



RESURGENCE

Uncertain Hands of God and Men: Providence in Process Thought and Open Theism

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The Dual Questions of Divine Providence

- I. How is God related to the world?

- II. In what ways does God act to sustain and regulate what happens in the world, both in relation to the natural world and also particularly in relation to human decisions and actions?

Providence in Process Theism

- I. Process Philosophy as the Background for Process Theology
 - A. Key Figures
 1. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947)
 2. Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000)
 3. John Cobb, David Ray Griffin, and the Center for Process Studies, Claremont, CA
 - B. Two Fundamental Principles of Process Philosophy
 1. The fundamental nature of all of reality is one of process, dynamism, becoming, change
 2. That the nature of reality is processive is itself fixed, permanent, eternal, and immutable
- II. Process Theology and Divine Providence
 - A. Outright and Wholesale Rejection of Classical Theism

 - B. Nature of God's Relation to the World

"God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 521).

Hartshorne's term for God's dipolar nature: "Surrelativism," i.e., Supremely Relative. His Absolute and Transcendent Supremacy is constituted precisely by his Everlasting and Maximal Relativity.

"True religion," writes Hartshorne, is "contributing value to God which he would otherwise lack" (Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," *Review of Metaphysics* [1967]: 274).

C. Process Theology's View of Providence in relation to Good and Evil

Providence in Open Theism

I. Background

- A. Key Figures: Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Greg Boyd, William Hasker
- B. Dissatisfaction with Process Theism and Classical Theism, *including* Classic Arminianism
- C. What is "Open Theism"?

". . . God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to **accept the future as open, not closed**, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. . . . We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that **God is open to the changing realities of history**, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him" (Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, pp. 103-104).

II. Biblical Support

- A. "Growth in Knowledge" Passage: Genesis 22:1-12 – "for now I know that you fear God" (v. 12)

1. The Openness Argument

"God needs to know if Abraham is the sort of person on whom God can count for collaboration toward the fulfillment of the divine project. Will he be faithful? Or must God find someone else through whom to achieve his purpose?" (John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, pp. 52-53)

2. Response

- a. Abraham's Fear of God and Romans 4 and Hebrews 11
- b. Transient nature of God's test of Abraham
- c. Parallel language in Genesis 18:16-21 – "and if not, I will know" (v. 21)
- d. So, what does "for now I know that you fear God" mean?

B. "Divine Repentance" Passage: 1 Samuel 15:11, 35 – "I regret [*nacham*] that I have made Saul king"

1. The Openness Argument

"We must wonder how the Lord could truly experience regret for making Saul king if he was absolutely certain that Saul would act the way he did. Could God genuinely confess, "I regret that I made Saul king" if he could in the same breath also proclaim, "I was certain of what Saul would do when I made him king"? I do not see how. . . . Common sense tells us that we can only regret a decision we made if the decision resulted in an outcome other than what we expected or hoped for when the decision was made" (Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 56).

2. Response

- a. Making sense of 1 Sam 15:11 and 35 along with 1 Sam. 15:29

1 Sam 15:29 – "the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind [*nacham*]; for He is not a man that he should change His mind [*nacham*]."

- b. Two reasons for taking 1 Sam. 15:29 as an absolute denial of God's change of mind
 - 1) God will not *lie* or change his mind – requires absolute unchangeability of mind
 - 2) God is not a *man* to change his mind – requires absolute unchangeability of mind

- c. 1 Sam. 15:11, 35 as anthropomorphic. Definition of Anthropomorphism: A given biblical ascription to God is anthropomorphic when the Bible teaches that God transcends the very human and finite characteristic it elsewhere attributes to him

- d. Jacob's Blessing of Judah: Gen 49:8-12—Judah is promised "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" (49:10). Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin and therefore simply could not be considered by God to be the first in the line of the promised Kings of Israel

- e. Other "repentance" texts provide confirmation: Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10

III. Select Biblical Teaching on God's Exhaustive Definite Foreknowledge

A. Isaiah's Vision of the True God who Declares the End from the Beginning

1. Isaiah 41:21-29

2. Isaiah 46:8-11

B. Psalm 139

C. Daniel 11

D. Jesus' Prediction of Peter's Three Denials (John 13:38; note also John 13:19)

IV. Application and Conclusion: **Uncertain Hands of God and Men**

A. Facing the Unknown with the God who Doesn't Know the Future

e.g., John Sanders' view of the first sin in the garden as "implausible" and "totally unexpected" for God (Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, pp. 45-46).

B. Facing Suffering with the God who Doesn't Know the Future

e.g., Greg Boyd's story of "Suzanne" (Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp. 103-106)

C. Prayer and Hope with the God who Doesn't Know the Future