38-42.

Although Martha and Mary appear in the Gospel of John along with their brother Lazarus, only the Gospel of Luke contains this famous story of sibling tension. Luke has not, however, told the story in chronological order. Bethany, the village where the sisters lived, was near Jerusalem, but at this point in the Lucan narrative, Jesus was still in Galilee. The reason for this chronological rearrangement will become apparent later.

As Jesus traveled to Jerusalem, he stopped in the little village of Bethany at the home of Martha, one of his dear friends. How this visit delighted Martha! The wording of the text reveals that she wanted to do something special for her friend. Eager to celebrate his visit in proper Middle Eastern fashion, she proceeded to rush and fuss, to slice and dice, to sift and stir, preparing the most sumptuous meal her household could afford.

Now as Martha busied herself in the kitchen, her sister Mary sat quietly at Jesus’ feet, hanging on his every word. As the minutes passed, Martha became increas-

ingly irritated with her sister. When she could stand it no longer, she asked Jesus to intervene. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself. Tell her then to help me” (v 40).

Jesus’ reply was tender but firm. “Martha, Martha,” he began, “you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (vv 41-42). His words are pregnant with meaning. Consider the following spiritual truths.

First, Jesus shattered the social barriers and customs of his day. Twenty-first century readers may fail to discern just how shockingly revolutionary Jesus’ actions and words were. In the ancient Mediterranean world, men and women were sharply divided by space, role, and expectations; their respective worlds were far more separate than anything we know today. But Jesus disagreed with this forced segregation of the sexes.

To begin with, Jesus was a guest in the home of a woman. That alone would raise more than a few eyebrows! We are not told whether

Martha was widowed, divorced, or had never married, but whatever her marital status, it was most unusual for a woman to be the head of a household. An unmarried woman usually lived in the home of her father, brother, uncle, or adult son. Martha had assumed a traditional male role, and Jesus honored her with his presence.

Even more shocking was the fact that Jesus allowed Mary to sit at his feet among his male disciples. No respectable rabbi would allow such a thing! A familiar rabbinical precept ran: "Let the words of the Torah be burned rather than committed to women." Jesus disagreed. He felt that women and men were equal in the sight of God. Indeed, Jesus said that in assuming the role of a disciple Mary had chosen what was best, and it would not be taken away from her regardless of social custom.

It is to the church's shame that within only a few generations it completely reversed Jesus' liberating attitude toward women, once again severely limiting their role in church and society. Many long centuries passed before certain branches of Christendom began to reclaim Jesus' teachings about women. But equality for women is still far from a universal Christian teaching.

This story contains a second spiritual truth: people are easily distracted from what is best. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing." This statement can be understood

two ways, but fortunately both interpretations make the same basic point.

Some scholars understand Jesus to be telling Martha that she is preparing too many dishes; one would suffice. After all, he had come to enjoy her company, not her food. His words are especially poignant when we remember that he was traveling to Jerusalem where a cross awaited him. In light of the inner turmoil Jesus must have been experiencing, food was not all that important; fellowship with beloved friends, however, was crucial. Mary understood.

Other interpreters understand Jesus to be telling Martha that listening to his teachings, not the preparation of food, was the one necessary thing. If this is the correct understanding of his words, we hear in them an echo of Deut 8:3, "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Martha needed to get her priorities straight, to put first things first. The preparation of food was not in itself bad; on the contrary, it was a good thing. But as the adage cautions, "the good is the enemy of the best."

And just how are we to distinguish between the good and the best? In my opinion, this is the point at which so many interpreters of the Martha and Mary story make an unfortunate mistake. In perusing the commentaries on this passage, one soon discovers that many interpreters resort to a simplistic allegorization: Martha

becomes the model of the active, busy Christian worker; similarly, Mary becomes the model of the contemplative, reflective Christian. Although these commentators admit that both models are good, they invariably say that this story demonstrates the superiority of the contemplative over the active lifestyle. Thus, the activist does well, but the mystic or scholar does better.

In my opinion, the key to a better reading of the passage lies in its placement in the Lucan narrative. As mentioned earlier, this story is not told in proper chronological order. In Luke 10 Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, but he is still in Galilee. Why, then, did the evangelist suddenly insert an incident set in the Judean village of Bethany? To answer the question bluntly, the gospel writers were not as concerned about chronological order as they were about theological order. Let me explain.

The textual unit that immediately precedes the Martha and Mary story is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The conclusion of that story is, "Go and do likewise" (10:37). The parable clearly urges religious activism. Immediately following that familiar parable the evangelist placed the story of Martha and Mary, a story urging, not going and doing, but listening and contemplating. In the words of the dean of contemporary preachers, Fred Craddock:

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A Room of One's Own: Why is Homelessness a Problem?

Douglas Sturm

Over the past couple of years, the city of Pittsburgh has been conducting aggressive sweeps of encampments in places where homeless people have tended to congregate and to sleep—in parks, under bridges, in train stations and abandoned buildings. The practice is not uncommon in urban centers throughout the US. However, Pittsburgh's sweeps have been particularly noteworthy in not providing advance notice of the sweeps to the homeless and in the disposal, without compensation, of all materials confiscated—clothing, blankets, personal effects.¹

In San Francisco, the hotel industry, in an apparent effort to sanitize the downtown and to make it more attractive to tourists, reportedly concocted a billboard campaign this spring to rid the area of homeless beggars in an indirect but crude manner. Designing slogans for billboards addressed to sightseers such as, "Today we rode a cable car, visited Alcatraz, and supported a drug habit," a council of hotel managers apparently intended to discourage visitors from giving money to panhandlers (identifying them, in the process, as drug addicts!), thereby inducing the homeless to move out of the public square.²

From many angles, as these cases illustrate, homelessness is con-

ceived to be a vital problem whose resolution is urgent. But what sort of a problem is it? On this question, public officials, business executives, human rights advocates, and homeless people themselves differ sharply. Perspective makes all the difference in determining the meaning of homelessness and what to do about it. Even what counts as homelessness and how homeless persons are identified depends on one's manner of understanding our social reality. Who are these people? What is their place in our social world?

Despite the seeming simplicity of comprehending what it might mean to be homeless, definitions are fuzzy and elusive. Factors often associated with homelessness are transience of place, instability of relations (particularly family), lack of regular housing.³ Yet these factors are far from precise as indicators of this condition. Nomadic peoples are, given their way of life, transient, but not strictly homeless. Many families, though homeless, make an effort to remain connected. In some cases, homeless people create their own communal residence—including rules governing their common life—even though use of that space is precarious, susceptible to dispossession by public officials at any time. A

recent act of the U.S. Congress defined any person homeless who "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence," taking advantage in its stead of supervised shelters or some place not designed as a "sleeping accommodation for human beings."⁴ But that omits those who double up with kith and kin.

Throughout the social history of the United States, what is now designated as "homelessness" has been identified by other terms—each expressive in its connotations of a kind of contextualized social perspective with which that condition was associated. To be designated a "vagrant" or "derelict," for example, was to be perceived as a threat to the social order, to be living a life of abandon and dissipation, and, as such, to be liable to incarceration. Urban locations where derelicts tended to congregate had their own special name as well—"skid row" or "bowery"—known for their flophouses, missions, abandoned vehicles, cheap saloons—places considered beyond the bounds of normal society.

With the Great Depression, a different sort of homeless identity emerged—"tramps" or "hobos," persons (usually men) who sought to sustain themselves doing spot work wherever they could find it. As surplus labor, they, too,

constituted, some thought, a potential threat to the social system needing to be mollified, a concern that elicited various New Deal programs.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, a new form of homelessness emerged creating a somewhat different kind of problem in social consciousness—"people who literally had nowhere to sleep, no shelter of any kind—no home." This new and growing "population was younger and contained disproportionate numbers of minorities as well as many women and children."⁵ While counting the homeless population is complicated, there is strong evidence of an astounding increase in its numbers during this time span. Recent estimates by two respected advocacy groups conclude that 3.5 million in the United States are currently homeless. Some studies conclude that about 40% of this number are families with children—85% of which are headed by single mothers. The negative effects on children are profound and long-lasting—intense anxiety, lowered self-esteem, increase in serious behavioral problems, poor physical health.⁶

If homelessness is conceived to be a social problem, however, then more important than the question of numbers is the question of causation. What drives people into homelessness? From an angle that concentrates on homeless individuals, several significant risk factors or personal vulnerabilities are closely correlated in varying degrees with

homelessness—broken marriage, job displacement, alcoholism, drug addiction, physical disability, mental limitation, incarceration, racial or ethnic identity. All these are properly understood as factors of concern in designing a constructive response to homelessness. Nonetheless these personal vulnerabilities are not nearly as significant in the causation of homelessness as two interrelated structural trends that have appeared over the past two decades—a sharp decline in affordable housing and a steady increase in poverty. These trends, I suggest, are largely the consequence of deficient public policies, explicit or implicit, whose underlying principles fail to appreciate the crucial role of "home" in the dynamics of a flourishing public life.

To comprehend and to respond adequately to the problem of homelessness we need to understand that our lives are intricately interconnected, that our destinies are interdependent, that as the individual members and families of a society suffer, so the whole society suffers. We need also to understand that a home occupies a special place within the social order. One's home, within the context of this understanding, is more than a shelter. It is more than one's "castle," as Sir Edward Coke's famous legal dictum would have it (though it should include, in some sense, protection from arbitrary intrusion by others). It is more a sanctuary than a castle; it a place of refuge and relaxation, a resource for restoration and

refreshment, a locus for renewal and revivification. As such, while a home has value in itself, it is, at the same time, a requisite for creative participation in the public realm. In this sense, at least, homelessness is a manifestation of social pathology and its resolution a mandate of social justice. Everyone, to appropriate a phrase from Virginia Woolf's famous feminist broadside, deserves a room of one's own. That's an implication of our solidarity with one another and should be a matter of deliberate public commitment. However, as an advocate of the homeless quipped recently, "For some time now . . . American culture has been markedly short on solidarity."⁷

¹ Greater Pittsburgh ACLU Press Release, May 5, 2003.

² National Public Radio, Morning Edition, April 29, 2003.

³ Dominant resources relied on in preparing this essay on homelessness include Kim Hopper, *Reckoning with Homelessness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), Martha Burt, et al., *Helping America's Homeless: Emergency shelter or affordable housing?* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 2001). and *Fact Sheets* published by the National Coalition for the Homeless (Washington D.C., 2002).

⁴ NCH Fact Sheet #3, "Who is Homeless?"

⁵ Barbara Duffield, "Poverty Amidst Plenty: Homelessness in the United States," in Valerie Polakow & Cindy Guillean, eds., *International Perspectives on Homelessness* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 197.

⁶ See Rosemarie Theresa Downer, *Homelessness & Its Consequences: The Impact on Children's Psychological Well-Being* (NY: Routledge, 2001).

⁷ Hopper, p. 214.

God-Nudges and the Art of Meaning-Making

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore

I write today from the hospital where my mother is recovering from emergency surgery. She had suffered from intestinal problems for a few days, but thought she was getting better. One of her friends had a feeling: “Something told me to spend the night with Elizabeth on Wednesday, so I did.” Mother’s sickness persisted, so her friend insisted on another call to the doctor, who sent Mother to the Emergency Room; the next day, she had surgery. The surgeon later said, “It is very good that we caught this condition before it went further; it could have been much worse.” How wonderful that Mother’s friend had followed her “something-told-me” feeling—a God-nudge!

How does a person learn to discern God’s nudges and to make meaning of the complex interplay of God-nudges and other life forces? Only after studying process theology did I have language for the intuitions that I had earlier learned to trust by trial and error. Other theologies have compelling explanations as well, but the process-relational view of God’s initial aim—offered in every moment of time and luring people to Life—is amazing! It accounts for people’s ability to intuit nudges that point to danger, reassurance, hope, or urgent action. It accounts for people’s

ability to make unexpected decisions to spend the night with a friend, campaign for a political candidate, speak up in a discussion, or pour hours into efforts to change public policy. What makes God-nudges all the more impressive is that they are given to every part of creation—every moment in the life of trees and oceans, as well as people and their communities. The wonder of God-nudges is the impulse toward life. They are also a mystery; thus, the art of meaning making is a critical educational task, offering challenges that open people to God.

Discerning God in every moment of life

The first educational challenge is to discern God amid troubling, wonderful, and everyday moments of life. *Teaching and engaging people in practices of prayer, meditation, searching and waiting for God are critical.* My mother’s friend was blessed with a rich life of prayer and intuition, which she had learned to trust. When something told her to spend the night with Mother (something she had never done before), she responded. I believe that the miracle of Mother’s surgery was indeed the work of God, moving in her friend, in the doctors and nurses, and in the love and prayers of family and friends. *How much more*

adequate might human discernment be if we could learn to practice and trust the Presence of God?

Discerning the interplay of God and other forces in creation

The second educational challenge is to help people discern and reflect upon the multiple interacting forces in creation—God’s lure, alongside tragic forces of human making, movements of God through others, and natural forces of the earth and cosmos. *The key educational practice here is to create spaces for people to reflect honestly and deeply on the many forces of this world and on the life questions they pose.*

Recently two women, facing the death of a friend, turned their conversation to recent tragedies, especially the death of a young girl who had been beautiful, gifted, and much-loved. One woman described the car accident that took the girl’s life, explaining several forces that caused the crash. Then, she added, “Her mother and I believe that God took her life, and God had a very good reason.” She proceeded to tell what she thought was the reason. The girl had been suffering several weeks with a painful, undiagnosed illness; the woman believed that God had taken the

girl suddenly so she would not have to suffer a slow, agonizing loss of capacity or death. The woman's theological language was not adequate to me, but I was impressed that she had wrestled with questions about God's power and other world powers (a car's broken brake signal, a moment of human tiredness and non-attention). Without trying to make a fully coherent picture, she told her story in a way that attributed wise action to God, alongside other forces that were also active. Some community(ies) had created spaces for this woman to ponder, and she had done so. *How much more adequate might human pondering be if people were regularly encouraged to wrestle with seemingly impossible questions (not just in times of tragedy) and consider diverse theological views?*

Responding to God's nudging

The third educational challenge is to encourage response to God's nudges—God's call in each moment—sometimes small and easy, sometimes life-changing and huge. *Critical educational practices are to study God's age-old relationship with the human family—calling, sending, and turning around; to pray for guidance and strength; and to create communities that support boldness and courage in responding to God's nudges.*

I can remember a late night session at my computer, working on legislation for the church. I had stopped to pray for strength because I was tired. In that moment, I encountered an unexpected nudge; I knew that I was facing a moment of decision—

whether to give everything in me to this work or to do it in a more partial way. I knew in that instant that I needed to do the former, and it made all the difference. The decision was made in an instant, but the efforts were long and difficult, perhaps the most significant work I have ever done. Every time I wondered if I were doing the right thing, I remembered that moment of decision, and the God-nudge came back in full force, followed by other nudges toward me and many other people. *How much more adequate might human responding be if we encouraged people in opportunities to study others' lives with God, to be silent with God, and to build communities of courage?*

Recognizing limits to human discernment and actions

The fourth educational challenge is to develop humility in the face of God's bountiful movement and human distortions, fear and resistance. Seeing through a glass darkly, we might expect glimpses of God, but no more fullness of sight than Moses had when God allowed him only to see behind God's back (Exodus 33:12-23). *The educational practices here are to celebrate moments of meeting God, engage in communal discernment with people of diverse experiences, and confess limits—our own and others'.*

The ambiguity of God-nudges is clear, as in the story of my mother and her friend. No one can know definitely when a feeling comes from God or from other sources; they are all mixed together. On the

other hand, when Mother's friend responded to a nudge, her act was life giving, extending my mother's days and the quality of her life. That is to be celebrated! Similarly, the woman who told her friend why a young girl had died in a car accident was able to name many of the forces involved in the accident. I do not believe, as she does, that God caused the accident to spare the girl a long illness, but I do find the woman's efforts at meaning-making and her ability to see God's movements to be illuminating. That too is to be celebrated. In a process-relational vision, logic does not require blaming God for accidents. The accident was a tragic event caused by many forces, mostly human-caused, but God was present in the midst of the tragedy, bringing forth life wherever it could be found. In a sense, the woman and I have both wrestled with meanings, and we have both found ways to celebrate God's hope in the midst of tragedy, while acknowledging other forces at work in the world. *How much more adequate might people be in accepting limitations if we learned, through celebration, communal discourse, and confession to accept our limitations and celebrate the God who transcends the broken and blurred realities of our lives?*

The image of *space* is central to all of the educational challenges we have named—space to be present with God, space for communities to discern and wrestle, space to face oneself and God's nudges, space to celebrate. *Let there be space!*

Translating God's Purposes

Robert and Adrienne Brizee

The snow pack on the Cascade Mountains is 72% of normal. It is likely that we will be facing drought conditions in Eastern Washington by late August. In our efforts to be more harmonious with our regional environment, we have plowed up one-half of our grass and have been spending hours farming our “west 40.” Our present vision, though incomplete, is that of raised beds, watered by a drip system, filled with flowers, herbs, vegetables, and berry vines. We do not yet know the final picture but assume that we will be divinely guided in each step toward creating beauty from fewer resources.

Beauty, adventure, intensity, complexity, harmony, love: limited words point toward the purposes of an awesome and mysterious God. These purposes are offered to every entity in the universe for their enjoyment and well-being. So says process theology. The easier part is to affirm that these proposals are true; the harder part is to discern how to live in accord with these purposes. How do we create unique human modes of being from the divine purposes?

One of our clues is *how* God relates to the universe. It is in this arena that process theology has made a most distinctive contribution. If God approaches us in persuasion, should we not also relate to others persuasively? If God offers us freedom to create

ourselves, should we not also offer such freedom in our relationships? If God is gracious to us, should we not be gracious to others? As God gifts us, we ought to gift others.

Yet to speak of purposes is to consider the content of the lures and whispers of God, the *what*, not only the *how*. Process theology has also identified God's call to adventure, beauty, intensity, complexity, harmony, and love. As stated, these rich and powerful purposes remain general and abstract, requiring translation into the specific and particular. Such translating, interpolating, or deducing, becomes the task of those who live in the presence of God.

We are thrown naturally into decisions, decisions, decisions! We are confronted with the translation of these purposes into the various realms of our lives: selfhood, marriage, family, career, friends, community, church, city, state, nation, universe. We experience competing values hourly and daily, whether invited or uninvited.

How simple it would be if, following a different theology, we had only to search out *God's will* for our lives. We would be engaged in solving a mystery. God has a plan for our lives, all we need do is discover it. Have it revealed, figure it out, consider it settled, step onto the pathway and off we go with confidence and assurance. Although some of

us grew up with this notion, it seems dated and inconsistent with an adventuring God.

We have found it helpful to think of *God's aim* instead of God's will. An aim is an offering in a moment, the twinkling of an eye. A will is a path for a lifetime. Thinking of God's purposes in terms of God's aims makes our task in one sense more difficult and in another sense more exciting. It is more like taking the hand of an adventuring God or accepting an invitation to dance from a dancing God than stepping onto the trail already blazed by God. Thinking in terms of God's aims, a five-year plan, let alone a lifetime plan, seems difficult to design unless it includes great tentativeness and flexibility. Circumstances change and our mode of being should be responsive to that change.

While it may be difficult to be free enough to adventure or dance, it may be more difficult to deal with the guilt and self-recrimination of wavering from an earlier path we thought was God's will for our lives.

“Circumstance” is a wonderful Latin word, *circum* meaning around and *stance* meaning standing. Thus, it represents what and who are standing around. Indeed, it is these very circumstances which God knows, feels, and takes into account in offering a new aim for our next moment. Divine lures and whispers are always up to date,

contemporary with the current conditions. God's awareness and feeling of what is happening in the universe goes into the selection of an aim for us. Adventuring is always based on the latest weather report and dancing is adjusted to the music being played. The decisions made years ago, months ago, days ago, hours ago may be vastly outdated and irrelevant to the conditions surrounding us in this emerging moment.

In addition, the circumstances through which we have lived grant us new experience from which we can create who we are and wish to become. It would be most strange to be living today as the person I planned to be fifty-four years ago as a high school senior—a pharmacist—or a college graduate fifty years ago—a professor of sociology—or a new doctorate forty-four years ago—the director of a college counseling center! In our learning along the way, we not only gain knowledge of the world, but also wisdom about our personal being. Usually we have known dramatic changes in both spheres. Aims offered which take into account circumstances are rich.

We find it a challenge to discern what it means for us to be beautiful, harmonious, loving, intense, adventuresome, and complex in our moments. We do not wish to become obsessive-compulsive in asking, "Wow, what do I do with this moment? Who is God wanting me to be now? If the problem with following God's will is that it can be clearly outdated and lead to great guilt, the danger with

God's aim is that we can become pedantic and puppet-like, awaiting the next imminent revelation.

We wish to share a few emerging situations, besides our mountain snow pack, in which we are attempting to define ourselves as persons who align with God's purposes.

Little did we know when we designed two six-week classes called, "Meet John Cobb," that the Wednesday noon group would want to continue studying process theology. We were pleased, complied, and named it a seminar. Nor did we know that the dialogue would become a focus on the process vision of Jesus. Both unfolded. Now we have moved to understanding the authentic parables, sayings, and acts of Jesus so that we can create a preliminary composite picture of Jesus. Our emerging proposal: if Jesus reveals God, we should know what Jesus said and did. We are experiencing this as adventure, knowing only in the broadest outline where we are going and finding that our mutual experience leads us to specific goals.

We live in an area in which we are members of the minority political party, Democratic. All of our state representatives, county commissioners, as well as our congressional legislator are members of the dominant party. We are presently assessing both our time and money in terms of the 2004 elections. We will be watching, listening, and discerning which candidates offer a vision which will be more in accord with those

values which we discern to reflect divine purposes.

We find it so easy to be cut off from nature even though we live in a community of less than 40,000 located in a river valley. It would be possible to meet our basic needs by patronizing local stores and restaurants, driving three hours to Seattle, or consulting the Internet. However, to both enhance our health and keep us connected with nature, we walk regularly in the mornings. We think that God lures us to hear the quail, sparrows, tanagers, and robins, see the balsam, lupine, and sage, watch the deer in winter on the hillside, the baby ducks in the canal in the spring, and experience the transformation of the hills each season from green, yellow, brown, to white. We hope also that God smiles as we pick up litter as we walk.

Given the world conditions of the past several years, we have become increasingly convinced that we must offer our ultimate devotion to the earth, globe, creation, universe rather than any lesser political unit. While we are responsible citizens of a nation, state, county, and city, belong to a particular church denomination, and hold membership in a political party, we feel that our decisions are to be made as persons who reach out to feel the universe as God feels the universe.

The purposes of God are to be translated into each moment. In our moments, these are among our current efforts to transform the possibility into the actual.

Liturgy on Purpose

Paul S. Nancarrow

Liturgy may be said to happen on at least two levels: a human level, and a divine level. Liturgies are occasions (or, more technically, societies of occasions) taking place in the corporate lives of religious communities, and in the personal lives of their individual members; liturgies are also occasions in the life of God. This is especially important in liturgies that are also identified as sacraments, because in these liturgies the human activities of ceremony and ritual are held to be outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, human signs by which God actively effects divine ends. But I think it can be claimed of all liturgy, indeed of all prayer, that it is simultaneously a human act and a divine act, a moment in the lives of people and a moment in the life of God. Liturgy, then, partakes of divine purposes. Liturgy enacts God's purpose on a human scale and in a human context and in a human way.

In very general terms, we can say that God's purpose in the world is the evocation of ever-richer forms of experience. "The teleology of the Universe," Whitehead writes, "is directed to the production of Beauty," where "Beauty" is maximum intensity of feeling with maximum harmony of feeling (*Adventures of Ideas*, 265). Such Beauty is a feature of God's own experience of the world: as God

receives into Godself the multifarious occasions of the Universe, God feels each moment with its own intensity, and God also feels the moments in their togetherness, God feels the moments as they are harmonized in God's own all-embracing perspective. Beauty, richness of experience, is first of all a quality of God.

But God does not, as it were, hoard this Beauty as a private possession: God wishes to share richness of experience with the creatures, and so God gives each new moment of creaturely experience an aim that it, also, realize a maximum intensity of feeling with maximum harmony of feeling. God's purpose for each particular occasion is that it reflect God's own richness of experience to the extent and to the degree and in the scope that it is able.

So the *particular* features of the initial aims God gives to creaturely moments differ as to the capacity of the creature, yet all God's aims for creatures share the *general* characteristic of striving for richness of experience. And all realizations of richness of experience, all accomplishments of creaturely Beauty, of whatever size and scope, re-enter into God and become components in God's experience of Beauty in the Universe. Thus God not only *perceives* the Universe as Beautiful,

but God lures and woos the Universe into *becoming* more Beautiful.

Liturgy is one stream of influence by which that wooing-into-Beauty takes shape in human life within the Universe. John Cobb, in "A Whiteheadian Christology," notes that all occasions of human experience begin with a God-given aim at Beauty, but that the divine origin of such aims is typically "buried" in the influx of the data of experience, and we are not generally conscious of God's aims for us in the immediacies of our experiences. On some occasions, however, God's aims for us might include the specific element that we be *aware* of God's aims for us, that our experience be frankly *religious* experience. Experiences of prayer, meditation, scripture study, and liturgy might embody aims from God that we be especially aware of an intimacy with God, or a judgment of God, or a call of God, or co-creative communion with God; such awareness brings a with it a particular richness of experience, a particular intensity and harmony, that makes these moments peculiarly reflective of God's purposes. In such moments we can live in a more intense way our vocation to be created co-creators with God, making Beauty for our world and for God.

Because liturgy is corporate and communal prayer, liturgy brings

an important social dimension to the realization of Beauty in accordance with God's purposes. A liturgical ceremony is a society of occasions in which streams of influence from God, from the corporate history of the community, from the individual life-stories of the worshipers, and from the material conditions of the present world, are all woven together in a rich experience of grace and empowerment. My own prayer is made more vivid, more intense, and more harmonious, in being joined together with the prayer of others in the tradition of a community. In a liturgy of intercession, for instance, I might be aware of my prayer for a sick friend; but when I hear spoken out loud one person's prayer for her friend, and another person's prayer for his family, and another person's prayer for a nation decimated by war, and I am aware that my prayer is joined with all these other prayers in a shared yearning for compassion and action, then my experience of prayer is made the richer, the more intense and more harmonious, the more Beautiful, for that liturgical sharing. Or when I preside at a celebration of the Eucharist, as presider it is my role to speak the Eucharistic Prayer on behalf of the whole assembly; but when I have heard others read scriptures, and sing hymns, and preach a sermon, and offer intercessions and thanksgivings, then my speaking of the Eucharistic Prayer is deepened and intensified by the awareness of sharing prayer with all these

others—and as my speaking of the prayer becomes more vivid because of my intense feelings, it evokes more intense prayerful feelings from the others as well. In liturgy the varied gifts and roles and offerings of many are brought together into a single corporate act of prayer that is richer, more intense and more harmonious, more charged with the Beauty of the purpose of God, than the prayers of the many would be on their own.

Liturgies are also occasions in the life of God

Liturgical celebrations, then, are both means and ends in God's work to accomplish the purpose of Beauty in the Universe. A well-formed, well-prayed liturgy is a moment of Beauty, an accomplished fact of rich experience for all its participants. As such, it adds to the total amount of Beauty in the Universe, and passes into God to be felt by God as a component in the total Beauty of all that is. Each liturgy is an end in itself, a realization of a particular intense harmony and harmonious intensity in a particular context. But each liturgy is also a means, a lure to a greater feeling of Beauty in a greater and more inclusive context. Every liturgy reveals God's ultimate purpose in the Universe: because every liturgy is a gathering of

many elements into one harmonious intensity, every liturgy is a picture "in miniature" of what God wants for the Universe as a whole. Each accomplished liturgy is, therefore, not just an isolated fact of Beauty, but a fact of Beauty that points beyond itself to the possibility of yet greater accomplishments of Beauty in societies of occasions that draw together more diverse elements into more intense harmonies. As with Isaiah, whose liturgy of burning incense in the Temple opened up into an experience of the liturgy of heaven around God's throne, and issued in a call to be God's prophet and bear God's word to the people (Isaiah 6:1-8)—so with us, whose liturgies give us experiences of Beauty that open up into yearning for the yet greater Beauty of inclusive well-being for all God's creatures, and issue into the call to us to be co-creators with God of well-being in every way we can. Liturgy is an accomplishment of God's purpose, and also a revelation of God's greater purpose, in rite and ceremony and prayer.

So liturgy enacts God's purpose on two levels: on the divine level, it accomplishes Beauty that God can feel and harmonize into God's experience of the Universe as one; and on the human level, it incorporates us into the realizing of God's aims for Beauty, for richness of experience, for inclusive well-being, as created co-creators and on behalf of all God's creatures.

Can We Discern God's Purposes?

Bruce G. Epperly

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

~Jeremiah 29:11

At the heart of Western spirituality is the vision of God as the Holy Adventure whose will is reflected in the ongoing creation of the universe, the history of nations, the evolution of the planet, and the individual growth of persons. The divine purpose—traditionally described as the “will of God”—embraces the details of our ordinary lives as well as the far horizons of personal, planetary, and cosmic history. Divine providence is at work in all things to achieve ends both great and small. Universal, yet intimate, God's presence is the foundation of religious experience. God's will can be experienced by solitary individuals as well as communities of faith. Mystics throughout the ages assert that God desires to be known, for in our knowledge of God we discover our true identity, vocation, and happiness.

Process spirituality also affirms the ubiquity of Divine providence. God's aim at beauty, intensity, order, and novelty, gives birth to every moment of life. Woven through the many strands of causation that make up each experience—and a lifetime of

experiences—God aims at the highest good congruent with each creature's past, present, and future social context. Process spirituality affirms that God's purpose is relational, persuasive, and supportive of creaturely freedom and creativity. God is intimately related to each moment of experience as well as the tapestry of experiences that constitute a lifetime, community, or planetary adventure. While process theologians generally avoid the implicit determinism characteristic of certain evangelical language, process thought nevertheless affirms that the intimate Eros of the Universe has a “plan” for all things.

Traditionally, spiritual formation has revolved around discerning and following God's purpose for our lives. What is unique about process spiritual formation is the inextricable connection between God's purposes in individual life and in the ambient social circles that shape and are shaped by our experiences and actions. While these purposes are manifold and momentary, they always point beyond the self to its social and cosmic context. Process spirituality revives the vision of Shalom—the quest for wholeness at every level of life—that characterized the theological and ethical vision of the Hebraic and early Christian traditions. Accordingly,

all spirituality is global as well as individual. We save the world through our own individual spiritual commitments, but these spiritual commitments are profoundly shaped by the ambient universe.

In the matrix of relationships from which each moment's experience arises, spiritual formation inspires attentiveness to God's will not only in our own experience but in every encounter—both personal and corporate. All things are words of God, and in every encounter God is addressing us. With the patriarch Jacob, who once dreamt of a ladder of angels ascending to heaven and descending to earth, we confess in each moment, “Surely the Lord was in this place—and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16). Process spiritual formation invites us to discern God's purpose in this moment and its connectedness with countless other moments, and to align ourselves with God's own purposes by bringing forth beauty, creative order, and wholeness. The peace that emerges from encountering God joins our well-being with the well-being of all creation. We discover that God is “in this place—and we can know it!”

While discerning God's will begins and ends with humility,

process spiritual formation provides a way to experience the divine purpose in our lives and our communities. Beginning with the experience of wonder and amazement at life itself, process spirituality affirms that, in spite of the brokenness of life, each moment, at its depths, declares the glory of God. All encounters are theophanies calling us to experience the holiness incarnate in the midst of time. All the senses are vehicles of revelation. Using the word “listening” as a metaphor for our relationship to God, we can open ourselves to receive guidance in every encounter. If God is “the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness,” then the experience of beauty and the consequent commitment to support the realization of beauty awaken us to God’s purposes. Alignment with God’s aim at beauty enables us to become embodiments of divine beauty ourselves, manifesting God’s purposes in our daily lives. Accordingly, process spiritual formation joins receptivity and action—we experience the Divine aim in our commitments to “do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8).

Experiencing God’s purposes

Spiritual formation involves the interplay of divine and human creativity and receptivity. Accordingly, there are as many paths to awakening to God’s purposes as

there are persons and situations. However, some paths join the uniqueness of our experience with the universality of divine revelation and the wisdom of our faith traditions. Simple as it may seem, the first step is to ask for divine guidance through an encounter, insight, scripture

Process spiritual formation invites us to discern God’s purpose in this moment and its connectedness with countless other moments, and to align ourselves with God’s own purposes . . .

passage, or dream. In praying for guidance, we open to deeper levels of awareness and experience. Some seekers use a prayer such as “God show me your purpose (or will) for this moment . . . this relationship . . . my life.” Implied in asking for guidance is the recognition that God always provides an answer and that you

can open yourself to divine wisdom through the many media of divine revelation—a synchronous meeting, an unexpected word or phrase, a sense of peace or joy with a particular course of action, a healing dream.

Second, we discern God’s purpose through acts of love. Jesus reminded his followers that we can encounter God “in the least of these.” In the least of these, we experience the call of God that joins our own self-realization with the well-being of others.

Third, we discern God’s purposes by listening with our whole selves. If God’s manifold and momentary aims at beauty radiate through both the micro- and the macro-cosm, then in insightful listening to any part of our experience, we may intuit God’s purpose for our lives. In holy listening, whether through meditative prayer, visualization exercises, or silence, we nurture the seeds of action and become partners in God’s aim to heal the earth. God is not aloof, silent, or incomprehensible. We can experience glimpses of the Holy Adventure and the Divine Purpose for our lives.

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Process Resources

Using *Life Connections*: The P&F Confirmation Curriculum in Practice

Sharon James Fazel

This fall I had a small but, once again, unique set of confirmation students: four girls, two boys; ninth graders, all. Transition age? Big time! It was a collection of kids with bright minds, but complex personal stories; each with emotional roller coasters all their own to ride. But with only six—and me—there was no way around those stories! There was only *through*.

For three years prior, I had been using a denominational confirmation resource which offered so many different choices at each step along the way that I found myself continually facing the dilemma of “over-choice,” and wondering how I would achieve continuity.

I needed a confirmation resource that was more specific, yet free enough to allow choice and improvisation. I needed something clearly focused on the Good News but that made few assumptions about Bible study (we cannot count on ninth grade biblical scholars); and I needed something with plenty of room for questioning, that would even give equal honor to bold, outright doubt! And, thanks to a friend involved with Process & Faith, I found the confirmation resource I needed in

Rick Marshall’s *Life Connections, A Confirmation Curriculum from the Perspective of a Relational Theology*.

The curriculum is based on the theme of “story.” Although certainly not an unheard of approach to theological study, this educational treatment works faithfully through the steps of story development, while employing useful, creative tools. There are role plays and guided imagery, theological reflections and probing questions, group prayers and suggestions for simple rituals, and even ideas for field trips. The approach was consistent to the theme of story; and that was a real anchoring device for me as a facilitator among these young people. I saved our newsprint pages from our opening discussion of the elements of story, as Marshall lays them out: characters and relationships, meaning and understanding, order and chaos, conflict, goals and changes in the journey, what’s at stake, resolution and—especially—*point of view*. I later found these early sheets invaluable in our final discussions, because reminding the students of these elements helped them focus their own faith statements.

Of course, the assumption that “God is ever-growing, ever-becoming” of process faith is embedded within the *Connections* curriculum, which allows and encourages questions that flow beyond the boundaries of the church, and even the Christian faith. Once again, this worked especially well for us, because we had already committed ourselves as a church staff to focus the year not only on our own denominational history and polity (United Church of Christ), but also rather extensively on an exploration of interfaith dialogue and experience.

With our confirmation students and both our middle school and senior high youth groups, we took regular interfaith field trips. We worshipped with our Muslim friends (with whom we had already established a relationship before 9-11) at an Islamic mosque. There, we were very careful to abide by all clothing and other customs, including separating by gender, and girls covering their heads and arms. We attended a “demonstration Seder” offered annually by a large synagogue in another local community, where we participated in an educational “sample seder” during

preparation for Passover. We also visited a neighboring Buddhist monastery, where Tibetan monks, including this year's visiting Tibetan Rinpoche, spoke with us about Tibetan Buddhism. The monks served us tea and invited us to join them for prayers. This last experience was perhaps the most impactful on our confirmation students. Several of them in that visit experienced what they came to call the "Holy Spirit," albeit in a non-Christian setting!

Thus, I appreciated the flexibility of the *Life Connections* curriculum, which allowed us to explore deeply these interfaith experiences, yet relate them as "other faith stories" to our own Christian faith story. What I came to realize for myself, and then see happening in our students, was that exploring in a deeply experiential way the spiritual practices of other faiths—at the guiding hand of someone active within that faith—resulted in a deeper realization of the sacredness of my own spiritual journey as a Christian. Truth be told, I feel more deeply committed to identifying myself with the Christian faith after coming to a clearer understanding, *experientially*, of how committed others are to their respective faiths. I believe this was true for our students, as well. One of them declared in her faith statement: "The monastery is in a house that I have passed countless times on my way to school. And right there in [place] was a center of the Holy Spirit! We sat in the basement on the little cushions and listened to a monk

tell us of the Holy Spirit. He never called it that, but that's exactly what he was describing—a presence of good in the world."

I must confess that I did not use every lesson in the *Life Connections* curriculum. We began our study with something else, introducing *Life Connections* later in the year. (We will introduce it much earlier next year!) But perhaps that is part of the curriculum's real value: it is flexible enough to withstand "picking and choosing" and fluid schedules, even though it is "intact" enough to be implemented as an "A to Z" journey. Moreover, for next year I have drafted help for the journey: a layperson will be assisting; and we will be establishing a "parents' council" to advise and assist us along our path. We will also put 8th and 9th graders together in one class, then hold confirmation only on alternate years. Only time will tell if this new plan works! But—I am confident that the *Life Connections* curriculum will not only withstand, but will also support and enhance, the processes we undertake.

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Life Connections is available from Process & Faith for \$18, plus tax and shipping.

Critic's Corner: Books

Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism.

By Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003) 125 pages, pp., \$18.

Reviewed by Richard G. Wheatcroft

One of the indirect consequences of globalization is the emergence of religious pluralism, which many observers agree is the major issue on the twenty-first century agenda of faith communities. Some faith communities confront religious pluralism with fear, seeing it as a threat to the uniqueness of their belief. They respond by building and living in a ghetto of exclusivity. Other faith communities regard religious pluralism with tolerance. Accepting the differences between beliefs, they attempt to find common ground, thus maintaining an open house of inclusiveness.

In a major contribution to the issue of religious pluralism, Marjorie Suchocki offers a comprehensive theological foundation for faith communities, particularly the Christian community, for going beyond these alternatives and affirming religious pluralism as a positive and hopeful reality. She writes, "My goal is a Christian affirmation of our own Christian tradition *and* other traditions, living toward a vision of the world as a community of diverse communities."

Using her perspective of process-relational theology, the author interprets Genesis I as the story of the interactive call of God

and the response of the world. The result of the interaction is "a conglomeration of mind-boggling diversities" at all levels of creation, from the "deepest cellular level of things" to the human species and community. The call of God and the response of people are characterized by a diversity of cultures and religions, which she sees as "the work of God in creative response to people in their various contexts in the world."

On this foundation she suggests that in the interaction of call and response, God is "incarnated" in the world through human cultures, calls all religions into existence, and is present in the response of all faith communities. She writes, "The goal of God's call within each culture is toward richness and inclusiveness of community." This leads her to caution about "abstracting" truth from our experience to declare our way is the only "way, the truth and the life." She maintains that the way, the truth, and the life proclaimed by all religions are "parallel truths." She writes, "My naming of God through Jesus Christ reflects the work of God with me and the tradition in which I stand, and it truly names God. A Jewish naming of God reflects the work of God with Jews in the tradition in which

they stand. We are each naming the way God has worked with us respectively." And she would apply such naming of God to other faith traditions.

She then proceeds to offer criteria by which we can judge the "multiple forms of truth" which emerge from the various experiences of faith communities. The first is the belief that humanity is created in the image of God. After tracing the use and interpretation of the image of God concept through Christian history, she believes it to be helpful to associate it with the Trinitarian nature of God. If this is done, the image of God is communal, not individual. She writes, "For the human to be made in the image of God is for the human to exist in community that is itself created in and through irreducible diversity." Consequently, a Christian affirmation of religious pluralism will involve working "toward the goal of becoming a community across lines of irreducible differences, after the model of the image of God" under the criteria of "deeds of righteousness, mercy and kindness."

The next step is to see the Christian symbol of "the reign of God" as both a "theologically based

reason for affirming other religions” and a criterion for “evaluating ourselves and others.” She writes, “A theology of the reign of God calls us toward a new affirmation of religious pluralism.” We live the reign of God when we reach out to the “strangers within our gates,” people of other faith communities, and engage them as friends in dialogue.

In a chapter entitled *Saving Grace*, the author deals with the meaning of the cross and resurrection and its implications for understanding what God has done for us in Christ. She illuminates four concepts that have been regnant in different eras of the history of the Christian church, relative to a particular understanding of what is wrong with the human condition. This pluralism of understandings, evident in Christianity, is a demonstration that God can reveal God’s love and grace in diverse ways within different cultures and faith communities.

The Dignity Of Difference: How To Avoid The Clash Of Civilizations. By Jonathan Sacks. London & New York: Continuum, 2002, 216 pp., \$14.95.

Reviewed by Richard Wheatcroft

This remarkable book is a bold theological statement that could set the 21st century agenda of the religious communities throughout the world. The author is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Britain and the Commonwealth, who holds visiting professorships at Kings College, London and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

The primary challenge the world faces in the 21st century is globalization, “the inter connectedness of the world through new systems of communication,” which is one of the great transformation in the history of the world. The author writes, “On the one hand, globalization is bringing us closer together than ever before, interweaving our lives, nationally and internationally, in complex and inextricable ways. On the other hand, a new tribalism—a regression to older and more fractious loyalties—is driving us ever more angrily apart.”

The process of globalization is “profoundly destabilizing” to economies, governments, religious and educa-

Concluding her Christian affirmation of religious pluralism, Dr. Suchocki writes, “I believe that God is calling us to a new and more intense form of mission activity in the world—not to convert the world to our own religion, but to convert the world toward friendship.” Friendship can be cultivated on the personal and local congregational level when we share knowledge and engage in conversation about our different faith communities. Friendship can also occur on the global level when we “together seek deeper knowledge of the roots of the ills that plague our planet.”

This profound, illuminating, engaging and prophetic book is a major contribution to the agenda of dealing with the issue of religious pluralism. At the end of each chapter are questions for personal reflection and group discussion. *Divinity and Diversity* is an essential guide for individuals and groups committed to converting the world toward friendship.

tional institutions, families and individuals. Since all of these areas have an inescapable moral dimension, the world’s religious communities have a responsibility to engage the issues of war and peace, poverty, hunger, disease, oppression and lack of freedom. Sacks writes of the urgency, “I believe that globalization is summoning the world’s great faiths to a supreme challenge, one that we have been able to avoid in the past but can do so no longer.”

If the world’s faith communities are to respond to the challenge, they must deal creatively with their own differences. Usually, when religions are in conversation with each other, the task is to recognize differences, find some common ground, and plead for tolerance of one another. But Sacks proposes a different “model and metaphor” which he calls the “dignity of difference.” He points to the need for adherents of religions to recognize, appreciate, cherish and celebrate our differences.

Using the first twelve chapters of the Book of Genesis as his biblical base, Sacks argues that “Biblical monotheism is not the idea that there is one God and therefore “one faith, one truth, one way of life.” This interpretation of monotheism is the foundation of Jewish, Christian and Islamic fundamentalism

Continued on page 32

The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming, by Catherine Keller
(London: Routledge), 2003, xx + 307 pp., softcover \$25.95

Reviewed by Zandra Wagoner

What happened to the chaos of Genesis 1.2? Why did it disappear from Christian theology—at least on the face of it? Was it murdered? Was it a “she”? “Was” it at all? Is this a mystery that can be solved? (xix)

These questions flow through Catherine Keller’s newest publication, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. Her central image is that of the biblical *tehom*—“the deep, salt water, chaos, depth itself” (xvi)—as found in the opening verses of the Genesis creation narrative. Keller begins with the premise that although *tehom* is present in the biblical text, classical Christian theology erased the *tehom* waters of chaos, the “darksome deep” (p. xvi), through the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*, which established as unquestionable the omnipotent God who created out of nothing. This doctrine is funded by the linear time of salvation history, whose absolute origin guarantees an absolute end. Keller argues that Christian theology “created this *ex nihilo* at the cost of its own depth,” and at the expense of those faces who have represented chaos in the West—female, mother, pagan, queer, dark, animal (xvi). Keller seeks to deconstruct the *tehom*-

ophobia of Christian theology, biblical interpretation, and western culture, in order to reconstruct a *tehom*ophilic theology that “bears with the chaos” (29). She proposes a new doctrine, *creatio ex profundis*—creation out of the unfathomable depths—from which she will build a post-structuralist, process theology of becoming.

Keller begins her book with the destabilization of the *ex nihilo*. She reads the doctrine through its founders, Theophilus and Irenaeus, and then tracks its transformations in the hands of Augustine and Barth. Keller shows it to be a doctrine of dominology. As Keller explains, the “Father needs nothing but his own logos to create. This is a rhetoric of sheer power” and masculine mastery (55). Keller argues that the doctrine is constituted through an exclusion of the chaotic, the sensual, the feminine, the disordered, the unruly, the material, and the queer. Thus, *ex nihilo* is not just about creation-out-of-nothing, but “of masculine supremacy, of female abjection, and of unilateral domination” (53). And, as Keller cautions, the erasure of chaos into abject nothingness is a vicious circle: “the nothingness invariably returns with the face of the feared

chaos—to be annihilated all the more violently” (xvi). Or more succinctly, “the *flux* repressed, returns as *the flood*” (10).

Although the founders of *ex nihilo* sought to settle the *tehom*ic question once and for all, Keller traces how the chaotic waters resurface, or “leak,” into Augustine’s conflicted relationship with the maternal, deep “nothing-something,” and how the watery chaos violently appears in Barth’s God who creates *against* the nothingness, represented as evil itself. Keller traces a similar pattern among biblical scholars. She is particularly interested in those scholars writing since the discovery of ancient myths that are intertextually related to Genesis 1, most importantly, the Babylonian creation myth of the slaughtering of the chaotic, salt-water goddess Tiamat that pre-marks the biblical *tehom*. With this new knowledge, biblical scholars now take into account that *tehom* was not *nothing*, but repeat Barth’s habit of positioning *tehom* as the “indispensable Other, indeed as the defining enemy” which God must conquer (113). While the story of creator vs. chaos recognizes *tehom* as *something*, it is but the flip side of the ‘ole *ex nihilo*; both dependant upon the devaluation of chaotic

matter and its many cognates.

Keller turns to an 11th century Jewish biblical hermeneut who translates the first two verses of Genesis 1 with an important difference. This translation positions *Elohim* as in cooperation with *tehom*, a relational, non-coercive creation that shows no sign of conquest or conflict. Here chaos is neither nothing nor evil. While the biblical text is certainly marked by a conquest of the watery goddess, Keller argues that it is also possible to read the biblical text not as another matricide, but as a “dialogical cooperation” (117) between *Elohim* and the formless deep. Keller’s *tehom*ic theology does not “pretend to know what the text meant, let alone to know it better than it knew itself” (122), but rather practices a *tehom*ic hermeneutic that acknowledges the “endless labyrinth of interpretation” (104) or “sea of heteroglossia” that is decidedly relational and perspectival. From her multilayered interpretations of biblical and non-biblical sources, Keller forms her *tehom*ic theology of becoming.

Keller’s constructive theology is a trinitarian dance of the Deep, the Difference and the Spirit. The Deep, or *depth of God*, is a dense “matrix of all relations” (227), a “matrix of every becoming” (219). Keller rejects the foundation of an absolute origin, but in distinction to those post-structuralists who dismiss depth and champion surfaces, she retains depth as the layered, enfolding,

bottomless, heterogeneous place of potentiality and infinite beginnings. In addition, Keller’s Deep does not allow for the conflation of chaos/dark/evil, a source of modern racism. Keller characterizes the *depth of God* as a luminous darkness, the place of infinite mystery, and in so doing, theologically subverts the opposition between lightness and darkness. The trope of infinite mystery, drawn from negative theology, is an internal deconstructive element that ensures the Deep always exceeds our capacity to know, and necessarily subverts all truth regimes.

The Deep gives birth to the Difference, the *difference of God*. This beginningless becoming of God ensures that “becoming is not outside of God nor God outside of becoming” (180). Keller draws from chaos theory the notion that order has the tendency to irrupt within chaos, and through strange attractions, self-organizing systems are lured “out of the fluctuating possibilities” (195). In Keller’s language, both human and divine emerge from the depths as “pluri-singularities,” not separate ones but “interdependent individuations, constantly coming, flowing, through one another” (179). It is through the relational, erotic cooperation between the Deep and Difference that creation unfolds and is solicited. Keller’s third “person,” the Spirit, is characterized as the “relation of relations,” which provides the vibrating, material energy and

interconnection between creator, creation and chaotic potential. Within this theology lies the hope that by bearing with the chaos we can “make *better orders*” (23).

Face of the Deep will delight those who have been enticed by Keller’s theological insights in the past, for the main purpose of this book is to develop a sustained constructive theology. A defining feature of Keller’s book is her commitment to reconstruct theology, not from nothing, but from everything preceding it. Not only is this book a continuation of themes found in her previous books, it builds from a relational multitude of resources. Notably, no theologian, biblical scholar, biblical text, or theorist is pure foil for her. Rather, each provides openings at the edge of chaos, where creative possibilities take place. Her book reads as an intertextual collage weaving together the past with possible futures. And for those who are inspired by the play of language, Keller’s ability to find intertextual connections between popular idioms and her theological ponderings are nothing short of *tehom*ic brilliance!

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Critic's Corner: Film

Marjorie Suchocki

Bruce Almighty

Universal Studios: 2003
Tom Shadyac, Director
Starring Jim Carrey, Jennifer Aniston, Morgan Freeman



Hollywood's God appears in many guises, and this latest epiphany with Morgan Freeman as God and Jim Carrey as his minion does as well as any for lighthearted summer flick fare. When God decides to take a week's vacation, he hands his powers over to self-centered egomaniac Bruce just to show the cad that being God is not all it's cut out to be. Fortunately, aside from details such as causing a tidal wave in Japan, Bruce's divine powers seem to be limited to his locale in Buffalo. He plays "parting the Red Sea" with his tomato soup; his dog miraculously learns to use the toilet; his girl friend Grace's bosom increases several sizes; a rival newsman makes a fool of himself as he assumes the anchor job Bruce had coveted for himself, and Bruce, of course, shines as the on-the-spot newsman covering unexpected spectacular events. Carrey's antics play the one-liner jokes of foolishly misused powers to their natural inane conclusion until the seven days are over, God steps in, and all is made right. Since the days of Aesop, stories

with morals have had their place. "Bruce Almighty" practically hits you over the head with its message: "Be yourself, but don't be self-centered." Duh!

And what of God? The film intones several times that not even God must interfere with free will—although evidently the injunction does not apply when it comes to forcing the rival to flub up his debut as newsroom anchorman. Other than that, the film suggests that there are far too many prayers for God to handle, and that given the great variety of conflicting requests, answering "yes" to them all leads to social disaster. Bruce, who has the power but not the wisdom of God (evidently wisdom and power have no essential connection here), finds prayers to be an interminable nuisance. Presumably—but not evidently—the "real" God can handle them.

In many ways, the film reflects American folk wisdom about a kindly God whose basic job is to answer prayers, and who theoretically can do anything except interfere with free will. Despite Morgan Freeman's awesome

mortal powers, this film does nothing to question or challenge such assumptions. Early in the film, Freeman and Carrey are shown walking on water. Perhaps the message is that one is not to look for depths when the purpose is to skim the surface of things. So view the film as summer fun, but forget about using it to probe for theological or religious insight. And be thankful for process alternatives!

Summer course films

For those who were unable to attend this summer's process class team-taught by Marjorie Suchocki and John Cobb, here is the list of films that the class watched. Grab your popcorn and ponder the process themes in these films!

The Hours

The Spitfire Grill

The Apostle

25th Hour

The Color of Paradise

The Hours: Sharing An Experience

Tari Lennon

I love movies. I always have. From my first moment sitting in a darkened theater, my mother close beside me, watching *The Wizard of Oz*, I have been a fan. Over the years, like most of you, I've seen some outstanding films, some terrible films, and a whole lot of unremarkable films. Once in awhile, though, there has been a film that so completely engaged and touched me that I was no longer aware of watching a screen but had instead the experience of being a part of the movie, actually participating in the unfolding drama. Movies like *Limelight*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Lion In Winter*, *E.T.*, and *The Mission* held that transforming power for me—and now, *The Hours*.

This movie has received so much media attention, both positive and negative, and has been used by the political left and right to make such cliched comments about feminism, chronic illness, depression, child-abandonment, suicide, *et al.* that I had to go see the movie a second time just to make sure I hadn't dreamed *The Hours*. I hadn't.

The movie is a faithful adaptation of Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize winning book that connects the lives of three different women from three different historical periods via their relationship to Virginia Woolf's work, *Mrs. Dalloway*. That book is an incred-

ibly dense work that explores the interior world of its central character with such intensity that, not uncommonly, the reader has the experience of needing to gasp for air. I had the same experience in the movie.

The three lead actors, Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep, are so accomplished in their portrayals of the three women that the only word appropriate for their work is—breath-taking. A tilt of the head, a downward cast eye, a sudden slump to the shoulder, a twitch of the eye take the viewer into the interior worlds of each character with such subtlety that one senses a kind of joining together with the actors in experiences of shared exploration. Through those shared explorations we come to a deeper understanding of the myriad ways in which we are connected to one another. By discerning those connections we become aware of our profound need that our lives bear meaning. That awareness, in turn, reminds us of the gift that each day is in affording us the opportunity to discern those connections and find that meaning.

The very way in which the movie (like the book) is structured invites the viewer to enter into a relationship with the principals. The story itself seems to be saying, "if you stay on the outside

of these three women and content yourself with analyzing and/or judging them, you too will be guilty of the same lack of understanding that endangered their lives." To be willing to let the actors take us to a place where we are willing to lay aside our beliefs relative to marriage, motherhood, womanhood, and self-identity is to come to a place familiar to all regardless of the style and content of our lives. That altogether familiar place is where choice transmutes despair into a place called hope.

Virginia Woolf's unwavering commitment to herself and her art, Laura Brown's decision to live, Clarissa's resurrection from her own *angst* emerge from the rubble of quaking selves. In the end we are sad that Virginia Woolf took her life, that Laura Brown left her family, and that Clarissa had to witness her dearest friend's suicide. But it is those very acts that carry us into the interior worlds of these three women. Once we are there with them we are no longer tempted to ask "why?" but moved to say "thank you" for revealing a human capacity for courage that ennobles the entire human family. This movie invites a certain awe in its contemplation of the mystery at the heart of all human choice-making. In the encounter with that awe, we come to view each other with ever increasing amounts of humility.

P&F Connections

Wenatchee, Washington

In meetings on May 18 and 20, we had lively discussions of the most recent *Creative Transformation*. Several people from Wenatchee attended the Theology of Belonging seminar in Claremont June 23 - 27. Bob and Adrienne Brizee and Julia Gotthold are busily writing and revising the adult curriculum: *Dancing with the Divine: Proposals about God from Process Theology*. Bob and Adrienne created and co-led three worship services celebrating John Wesley's 300th birthday (and Bob's 70th), Adrienne serving as liturgist, Bob preaching. For more information, contact Adrienne and Bob Brizee at brizeeab@aol.com.

Minnesota

June 3 marked the first anniversary of the formation of P&F: Twin Cities. We now have fifty Process & Faith members in Minnesota. We have had lively discussions about articles in *Creative Transformation* and meetings with Marjorie Suchocki. On June 25, our meeting consisted of panelists describing how they have taught process in their settings. We are looking forward to a visit and lectures by John Cobb in September: St. Paul on the 21st, Rochester on the 22nd, and Duluth on the 23rd. Contact Kirsten at kmebust@twincitizen.net.

Seattle-Tacoma

Paul Ingram held a meeting on April 10, with John Cobb, to organize a group. Interested? Contact Paul at ingrampo@plu.edu.

Bluegrass/Lexington, KY

We goofed! Had the wrong email address in the last issue. Charles Arterburn is interested in getting a group going, and you can contact him at crart02@yahoo.com.

Atlanta

Atlanta folks are breaking for the summer, looking to get a discussion group going in the fall. Contact Monica Coleman at revmonica@worldnet.att.net or 404.235.6807.

Indianapolis

On April 20, 19 people, including process theologian Clark Williamson, met with Marjorie Suchocki at Helene Russell's home to establish P&F: Indianapolis. Following vigorous discussion of process themes, the group decided to include social action and liberation themes as part of their agenda. Contact Helene Russell at hrussell@cts.edu.

San Diego

Michael Lodahl is willing to host an organizing meeting for those interested in getting a group together. Details forthcoming, so contact Beth at P&F if you want to be part of it!

Orange County at Brea

Rick Marshall and the folks at Brea Congregational UCC are starting a process discussion/study group in the fall. Contact Rick at bccrick@msn.com

Ottawa, Canada

Our group is organizing an event around John Cobb's visit to Ottawa. John will be giving lectures at St. Paul University Nov. 18, 19 and 20. We will have one meeting with him for process folk as well as our own concurrent study. I will be organizing hotels for folk from outside Ottawa in the fall. To be kept informed email George Hermanson at tsauc@bellnet.ca or Trinity St. Andrews United Church 291 Plaunt St Renfrew On K7V 1N2.

Belgium-France

Freddy Moreau works tirelessly and passionately on promoting process theology. One of his projects is translations of John Cobb's work and articles from *Creative Transformation*. In support of his work, to introduce U.S. readers to their colleague overseas, and to greet our friends in Belgium-France, we offer on the following page a portion of Freddy's response to Cobb's recent homily on hope, which is both a translation and his further thoughts on the subject. (The full text is on the P&F website.) Contact Freddy directly at freddy.moreau@skynet.be, or visit his website at: <http://www.protestantismeliberal.be/>

Your Town?

Check the P&F Datebook—are folks speaking in a location near you? Take the opportunity to organize P&F: Your Town! Contact Beth at: faith@ctr4process.org

L'espoir, traduit par Freddy Moreau

Churchill disait que la première victime d'une guerre était la vérité! A cette nuance près, que les procédés de manipulation utilisés de part et d'autre sont tellement grossiers qu'ils influent heureusement peu sur les esprits mais suffisamment pour nous inciter à cultiver l'espoir, car espérer c'est aussi une façon de prier.

Les événements que nous vivons actuellement avec toutes les exagérations auxquelles nous sommes confrontés et même soumis, nous désorientent par leurs incomplétudes, leurs inexacitudes, leurs extrapolations démagogiques voire leurs expressions diaboliques.

Nous ne sommes ni Insensibles! ni Naïfs! ni Imbéciles! Nous voici pourtant à la recherche de nos illusions perdues, mieux, nous sommes à la quête d'un sens créateur auquel nous intégrons l'espoir car sans espoir la vie s'essouffle.

“La fin de l'espoir est le commencement de la mort” (Charles de Gaulle). L'espoir fait vivre, c'est un moteur! Comme tout moteur, l'espoir doit se nourrir, l'espoir doit être alimenté . . . Alimenté par les événements que nous subissons et que nous suscitons aussi : ceux que nous vivons autour de nous, que nous lisons dans la presse, écoutons à la radio, voyons à la télé, j'irai jusqu'à dire que la force de l'espoir prend naissance au creuset de ce que nous avons de plus précieux, au sein de notre imaginaire!

Ce moteur, guidé, animé par l'Esprit est une sorte de mouvement perpétuel tout comme notre respiration, notre coeur. L'espoir est pulsation, sans espoir la vie n'est pas possible! L'espoir est l'expression d'un don de Dieu.

Comme l'amour et la foi, il est inoxydable aux circonstances, il dépasse les spéculations sur l'avenir, il n'a pas vraiment de contenu spécifique . . . l'adversité ne le contamine pas, même dans les cas les plus désespérés.

Serait-il une question d'optimisme personnel ou de tempérament particulier, serait-il une alternative au contentement de soi, l'option ultime face au désespoir?

A qui donc appartient notre espoir? A un Dieu “fourre-tout” qui règle tous les problèmes pourvu qu'on sache s'y prendre. Ou bien nous appartient-il de le mettre en route, comme participant et

responsable de notre devenir?

André Gounelle écrit dans son livre “Le Dynamisme Créateur de Dieu” : “Quand on attribue à Dieu la toute puissance, on s'en fait une bien piètre idée... User de contrainte est souvent un signe de faiblesse...Le seul pouvoir digne d'estime est celui de la persuasion par le travail incessant de l'Esprit” et pour ceux qui croient au Process, le fait de savoir qu'ils collaborent, qu'ils créent avec Dieu pour arriver aux meilleurs résultats possibles ne peut, évidemment, que les conforter dans leurs espérances.

Pour ma part, je suis intimement convaincu que vivre l'espoir c'est croire, profondément, que nous-mêmes et les autres aussi pouvons devenir ce que nous ne sommes pas encore, ici et maintenant, c'est à dire, plus aimants, plus sensibles, plus enclins à apprendre les uns des autres.

Vivre l'espoir signifie aussi croire que les institutions peuvent devenir plus justes, que le monde peut devenir plus paisible et équitable et que la destruction écologique peut ralentir et stopper. Mais, prenons garde de ne pas prendre des vessies pour des lanternes. Vivre l'espoir, cela signifie qu'il s'agit de mettre en route des réalités possibles, il ne s'agit aucunement de réalités acquises !

Ne sommes-nous pas déjà heureux et fiers d'être des collaborateurs de Dieu? Dans cette perspective nous voulons croire que nos actions seront positives. Mettre en route ces possibles vaut donc la peine. Ces possibles nous ouvrent à l'autre, ils brisent notre solitude. Ils sont les fruits de l'amour, de la justice, et de la paix, parmi ceux qui nous entourent et dans le monde des hommes. L'espoir n'est pas un luxe, il est l'alternative nécessaire et dynamique face au désespoir qui reste, je pense, la forme la plus courue du suicide.

Cette démarche nous invite à ne pas nous satisfaire de ce qui est !

Beaucoup d'entre nous reconnaissent que les attentes qui les ont soutenus sont en train de s'effriter, c'est la raison pour la quelle, nous devons nous efforcer d'être inventifs et créateurs d'alternatives satisfaisantes . . .

Continuez: http://www.ctr4process.org/pandf/Freddy%20M/homily_on_hope.htm

Announcing: P&F Press!

This small press will be used to publish selected books of process-oriented essays, curricula, and a process liturgical resources book.

We are honored to announce that our first publication, *Belonging Together: Faith and Politics in a Relational World*, will be available August 2003. This vital collection of essays is edited by Douglas Sturm, one of our distinguished contributing editors. Essayists are Warren Copeland, Frank (Chris) Gamwell,

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Wheatcroft on Sacks, from page 25

which leads to the attempt to impose a single truth on the whole world and often results in tragedy. On the contrary, the truth of monotheism, as understood by Judaism, is that God is One but created diversity. God is the God of all humanity in all its diversity and is only partially comprehended by any faith. There is “the dignity of difference.” Sacks is also emphatic that the biblical witness is that since God creates difference, “it is in-one-who-is-different that we meet God.”

Sacks offers seven moral principles, devoting a chapter to each, which can provide us with a

vision for living with the uncertainties and insecurities of globalization, and give us “compass bearings” which we can use to judge whether or not we are moving in the right direction.

Sacks concludes with “A Covenant of Hope.” He believes that “the opportunities posed by global capitalism and the power of technology are vast and potentially benign.” However, the opportunities are accompanied with immense risks, posed by the concentration of wealth, our habits of consumption, the despoliation of the environment, and the rise of envy, anger, and violence at perceived injustice. He

also reminds us that the “world faiths embody truths unavailable to economics and politics, and they remain salient when everything else changes.” He writes, “They remind us that civilizations survive not by strength but by how they respond to the weak; not by wealth but by the care they show for the poor; not by power but by their concern for the powerless.”

Sacks emphasizes that the faith communities of the world need a “covenant of hope” “each acknowledging the integrity and sovereignty of the other, and pledging themselves in mutual loyalty to achieve together what neither can achieve alone.”

Announcing the *Process & Faith* *Hymn/Liturgy Contest*

Submissions must reflect a process-relational view of the world. Winners to be chosen by a national panel of judges. Prizes will be awarded in two categories: hymn and liturgy. This contest is part of a larger plan to publish a P&F Press book of process-themed worship resources. All prizewinning submissions and honorable mentions will be included in the book. Process & Faith reserves publishing rights for this purpose. Direct inquiries to faith@ctr4process.org. For more information, see: www.processandfaith.org.

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Submissions due: January 15, 2004

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Send submissions to:

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