

THE HISTORICITY OF GOD

Contemporary theology has had its attention taken by a footnote in Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* suggesting that God's being might be more richly construed in categories of primal temporality (*ursprüngliche Zeitlichkeit*) which is infinite, rather than in those of a spurious eternity.¹ Among the reasons for this is the influence of Hegel on Heidegger, for whom eternity, like being, was an empty notion devoid of all determination until through the mediation of time it was sublimated into a pure becoming transcendent to both eternity and derived time. Operative too is, seemingly, the biblical view of a God of historical revelation in dialogue with humankind. More proximate, however, is Heidegger's own envisagement of God's being on analogy with that of man, wherein the structure of the latter's privileged existence is Care (*Sorge*) that plays out its meaning as temporality. Here, in an avowedly anthropomorphic view, time is essential to man's structure as the sphere wherein he achieves his own being in self-enactment. Like man, then, God's being is to be found only in-a-world with others (*In-der-Welt-sein*), manifesting itself as Care.

GOD AS PRIMAL TEMPORALITY

Schubert Ogden was one Christian theologian who took up this challenge and attempted to work through its implications.² Notably, he began by applying Heidegger's distinction between the ontic or *existenziell* order on one hand and the ontological or *existenzial* on the other. The former represents God's *Existenz*, His concrete involvement in the historical world, a sort of divine derived time, superior to but homogeneous with finite historical events. The latter is properly the concern of the philosophical theologian; it is the formal structure of God's being in which His "within-timeness" is grounded; this is God's primal temporality and represents what Ogden calls the divine "existentiality" in distinction from the divine "existence." Primal temporality is thus a conception closer to "historic" than to "historical," more akin to the biblical *kairos* than to the *chronos* of Greek rational thought. As structuring divine being, it conveys that God is essentially and by inner necessity relative to finite entities. Its immediate implication is that God, existing in the present, is measured by His past as He looks creatively to His future.

More importantly, perhaps, is Ogden's further clarification, namely, that the divine temporality is infinite. This means that God's being,

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper, 1962) 499, n. xiii.

² Schubert Ogden, "The Temporality of God," in *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 144-63.

while it cannot be other than relative to a past and a future (and this means a past and a future with others who are in time) bespeaks a past that had no beginning and a future that will have no end (unlike human existence, which is "unto death") and so one of limitless possibilities. It means further that God is not present to some one segment of time (as is true of whatever is finitely temporal) but equally to all moments of time without exception. God exists in dependence upon the others with whom He is essentially in relation, but the character of that relationship is not determined by factors extrinsic to God; thus it transcends the limitations inherent in all finite relationality. In this way Ogden justifies Heidegger's characterization of primal temporality as "infinite."

GOD AS BEING IN HISTORY

The suggestion arising from existential philosophy that God be conceived in terms of "primal temporality" has found fertile ground in theological circles. The Neo-Orthodox movement gave this (independently) a form of its own in conceiving God not as being but as event. Concretely, this was the event of revelation, which was thus seen as a self-communication indistinguishable from God Himself. This has to be understood, however, against the background of the distinction—usually implicit but always operative—between the *Deus in se* and the *Deus pro nobis*. God in Himself is not a God for men and women and remains unknown and unknowable. In willing to become a God for us out of love, God makes Himself identical with the event of revelation. Thus for Karl Barth the doctrine of the Trinity is the immediate awareness in faith of the structure of revelation as divine, the awareness that God is the *agent* of revelation (*God reveals*), the content of revelation (*God reveals Himself*), and the very occurrence of revelation (*God reveals Himself*).

Neo-Orthodoxy succeeded to a degree in its attempt to recoup the weightiness of traditional Christian language that had been put in question since the time of Schleiermacher. But it paid a price that was to prove too dear a one, the jettisoning of a concern for history, a concern indigeneous to Christian belief. Historical criticism against Christian claims led Barth to seek safe harbor in a kind of metahistory within God (*Urgeschichte*), the eternal election of Jesus as the Christ. Bultmann, for his part, made faith secure by retreating from the vicissitudes of history into a world of existential decision; here what mattered was not interest in the Jesus of history but rather concern for the kerygmatic Christ, for the Christ proclaimed and confessed, for which confession the life of Jesus provided only the occasion.

In time it became obvious that the ahistorical character of the Neo-Orthodoxy movement rendered it inadequate to the demands of Christian belief. An alternative to it was worked out above all with the work of

Wolfhart Pannenberg, who, accepting Barth's theology of revelation, viewed that revelation not as a kind of metahistory but as coincident with history itself in its universality (*Universalgeschichte*).³ History, of course, is universal only in terms of its end, which has not yet arrived—a problem Pannenberg resolved by viewing the resurrection of Christ as an anticipation (for believers) of the consummation of history.

What Pannenberg appears to do is to conceive God as primal temporality (much in line with Ogden's response to Heidegger's footnote) but then to reverse the directionality of time by affording ontological priority to the future. God is not just related equally to all moments of time as they unfold out of the past and into the future by way of the present. Rather, God is the power of the future impinging upon the present, determining it to be what it truly is in virtue of the truth that the true essence of anything is constituted by what it is to become. All reality is then historical, or, differently put, "history is reality in its totality,"⁴ which totality lies only in its consummation. In this sense meaning is resident within events themselves, not bestowed upon events by subjects who are obedient to Christ (Bonhoeffer) or who confess the proclaimed Christ (Bultmann). Whatever is historical, then, is revelatory of God.

God is thus the power over all that is (*Macht über alles*), but in the way in which the future (for Pannenberg) is determinative of the present. Such a future, unlike Hegel's, remains open—even for the resurrected Christ.⁵ It enables Pannenberg to write "God does not yet exist."⁶ When He does come to exist, however, God will reveal Himself as always having been. What this does *not* mean, first of all, is that God, fully actual in Himself from the beginning, comes to be known by us only gradually with the passage of time. Rather, Pannenberg means "in the eternal God Himself a becoming takes place."⁷ Since that becoming is historical, it seemingly has to be said that God's being is intrinsically historical. But since that becoming is not the unfolding from the past of virtualities

³ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg (London: Macmillan, 1968) 123–58; also Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in *History and Hermeneutic*, ed. Robert Funk (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 122–52 (first published as Vol. 4 of *Journal for Theology and the Church*, 1967; also available in *Basic Questions in Theology* 1 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970] 96–136).

⁴ W. Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," in *Basic Questions in Theology* 1, 21.

⁵ Cf. Pannenberg's "Response to the Discussion" in *Theology as History*, Vol. 3 of *New Frontiers in Theology*, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 264, n. 74.

⁶ W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. R. J. Neuhaus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 56.

⁷ W. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 157.

resident there from the beginning, in either an evolutionary or a teleological sense, Pannenberg is able to say (somewhat idiosyncratically) that God will reveal Himself at the end as always having been what He has become historically.⁸ His becoming is the arrival of the future, understood in the sense that every existent is a mere provisional and pleptic instantiation of that future.

The question this poses is: Has Pannenberg virtually identified God with the process of history? If this means history in its human immanence seen as a mere code word for God, the answer is no. But it would seem that Pannenberg has reduced the being of God to that of a divine historical process vis-à-vis the world. God's being is identified with His reign, which is in the process of being historically achieved and has been anticipated in the destiny of the Resurrected One. Thus God's being is entirely within history. Pannenberg has at least collapsed revelation into history (the truth is not only that revelation is history but even that history is revelation), and revelation is God's self-communication. We cannot conceive or speak of any other God than the One who is coming into existence historically and who will exist when history comes to its consummation as the full achievement of God's lordship. Clearly this envisages a close to history, though Pannenberg qualifies this in speaking of "the possibility of a contortion of time" after history is completed, meaning an experience of process "different in some way from the forces of time which we experience at present . . . a process into the depths of our present lives concerning the direction of the relation to God, participation in God's glory."⁹ At work here is an ontologizing of history and an identification of God with that history in the totality of its meaning. God is thus not eternal (in the classical sense of timeless) but conceived rather as total time, which is time from its consummation.¹⁰ That consummation yet to come will reveal when it does come as always having been. And this is not to be understood merely epistemologically but ontologically.

There is an obvious problem of understanding here—basically that of the tendency to historicize God. The denial to God of anything suggesting nontemporal eternity seemingly leads to the virtual identity of deity with the process of history. This clearly demands a unity to history in the

⁸ *Theology and the Kingdom of God* 63. Because of this contention Pannenberg is able to disagree with Whitehead that "the futurity of God's Kingdom implies a development in God" and to insist only that "the movement of time contributes to deciding what the definite truth is going to be, also with regard to the essence of God" (62). Just how this is consistent with the words cited in no. 7 above is not clear.

⁹ "A Theological Conversation with Wolfhart Pannenberg," *Dialog* 11 (1972) 287-88.

¹⁰ *Theology and the Kingdom of God* 62: "Eternity is not timelessness. . . . The very essence of God implies time."

totality of its meaning that suggests the imposition upon the living God of an abstract, universal, unified *idea* of history in its totality. As something a priori, it is difficult to see why this does not undermine genuine history in its event-like character and the truly historical dimension to revelation. A quite similar reservation is felt by some regarding the ahistorical *Vorgriff* of transcendental Thomists such as Karl Rahner. But history can be history only if it is not virtually identified with God but remains the result of a dialogic relationship between God and man. Is the Christian vision not rather one of a God remaining transcendent to history in Himself, who only assumes our history, choosing to become in creation the Lord of history and in incarnation subject to it?

True enough, Pannenberg himself has denied any such identification of God with the process of history itself, insisting that he only intends denying that history is "an 'immanence' to which one can and indeed would have to oppose a 'transcendence.'"¹¹ But even in this disavowal God remains transcendent to each particular event by overcoming and surpassing it in the mode of the newness of event which dawns and negates the previous event that anticipated it. Futurity, in short, remains the mode of divine being. God is not the ground of the phenomenal world but the source of events which come to pass in a contingent and free way. God thus determines all events, but from within history, that is to say, in the way the future determines the present—in a word, contingently.

Another perspective on the same problem is that such a theology seems content with a finite deity of history whose attributes—granting only the addition of personhood—are strikingly similar to Heidegger's *Sein*. A way around this is to allow that Pannenberg believes that theology can deal explicitly only with the *Deus pro nobis*. Of the *Deus in se* nothing whatsoever can be said. This at least could leave the way open to granting that something like Pure Act is characteristic of God in Himself—of the God who, unknown and unknowable, is not a God of humankind apart from His choosing in unexacted love to become such. Such speculation, however, is not to be found in Pannenberg's explicit thought; it can only be suggested that it seemingly is operative there in a covert and surreptitious way. One oblique indication of this may well lie in his consistent rejection of analogy in favor of doxological language about God.¹²

¹¹ "Response to the Discussion," *Theology as History* 250–51.

¹² Cf. "Analogy and Doxology," *Basic Questions in Theology* 1, 212–38; also "Response to the Discussion," *Theology as History* 251. Pannenberg's major treatment (and rejection) of analogy is to be found in his unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*; cf. Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Right Way to Speak about God? Pannenberg on Analogy," *TS* 43 (1982) 673–92.

GOD AS NONTEMPORAL BECOMING

Heidegger's distinction between the *existenzial* and the *existenziell* order, applied by Ogden to the question about God's being, suggests obvious parallels with Alfred Whitehead's doctrine of a primordial and a consequent nature in God. This very dipolarity, however, raises serious questions of its own centering on the sort of relationship prevailing between the two natures. The prevailing resolution up to the present would seem to be that worked out by Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb.¹³ Here the emphasis falls markedly on the consequent nature as alone actual and concrete, with the primordial nature designating an abstract realm of pure possibilities for God that is real only as embodied in the consequent nature. On this view God is eminently temporal — in "his derivative nature . . . consequent upon the creative advance of the world," which nature is "fully actual," "everlasting," but "incomplete." What is conveyed by "primordial nature" has receded into the background, namely, that dimension of God's being that, though "actually deficient" and "unconscious," may be called "infinite" and "eternal."¹⁴

Lewis S. Ford, however, has offered another, more nuanced interpretation of Whitehead that enables us to enter more deeply into the question at hand.¹⁵ This interpretation emphasizes not God's consequent nature characterized by temporality but the primordial nature which enabled Whitehead to refer to God as "a non-temporal actual entity."¹⁶ The primordial nature involves God's conceptual feelings, which as such bespeak no temporal limitation whatsoever (unlike finite conceptual feelings, which originate at some point in time and are dependent upon prior physical prehensions). Divine conceptual feelings transcend temporality altogether then, but are analyzable into an objective aspect and a subjective counterpart to this. The objective dimension consists in God's being confronted with the realm of eternal objects and clearly introduces the notion of eternity into God (though Ford prefers here the designation "atemporal"). The eternity in question, however, is of a negative and abstract sort, like the eternity of numbers or the Platonic

¹³ Cf. Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967) esp. chap. 5; also *The Divine Reality* (New London: Yale University, 1948); also "Whitehead's Idea of God," in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. P. A. Schlipp (New York: Tudor, 1941). See John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) esp. chap. 5.

¹⁴ All the words in quotation are from Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) 524; in the Free Press edition (New York, 1969) 407.

¹⁵ Lewis S. Ford, "The Non-Temporality of Whitehead's God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1973) 346-76.

¹⁶ *Process and Reality* 73; Free Press edition 60.

forms. It answers to the concept of "timelessness" and designates a realm of values that *in se* lack all actuality; it represents merely an abstract structure of the divine nature taken primordially.

Ford's interpretation of Whitehead, however, stresses the subjective dimension to the primordial nature, namely, the nontemporal decision wherein God renders Himself actual as a subject. In so doing, God renders the eternal objects actual by embodying them in the process of becoming. This exemplifies Whitehead's principle that "apart from things that are actual, there is nothing."¹⁷ Here God posits Himself, outside time and independently of the world, as the sort of God He chooses to be in transcendent freedom by His ordered envisagement of the eternal objects. What is at work here is Whitehead's later doctrine of actual occasions as self-creating in a process of concrescence. Ford's contention, which takes him beyond other process thinkers, is that the divine self-creating is by way of such a decision—a nontemporal decision, however, in contrast to other entities, whose decisions are temporal.¹⁸ This involves distinguishing between actuality on one hand, and definiteness or determinateness on the other. It is decision, as the self-expression of a subjectivity, as that whereby an entity posits itself as an existing subject, that accounts for actuality. Definiteness of form or determinateness, by contrast, is rather the immediate consequence of decision and actuality (thus we tend to confuse them with actuality), and in itself bears rather the character of potentiality insofar as it is available for prehension and can contribute to future decisions. In contrast to classical metaphysics, then, determinateness and concreteness are not manifestive of actuality but constitute potentiality for further becoming. By way of bolstering this view, Ford is able to point out the inability of Aristotelianism to surmount the difficulty inherent in a doctrine that derives actuality from form. If the forms bestow actuality on matter, why are they not actual outside of the composite, and so subsistent, as they were for Plato? Whitehead seeks to avoid this problem inherited from Plato by reducing actuality to subjective decision, one which in God's case is nontemporal. Actuality resides ultimately, then, not in substance (Aristotle's *ousia*) but in the successive states of substance, in its becoming or its history. To state this another way: for Aristotle, perfection consists in things being determinate, finished, and limited, whereas imperfection was viewed as the indeterminate, the unfinished, and unlimited. Aquinas found this congenial and gave primacy to act over potency, to existence over essence. Whitehead inversed this order, preferring to look upon the determinate as unfinished and as supplying the potential for further perfecting.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 64; Free Press edition 53.

¹⁸ Ford, "Non-Temporality" 325 f.

Clearly, all of this issues in a conception of God different from that of process thinkers such as Hartshorne, Cobb, and others, who stress the consequent nature and who view God's actuality and subjectivity in a never-ending series of temporal decisions. Ford's stress upon the nontemporal decision of the primordial nature once again introduces a timelessness within God. But not a timelessness that remains indifferent to all temporal passage—as characterizes the doctrine of the eternal objects taken by itself. Nor a timelessness that includes within itself all moments of time—as is the case with the medieval understanding of eternity. "Nontemporal" here rather means independent of temporal passage as such but capable of being related to any given moment of time.¹⁹ The reason for this is simply that the divine nontemporal decision is an instance not of being but of pure becoming. God is continuously realizing Himself by way of one of an infinite number of pure possibilities—precisely in order to make available, through the initial aims He supplies, real possibilities for temporal concrescence in the world. Thus in His very reality God is a God of constantly emerging novelty, of eternal becoming. What Ford has done in effect, in a convincing interpretation of Whitehead, is ground the God of a temporal becoming in dependence upon the finite world (the consequent nature) in an ontologically prior nontemporal becoming that is the source of the never-ending creative advance into novelty.²⁰

THE ETERNAL GOD OF BEING

The foregoing attempts at reconceiving God in categories of primal temporality, historicity, or eternal becoming are all indebted to the discovery in contemporary thought of the historicity of men. Implicit in this is the understanding that all statements about God are at the same time unavoidably statements about humankind. Temporality is viewed, in the modern experience, not as defect but as boon—as holding out to man and woman the possibilities of self-enactment. This gives a certain priority to the future on which basic humanity can rescue the past and enrich the present; it means life in hope through transcending the limitations of present existence. Metaphysically, this has meant a swing of the pendulum from being as absolute value to that of becoming. Theologically, this thinking has been extrapolated from anthropological considerations and introduced into notions of God. Classical thought (Stoic, Platonic, Aristotelian, and medieval) showed by contrast a preference for permanence over change. The Greek discovery of *logos*, and the equation of intelligibility with being, meant that temporality was

¹⁹ Ibid. 357–59.

²⁰ In principle, such creative advance into novelty must be capable of failure. Whitehead, however, understands God in the fidelity of His decisions as preserving the creative process from eventual destruction.

understood as a diminution of being, its admixture with potency for change, and so an approach to nonbeing. Time was thus rooted not in being, which as such bespoke no limitation, but in being as finite, i.e., as subject to motion and so to measure; the truly existent, the really real—e.g., Plato's forms—represented a storm-free area, one isolated from such deficiency.

In such a thought system God is presented as pure being with the attribute of eternity, utterly transcendent to all diminution of being arising from temporality or becoming. The most critical version of this mode of thinking appears in Aquinas' transformation of theology into something analogous, in the domain of faith, to Aristotle's *epistēmē*. Here created things are not the explanation of their own existing; they exist contingently, exercising an act of being bestowed on them by that being that is alone its own existence, namely, God. As such, all creatures are finite and intrinsically mutable—such mutation being a consequence of their drive towards fuller actualization. Time is precisely the measure (one and uniform in the mind, then) according to before and after of this process. God's reality was surmised, on analogy with that of creatures, as consisting of pure being, fully actual in itself, and thus ontologically incapable of alteration or change—simply because there was nothing lacking to God which He could acquire by changing. The pure actuality of God thus grounded His immutability, which was in turn the proximate foundation of His eternity as the negation of any way of measuring succession or passage.²¹

Eternity is, etymologically, a negative term bespeaking the denial to God of temporality, just as immutability is in virtue of the *via negativa* a denial to God of all imaginable modes of created mutation. But what is designated by this negative use of analogy is a positive attribute of God that remains unknown in itself. Thus eternity means timelessness, but only insofar as it is interchangeable with the dynamism expressed in the pure act of "to be." God, who is "unmoved," is misconstrued unless it be understood that He is by the same token the *primum movens* of everything else. Thus the medieval preference for stability over change is not an option for a static notion of being; rather the opposite. This led to conceiving eternity imaginatively as the *nunc stans*, on analogy with the *nunc fluens* of time; here time is, in Plato's phrase from the *Timaeus*, "the moving image of eternity." Eternity, then, is not procession without beginning or end, which would be rather everlastingness (nor is it what the medievals termed "aeviternity"²²), but a mode of being beyond all

²¹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 3, a. 3. God's essence is His very act of existing, whence it follows, q. 9, that He is immutable, and thus, q. 10, that He is eternal.

²² "Aeviternity" was the medieval term for the measure of the duration of things substantially unchangeable but accidentally subject to change; cf. Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 10, a. 5.

measure and duration, characterized by the total absence of all succession. Most commonly, this was appropriated by way of Boethius' classic definition "the perfect, total, and simultaneous possession of interminable life."²³ This answers to timelessness, but a timelessness that (granting the existence of time) includes all time within itself. God in His eternity is by necessity related to every moment of time—not just as each temporal moment unfolds, for that would subject God to time in its succession, but as overarching all of time in its entirety. Divine eternity, in Aquinas' view, is not God's one universal history with us (Pannenberg); nor is it everlastingness (Whitehead's consequent nature); nor atemporality, which abstracts from all temporality; nor nontemporality, which bespeaks internal succession and relates only to particular moments of time (Whitehead's primordial nature).

All of this, of course, represents the received doctrine of the Christian tradition up until the time of the Enlightenment. Contemporary theology, facing the phenomenon of pluralism, is by and large agreed that, whatever other methodological path it pursue, theology today must proceed hermeneutically. By this is meant that the believer, far from entering upon presuppositionless thinking, must think from within a tradition that is mediated historically. This sets the theological task as one of appropriating a tradition critically, that is to say, interpretatively. The intent is to grasp the living *traditio*, not just to repeat the *tradita*; this can be done by entering into dialogue with the subject matter as presented in the texts of the tradition, but in light of present experiences. It is only present experience as interpreting and as being interpreted by past experience that allows meaning to happen and, in the case at hand, God's revelation to come to pass.

If this be so, then the conceptions of God as eternal on one hand and as primal temporality on the other confront one another. The question that needs exploring is whether these remain irreconcilable or whether the two conceptualities might not condition each other in some mutually illuminating way. Primal temporality is argued for in two distinct versions: (1) as a divine historical process that will come to consummation (Pannenberg), and (2) as a divine ahistorical process that is in principle without end (Whitehead).

For the first of these, an insistence upon God as eternal *in Himself* serves to indicate that divinity is not self-identical with historical process. The latter is rather God's chosen means of communicating and mediating Himself to a temporal world. This means qualifying Pannenberg's own statement that God is identified with His coming reign; it demands, rather, explicit acknowledgment that God transcends His willing of

²³ Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* 5, 6 (PL 63, 858); cited in Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 10, a. 1.

Himself as the goal to history. Thus it makes clear the gratuitousness of God's choosing to render Himself a God for humanity in and through history. It is difficult to see how this is safeguarded if—as maintained by Eberhard Jüngel, who offers a more Barthian version of Pannenberg's vision—it is godless to speak of a God without men and women.²⁴ At the same time Pannenberg's approach has the advantage of emphasizing that humanity's relation to God is basically historical, in such wise that priority is given to the future, and moreover a future that remains an open one. In short, the two aspects need to be seen together; the God-world relationship must be grasped in the two dimensions of history on one hand, with all the risks attendant upon the exercise of freedom, both divine and human, and of being on the other (grounding a metaphysics) wherein historical process is tethered down so as to escape being merely arbitrary, contingent, or voluntaristic.

If this primal temporality be reduced back to where it signifies a never-ending process of becoming intrinsic to God Himself (as in Ford's interpretation of Whitehead), then the traditional notion of eternity calls this into question by contesting the legitimacy of introducing potency into the deity. The divine nontemporal decision, after all, is God's actualization of Himself by way of one of the infinite possibilities objectively available to Him from the realm of eternal objects. Such infinitude of possibilities is seemingly not extrinsic to God; this, were it the case, would subordinate God to something nondivine.²⁵ Whitehead's principle that nothing is real which is not actual in some subject demands rather that such infinity be an intrinsic structure of God's primordial nature. But for process thought this can be at best a potential infinity; possibly it can explain Whitehead's ultimate category of Creativity, which is itself nonactual. God's nontemporal decision, which does constitute Him as actual, is only an ongoing instantiation of Creativity. This is simply to say that God, in His actuality and reality, is finite.

The contribution of Ford's interpretation of Whitehead, on the other hand, is that the notion of a nontemporal self-actualizing decision on God's part suggests a deepening of the concept of eternity. It is not too

²⁴ This is Jüngel's premise throughout his recent *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977); see also *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976): "And thus one will be allowed to say and will have to say that there is—thank God—no being of God in-and-for-itself without man" (108, n. 160).

²⁵ Practically all commentators on Whitehead are agreed that such is not the case. Cf., e.g., Barry L. Whitney, "Divine Immutability in Process Philosophy and Contemporary Thomism," *Horizons* 7 (1980) 49–68, who criticizes my suggestion that such might be at least a logical implication of Whitehead's thought. That ambiguity remains is borne out by Whitehead's statement that "The non-temporal act of all-inclusive unfettered valuation is at once a creature of creativity and a condition of creativity" (*Process and Reality* 47; Free Press edition 37).

farfetched to see Whitehead's thought here as articulating in different conceptual categories what Aquinas means by eternity as the measure of Subsistent Being—as long as due emphasis be given to being as act. Existence or actuality for Aquinas is not mere facticity nor givenness but the exercise of existential act,²⁶ the existent "is," somewhat as analogously the runner runs or the singer sings. The ultimate source of such exercise can only be what Aquinas calls, borrowing a Greek term, the *hypostasis*, that is, the subject-person (or, granting the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the three Persons). This seems an approximation of Whitehead's principle of reformed subjectivity, and suggests that a God of nontemporal becoming is somewhat akin to a God whose being is surmised as that of Pure Actuality. In either view divine reality is a dynamism: the former that of a potency to act process, the latter that of a process that can only be represented as that of act to act (as in the eternal relating that constitutes Father, Son, and Spirit). The enormous difference, of course, is that Whitehead's God continuously attains to a newness of perfection that is intrinsic to His own developing divine being; the eternal God of Thomism can be seen as acquiring new relationships to the novelties introduced into the world by His creatures but without undergoing enrichment in His own inner beingness.

TWO COROLLARIES

Two corollaries deserve mention by way of conclusion. The first is that conceiving God as eternal, and so as immutable, does not preclude allowing that He is really related to the world. Such real relations are, it is true, denied verbally by Aquinas, who understands all relations of God to world as rational relations. But that rests upon a precise understanding of real as implying causal dependence. In this understanding, whose roots go back to Aristotle, God is not enriched by these relationships to the world; the creature's activity does not contribute anything to God's already totally perfect being. Such relationships of God to world nonetheless remain *actual* ones founded on God's own causality towards the world. God does truly know, love, create, act upon, redeem, etc. this universe of creatures. In this sense there is no problem in designating such relations as real. Aquinas prefers to avoid the term in order to make clear that the proximate foundation for the relation is the creature's dependence upon God, while the remote foundation is God's pure causality as unaffected by the effect upon which it operates. This is simply a

²⁶ The whole metaphysical system of Aquinas pivots on the real distinction between essence and *esse*, in which the former explaining the nature of something is merely potential towards existence, whereas the latter is its *actus essendi*. *Esse* is thus the first perfection and the act of all acts: "Nothing attains actuality except by way of existing, and the act of existing is thus the ultimate actuality of everything and even of forms themselves" (*Sum. theol.* 1, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3; cf. also *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3).

way of saying that the motive of the divine causal acting cannot be any self-enrichment of God, who is already fully actual, but only an altruistic gifting of the creature, who is thereby "really" related to God in this sense of the term "real." What Aquinas wishes to avoid is any suggestion of ontic relations accidentally accruing to God's being. Modern usage, however, would sanction using the term "real" to cover God's effective altering of the creature vis-à-vis Himself.

Secondly, predicating eternity of God rather than primal temporality does mean denying, at least without qualification, that God suffers intrinsically in His own godhead. That God does so suffer is taught in all forms of process theology (finding inspiration in Whitehead's designation of God as a "fellow sufferer") and is echoed in many theologians who tend to historicize God's being—notably Jürgen Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel. The doctrine of an eternal God that claims to be Christian must obviously make room for a God who suffers. This is usually explained as suffering not in His divinity but in the humanity He had made His own in Jesus the Christ. But that humanity is confessed as the humanity of God, which means that in some mysterious sense God suffers. Further explanation was forthcoming in the tradition with the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*. But that seems inadequate to the mystery. Somehow a way must be found to say that God is beyond all suffering in His own inner being (a notion which process thinkers explicitly deny and which Moltmann leaves ambiguous²⁷), and yet in His love opens Himself freely to "experience" human suffering in a way that does not diminish His beingness.

In short, if God really relates to a world of creatures, and if those creatures creatively introduce genuine novelty into the world (as they do), and if they truly suffer (as they do), then this cannot remain alien to God's experience. Thus in some sense, without jettisoning the divine immutability (which would dedivinize God), God responds knowingly and lovingly to such suffering. One suggestion may be made here as an alternative to the dipolar nature introduced into God by process thought. The suggestion is to acknowledge as irreducible the distinction between nature and person (or, in a trinitarian context, Persons) in God. It might then be possible to maintain that *in His nature* God is eternally the infinite act of being and as such is incapable of any enrichment or impoverishment of His being; here the divine being is considered in its

²⁷ Whitehead in an oft-quoted phrase refers to God as "the fellow-sufferer who understands" (*Process and Reality* [New York: Free Press edition, 1969] 413). Moltmann writes of creation as "'an act of God inwardly,' which means that it is something that God suffers and endures. . . . Creative love is always suffering love as well" (*The Trinity and the Kingdom* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981] 59); the ambiguity lies in the fact that Moltmann at other times views God not as suffering by natural necessity due to the very nature of love as such but only as willingly opening Himself to such suffering.

absoluteness and remains immutable. *In His personhood*, however, we are dealing with God's being in its freely-chosen self-relating to others, in that intersubjective disposing of the self that is self-enactment and self-positing. Here we are concerned not with *what* God is in His being as transcendent to world, but with *who* He chooses to be vis-à-vis a world which He creates and redeems in love. Seemingly this allows for a never-ceasing newness of personal relationship without implying any qualitative aggrandizement or diminution of divine being absolutely taken.

But even here—if one can grant that God does will freely to undergo change, not absolutely but relationally—this is not to introduce temporality into God. For He does not change successively, as if waiting on our decisions; rather, He chooses to be affected by, and responsive to, our temporally achieved transformations in a mode consonate with His eternity. He knows all alterations, including those that are not determined by Him but truly rise from our freedom, in the mode of simultaneity.

In the end, this is only to say that none of our finite categories of thought are adequate to the utter transcendence of God. Eternity as mere timelessness is an empty concept. Primal temporality secures God's relevance to the temporal order, but at too great a price. Dialectical recourse to both measures of duration is unsatisfying in that this leaves unexplained why introducing temporality, and so potentiality, into the deity does not compromise divine simplicity and thereby render God finite. Eternity in its medieval sense as encompassing all time within itself comes closest to designating (in its negative form as *e-ternitas*) a positive attribute of God that remains resistant to conceptual grasp.

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