

# Process theology



## Luke 2 (Excerpts)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph went to Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who

was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

<sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

## Definition

Process theology may refer to all forms of theology that emphasize event, occurrence, or becoming over substance.

## Themes

- God is not omnipotent in the sense of being coercive. The divine has a power of persuasion rather than coercion. Process theologians interpret the classical doctrine of omnipotence as involving force, and suggest instead a forbearance in divine power. "Persuasion" in the causal sense means that God does not exert unilateral control.
- Reality is not made up of material substances that endure through time, but serially-ordered events, which are experiential in nature.
- God contains the universe but is not identical with it (panentheism, not pantheism or pandeism).
- Because God interacts with the changing universe, God is changeable (that is to say, God is affected by the actions that take place in the universe) over the course of time. However, the abstract elements of God (goodness, wisdom, etc.) remain eternally solid.

### Process and Jesus



Contrary to traditional Christian theology, the *Christ* of mainstream process theology is not the mystical and historically exclusive union of divine and human natures in one hypostasis, the eternal Logos of God uniquely enfleshed in and identifiable as the man Jesus. Rather God is incarnate in the lives of all people when they act according to a call from God. Jesus fully and in every way responded to God's call, thus the person of Jesus is theologically understood as "the divine Word in human form." Jesus is not singularly or essentially God, but he was perfectly synchronized to God at all moments of life.

### Process and theodicy

Process Theology argues that there must be "*real relations*" in God. A "*relational*" God is a God who can have real relations with other beings - who can love and pity, hold hopes and be disappointed, can condemn and forgive. The Bible often describes God in relational terms. In classical monotheism, God is non-relational because he is impassible: he cannot feel emotions or passions and cannot change.

This means God is not moved by people's suffering. This leads to Whitehead describing God as:

**THE GREAT COMPANION—THE FELLOW-SUFFERER WHO UNDERSTANDS -**

This is the idea of a God who can suffer and feel pleasure - and therefore understands human suffering and pleasure. It links to Christian teachings because God suffers as Jesus, on the Cross, and is therefore part of all human suffering.

