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Benjamin A. Reist

San Francisco Theological Seminary

Stuart Professor of Systematic Theology

DOGMATICS IN PROCESS

This lecture is dedicated
to
Bernard Loomer

in commemoration and recognition of his work
and the value we placed in him as a colleague.

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Dogmatics in Process

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Context and Process

The development of the theologies of liberation in our time has brought with it the compelling demand for the *contextualization* of theology. Though the widespread recognition of this demand is comparatively new, the demand itself has deep roots, going back at least as far as the pioneering work of Ernst Troeltsch, in relating the tasks of constructive theology to the rising new science of sociology, and to the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Lehmann, in sensing the radicalizing of theological ethics on this side of the break with nineteenth century Protestant theology initiated by Karl Barth. In this light it has always been clear to me that the locus of theological creativity can be delineated as follows: theological creativity is inexorably demanded when the ethic it necessarily generates, and upon which it in turn depends, demands consideration of issues that outrun its prior clarities.

The historical side of the nexus indicated by these several names is complex indeed, but even more complicated is the inexorable expansion of the contextualization of theological creativity that sets in when we take into account the fact that a decisive component of the present is that we are on this side of the rise of post-modern science. Here, too, complex developments are at hand, entailing at least the coming to terms, theologically, with the breakthroughs associated with such celebrated figures as Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, and Kurt Gödel.

These background considerations must be set aside, for the present, with the simple observation that what is underway is the expansion of the contextualization of theology from the ethical arena to the full scale inclusion of the theology of the natural, as well. This is not to be confused with either the longstanding theological appropriation of insights from the realm of natural law, nor the more recent debates in our own century that subsume the issues of revelation and reason under polemical thrusts concerning natural theology. But it is to be noted that the development is cumulative,

Benjamin A. Reist is Stuart Professor of Systematic Theology at SFTS. This is the 1986 GTU Faculty Lecture, the tenth annual in that series, delivered in Berkeley on March 19, 1986. The lecture was dedicated to Bernard M. Loomer (1912–1985) in commemoration and recognition of his work and of the value placed by the entire GTU community in him as a colleague.

and that it is salutary for the deepening of the theologies of liberation and of the broader framework of theological ethics contributing to their rise.

What I shall call "processive dogmatics" is necessitated by this expansion of the contextualization of theology. Both the theologies of liberation and theology on this side of the emergence of post-modern science locate the norms of reflection in the very midst of the constructive enterprise itself. The former does this in the interrelation of action and reflection, in which *orthopraxis* replaces *orthodoxy* as the disciplining concern in theological reflection. The latter senses the identical need, for only a location of the norms of reflection in the midst of reflection can meet the demands of Polanyi's great maxim for what he calls "the tacit dimension" of scientific inquiry, "We can know more than we can tell."[1] Here we encounter a distinguishing characteristic of processive dogmatics. The very term "dogmatics" carries the air of finality, the passion for the all-controlling conclusion. But if in theology, as well as in any other human inquiry, what we know lures us beyond the limits of present clarities, then the norms of that line of reflection too must be located in the continuum of reflection, rather than in the profundity of conclusions.

Such a processive dogmatics is dependent upon an understanding and utilization of the perspective of process modes of thought. Despite the complexity that comes to mind with the mere mention of the name Alfred North Whitehead, this perspective comes into quite succinct focus if one sees that the clue to Whitehead's significance for constructive theological effort—and, I would contend, for understanding his philosophy as a whole—is his *Science and the Modern World,* and the theory of induction he there delineates. This is set out in one of the early chapters of the work, "Mathematics as an Element in the History of Thought." The basic assumption for this perspective is clear: "Provided we know something which is perfectly general about the elements in any occasion, we can then know an indefinite number of other equally general concepts which must also be exemplified in that same occasion" (1925:27). And this assumption is precisely what causes trouble. "The theory of Induction is the despair of philosophy—and yet all our activities are based upon it" (1925:23).

We must not run by the word "indefinite" in this formulation too quickly. Induction has to do with an *indefinite* number of implications involved in any set of elements in a given occasion. Accordingly, induction is intrinsically open-ended. The disciplining of induction, then, cannot be preoccupied with the finality of its conclusions, since these must always be leading to further possibilities. One of the truly memorable points adduced by Whitehead in elaborating this matter emerges in his brief remarks on

[1] For the citation, cf. Polanyi 1967:4. For the idea, the epitomizing work containing this citation, *The Tacit Dimension,* suffices; it itself is rooted in the second part of Polanyi's major work, *Personal Knowledge,* entitled "The Tacit Component" (1962:69 ff.).

Pythagoras, "the first man who had any grasp of the sweep of this general principle" (1925:28), and Plato, who relayed Pythagoras' insights to the philosophical tradition at large, since "the Platonic world of ideas is the refined, revised form of the Pythagorean doctrine that number lies at the base of the real world" (1925:29). For Whitehead, "Plato and Pythagoras stand nearer to modern physical science than does Aristotle." This is so because "the practical counsel to be derived from Pythagoras is to measure, and thus to express quality in terms of numerically determined quantity." In sharp contrast, "Aristotle by his Logic throws the emphasis on classification." Given this, Whitehead could formulate one of his most crucial observations: "The popularity of Aristotelian Logic retarded the advance of physical science throughout the Middle Ages. If only the schoolmen had measured instead of classifying, how much they might have learnt!" (1925:29). The disciplined indefiniteness induction presupposes has to do with measurement, not classification. As Whitehead quickly went on to assert, classification is not thereby damned. But its propensity for finality is! Thus, "Classification is necessary. But unless you can progress from classification to mathematics, your reasoning will not take you very far" (1925:29).

It would be too much to claim that what we have before us now is proleptically the full range of Whitehead's thought. But it is the case that *the* decisive clue to both his creativity and his contribution now emerges for our scrutiny. Measurement, not classification, has to do with mathematical reasoning. To measure is to compare, and comparison presupposes relationship. This intimates something of cardinal significance in dealing with Whitehead's thought. To be sure, there is no way to build on his ideas without using the term "process" in a highly prominent and central way. The fact remains, however, that it is misleading to do so uncritically, for the key idea in his reflections was that of *organism,* and *process* becomes the crucial notion primarily because it is a function of organism. Given this, I argue that a necessary string of terms asserts itself: measurement has to do with comparison; comparison presupposes relationship; relationship is intrinsic to organism; organism has process as its inexorable function. Relationality is prior to process, since it generates it.

Organismic relationality is alive, it is continually on the move, and so its reality can only be discerned by watching its emerging, new configurations. This is why the great pitfall of reflection, given Whitehead's concerns, is what he called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness," in which thought becomes fatally preoccupied with the "simple location" of its concerns in things, rather than in relationships. Moreover, the contention that organismic relationality is continually on the move is the setting of Whitehead's central syllogism: "Thus nature is a structure of evolving processes. The reality is the process" (1925:72).

Since the *reality* is the process, this is the context of his understanding of ultimacy, which though singular in nature, is composite in character. The

three components of this organismic singularity are what Whitehead designates as "the ultimate notions of 'creativity,' 'many,' [and] 'one,' " and he insists that all three of these notions are "involved in the meaning of the synonymous terms 'thing,' 'being,' 'entity.' " For Whitehead, " 'Creativity' is the principle of novelty." This is the case because creativity has to do with "ultimate matter of fact." And this ultimate matter of fact is nothing less than the manner in which that creativity by which the many become one continually points beyond itself to the genuinely new. Or, to utilize Whitehead's own great maxim from his central work, *Process and Reality,* "the many become one, and are increased by one" (1929:21).

That the many become one and increase by one *inexhaustibly* should be obvious. What may not be obvious is the insight implied in linking the terms "creativity" and "novelty" by way of clarifying this, and insisting, at the same time, that this, and nothing else, is ultimacy. No simplistic innovation is involved, rather an incisive critical principle is at stake, and it may be formulated in two dialectically related propositions. Given Whitehead's insight that creativity is only creative if it has to do with novelty, novelty is only novel if it is creative. Processive reality, then, has to do with both the creatively new, and the novel creativity, in which, continually, "the many become one, and are increased by one."

This issue is of decisive significance for the understanding of history and hence is of equal importance for constructive theological reflection. History, too, is organismically alive. The many become one and increase by one whenever and wherever the historian does her or his work. The conclusions reached in historical reflection are always more significant for the new horizons of reflection they disclose than they are in themselves. This is why Loomer always claimed that "historical understanding" is a better descriptive term than "process thought" for Whitehead's incisive contributions. *Induction* is the stuff of any historically informed theological reflection. I for one am convinced that this is the decisive point for relating Whitehead's work as a whole to the task of constructive theology. It is even more important than his great contention that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (1929:343). Indeed the contention that ultimacy has to do with the many becoming one and increasing by one *informs* this insight.

The Risk of a Processive Dogmatics

Processive dogmatics is related to, but not to be confused with, process theology. The regnant versions of process theology clearly understand themselves to be *philosophical* theologies, rigorously unfolded in terms of the decision that the *right* philosophy for our times is that system of thought developed by Whitehead. The perennial problem of understanding the relationship between theology and philosophy never will reach a simple resolu-

tion. But we must be warned by an alert sounded by one who is himself

deeply influenced by process thought. Ian Barbour, in his remarkable *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* incisively warns that theology must adapt, not adopt, a metaphysic, for if this stricture is not observed the metaphysical system in question will so dominate the theological reflection utilizing it that *theological* arguments will be settled on *philosophical* grounds (170).

Processive dogmatics is indeed theological reflection in process modes of thought, but it seeks to abide by strictures such as Barbour's. One of the quickest ways to focus the matter is to note the definition of process theology proposed by John Cobb and David Griffin: "Process theology operates on the one side from the perspective of Christian faith and on the other in the metaphysical context provided by process philosophy and its doctrine of God" (41). Processive dogmatics does not function in terms of a doctrine of God provided by *any* metaphysical system. Its doctrine of God is derived from the faith and legacy of the liturgically ordered tradition of the church. The recognition of the *contextual* significance of the rise of process thought takes a different form for such a theological undertaking. Process modes of thought are necessary for the understanding of the contemporary significance of precisely that heritage for these our present times. In fact, the difference that these modes of thought makes for dogmatics is even more drastic than the process theologies as we know them can envision. What is at hand is a transmutation of the task of dogmatics. This transmutation may prove radical indeed, and involves risks that could not be run until the present context, with its demands for genuine involvement, had come into reality.

The most significant kerygmatic theologian of our century is Karl Barth, and the most pervasive aspect of his work as a whole is his understanding of what he often called "theology proper." The risk of a processive dogmatics takes shape in the midst of challenging Barth at precisely this basic level of his prolific theological creativity. One of the most succinct formulations of Barth's understanding of the discipline of theological reflection occurs in the delineation of the task of dogmatics with which he began his *Dogmatics in Outline:*

> Dogmatics is the science in which the Church, in accordance with the state of its knowledge at different times, takes account of the content of its proclamation critically, that is, by the standard of Holy Scripture and under the guidance of its confessions (1947:9).

Bearing in mind that the German word "Wissenschaft," rendered "science" in the translation quoted, refers to any ordered or disciplined inquiry, and not just to what we call in English the natural sciences, we see that for Barth there are three normative components in the work of dogmatics: the Biblical base, the confessional tradition, and "the state of [the church's] knowledge at different times." This is the only order in which Barth would have these components considered, for the Bible and the confessions entail the standard to be dealt with in accordance with what is known at a given

time. Barth's greatest fear was that preoccupation with the latter would undermine the priority of the former. It is precisely here that a person wrestling with the task of dogmatics as understood by theology in process modes of thought must take issue with him.

For the deep issues to come into the open, there are two strong emphases in Barth's concern that must be noted carefully. The first is the insistence that dogmatics is a function of the church. It has to do with faith seeking understanding, as he never wearied of saying. Accordingly, whereas the church at any given time must render account of its proclamation intelligibly, it must do so in a way that carries forward the confessional tradition from which it draws both the gospel and the incentive to proclaim it ever anew. The second key emphasis is that though the church is so bound, it is also responsible to what it knows to be the case at a given time. That this is a decisive element in Barth's thought must be highlighted. It is often overlooked, by his friends as well as detractors. He too was concerned with doing justice to the demands of the contexts within which dogmatics functions. That these demands are always *approached* with theological insight, and never generate such insights independently, is the hallmark of Barth's contribution.

What we must now recognize is that to be faithful to Barth's intentionality is to move beyond just this certainty lying at the heart of his massive productivity. What I have referred to as the expansion of contextual theology now makes it abundantly clear that we may no longer leave the task of dogmatics where he left it. The relationship between the three components of his delineation is far more fluid than he ever was willing to concede. One may not deal with any one of them without touching the other two, and one may begin the discussion with any one of them as long as the other two are taken into account. The relationship between these three components is *synergistic* rather than linear. A *set,* not a sequence, of factors is involved. In the mathematical sense of the term the relationship between the three factors is *commutative.* That is to say, there is a sense in which the end product of the combination will be the same wherever one begins the process of interrelating them.

The point that has just surfaced must be handled with great care, for only an analogy from the realm of mathematics is involved. Multiplication is commutative. What this means is that

$$5x3x2 = 2x3x5 = 2x5x3$$

so that the order in which the factors are dealt with has nothing to do with the result. The "factors" of dogmatics are similarly related. But the end products are not literally identical. Rather, what is at stake is the fact that the resultant systems of faithful reflection *intersect* in *patterns of resonance,* which are themselves so sympathetic in their response to each other that they manifest a familial correspondence. Thus, valuable though the mathematical analogy is, like all analogies it is transcended by reality.

To contend that the components of dogmatics are synergistically related runs risks that Barth was not willing to entertain. He could never allow a normative significance to be given to the context within which dogmatics is attempted. And we must do so. The risks involved must be run because they are intrinsic to creativity. Unexpected novelty will be the result. This is the case whenever, and wherever, the many become the one and increase by one.

So to understand the task of dogmatics is to encounter a possibility utterly unimaginable for Barth. What is involved is nothing less than placing the genius of his delineation in close proximity to the kind of apologetic concerns that Tillich championed—not for the purpose of fulfilling the apologetic task on its own terms, *but for the purpose of keeping it kerygmatically honest*. This focuses the sense in which the relation between dogmatics and apologetics is always dialectical, and therefore reversible. But more than that, it focuses the sense in which the word "risk" must be used here: *this* understanding of the kerygmatic dimension carries with it the assumption that the *kerygma* has never been finished, and never will be. A processive dogmatic has the responsibility of disciplining the continuing development of the content of the gospel itself.

The goals here envisioned are far too extensive to be achieved easily, and they demand more than a single generation of even the most ideally collective effort could possibly accomplish. At the same time, to bring forward and adapt Barth's delineation of the task of dogmatics is to acknowledge the priority of the dogmatic tradition for any serious attempt to add to that tradition the constructive efforts of a given generation, and with this goes the faithful acknowledgement that such limitations have always disciplined theological reflection at the service of the church. At the same time this very priority is itself transformed. No longer may the dogmatic tradition *condition* the reception of new possibilities. It must rather evoke them, however transmuted prior certainties may become. For the tradition is what is to be extended and extrapolated into realms of knowledge no prior era could have anticipated. And this is the continuing locus within which theological creativity always has, and always will, live. It is the context of *kerygmatic* as well as *apologetic* theological reflection.

Given all this, the point to speaking of the *risk* of a processive dogmatics becomes clear. The task of processive dogmatics entails *recapitulating, extending,* and then *extrapolating* the foci of reflection with which a given tradition has been preoccupied. Since process modes of thought inform this undertaking, the third of these responsibilities replaces the first two as the central concern of the effort. The first of these steps involves indicating and elaborating where a tradition has been in its thinking. To a lesser extent, the second step is also dominated by the past, though the moves beyond the confines of a simple recapitulation of the reigning insights is at least hinted whenever a new context evokes rigorously new statements of insights already forged in former times and places.

The third step, however, extrapolating, explicitly attempts to move beyond the frontiers of known formulations, in ways demanded by direct involvement in new contextual demands. This may either entail thinking further along lines of inherited foci of reflection, or it may indicate moving beyond even these known concerns in the forging of utterly new agenda in the ongoing attempt to make the search for ultimacy intelligible. However it takes shape, one thing is clear from the outset. A processive dogmatics seeking to activate the extrapolation of known insights will undertake both the recapitulation and the extension of past insights differently than that kind of theological reflection that regards the gospel itself as a fixed entity needing only continual restatement, whatever horizons may be encountered.

Here, now, the real depths of what I am calling the *risk* of dogmatics in process comes into view. What is entailed is not simply the dialectical positioning of kerygmatic theology alongside the apologetic enterprise. It is rather to suggest that there is more to the kerygma itself than we have so far discerned, or than has been disclosed to us. In mathematics, extrapolation means determining what a variable will be when moved beyond the range of its observed functioning. To use terms more obviously relevant to the present undertaking, it is the work of inferring from the known that which is not yet known. In the present contexts this bears directly on all constructive theological efforts, as will be demonstrated. More than a formal observation is involved in saying this, for the very subject of theological reflection is at stake. The basic reason why the extrapolation of past theological insights is at the heart of a processive dogmatics is that the God of whom Jesus the Christ speaks, and in whom we believe, is on the move, for this God is on the same side of an unfolding future as we are. A processive dogmatics can take account of this in ways that are strikingly new but at the same time hoary with precedent. It always has been, still is, and always will be true that the Spirit of the living God never ceases to speak.

An Example of Dogmatics in Process

Dogmatics as a function of the church has to do with faith seeking understanding. But the church as we know it is multifaceted in such a way, and to such an extent, that there is no dogmatics in general. One of the great benefits in thinking theology in process modes of thought is the liberation into the affirmative recognition of the intrinsically plural character of any serious attempt to work out a relevant dogmatics in the present contexts in which we find ourselves. In specifying that what I seek to develop is a brief prospectus of "Dogmatics in Process—in a Reformed Key," I intend to indicate only the sources of the line of reflection at hand. In Thomas Kuhn's and Ian Barbour's sense of the term, I am explicitly working out of the paradigm of the Reformed tradition.[2] However, in gladly stating my own confes-

[2] Thomas Kuhn delineated his idea in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions;* it receives a

sional identity I do so, along with all who acknowledge the irrevocable arrival of ecumenical self-consciousness, for the purpose of contributing to the broader continuum of reflection within which my own understanding is only one of a series of possible considerations. This consciousness, I might add, is the precondition of responsible theological scholarship in the context of the Graduate Theological Union. Its deepening recognition is one of the singular benefits of being so involved.

I shall set out this prospectus in three steps, dealing first with Calvin, then Schleiermacher and Barth, deliberately treated in a continuum, for reasons that will become apparent. In the light of these first two steps, a twofold extrapolation will emerge, involving first the doctrine of creation and second the impact on hermeneutics of the struggle against oppression known as the women's liberation.

Calvin

It is a mistake to think that Calvin's central concern had to do with the sovereignty of God. The phrase was not even his,[3] though the period of Protestant Orthodoxy in its Reformed version was probably correct in using it to epitomize his work. For the faithful of this period, as for Calvin himself, the existence of God was not in question. What was decisive was the question as to whether this existing God is merciful. The gospel of Jesus the Christ epitomizes good news indeed, for the Word of God is that God is love. This was, and always will be, the heart of the gospel. But *this way of understanding* the central affirmation of Christian faith raised a severe problem. For the prevailing logic informing this affirmation was that the God of power is the God of love.

The striking fact is that Calvin himself seemed aware of this. In all, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* went through five Latin editions, with accompanying editions in French. In the last of these, the definitive Latin edition of 1559, he structured the argument, for the first time, in terms of the progression of the Apostles Creed. Up to this point the discussion of predestination, or election, was joined to the discussion of providence. The result was that Calvin was left exactly where Augustine was, with the problem of wrestling with election as a function of the power of God.

With the 1559 edition of the *Institutes,* a decisive move took place. Calvin *separated* providence and predestination, leaving the former in Book I, where, along with the doctrine of creation, it properly had to do with the power of God, and moving the latter to the end of Book III. This meant that

[3] The references to Calvin's *Institutes* are given in standard notation, with page numbers in square brackets indicating references to the standard English translation, edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles. The notes to Books I and II are by Edward A. Dowey, Jr. [cf. pp. xix and xx]. The particular reference noted in the text is note 1 on pp. 120–121. (The pagination is continuous throughout the two volumes.)

the discussion of election unfolded in treating the living of the Christian life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that its central focus had to do with the proclamation of the gospel.

This is only one of several decisive maneuvers setting in with the 1559 edition, but it will suffice to indicate that, for processive dogmatics working out of the Reformed paradigm, the striking thing about Calvin was that his thought was constantly undergoing refinement and development. It is fascinating to watch his conclusion emerge across the terrain of the successive editions, where it becomes quite clear that the basic reason the 1559 edition is the definitive edition is that Calvin did not live long enough to write another. He never did finish pondering the opening lines of his reflection (and in one way or another they are there at the outset of each of the editions):

> Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern (1:1:1 [35]).

Given this, to ponder the reasoning informing the shift before us is to take the pulse of the continuum of his reflections, precisely the subject matter of any processive examination of past theological efforts. For one can then begin the task of watching a genuinely controlling vector of reflection move from one figure to the next as the tradition unfolds.

That the movement of faithful reflection is the locus of true creativity and devotion should always have been recognized to be intrinsic to Calvin's thought. The very authority of the scriptures upon which humanity is dependent for its knowledge of God depends, for Calvin, upon the "secret testimony of the Spirit," and that in a truly astonishing way:

> They who strive to build up firm faith in Scriptures through disputation are doing things backwards . . . . even if anyone clears God's Sacred Word from man's evil speaking, he will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires . . . . the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason . . . . The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded (1:7:4 [79]).

Perhaps it is with modern ears that one hears an overtone to Calvin's formultion that has long escaped notice. Nevertheless, we ourselves are profoundly involved in the authenticating of the bases of our conviction.

Schleiermacher and Barth

I hardly need labor the point that to treat Schleiermacher and Barth together is not the usual procedure. Indeed, the prevailing, though challengeable, view is that Barth's resounding *Nein!* in response to Emil Brun-

ner's *Natur und Gnade,* in 1934, would be tame compared to the explosion of wrath to be expected from him were he to have heard of such a proposal as that put forth here. But for a processive dogmatics, preoccupied with the question of discerning the *dynamics* of the shaping of the Reformed tradition, in order to extrapolate the resources of that tradition for contemporary theological construction, such a treatment is not only possible, it is mandatory.

With Schleiermacher a far-reaching maneuver began, one which involved focusing the question of ultimate meaning as central to the question of transcendence and self-understanding. I am convinced that the lasting significance of his work takes its rise here. Now if we keep strictly in mind Calvin's insistence that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity go hand in hand, and if we give full notice to the fact that Calvin was one of the figures most often cited by Schleiermacher, the purpose of including Schleiermacher in our thinking on "Dogmatics in Process—in a Reformed Key" strikes our attention: in Schleiermacher's thought, it is impossible to think of God without thinking of humanity.

This was precisely the problem with Schleiermacher as far as Barth was concerned. On this side of his work it has not been permissible to think of Schleiermacher as pivotal for the *development* of the Reformed tradition. I contend that this view must be challenged and corrected. Schleiermacher's philosophical mentor was Kant, as was also the case with Barth. For each of these figures, then, the issue of the transcendence of God was decisively epistemological in character. The question How do we *know* God? is the direct derivative of the question How do we *know about* God? Schleiermacher had an answer for this double question: We know god as we know about God in the context of our feeling of absolute dependence (1928:12ff.; cf.1960:23ff.), or, the same thing, in the context of our struggle after ultimacy. This is how deeply intertwined are the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity.

As is so well known that it need not be labored, Barth was hardly satisfied with this way of thinking. For him, as he put it early on in his work, to argue so is vulnerable at the point of sounding as though we can talk about God by talking about humanity "in a loud voice."[4] That is to say, Schleiermacher's solution to the epistemological problem at the heart of understanding the knowledge of God was so anthropocentric that it would prove vulnerable to defeat at the hands of any rising, new philosophy. For Barth, the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* must hold sway at the center of theological reflection. Only then would theology have God, not humanity, as the subject of its central concern. For then, given Barth's understanding

[4] Barth made this remark in an address in October, 1922, entitled "The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry"; cf. p. 196 of the English translation in *The Word of God and the Word of Man.*

of the Bible, we know God because we know, and are known in, Jesus the Christ. Christology, therefore, is the setting of the intrinsic interrelationship between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity.

This is familiar terrain. It is time, though, that notice be taken of an all too often overlooked point. Schleiermacher and Barth had much in common. The overlooked point is that Barth could never leave Schleiermacher alone.[5] I am convinced that the underlying reason for this is that what was setting in with Schleiermacher was in fact *continued* by Barth, in a much more radical way. Both moved beyond the limitations of Protestant orthodoxy at precisely the same point: the gospel of Jesus the Christ has to do *not* with the fact that the God of power is the God of love, *but* with the fact that the God of love is powerful. Barth's insistence that understanding both the basis for, and the content of, this claim entails a polemical transcending of Schleiermacher's Christo-centrism with a radicalized Christology was indeed forceful—so much so that we can miss the continuity between them. There is a curious sense in which Barth was to the *left,* not to the right, of Schleiermacher. For each of them, as indeed for Calvin and the entire development of the Reformed tradition—for Protestant thought in all its variations for that matter—the basic issue has to do with the interpretation of scripture. The basic issue is hermeneutics.

Schleiermacher is often regarded as the father of modern Protestant theology. One of the reasons informing this view is inherent in the way he handled scripture. Turning his back on that high rationalism that saw the Bible as the source of propositions that can be welded into airtight systems, impregnable from without and capable of reducing all new thoughts to insights locatable within established categories, Schleiermacher contended for what he called a "large-viewed" use of the Bible, one which refused to consider any Biblical metaphor apart from the context giving rise to it, and one which, thinking in terms of "paragraphs" rather than "sentences," so to say, saw the function of the Biblical interpreter to be governed by poetic imagination rather than ideological rationales.[6]

So it was that Schleiermacher ushered in that hermeneutical self-consciousness that marks off modern theology from its predecessors. Given the work of figures such as Paul Ricoeur, we know that we can no longer stay where Schleiermacher lodged, with the task of "understanding the authors better than they could understand themselves," since it is the wrestling with possible worlds, on this side of the text, that now dominates our

[5] Cf. the many references to Schleiermacher in Bush 1976, especially the last one on pp. 493–494.

[6] For Schleiermacher's contention for the "large-viewed use of Scripture," see p. 116 of the English translation; for his contention that "Christian preachers must have the freedom granted to poets," and the manner in which this must be disciplined, see p. 411 of the English translation.

attention and goads our imaginations. But even so, on this side of Schleiermacher we know, and know that we know, that the point to wrestling with the Biblical texts is not exhausted by finding out what they *say,* but rather with what they *mean* for us, where we are. In precisely this fashion Barth wrote his commentary on Romans. The challenging of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic deepened the hermeneutical self-consciousness itself.

Twenty years would be needed for Barth to reach bedrock in *his* hermeneutical breakthrough. And what a pair of decades it was: the initial attempt at dogmatics, *Christliche Dogmatik,* the study of Anselm, the stand at Barmen, and then *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* up to II/2—all this would be needed for him to discern the deep connection between election and ethics at the heart of his system, and this in turn would pave the way for the magnificent statement epitomizing his grasp of the relationship between Israel and the church. The word of the living God to the church cannot be true if the word of the same God to the synagogue *is,* not *was,* a lie. Thus we must take Romans 11:29 with the utmost seriousness: "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (RSV)." And so we must be able to say, "We can never believe in unbelief; we can believe only in the future faith of those who at present do not believe" (1957:296; cf.1942:325). The universalism in which Karl Barth believed was the universalism of the gospel itself. This is to the *left,* not the right, of Schleiermacher's radical grasp of the feeling of *absolute* dependence.

Creation and Liberation

To follow Barth in insisting that Christology is at the fulcrum of the effort of faith seeking understanding is to carry forward a central affirmation of Calvin. This is the view that the *relationship* between God and humanity is so conjoined with the knowledge of God that it is fair to say that faith knows no God other than the God of this relationship. For Calvin, creation and providence were functions of the power of the Lord God Almighty, as this God is encountered in scripture. On this side of the development of modern Biblical criticism, carrying forward as it does the very hermeneutical consciousness initially advanced by Schleiermacher, and on this side of Barth's insistence that the knowledge of God begins with the knowledge of the person and work of Jesus the Christ, creation and providence are the works of the God already known to be love. This is the uniquely priceless import of the Biblical word, and for this reason, more basically than any other, the authority of scripture in the company of the faithful is invulnerable.

All this intensifies one of the deepest dimensions of the Bible viewed critically, that the idea of the covenant is the *presupposition* of the idea of creation. This point, however, is no longer the simplistic point that the Neo-Orthodoxy of the middle of the twentieth century thought it to be. Biblical critics such as Claus Westermann have shown that the development of faith

in God the Creator is complex, rather than unilinear (1971), though it still remains the case that the logic appearing all over the Old Testament, and therefore the New, remains that of *arriving* at the insight that the God of the Covenant is in fact the Creator of all that is, or will be.

This complexity is actually comparatively less problematical than is the growing awareness that faith on this side of the advent of post-modern science can no longer confess "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . ." *either* in the way the writers of the Apostles Creed confessed it, *or* in the way that such recent figures as Barth and his contemporaries did. On this side of Einstein there is no assurance whatever that this is the only universe there is, or has been, or will be. The Creator God is creator of all these. But on this side of Einstein too such a conviction is still one of faith seeking understanding, though *far more* is involved than we knew—the God of love may be the creator of *a vast set of realms.*

So it is that for us Calvin's basic claim that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity are intertwined reaches an even more vast sweep than it did for him, and even than it did for Barth. Normative for us is the concatenation of insights on this side of Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin, that we are intrinsically a part of the vast web of life the Earth has spawned. From it we ourselves have emerged. Normative for us, also, is the growing awareness that the mind-boggling character of what we know of the macrocosm of which we are a part carries with it the increasingly astonishing grasp of the nature of the mind that is so confronted by what it itself can know. Normative for us, then, is Polanyi's hunch that the way we know reality is a clue, indeed the decisive clue, to reality itself.[7] Unavoidable, then, for us is the absolute necessity of moving beyond the mighty words of the ancient creed, to contend "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of the Earth and all within it, and of all of which it is a part, and of all that precedes, accompanies, and follows it . . ."

Such then are the new reaches of a dogmatics in process as it wrestles with the confessional nature of the claim that the God of love who is the God of power is the Creator God at the source of all that has been, is now, and will be. When Teilhard de Chardin quotes Julian Huxley, concurring that humanity "is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself" (220), the liturgically disciplined theological imagination reaches unprecedented questions. Is humanity the way the cosmos thinks? Is it the way the universe prays?

It is not too much to claim that the arrival upon our consciousness of questions such as these truly demands the extrapolation of the insights of the past into reaches far beyond the imaginative horizons of even the most revered of the sages of the tradition. But such a broadening of the faith in

[7] Cf. especially Marjorie Grene's introduction to *Knowing and Being* (1969:xv).

the Creator God is not all that is before us. If the God of love is the God of power, then we may not avoid discomfort over still speaking of "God the Father" without qualification, at least, and more probably, without transcending this way of speaking. We may no longer leave half of humanity invisible. Here, too, the God of love, whom we know, and by whom we are known, in Jesus the Christ, is on the same side of an unfolding future as are we.

There is more to the struggle for the liberation of women than simply the question of language, to be sure. But the issue before us in recognizing that the phrase "God the Father" is in more trouble than the words "maker of heaven and earth" is not a *simple* linguistic problem. Neither is the insistence that inclusive language is at the heart of the struggle for women's liberation.

One of the most compelling and incisive treatments of this issue is Sallie McFague's *Metaphorical Theology.* Obviously there is something profoundly biblical—unmistakably Hebraic—about the fundamental issue involved in the struggle for inclusive language that marks the passion of the women's liberation movement, and McFague gives a memorable and emphatically cogent insistence to the basic issue: "What is not named is not thought; symbol and concept go together and hence the form of the naming dictates the nature of the thought" (217-218, n. 31).

The world in which "what is not named is not thought"—this indeed is the world in which theological idolatry can flourish. Only if our grasp of the struggle after ultimacy is growing and expanding can the oppressive restrictions of leaving yesterday as the only arena of imaginative insight be overcome. What is more, the world in which "the form of naming dictates the nature of the thought" must recognize that *if the form of naming is fixed, there can be no thought about the unexpected, the genuinely new.* This is the basic reason why theology must assert and embrace in a comprehensive way the processive character of its metaphorical nature. Just as preaching must be fluid and alive if it is to fulfill its function, so must theology be faced continually with the fact that there is more to be understood *in the gospel itself* than has been understood so far.

This, above all, pertains to the understanding of the God of whom the gospel speaks. The major breakthrough in McFague's discussion is her insistence that we may no longer restrict this understanding to a single, regnant root-metaphor. Her version of Stephen Pepper's concept has her thinking of root-metaphors as the "key concepts" through which we see or understand all that is going on (28). Her discussion culminates in a chapter entitled "God the Father: Model or Idol?" in which she sets out the central contention that "the root-metaphor of Christianity is not God the father but the kingdom or rule of God, a relationship between the divine and the human that *no* model can encompass" (146). That is to say, there is no single key concept in terms of which the gospel is to be grasped. This is the threshold

across which lies insight into the decisive issue, which is not with the metaphor God the Father, but with the absolutizing of it in theological reflection (cf. 29).

The choice yield of McFague's line of reflection contains the disciplined insight that this judgment is equally applicable to her own constructive suggestion. She develops a compelling case for thinking of God as friend, and thus overcoming the limitations of parental models of either gender. But she is equally cogent in insisting that to argue so is not to develop a case for a new root-metaphor. The nature of theological reflection inheres not in its *roots* but in its *dynamisms.* Thus many metaphors come to mind, and all are valid as long as none is absolutized. "The root-metaphor of Christianity is not *any one* model but a relationship that occurs between God and human beings. Many models are needed to intimate what that relationship is like; none can capture it" (190).

The God of love is the God of power—the covenant God is the creator God—so the contention relentlessly resounds. But the astonishing fact is that we must take creativity itself as the clue to the meaning of creation. Just as the process of the contextualization of theology at large drove from ethics to nature, so here the synergistic relation between these two foci of reflection interact. They nourish each other. Ethical passion rooted in the gospel of Jesus the Christ cannot ignore the cry of the oppressed. When both women and men of faith hear that cry they are given the insights needed for the creativity now demanded.

In the struggle of the oppressed, the God revealed in Jesus the Christ acts on this side of an unfolding future, the same side on which the creatures of this creating God live, move, and have their becoming. No single metaphor can ever again dominate the composite understanding now demanded. With the questions that burst into the open with Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin, the traditional regnancy of the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* recedes, and the heretofore rejected notion of *creatio continua* comes to the fore. But it is not post-modern science alone that forces this recognition. Prior to that recognition stands the knowledge of the relating God, who continues to create, and to enable and demand creativity from the inhabitants of the order summoned into becoming—and this creativity cannot flourish until *all* God's children are free.

Conclusion

What I have attempted in this discussion is a sketch of dogmatics in process, in *a Reformed key,* worked out in an extrapolation of the line Calvin-to-Schleiermacher-to-Barth into two decisive contemporary issues demanding constructive theological reflection. This, of course, is not the only possibility of such an undertaking, nor should it be. A viable option would be Charles McCoy's proposals concerning "covenant theology" in which the decisive figure is Cocceius rather than Calvin, H. Richard Niebuhr rather

than Barth, and Michael Polanyi alone, with no assists from Alfred North Whitehead.[8]

Moreover, the goal of a processive dogmatics is by no means restricted to operations in a "Reformed" Protestant line of reflection, since many other Protestant efforts, and even more Catholic constructions, are close at hand, and all of these deserve detailed scrutiny. The road to the future is inductive, moving from particular to particular, and consequently *perspectives* are far more important on such a path than *systems* ever can be. What is at stake is the living character not only of the search for ultimacy, but of ultimacy itself. At pivotal moments in their labors, both Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr were perplexed over the inexorability of wrestling with "progressive" revelation.[9] We can now move much further along this path, in the sure and certain hope that revelation is *processive* rather than progressive, and thus encounter on the road itself the transcending companion who redeems our efforts in acting out the ultimate vision of reality, and continues to say, "I am with you always, to the close of the age."

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