What *Is* PROCESS Theology?

A Conversation with Marjorie

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What *is* Process Theology?

1. In a nutshell, what did you say it is?

Well, some nuts are hard to crack, but try this: Process theologies are relational ways of thinking about the dynamism of life and faith. Process-relational theologians integrate implications of a thoroughly interdependent universe into how we live and express our faith. We are convinced that everything is dynamically interconnected; that everything matters; that everything has an effect. Such insights can be adapted to many faith traditions, but this particular booklet applies them to Christian faith.

2. Is there a difference between process theology and process-relational theology?

No, I am using the terms interchangeably. "Process" indicates the dynamism in this way of thinking, and "relational" indicates the supposition of radical interdependence.

3. What sources do process (or process-relational) theologians use?

Like many Christian theologians, we draw from Scripture, the long faith tradition, philosophical categories, and our own experience. The philosophical categories we use are those of process philosophy, especially as developed by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. But I caution you to notice (should you decide to

investigate further!) that these sources and categories can be used by process-relational theologians in a great variety of ways!

You will find that within Christianity, process philosophy has appealed most to liberals, but there are also evangelicals who find it useful. Some Unitarians use process philosophy without appropriating much from Christian scripture or tradition. Further, Jewish and Buddhist thinkers have made use of process philosophy, operating with quite different scriptures and traditions. My answers here reflect my personal experience as a committed "oldline" Protestant who finds rich meaning in the affirmations and symbolism of the Christian tradition, but sees the need for quite radical revision of some inherited teachings. Thus this booklet presents a Christian process theology that makes the most sense to me, but you will find some of these other ways of developing process theology in the attached bibliography.

4. But aren't Scripture and tradition clear enough to stand on their own?

To study the history of any faith tradition is to see how that faith adapts to the "common sense" of its particular time and place. Tradition is like a flowing river that continuously carves out new paths. Once I saw a detailed map that showed how the Mississippi River had continuously changed its course throughout its history. It still goes down to the sea, but how it goes down to the sea is a varied story. It's the same with tradition. It all leads to the expression of God's work with us, but how it expresses that work varies from age to age. If we stare at a single spot in tradition, and see it as if it were the entirety of it, we get the illusion that tradition stands still. It's tempting to reduce the whole tradition to what happened at Nicea in the 4th century, or with Aquinas in the 13th century, or Luther in the 16th, or Wesley in the 18th. But the tradition is much richer than any single period! It is constantly moving, and we who are a part of that tradition are responsible for knowing how it has developed, and for contributing to its contemporary flow.

The same is true of biblical understanding. The texts are given, but how they are interpreted varies enormously from age to age. Just think of the way several great streams of Christianity interpret those baptismal texts! The texts are the same; the interpretations are quite varied and even contradictory. So how we draw from Scripture is also an adventure. Scriptural understanding blends studies of the actual texts together with the history of the way those texts have been interpreted in the tradition. Scripture may *look* like a steady state sort of thing, but it is actually a dynamic story of varying interpretations and applications through history.

Both Scripture and tradition are formative for the Christian tradition, deeply contributing to the changing shapes of Christian theology. But in using Scripture and tradition, we all use other categories to help us interpret them—even when we think we are not! Process-relational theologians join those who claim we should be clear about how experience and philosophical suppositions affect the way we interpret Scripture and tradition.

5. But doesn't that dilute Scripture and the tradition?

Philosophy (the methodical use of reason to interpret the world and/or our experience within it) has always been involved in interpreting Scripture and creating the tradition. It's not a question of *whether* philosophy will be used, but *which* philosophy will be used! Process people think that Scripture speaks deeply about a relational world to whom and with whom God also relates. So why not use a philosophy that is relational—like process philosophy?

6. And experience, please?

Theology is always filtered through one's own experience! One of the great differences in theology since the 19th century is that we increasingly began to recognize the role of our own subjective experience in how we develop theology. On the one hand, we always bring a perspective that is shaped by things such as our social location, our gender, our nationality, and so forth. But we

also bring our religious experiences into the mix—that is, our interpretation of the presence of God in our own lives. To ignore this experience is to pretend that theology is just some head trip that may or may not relate to the way we live.

So, then: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience all enter into the way process-relational theology is formed. It becomes the "stuff" from which we express our faith that God is with us for our good.

7. So you use these four sources, but what exactly is process philosophy?

Process is a relational philosophy. There have been various relational ways of talking about the world since "way back when," but most philosophers talked as if the ideal thing should be something solid that doesn't depend on anything beyond itself. To be in relation was considered a lesser value than total self-sufficiency. In the 20th century we began to see that the ability to relate to another wasn't just a happenstance of the way things are, but is the core of the way things are. To exist is to be in relation. Does God exist? If you say yes, then God must also be in relation. To whom? To everyone and everything!

The philosophy takes relationship a little bit further. Process thinking says that to be related to something is to be internally affected by that something, and to affect something else in turn. Relationship is itself a dynamic process! To exist is to be affected by others, and to have an effect on others. Again, does God exist? If you answer yes, then God is affected by others, and has effects on others. Which others? All others!

Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne are the two major philosophers of the 20th century who most fully developed this kind of philosophy. Process theologies usually draw from either or both of these philosophers.

8. So what does this mean for the way process-relational theologians talk about God? Is God still the Creator?

Of course! But as you might expect, how we talk about God as creator in relational categories differs from the "creation out of nothing" that has been so dominant in most of the Christian tradition. If God is in relation, then God is always in relation. Process does not have a way to talk about there being absolutely nothing except God. Process-relational thinkers tend to take Genesis 1 more seriously than does the tradition, for Genesis 1:1 does not speak of God existing independently and apart from anything else. In Genesis, there appears to be a primeval chaos with which God works, and from which God brings order—creation—into existence.

In the relational categories of process thought, God creates *with* the world. We actually think this is a much stronger way to express God's power. A children's fable once told about a rivalry between the wind and the sun. Which one would be able to remove the coat of that man down there on the road? The wind thought that it could, and so it blew and blew and blew with great force. Unfortunately, the strength of the wind was such that the man just drew his coat more firmly around himself. Then it was the sun's turn. The sun just beamed its rays down upon the man until finally he grew quite warm—and removed his coat. In process terms, the wind worked coercively, trying to force its will upon the man, but the sun worked persuasively, luring the man's cooperative action. To be able to elicit the willing cooperation of another is a far greater power than simply to force the other to do as one wishes.

God creates through persuasive power. Don't we experience it that way? We don't see God yanking things and people around as if they were puppets! The tradition accounts for this by saying that God gave people freedom. Process people think that freedom isn't an occasional thing limited to just some aspects of creation, but that something like freedom pervades all existence. Every part of God's creation has some element of freedom. What we call "freedom"

ranges from very low levels of indeterminately random events to very high levels of conscious decision-making. And there are many grades in between. God works with each element in existence, in every time and place, offering possibilities for achieving the good. Finally, the world determines what it does with God's possibilities in every moment. Freedom means the ability to participate at some level in what one becomes.

If we take freedom seriously, then we must talk about three powers of creation. There is the power of the past, which simply means that where we are and when we are makes a difference to who we can become. We must take account of these past influences, because we simply do not exist in a vacuum. We exist relationally. In a sense, we take the creative influences of the past into ourselves in every moment.

But we also take the creative power of God into ourselves at every moment. In this second creative power, God offers us a future, a way of becoming oneself that is not quite like any other way ever achieved before. God's creativity is the power of transformation, of hope, of a new future. God's influence toward the future takes account of the past that affects us, offering a way of dealing with that past.

And the third creative power, of course, is ourselves. Finally, we decide what we will become. We are responsible for dealing with the actual past received from the world and the possible future received from God. The world as we know it is, in every moment, the end result of this creative process: the power of the past, which is the power of the world; the power of the future, which is the power of God, and the power of the present, which is our own power to integrate these influences into who we are becoming in every moment. Our freedom is to take these three creative powers and to use them. The choice of how we use them is ours.

So yes, God is by all means Creator, calling the world into existence in every moment. But God creates *with* the world, not independently of the world. The world enters into something like

a creative dance with God, emerging anew in every moment as it takes its past and God's future into its becoming self.

9. Well, what about evil? Doesn't evil ruin this notion of a "creative dance"?

Your question comes too quickly! What *is* evil? Is it the same as what we call sin? Traditionally, evil has been understood to be the destructiveness that seems to be built into the nature of things. Volcanoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes are not evil in themselves, but they certainly can have evil effects—"natural evil"—for living creatures! Illness and death have also been called "natural evils." All living creatures are by definition mortal; hence all will die. Is this what you mean by evil? In a process universe, every creaturely becoming takes place in a myriad of other creaturely becomings. There is necessarily a measure of conflict built into the system, particularly given our interdependence. For process thinkers, this is all part of the dynamism that makes existence on our planet possible. Thus, the fact that sentient creatures experience pain is part of the price of our existence.

Sin, on the other hand, has been understood as moral evil, or choices that go against God's will—"missing the mark" is a frequent biblical meaning for sin. The Christian tradition has often combined these two senses of natural and moral evil by suggesting that sin is the originating cause of all evil, including natural evils of calamity, illness, and death. While process theologians tend to agree with the "missing the mark" interpretation of moral evil, they disagree with the claim that moral evil is the reason why we have natural evils.

10. Do you mean that process theologians don't hold with 'Adam and Eve'?

Ah, Adam and Eve. A quick summation of the tradition might be helpful here to highlight some of the differences between process theologies and the long tradition of "original sin." For much of Christian history, all sin and evil was traced to the disobedience of a first human pair. Their disobedience resulted in a corruption of

their very nature. Prior to this failure, Adam and Eve presumably lived rationally, so that their minds always governed what they felt and did. What they felt and did was always orderly and good in a perfect love for God, and love for the world in and through God. Following disobedience, this orderliness was overturned, and proper love lost. Consequently, Adam and all his progeny are afflicted with unruliness. The mind no longer governs the body rationally, and all manner of evils follow.

But process cannot follow this view. All the evidence suggests that humans are part of a great evolutionary process, and that God creates in and through this process. "Creative transformation" is another name for changes that emerge in evolution. Instead of talking about a perfect first human pair existing about 6000 years ago, we talk about the long evolutionary history of our race, and the role that aggression and violence have necessarily played in our development—sometimes for our good, sometimes not. But as relatively weak creatures on the animal scene, it was important for us to live by our wits, and to struggle for our food and shelter. The ability to fight was important to our survival, and we used it—and still use it—to shore up our defenses and build up our own interests. The capacity to do this takes many forms. In positive forms, we blend our own interests with the interests of the wider communities within the world. In negative forms, we secure our own interests against all others—greed and rapaciousness are illustrations of this. Process-relational thinkers affirm that God calls us beyond violence toward communities of well-being.

Another difference between process and traditional views concerns the role of reason. Like the tradition, process thinkers value reason highly, but not in the same hierarchical order. Reason is part of the mind-body integration of what it is to be human. Reason is valued as part of the whole of who we are. What threatens to overwhelm us is not our bodies or emotions—they are who we are!—but our tendencies toward the many forms of violence. The tradition sought to control bodily urges and desires; process thinkers seek to control the human capacity for violence.

What, then, is sin in process views? It is, as the tradition claimed, "missing the mark." And what is the mark? The mark would be the fullest development of what we can be, individually and communally, in expanding circles of caring to God, self, and neighbor. To talk about sin is to talk about the refusal of love from and to God and from and to neighbor and even from and to oneself. Still another way of talking about sin is to say it is unnecessary violence.

In a process view, one must talk about communal as well as individual sin. We live interdependently, and we act interdependently. Individual sins are magnified when exercised through our communal identities, creating great evils through such things as oppressive systems of exploitation, wars of aggression, economic systems based upon greed, or systematic decimation of our environment for the sake of profit.

Because we believe God is always calling us toward the good, we believe that God calls us toward transformation from violent ways of imposing our wills on other creatures toward ever-new cooperative ways of creating good on this earth. When we fail to heed God's call, we fail to contribute as best we can to the commonwealth of all. This failure is sin. Sin—whether personal or societal—has ill effects that spiral beyond its origins in this interdependent world.

11. But you said God is related to the world. How does God relate to sin? Is this where traditional notions of "justification by faith" come in?

Process thinking holds that God is the most relational reality of all. If God relates to all the world, then human choices to damage others—be it humans, animals, or the environment—are felt by God. God feels everything that happens in just the way that it happens—God feels victims and violators. Our long tradition thought of God as observing evil, but not feeling it—indeed much of the tradition thought that God could not feel anything at all!

This was what the doctrine of "divine impassibility" was all about. But if God is relational, then God feels, and feels perfectly. The issue is not whether God feels the world, but what God does with God's feelings of the world!

Think of the traditional Christian image of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. One part of the Christian tradition could not imagine that God could experience pain; therefore, it formulated theories of God's abandonment of Jesus on that cross. The cross then became God's wrath, poured down on the God-forsaken Jesus because he was bearing the sin of the world. Thus there is a strong element of the Christian tradition that views Jesus death as suffering inflicted by God on the God-Man Jesus instead of us as punishment for our sin. "Justification by faith" was taken to mean God's action through Jesus of clearing the slate of sin for all who were united to Jesus through faith. Our sins were transferred to him, and therefore would no longer be counted against us.

Process-relational thinking need not go in this direction, for several reasons. First, we cannot separate God's presence to the world even for a moment, much less for three hours on a cross. God was with Jesus on that cross. Second, to the extent that process-relational theologians view unnecessary violence as sin, violence cannot be that which saves us from sin! To attribute such action to God is like taking the most vile aspect of our own vengeful spite, and projecting it onto God.

How, then, do process-relational thinkers view that crucifixion? The Christian tradition is a many-splendored thing, and while viewing the cross as God punishing Jesus for our sins has achieved some dominance, it is by no means the only Christian response to the cross of Christ. Abelard, living in the twelfth century, argued that God saves us by revealing through Jesus Christ both God's nature and that which human nature is called to be. This revelation is healing and empowering for us, and Christ becomes our teacher. Process thinkers tend to side with Abelard. Jesus reveals who God is to us and for us. The cross does not represent vicarious sacrifice, but the revelation that God is with us even in our deepest pain.

God feels us. Jesus did indeed suffer the pain of sin—crucifixion is a vile sin. Because it is morally evil to crucify persons, Jesus died *because* of sin. But this is different from saying that Jesus died *for* sin. Jesus reveals that the sins of all humans affect God. If God feels the world, then God feels the sins of the world. If Jesus is understood to be a representative of God, then by his crucifixion he reveals that God feels the effects of our sin.

12. So does the process God simply writhe in agony throughout eternity?

While God must feel the world, what God does with the felt world is entirely up to God! Because of the philosophy we use, we relational theologians can maintain that God judges evil within God's own nature, and transforms evil through this judgment. God integrates the feelings of the world into God's own self, transforming those feelings in the process until they are conformed to the divine character. If the Christian tradition speaks of God in crucifixion, it does not stop there—it speaks of resurrection. Process theologians think of God as the resurrection in a variety of ways, the most important of which is the creative transformation that God works for the world within the divine nature. Some process thinkers understand this to be the resurrection of the world into God for a judgment that saves, arguing further that this internal transformation within God has an effect on what creative transformations are yet possible within history. Other process thinkers argue that while God feels the world, what can be called resurrection—or creative transformation—happens for the world not in God, but only in history.

13. Is this how you deal with resurrection? What do you process-relational theologians think about Easter? Was there an "empty tomb"?

If we take the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to be a revelation of God for us, then the resurrection is a vital part of this revelation. Resurrection reveals that sin does not have the last

word, but God does. God is the power to answer our sins not by succumbing to them, but by transforming them.

Because I see resurrections all the time, and experience them within my own life, I can talk about resurrection confidently. If you push me to say that all the molecules in Jesus' body were summoned together and the processes of death reversed and Jesus just got up out of that grave and went through a few walls and that's what resurrection is all about, I think you're missing the point. I can't tell you *how* God raised Jesus within history. I, like most theologians—process or not—am convinced that resurrection is something utterly different from resuscitation. Resurrection cannot be reduced to molecules revivifying! Resurrection is the power of God to overcome evil, to bring hope to otherwise hopeless situations, to make creative transformation possible no matter what. Womanist theologians say that "God makes a way out of no way," and this is what I think resurrection is all about. The resurrection of Jesus is like a great shout telling us that no evil is greater than God, or can overcome God's power of resurrection. Because of this revelation—however God brings it about—we know we can trust God no matter how bleak situations may seem. God is there, offering us a future that can change history—whether our own or the whole world's—toward the good. Resurrection tells us that hope is grounded in the reality of God.

14. So then, for process-relational theologians the importance of Jesus is his revelation of the nature of God? We hate to ask, but how could Jesus have given such a revelation? Don't you see him as just another man?

One at a time, please! For process folks, Jesus represents God for us, because we see him consistently responding positively to God's moment by moment call to him. That call is that he live as God would have him live in each and every situation. He conforms himself so thoroughly to the will of God that in and through his person and his actions, we see clearly what God is like. We learn through him that God's will is toward love, compassion, justice,

kindness. Because we trust that God's character is revealed through Jesus' life, we can trust God as well!

As for how he could reveal God, the dynamics are the same dynamics operative in every aspect of creation: the power of the given past, the power of God's call toward a possible future, and the power of subjectively integrating the two. We presume that God used the power of Jesus' Jewish past to offer him the possibility of living according to the love of God in every moment. So far as we know from the record, Jesus responded freely and positively to the call of God. He lived God's love, and thus revealed God. This was not a "supernatural" revelation, but a revelation through the natural processes of existence.

It is possible that if it hadn't been for the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus would have been viewed as another great teacher, or even have been absorbed into the anonymity of history. But he suffered the cruel violence of political torture, which was followed by the amazing stories of his resurrection appearances. All of the gospels are written *because* of these resurrection appearances, so that Jesus' life and death are seen through the lens of the resurrection. The resurrection is the vindication of the way he revealed God—in his life *and* in his death. This revelation becomes the ground of our faith that God is the power of creative transformation in history.

15. Hmmm . . . now you're too much of an optimist. Look around you! Read the newspaper! How can you possibly say that God is a power for creative transformation in our world? Pretty hopeless hope, judging from today's news.

And that's where you're plumb wrong! Remember, the God of all the universe works *with* the world, not *on* the world. God *always* offers possibilities for a good that the world can bear. That qualifier, "that the world can bear," is not a disclaimer, just a witness to the threefold power of creation mentioned above: the

power of the past world, the power of the future from God, and the power of the present, which is our own integration of these powers into ourselves. If I am being hit over the head with a lead pipe, the only possibilities for my good that are suited to me have to do with how I respond to the blow. The physiological response will be largely determined by the blow itself, but even there, we can count on influences toward healing throughout our bodies if the blow isn't lethal. Beyond this, God offers me emotional and social responses that will work to my own and to the communal good. I need not get twisted into hatred or bitterness or vengefulness. If the blow is lethal, my earthly life will be over—but God is the power of resurrection. I will experience the resurrection life in God.

But your objection had more to do with social and political realities, not simply an individual experience. Again, God works with us all toward the communal good. We are called to responsiveness to God, to care for the common good. God works *with* us, and calls upon us to use all our collective wisdom and power in cooperative response.

16. You said God works with us toward our individual and communal good. Does God have a plan for our lives?

I'd have to say that the plan is in process! Because God works *with* the world, God's plans are necessarily responsive to the world. Process people can say that God works generally toward greater complexity, harmony, intensity, and beauty in the world. How this applies specifically depends upon the world as well as God. Let me give you an example: years ago I was faced with a vocational dilemma. I was perfectly happy teaching at a seminary, directing its Doctor of Ministry program, and teaching many students. As it happened, one afternoon as I was teaching a class of ministers, I received a phone call: another seminary was asking me to be its dean. I hadn't sought this other job—it had "sought" me! What to do? I told the class, and immediately one of them put a chair in the middle of the circle, and told me to sit down. Then these pastors gathered round me, touching me, praying for me.

Following their prayers, one said, "Marjorie, you can't make a wrong decision." I knew at once what he meant. Because of the faithful presence of God, both options were real possibilities. If I chose to stay at the one school, God would work with me to bring about the best possibilities in those circumstances. But if I chose to leave, the same was true: God would work with me in those circumstances as well! Was one better than the other? Probably. But if I made a mistake in choosing, God would nonetheless work with me toward my own and others' good! I could count on it! God's plan for my life, then, was not in the "go here, do this, do that," but in the overall direction of increasing my openness to God and to others, and acting with the best wisdom I could muster. In the process, I could trust God. Whatever the decision, there was no need to look back, or to second guess. God's plan for my life is that I become more Christ-like: more deeply loving, more widely caring about life in community, more intentional toward the good in all my acts. And this plan can work in all manner of circumstances.

Our Christian understanding of the way God works both generally and specifically in our lives is grounded in the revelation of God that we see in Jesus Christ.

17. You keep talking about the "communal good." Some of what you're saying sounds pretty individualistic to me. Is the church simply a gathering of individuals, each of whom cares about the common good?

The church is much more than that! Process thinking gives a dynamic way of taking seriously such images as being "one in Christ," and "I am the vine, you are the branches."

We live in an interconnected world, where we are continuously receiving the influences of others, integrating these influences into our continuous becoming. The church is created as we receive the influence of the revelation of God in Christ into who we are, weaving it into our very beings. We are literally being formed in

and through the influence of God as mediated through Christ. But if this is so for each, it is so for all. This means that there is a unique sharing of identity among us Christians, binding us into the community of Christ. We are members of one another, being many and one at the same time.

There is an important ramification to this continuous emergence of the church as the community of Christ. Remember, to be is to have an effect. Each individual influences what other individuals may become. This power of influence is exponentially multiplied through the interweaving of individuals that continuously creates community. It's sort of like the old image of the difference between a single straw and a broom when it comes to sweeping floors! Woven together into community, governed by the vision of God mediated through Christ, the church can be a more powerful force for good in the world than any single person could be.

A peculiar thing about a community of faith is that it unites people who might otherwise not come together. It usually takes us beyond our togetherness with people close to us, like family and friends, and unites us with all sorts of others. This becomes a "proving ground" for learning to care for others beyond our own circle, expanding the edges of that circle. This openness to one another's good, and to the common good beyond even our own community, is also openness to God.

18. So which came first, the individual or the community?

Can you accept a "both/and" answer? No individual is born in a vacuum; each person is born into a ready-made community, whether it be toward the good or toward the ill. That community shapes the child's becoming sense of him or herself. But the growing child is increasingly responsible to some degree for what he or she does with the influence of the community. We recognize this in the church through infant baptism, formally taking the child into the shaping influence of the community called church. But that growing child—or adult, in cases of adult baptism—

also shapes the continuing community. In an interconnected dynamic world, one cannot so easily separate out "individual" and "community" so as to decide which came first! It is always an interwoven relationship, so that we best speak of people as "individuals-in-community."

19. All right, you've talked about how process-relational people think—but what about things like prayer, and worship, and stuff like that?

In a process-relational world, prayer is more important than ever. If God works with the world, then prayers are part of what God works with. And think about it. Prayer actually changes the way the world is, and therefore changes what can happen. In the most simplistic of terms, if you are praying, you aren't *not* praying! Your praying is an openness to God's own desires, and this opening is something God can work with. Prayers aren't some magic-lantern sort of thing, or some "pretty-pleasing" that we present to God. Prayers have a very pragmatic function: they make a difference to the kinds of empowering calls that God gives to us and to others.

As for worship—this is both communal and personal. Communally, it's a joining of people together through Christ in openness to God and one another. Through this shared openness, our shared offering of ourselves in praise to God, we become woven into one another's welfare. This weaving isn't just a present thing—to the contrary, the liturgies that many churches use in worship also unite us to generations who preceded us. These prayers were their prayers; these readings were their readings; these hymns were their hymns. We are united with "the company of the saints" in our worship! And we today, adding our praise and prayer in new as well as in old ways, join that "company of the saints" for tomorrow's Christians. We anticipate the future, even as we remember the past! So worship plays a peculiar role in uniting the church-past and church-future in the worshiping congregation of the present.

In worship we also cultivate openness to God in love for God and neighbor—human and otherwise!—in all our living. Thus the worship of God involves us increasingly in actions that bring about well-being on this earth. No one person can do everything—but every single person can do something, and together we can do more than we can individually. So the worship of God involves not only our corporate actions on designated days of worship, but it involves us in individual and corporate actions toward the communal good throughout our lives. Worship, then, pervades our times.

20. You keep talking about community, and the communal good, in the context of *Christian* faith—what about other faiths?

Process-relational people are convinced that God works faithfully throughout the world—throughout the universe, really—toward the good. This means that God is fully involved in all the religions of the world, calling them toward faithful modes of being community together. There's no essential reason why there should be only one form of human community—to the contrary, all the evidence suggests that God rather delights in diversity. And while Christians gratefully see God for us in Christ and in Christian community, there's no essential reason why God can't work in other ways too. In a deep sense, that's God's business, and the business of those committed to the form of religious life to which God calls them.

Process-relational Christians tend to think that God is calling us to a new moment in the world's history—to a moment of friendships developing across religious lines, both individually and corporately as communities of faith. Friends respect one another. They talk to one another, learn from one another, are even transformed by one another. What if God is calling the religions of the world to create new modes of caring in a world still too torn by greed, lusts for power and domination, and a will to destroy others? Our new mission may be modes of friendship through which we cooperate with one another toward the common good. And this common

good involves protection and care for our planet, sustainable lifestyles for the world's people, care for all earth's creatures. It's a relational, interdependent world. Perhaps God now calls us to live more fully into this reality.

21. Whew—you've worn me out. I have more questions to think about—or "feel" about! But first, will you tell me something about yourself? Who is this "Marjorie" that I'm talking with?

I'm just one more person deeply affected by process-relational ways of thinking! There was a time when I felt like "Humpty-Dumpty." All the "answers" to questions about how God works with us began to break down for me—they no longer made sense, and I felt as if I were falling off of some great wall into a chasm. But then it was as if the chasm itself were "God"—that I had fallen out of belief in categories and doctrines and into the mystery of God as present. So I looked for new ways to talk about the God I knew through chasm *and* Christ, if that makes sense to you! I went to school, studied philosophy and the Christian tradition, and was accused of being "just another process thinker" when I didn't even know what "process" was! Then I discovered Whitehead's way of thinking about the world, and it was as if he were describing the world that I experienced. So I began to use his philosophy to reshape how I express my Christian faith. And I am deeply convinced that all our philosophies and theologies pale beside the wonder of who God actually is—I suspect God puts up with all our theologies, since none of them can adequately plumb the mystery of God, the love of God. I am a United Methodist, and I like the way Charles Wesley so often says in his hymns that not even angels can comprehend the love of God—even though they spend eternity trying! In any case, I finished school and went on to teach theology—many kinds, not just process—at three seminaries, retiring recently from Claremont School of Theology. I am the director of the Process & Faith Program of the Center for Process Studies, and also the director of the Whitehead International Film Festival here in Claremont.

Want to read more?

Here are a few suggestions:

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