

A PROCESS THEOLOGY OF INTERDEPENDENCE

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AS WHITEHEADIAN process theology enters its third generation, it is no longer dominated by a few major thinkers. For the most part, Whiteheadian process theology has been developed by theologians within the liberal Protestant tradition. Recently, process theology has been given serious attention by a wider audience. In particular, it is being appropriated by Catholic theologians. David Tracy, for example, focuses on problems in foundational theology by incorporating a process perspective.¹ Bernard Lee uses Whiteheadian process categories to seek a new understanding of the Church and the sacraments.²

The future direction of process theology remains open, but for two reasons I anticipate that the question of "individual and community" will be given increased attention. First, process theology has already explored the doctrines of God, human existence, and, most recently, Christ. While these are still open issues, one would expect that other doctrines, such as the Church, will become increasingly important. Second, and perhaps more significant, lines of contrast are emerging as process theology moves out to embrace a wider perspective. In particular, there appears to be a difference between Catholic and Protestant theologians regarding the relationship between the individual and the community. Of course, contrasting emphases should be welcomed, for only through contrast is novel advance possible.

In this paper I will suggest possible strategies for the development of a process theology of the Church based on fellowship through love. In Section 1 the work of John B. Cobb Jr. and that of Bernard Lee are compared to make two points: first, that the question of the Church has been addressed primarily in terms of the framework of individual and community; second, that there is a difference of emphasis concerning the primacy of the individual, or contrariwise, the primacy of community, which is a function of religious affiliation and not rooted in the process perspective itself. In Section 2 an alternative approach to the question of the Church is proposed based on a process theology of interrelations. Rather than addressing the doctrine of the Church in terms of individual and community, we should focus on love as a categorical primitive.

¹ D. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

² B. Lee, S.M., *The Becoming of the Church: A Process Theology of the Structures of Christian Experience* (New York: Paulist, 1974).

I

As mentioned previously, process theology has been nurtured for two generations primarily by liberal Protestants. A survey of the treatment of the issue of the individual and community leads to the recognition of the limited amount of *systematic* treatment given to the doctrine of the Church by process theologians. Perhaps the best process doctrines of the Church have been developed by Norman Pittenger³ and Daniel Day Williams.⁴ Both authors are concerned with Christian fellowship through love. However, Pittenger's work has been outside the mainstream of discussions among process theologians, most probably because of its nonsystematic treatment of the issues, and the fact that Pittenger teaches in England, not the United States. Similarly, Williams' treatment is nonsystematic. His central thesis concerns the relationship between love and communion. However, he does not use technical Whiteheadian analysis in his discussion and he is probably as deeply influenced by his teacher, Henry Nelson Wieman, as he is by Whitehead. Furthermore, while published in 1968, Williams' book is based on lectures given in 1952 and 1953. Consequently, it does not direct itself to the issues of postliberal and postmodern theology.⁵ We are therefore faced with the situation that a systematic process doctrine of the Church which addresses itself to the mainstream of current process theology has not been developed.

Process theologians have always been fully aware of the dynamic of relationships between the individual and the community, but the emphasis has fallen thus far on the side of the individual. Cobb's criticism of Williams' book captures one of the main reasons why process theology has been more deeply concerned with the individual than with the community. Cobb believes that in making "community" the goal where the tension between the self and other is overcome, Williams does not adequately handle the problem of self-centeredness:

I [Cobb] agree with him in seeing love as presupposing and maintaining the distinctness of lover and loved, but Williams' account does not explain the intensity of the longing to escape individuality by overcoming the separating self-consciousness. For him community is the universal goal, in which all participate in some measure; hence the need is only to extend and deepen community. Williams leaves unilluminated the suffering of self-preoccupation which leads to

³ N. Pittenger, *The Christian Church as Social Process* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

⁴ D. D. Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

⁵ Postliberal should be understood as indicating that the unique authority of Scripture is weakened and that universal experience, not just Christian experience, is significant. Postmodern should be understood as indicating that relativism does not necessarily lead to nihilism.

the identification of separateness, of ego, and even of consciousness with evil.⁶

For Cobb, and I believe for Protestant theology in general (e.g., Luther, Niebuhr, etc.), the problem is not *first* how to deepen community. Rather, the problem is estrangement in the suffering of self-preoccupation. Consequently, attention is necessarily focused on the individual rather than on the community.

Cobb's treatment of self-centeredness approaches the issue of estrangement from the side of the individual. In Christian existence, according to Cobb, selfhood is intensified. Christians objectify themselves and take responsibility for their own actions and being. This self-transcending existence expresses itself in love. But (and here is the main point) love is only a real possibility if first the suffering of self-preoccupation is overcome. The dynamics of our salvation from estrangement are outlined in detail by Cobb:

... every effort to love, in order to break out of the misery of self-preoccupation, is also an expression of the self-preoccupation and is condemned to intensify it.

Love is, therefore, on the one hand, the only salvation of the spiritual man and, on the other hand, unattainable by his own efforts.

... [Love] is made possible by the gift of an undeserved love, and hence it cannot seek a deserving object for its expression. ... hence, the prior relation of the other to the self cannot be relevant.⁷

Notice that the saving love *is* grace through faith alone—it is not relevant to the prior relationship between self and other in community. Community is possible only after estrangement is overcome. Community is not the condition for salvation from the misery of self-preoccupation.⁸

Recently, Whiteheadian process theology has been influential among Catholic theologians. While Ewert Cousins and Walter E. Stokes, S.J., did promote process theology within Catholic circles, neither developed any full-length systematic treatments of process theology. The work of David Tracy is thus far in foundational rather than systematic theology. One would anticipate that his methodological considerations will eventually find application in systematics. However, the first full-scale discussion of the Church using the process perspective by a Catholic theologian has been developed by Bernard Lee.

The systematic structure of my argument would be enhanced if Lee's process analysis of the Church focused on the community at the expense

⁶ J. B. Cobb Jr., "A Process Systematic Theology," *JR* 50 (1970) 204.

⁷ Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 135–36.

⁸ The emphasis on the individual is also extended to other issues in process discussions. For example, in debates about the nature of God, those favoring the entity view dislike the *image* of God as a string of occasions. However, if the emphasis is placed on relating, continuity is achieved where atomicity seemed to be implied.

of the individual. However, real issues are never that simple. In choosing the phrase “individual-in-community,” Lee shows his keen awareness of the balance between self and world in Whiteheadian thought. He begins his analysis by drawing out the special emphasis placed on the individual:

The human decisions which create process and shape history are decisions of individuals. Society has no mind of its own—there are only the minds of its individual members. It is, therefore, in the interior assent of the individual that society itself is created. That is equally true of the Church. The Church is created by the responses of individual persons to the Jesus-event.⁹

Notice that Lee, like Cobb, addresses the issue of the Church within the framework of the individual and community. However, in constructing a Whiteheadian systematic analysis of the dynamics of the embodiment of the Jesus-event in the structure of a Christian’s becoming existence, Lee sees the role of the community, that is, of the Church, in a radically different way than does Cobb.

The difference of emphasis in Lee and Cobb is a function of their respective treatments of the dynamics of grace as the gift of love. Lee makes frequent reference to Cobb’s treatment of love. Both recognize that “we need to know that we are loved in order to have our intrinsic value affirmed.”¹⁰ But from this Lee concludes that “we *need* the love of other human beings to believe in ourselves.”¹¹ No doubt, Cobb would also share this basic insight; however, within the dynamic of grace, Cobb, as I pointed out earlier, believes that the “prior relation of the other to the self cannot be relevant” to the affirmation needed to break out of self-enclosedness.¹² Lee also stresses “the essential loveliness of man by God”¹³ but he concludes:

Today, the locus of that defining characteristic of God’s love is meant to be in Christian community, so that it is Christian community that assures a person of his radical loveliness. If that kind of love is not present in Christian community, then it *is not available as a datum of experience*, and cannot transform the life and love of mankind. Christian community is the Sacrament of God’s love—and in that sense we do need the love of others to know that we are radically lovable *even before God*.¹⁴

At this point the difference between Cobb and Lee, a difference I believe between Protestant and Catholic, is crystallized. For Cobb, community is possible after estrangement is overcome. For Lee, the overcoming of estrangement is possible only when love is present in the Christian community. Hence, the priority of individual and community is opposite

⁹ Lee, *Becoming of Church* 169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 183.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cobb, *Structure of Existence* 135.

¹³ Lee, *Becoming of Church* 183.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 185 (emphasis mine).

in their respective treatments of love.

I believe that recognition of this difference helps explain the reasoning behind Cobb's criticism of Lee's book.¹⁵ Cobb cautions that Lee's approach to the Church as embodying a common element of form (namely the Jesus-event) "can lead to defining a normative essence of Christianity and excluding those who do not share it."¹⁶ He suggests that the unity of the Church is "not established in terms of a common element of form but in terms of the progressive canalization of novelty."¹⁷ Theology, for Cobb, cannot be based on applying a normative unchanging essence to the changing circumstances of the present situation. In fact, as the Church thinks in the present, it is a novel creative response to a new global situation. Whereas Lee treats the Jesus-event as a common element of form giving unity through inheritance to the structured society called the Church, Cobb treats Christ as the creative transformation freeing us from bondage to established patterns.¹⁸ If we need the Church as a condition to be free to love, then the Church must embody through inheritance a common element of form. If we must first *be loved* as a condition *to love* others, then the Church finds its unity in the *way* of responding to God's love, not as a condition for God's love.

II

In Section I I have attempted to make two major points: (1) that the doctrine of the Church has been treated within the framework of the question of individual and community, and (2) that there is a difference of emphasis between Catholic (Lee) and Protestant (Cobb) process theologians on the priority of the individual or the priority of the community. In this section I will suggest possible strategies for future reflection on the systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Church.

Tackling the problem of "individual-in-community" (to use Lee's phrase) within the process perspective leads easily into confusion. Debate about confusion leads only to more confusion. To deal with confusion, we must first sort out what the confusion is.

One way to deal with the particular question of individual and community is to look at the more general question of part and whole. The mention of "part and whole" uncovers the confusion, because that question arises in philosophies of substance, which have shaped both the traditional questions we ask as well as the subject-predicate form of language we use to unravel those very questions. But Whiteheadian process philosophy—the philosophy of organism—offers an alternative

¹⁵ Cobb, review of B. Lee, *Becoming of Church*, in *Process Studies* 4 (1974) 304.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 44–61.

to philosophies of substance. It is an alternative which turns substance philosophies on their heads.

Within the process perspective, to ask the question of part and whole, or individual and community, is really to ask the wrong question, which in turn leads to the wrong answer, or the right answer for the wrong reason. The "individual and community" question leads into confusion within process theology because attention is thereby focused on individuals and the communities which are composed of individuals. The tendency which follows is to treat individuals and/or their communities as the ultimate constituents of reality.

But in the process world view, the ultimate entities are *neither* individuals *nor* communities; in fact, they are not properly "entities" at all. True, the ultimates in process philosophy are termed "actual entities" or "actual occasions." But in the same breath that that statement is made, we must constantly remind ourselves that actual occasions *are* their relationships. Actual occasions do not *have* relationships. Relating constitutes their being.¹⁹ In contrasting the philosophy of substance with the philosophy of organism Whitehead at one point refers to Descartes:

Descartes in his own philosophy conceives the thinker as creating the occasional thought. The philosophy of organism inverts the order, and conceives the thought as a constituent operation in the creation of the occasional thinker. The thinker is the final end whereby there is the thought.²⁰

Much earlier in his career Whitehead made a similar claim in redefining geometry. For Whitehead, the line is the primitive, and points are derivative from the intersection of lines. In general terms, relating precedes being.²¹ Relating is a constituent operation in the creation of the actual entity. Relating is the primitive. The entity is derivative from its relations. Consequently, to discuss the question of the individual and the community is to ask the question upside down and backwards. We must first examine relating and determine how the individual and the community emerge from their relatings.

It would be naive to claim that process theologians are not painfully aware of the inadequacies of traditional questions and traditional subject-predicate language when applied within the process perspective. It would be equally naive to claim that process theologians do not understand the

¹⁹ The ninth category of explanation reads: "That *how* an actual entity *becomes* constitutes *what* that actual entity *is*; so that the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming.' This is the 'principle of process'" (A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* [New York: Macmillan, 1929] 34).

²⁰ *Ibid.* 228.

²¹ The similarity between this claim and the existentialists' claim that existence precedes essence should not be overlooked. Fruitful dialog is possible between existentialism, phenomenology, and process philosophy in understanding human existence.

primacy of relationships within the process perspective. However, in spite of their awareness, there is a tendency (even in Whitehead's own discussions) to reify actual occasions, to treat them as distinct entities, to treat them as subjects which act, to treat them as individuals which relate.

This tendency to resubstantialize Whitehead's vision is a function of the centrality of *Process and Reality* in most constructive process theology. *Process and Reality* addresses itself to an analysis of the internal constitution of actual occasions—the momentary drops of experience. By focusing attention on the internal constitution of actual occasions as a way of understanding theological issues, process theology has been concerned with understanding the nature of the individual-in-itself rather than the individual and its relatedness to the world. For example, God is understood either as an actual entity or a temporal society of actual occasions. The structure of Christian existence is understood in terms of the various phases of concrescence, such as the initial aim, the subjective aim, and satisfaction. Little attention has been given to a constructive analysis of the interdependent relationships which constitute actual occasions.

By suggesting a process theology of interdependence, I am suggesting a shift of attention. This does not mean a rejection of the usual approach to topics in process theology. Theology should function to shift our perspective when we are confronted by new situations. A shift of perspective is a shift in emphasis. It is curious that while Whitehead referred to his vision as “the philosophy of organism,” his creative thought has been labeled “process philosophy.” The term “organism” focuses attention on the organic interrelatedness of all reality. The term “process” focuses attention on the discrete moments of experience. A process theology of interrelations is a theology emphasizing organic interdependence.

The well-known drawing of a vase (or goblet) and two profiles provides a rich image for explaining what I mean by a shift of emphasis and attention. The drawing is an example of a reversible figure-ground relation. Depending on where one focuses attention when viewing this drawing, one can see either two profiles or a vase. Notice that, whichever image one pays attention to, the other image is still “in” the picture. The picture is a whole. Any focal awareness draws attention to one aspect of the picture in abstraction from the whole. If a person who saw the vase were to describe his experience of the drawing, that person would spend time discussing the vase. A similar situation would be true for the person who saw the two profiles. In drawing attention to one aspect of the picture, our focal awareness determines which topics are significant for discussion.

I see the present situation in process theology as like the drawing

described above. Process theology must affirm the value of individual existence and at the same time affirm the interdependence of relationships. Thus far in process theology, emphasis has been directed to the former at the expense of the latter. It is appropriate in philosophies of substance to conceive of two individual entities existing first in their essential being and then coming into relation. The relation is external to their being. But in the philosophy of organism the relation is constitutive of the essence of the becoming existent. The relation is internal to its being. An actual occasion is a unification of diverse relationships (prehensions). The feeler cannot be abstracted from the feelings, nor can the feelings be abstracted from the feeler. The individual cannot be abstracted from the relations, nor can the relations be abstracted from the individual. We must explain the whole picture, but we are faced with the dilemma that any attempt to explain the whole is necessarily an abstraction from the full concreteness of the situation.

We must, however, have shifts in perspective and new emphases of attention if we are to avoid the fallacy of accepting our limited abstractions as the full essence of the concrete situation. Emphasis on individuals and/or communities is dangerous, because it pushes the relational dimension of experience into the background. We must develop a process theology which is rooted in interdependence.

The preceding analysis leads me to my first and primary strategy for a process doctrine of the Church. We need, I believe, a better process theology of interrelations. Most process theology has focused on the intrapsychic structure of existence, rather than how that structure emerges from its relations of interdependence. Possibly a first step in this direction would be dropping the term "actual occasions" from the Whiteheadian jargon and substituting a term which emphasizes the relational character of becoming—perhaps "prehensive unification" or "prehensive unifying" in the gerund form to emphasize activity. The advantage of these terms is their dual emphasis on the relational as well as the unifying aspects of experience, thereby focusing attention on the organic interdependence of reality.

But one might question if such a shift in perspective is appropriate for Christian theology. The danger is made clear in the Buddhist doctrine of *pratitya samutpada* (dependent co-origination), which leads to the doctrine of *anatman* (no self). The individual gets lost in the blur of a multitude of relationships. But *anatman* is the negation of the distinctiveness of Christianity. Christian theology must affirm the personal identity of the self. Does not a process theology of interrelations eventually lead to some type of undifferentiated monism?

I believe the answer is no. One might object that a focus on relating places the importance of activity above persons. Does not a process

theology of interrelations depersonalize existence in the sense that all activity is of equal value? Furthermore, does not a process theology of interrelations obliterate personal identity through time, since a person is not some perduring substance but rather a society of momentary unifications of experience?

An adequate answer to the issue of activity and the depersonalization of existence involves two related issues. First, if reality were merely the myriad of all possible relations, nothing would exist. Existence—the realization of something actual—demands limitation. All possibilities and all relations are not felt equally. Limitation functions through valuation. Relationships achieve unity through the limitation of valuation. Thus a prehensive unification is valuation. But this does not answer the second dimension of the problem. Are there degrees of value? Is human existence more valuable than bovine existence? While there is no radical difference in kind regarding the structure of valuation, there is a difference in degree. The philosophy of organism affirms that the intensity of novel experience is richer than mere repetition of previous patterns of relatedness.

Perhaps the question of personal identity through time is a more serious problem. Certainly this criticism is often raised against process anthropologies which define a “person” as a temporally ordered society of actual occasions of experience. This type of society has only one member at any one time. Each moment of experience has a special intimacy of relations with the preceding and succeeding members of the society. The intimacy of relations, rather than numerical identity, accounts for self-identity through time. But, as mentioned previously, the usual tendency in process thinking is to focus on the atomicity, not the continuity, of reality by analyzing the internal structure of “actual occasions.” Consequently, the society termed “person” is thought of as a series of disjointed rather than interconnected moments, thereby intensifying the problem of resolving personal identity.

The thesis of this essay, however, is that we need a shift of perspective in process theology wherein emphasis is placed on interrelatedness rather than the internal constitution of actual occasions. Such a shift of perspective, I hope, will be helpful in gaining new insights into the problem of personal identity. Interrelatedness stresses the interconnectedness and continuity of existence. But in what direction does this shift of perspective lead us?

An adequate answer pushes my analysis to a second strategy for a process doctrine of the Church which is deeply interrelated with the first strategy. The future direction of process theology should entail an analysis of the becoming event as “subject-superject,” with the emphasis on

“superject.” Explanation of this strategy involves a brief description of Whitehead’s philosophical system.

In Whitehead’s philosophical system the term “subject” refers to an actual occasion in its character as a present becoming experience. Once the process of becoming is complete, the actual occasion becomes a datum in the past, and then exercises its function as an object. The focus of Whitehead’s attention in *Process and Reality* was an analysis of actual occasions as subjects; that is, Whitehead was interested in discovering the structure of the *internal* constitution of experience. But such an analysis leads to confusion in Whitehead’s system, because an actual occasion is not a subject in the sense of meaning an agent over experience. Whitehead realized this danger and cautioned that an actual occasion must be understood as subject-superject, where superject refers to the function of the actual occasion as related to the future through anticipation. However, Whitehead retained the term “subject” because of its philosophical familiarity.²² But the retention of common philosophical terms runs the danger of bringing in a good deal of old philosophical baggage—in this case, the tendency to abstract feelings from the feeler. This danger is inherent in the subject-predicate form of language.

“Superject” refers to the realization that one’s anticipation of the future is a crucial factor in the structuring of present experience. Furthermore, this anticipation can function with a specific reference to influence the future in a particular way, although the future can choose not to be so influenced. A superject is neither a substance nor a subject.²³ “Superjecting”—to coin the gerund form—is exercising the function of being a potential for every future becoming.²⁴

The importance of superjecting is lost when attention is focused on the internal constitution of actual occasions. In a theology of interrelations, attention is focused on how experience reaches out—out to the past and into the future. The visual image used by the process theology currently in vogue is a series or conglomeration of discrete drops of experience—circles drawn on the board. Often the present becoming experience is represented as a horseshoe opening to the past. The visual image in the process theology of interrelations is a blurred blob stretching out to the past and into the future. In fact, to capture the image of interrelations, we should probably shift from visual to auditory metaphors. Visual metaphors tend to spatialize existence into discrete loci. Auditory metaphors, such as images from music, temporalize existence, emphasizing interpenetrating relatedness. Sounds are discrete, yet penetrate the past and the future. One sound in an orchestral motif derives its meaning

²² Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 339.

²³ *Ibid.* 129.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 71.

through its relationships with the past development of the theme and the anticipation of the next chordal resolution.

To fully understand the importance of superjecting, we need to focus on relating as the primitive category in Whitehead's thought. As mentioned earlier, in his early work in geometry Whitehead defined "points" as derivative from the intersection of lines, making lines the primitives. In his work in physics he defined kinematic elements as the intersection of fields of force. We should carry this insight into philosophy and theology. Human beings are derivative from their relating. As subject-superject, feelings are at once aiming at their own end of transforming the indeterminate into the determinate and aiming at the future as a potential for a novel becoming.

The strategy of "superjecting" is particularly fruitful in theological discussions in at least three respects. (1) Superjecting, as the anticipation of the future as shaping the present becoming, creates a climate of dialog, already taking place, between process theology and the theology of hope.²⁵ (2) Superjecting is deeply correlated with the notion of responsibility, because it points out that we are not only responsible to ourselves, but we are "derivatively responsible for the consequences of [our] existence because they flow from [our] feelings."²⁶ (3) Superjecting treats public rather than private facts.²⁷ This should be most appropriate for the discussion of the Church.

My third strategy, interrelated with the first two, is to treat the issue of relating in terms of the *how* of relating or a way of responding, rather than in terms of the *what* of relations. Underlying this strategy is a conviction concerning the nature of religious experience. Religion is not one dimension of experience alongside of other experiences. Rather, religion structures all experience by unifying diverse experiences. If religion is a way of interrelating and unifying all experiences, then it cannot be described in terms of the object (or subject) to which one is related. By treating the issue of relating in terms of the *how* of relating, we may uncover a solution to the question posed previously in this essay: How do the individual and the community emerge from their relating?

In technical vocabulary the *how* of relating is termed the "subjective form" of a prehension. "Prehension" is simply a generic term meaning "a process of appropriating, of grasping, of taking account of" something. A subjective form describes how a relation is felt in terms of its quality and intensity. A subjective form inhering in a relation (prehension) is similar to a quality inhering in a substance. However, in a substance

²⁵ For example, see Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* 71, 238–41.

²⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 339.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 443.

philosophy, the quality is only accidental to the substance. In the philosophy of organism, the subjective form cannot be separated from the relating, which in turn cannot be separated from the becoming experience. Quality and activity cannot be separated from agency. In describing the inextricable unity of activity (relating) and agency (subject), Whitehead emphasizes that “the feelings are what they are in order that their subject may be what it is.” “The subject is responsible for being what it is in virtue of its feelings. It is also derivatively responsible for the consequences of its existence because they flow from its feelings.”²⁸

In less technical language we can say that how a person responds to others determines who the person is. It is equally true to say that who a person is determines how the person responds to others. That is, the subjective form, which describes the how of response, is also describing the being of the particular person. The subjective form “expresses the purpose which urged it [the feeling or relating] forward.”²⁹ In this way the subjective form is related to the unity of the person. Usually in process theology the unity of an experience is described in terms of the subjective aim at satisfaction. One looks inside of the experience to understand unity. In a process theology of interrelations the unity of experience is controlled by the subjective forms. One looks outside of the experience (to interdependence) to understand the unity.

The subjective form clothes a prehension. It fills out the relationship, so that it is not merely a relation but a response. As indicated in the discussion of superjecting above, a response includes both a reaction to the past and an anticipation of the future.³⁰ There may be various ways of responding—various subjective forms—joy, distaste, judgment, consciousness, oughtness. An example will clarify what a subjective form is. In describing the nature of moral responsibility, three features stand out as important: the act to be performed, the subject of the act, and the sense of obligation attached to the idea of that subject performing that act. The sense of obligation is the subjective form.³¹ While I have identified three features for the purpose of discussion, they are in fact inseparable.

How does the strategy of paying attention to subjective forms function in the context of a doctrine of the Church? The distinctiveness of Christianity rests in its understanding of the structure of human existence. A Christian is not merely responsible for what he does, but in a very radical sense is responsible for choosing the intentions and motiva-

²⁸ Ibid. 339.

²⁹ Ibid. 354.

³⁰ H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

³¹ Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 115.

tions which underlie all behavior. These intentions and motivations function as the center for the structuring of experience. The nature of the intentions and motivations must be understood in terms of love (agape). But love is a subjective form. Love describes a way of responding, which involves encountering the past and anticipating the future. Within the context of the general discussion of subjective forms above, love not only describes a way of responding but also a way of being, since how a person responds determines who a person is and vice versa. Love describes the purpose for being as well as the center for the structuring of experience, in terms of intentions and motivations.

Little systematic treatment of love has been attempted by process theologians. Whitehead does not deal with love in his *Process and Reality*. However, in the chapter entitled "Peace" in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead describes love in terms very similar to the Christian understanding of agape.³² Love breaks down the concern with individual satisfaction. In love, personality is transcended. Personal life passes beyond itself with a width including all particular realities. Whitehead stresses that such a love leads to peace, not anesthesia. In anesthesia discordant features of existence are dismissed into irrelevance.³³ Peace involves an order where individual actuality, in all its concrete novelty, is promoted in the strengthening of experience.³⁴ To transcend personal satisfaction is to harmonize "the soul's activities with ideal aims that lie beyond any personal satisfaction."³⁵

Here we encounter the paradoxical nature of love. Love, both as a way of responding and a way of structuring experience, functions to transcend personal satisfaction. Love gives unity to a person in order that *that* unification can be transcended. The advantage of understanding love as a subjective form is that it provides an explanation of how the community emerges with the emergence of the individual. It is difficult to understand how the actual occasion can transcend itself if attention is directed to the internal constitution of the occasion. However, by focusing attention on interrelations rather than individuals, attention is already directed to the interdependence of existence. I have already described how the subjective form functions in the unity of a person. It remains to describe how the unity of a community can be understood as a function of the subjective form.

In most discussions attention is directed to the role the individual plays in shaping the subjective form. Who a person is determines how a person

³² Considerable treatment has been given to Whitehead's understanding of "peace" as presented in the last pages of *Process and Reality*. I believe that the relationship between love and peace could be most illuminating for those discussions.

³³ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933) 294.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 292.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 288.

responds. However, the subjective form cannot be separated from the pattern of the community or environment in which the individual responds.³⁶ A relation does not describe something which connects a subject with an object, such as two terms of a relation. Rather, a relation describes the radical interdependence of an emerging individual within the social matrix which constitutes its environment. A simple example from common experience helps clarify my point. As mentioned previously, a person is a society. Who I am now depends upon who I was a moment ago and who I anticipate I will be in the future. If I were angry (a subjective form) a moment ago, this anger may shape my present experience, giving continuity of anger to my experiences over some period of time. Of course, I can decide not to be angry. This would involve a shift in subjective forms.

A similar analysis is possible when applied to other types of societies, such as the Church. Whitehead offers two explanations of the unity of a community. One method of achieving unity is by inheriting a common element of form. This approach is developed by Bernard Lee, where the unity of the Church is the inheritance of a common element of form—the Jesus-event. The other method of achieving unity focuses on intensifying the novelty promoted by a community. The purpose of the second method “is to receive the novel elements of the environment into explicit feelings with such subjective forms as conciliate them with the complex experiences proper to members of the structured society. Thus in each concrescent occasion its subjective aim originates novelty to match the novelty of the environment.”³⁷ From this passage it follows that one way a society achieves unity is through the conciliation of subjective forms, since the essential novelty of a feeling attaches to the subjective form.³⁸ We might say that an individual may inherit ways of responding which are expressed by members of the community. This inheritance binds the community into a unity and at the same time functions to give unity to the individual.

This second explanation of unity through subjective forms is particularly significant if the subjective form is love. In love, a person *is* in order *to be* for another person. Love is not directed toward future states of the individual, but rather to future experiences of other persons.

In the preceding analysis of unity, I have used the terms “individual,” “person,” “other persons.” Such language is dangerous, for it falls into the trap of an analysis of individuals and communities rather than relations. However, we may rethink this analysis in the terms of a process theology of interrelations. If we take the perspective (a necessary abstraction from the concrete) of the present feeling the past, and remember

³⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 357.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 155.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 354.

that the past *was* a present superjecting with love toward the future, then the present is feeling feelings clothed in love from a diverse past, not just the strand of experiences constituting its own past. The impact of this view is that both the individual and the community emerge from a mode of relating which gives the individual unity in order that the unity can be transcended. Love at once affirms the individual and the other. Love is an expression of interdependence.

In conclusion, I wish to show how these strategies can help to overcome the differences outlined in Section 1 between Cobb and Lee. Cobb argued that the individual must first be loved by God in order to break out of the estrangement of self-preoccupation. Community is a consequence, not the source, of God's love. Lee, on the other hand, argued that love is only a datum of experience if it is present in Christian community. Community is the source, not the consequence, of God's love. For both Cobb and Lee, the issue involves how individuals are freed to love.

According to the process theology of interrelations outlined in this section, the problem is not "how are individuals freed to love?" The problem is "how out of a multiplicity of relations do individuals and communities emerge?"

If we focus on the individual as a subject which has relations (in this case, a person who can love), we miss sight of the nature of the person as a superject, that is, what the person is for others. This point is given particular import if the subjective form, making possible the integration of diverse feelings, is love. The satisfaction reached through love is a satisfaction which transcends the individual. In love, both the community and the individual emerge. From the perspective of the individual, the past is reaching out in love and the present is thrusting forward in love. As subject, the becoming experience is individual, but as superject it is for the community. That is, individual and community are really abstractions—functions of attention or awareness—but cannot be dealt with as independent, since in fact they are interdependent. We must focus instead on organic wholeness and on the power which binds the world into a unity. The dynamics of becoming are subject-superject. In the dynamics of becoming in the mode of love, the individual is created to transcend itself for others, and the others are created to transcend themselves for the individual.