

# ALFRED N. WHITEHEAD ON PROCESS PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

## *Cosmos and Kenosis of Divinity*

JAVIER MONSERRAT  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

**ABSTRACT:** The modern dialogue between religion and science has to take into account the process philosophy and theology. Science, for the authors in this movement, is the thoughts of Whitehead: a science of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, understood according to a certain philosophy of process proposed by Whitehead (which is not only science but a risky, complex and subtle philosophy based on science). In this article we are only referring to one of the episodes in the philosophy of process: that which is characterised by Alfred Whitehead and some of his followers in the creation of the *philosophy-theology of process* in the Anglo-Saxon, and especially American world. Our intention is to present an evaluation and discussion that is oriented towards what we feel is important: the discussion of his cosmology and theology of kenosis. However, in order to do this we need to make our points of view fit in with a line of thought that makes reference to his metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Whitehead does not question the world at this ultimate level of «primary causality» (in its absoluteness and necessity) given that the world is eternal: that is absolute and necessary. Whitehead's problem is that of explaining the system of «secondary causes», because they do not seem to constitute a system that is sufficient but rather introduce the reference of God and an element of the world that contributes to what the world is from the inside. God, for Whitehead, is also not responsible for Evil because he does not create the world; on the contrary, he is subject to the conditions established in the same world and tries to overcome it and guide it to perfection. Kenosis or divine auto-limitation, for Whitehead, is only partial because a large part of divine limitation is imposed by the nature of the eternal world (not created) of which God form a part.

**KEY WORDS:** Whitehead, process philosophy, process theology, divine self-limitation, cosmic process, whiteheadian metaphysics, concept of God, kenosis.

### *La filosofía y teología del proceso de Alfred N. Whitehead: El Cosmos y la Kénosis de la Divinidad*

**RESUMEN:** El moderno diálogo entre la ciencia y la religión debe tener en cuenta la filosofía y teología del proceso. La ciencia, para los autores de este movimiento, es la visión de Whitehead: una ciencia de la primera mitad del siglo xx, entendida en conformidad con una cierta filosofía del proceso propuesta por Whitehead (que no sólo es una ciencia, sino una arriesgada, compleja y sutil filosofía fundada en la ciencia). En este artículo nos referimos sólo a uno de los episodios en la filosofía del proceso: el protagonizado por Alfred Whitehead y algunos de sus seguidores en la creación de la filosofía y teología del proceso en el mundo anglo-sajón y en especial americano. Nuestra intención es presentar una evaluación y discusión que se orienta hacia lo que consideramos importante: la discusión de su cosmología y teología de la kénosis. Sin embargo, para hacerlo, necesitamos ajustar nuestros puntos de vista con la línea de pensamiento que se refiere a su metafísica y filosofía de la religión. Whitehead no pone en cuestión el mundo en su nivel último de «causalidad primera» (en su absolutez y necesidad), dado que el mundo es eterno: dado que es absoluto y necesario. El problema de Whitehead es explicar el sistema de las «causas segundas», porque no parecen constituir un sistema suficiente, sino que introduce la referencia a Dios como un elemento del mundo que contribuye a lo que el mundo es desde sí mismo. Dios, para Whitehead, no es, por tanto, responsable del Mal porque no ha creado el mundo; al contrario, está sujeto a las condiciones establecidas por el mismo mundo y por ello intenta superarlo y llevarlo a la perfección. La kénosis, o auto-limitación divina, para Whitehead, es sólo parcial porque una gran parte de la limitación divina está impuesta por la naturaleza eterna de un mundo (no-creado) del que Dios forma parte fundamental.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Whitehead, filosofía del proceso, teología del proceso, proceso cósmico, auto-limitación divina, metafísica whiteheadiana, concepto de Dios, kenosis.

## INTRODUCTION

*The philosophy of process* was born out of the ideas of the English physicist and philosopher Alfred Whitehead (1861-1947), soon after he settled in Harvard University. His philosophy is already a *philosophy of process*. However, the birth of this philosophy as a real philosophical movement is connected with a group of his disciples, among whom Charles Hartshorne is, with out any doubt, the most relevant. The importance of this philosophical-theological movement covers a period from the 1950's until it is consolidated in the 1970's; in these years it is identified with the *Chicago school* and the journal *Process Studies* is founded. At the end of the 1960's and also in the 70's, there was also a theological movement that was known as *theology of secularization* or as *the death of God* that was influenced by the theology of process. However, these movements should not be confused with the theology of process, even though they have many similarities—although perhaps a different sensibility—and respond to a group of similar problems with respect to the meaning of religion in modern times. From those founding years, there has been the constant presence of the philosophy-theology of process in Anglo-Saxon theology, principally in America. There still exists today an orthodox movement of this philosophy-theology that is linked by the lines of thought of its principal authors: A. N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, David Ray Griffin y W. H. Vanstone. In any case, the *process philosophy and theology* is constantly considered to be one of the principal protagonists in the current dialogue between science and religion.

*Basic traits of processual thought*

Some of the traits of the *philosophy-theology of process* allow its special historical significance to be understood. However, its importance does not only depend on its intrinsic contents but also on its unquestionable social presence—which can still be seen today—throughout the last sixty years of English philosophy and theology. In this, a new and original way of looking at the philosophical-theological theme of divine kenosis has been considered. In our understanding, what it offers to how kenosis is thought about is one of its great values but at the same time, it is where the most significant problems and lack of focus can be seen.

*Liberal innovation.* The philosophy-theology of process stands out, above all else, for its creative and liberal attitude. This attitude does not depend on the need to maintain true to the tradition of a given religious paradigm nor on the fear of possible reactions from an «ecclesiastic authority». This school of thought thinks with complete liberty so that Christianity can be understood and make sense in the context of modernity. Its analysis came from the hypersensitivity to the modern world and from complete freedom from the past. This liberal «talent» has many existential aspects, such as those that are tragically conscious of evil and human suffering. Nevertheless, if only paying attention to tradition

can cause insensitivity to the present, paying too much attention to the modern threatens an insensitivity to the opposite: a disconnection with the essence of tradition and the core values of Christianity that are present in the faith of Christian churches in the past and the present (and not only of the catholic church).

*Theology from science.* The process theology has tried to be a *theology from science*. This can be understood, as science is one of the essential characteristics of modern times. Thinking about Christianity from the point of view of modernity requires that it be approached from the perspective of science. Therefore science, for the authors in this movement, is the thoughts of Whitehead: a science of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, understood according to a certain philosophy of process proposed by Whitehead (which is not only science but a risky, complex and subtle philosophy based on science). The philosophy-theology of process should be understood as an image of the cosmos, of man and of God which is made possible by modern science.

*The dialogue between science and religion.* Theology based on science, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been a *point of reference for the dialogue between science and religion*. Whoever promotes, from other perspectives, the modern dialogue between religion and science has to take into account the process philosophy. Many examples can be found. For example, Ian Barbour identifies with many processual assumptions, although he is critical of others: his work is a well-considered and critical connection of the Christian tradition. Other authors such as Peacocke and Polkinghorne are explicitly removed from process but discuss and nuance its assumptions; at their base, some of their positions, in fact, have a certain relation to viewpoints that are derived from the influence of the philosophy-theology of process. In fact, many current opinions about divine omniscience and omnipotence—which can be seen in authors such as George Ellis, W. Stoeger or George Coyne—with out any doubt, have their origin in the process philosophy and theology.

*Divine self-limitation and kenosis.* The themes of *self-limitation* and the *kenosis* of divinity can be found in the philosophy of Whitehead. It is about self-limitation or perhaps, even better, as a divine «limitation» in the world that effects omnipotence and omniscience. Nevertheless, these ideas have been assumed by the theology of process in order to justify the inaction of God against Evil and go even farther than that. God does not resolve the problem of Evil because God has a limited ability to intervene in things that happen in the world; he is not responsible for things that happen «inevitably». Therefore it is not only about a «divine self-limitation» against human freedom but rather a limitation that goes much deeper and much more radical than that «imposed» on God by reality. As we will see, this is one of the most radical and problematic points of traditional Christian theology. Nevertheless, this theology of process is with out a doubt «religious»: it has been the founding, in our times, of an understandable belief in a God that is personal and creates a feeling of a community of faith in Christian churches. This theological perspective has understood and taken seriously the

fact that a modern explanation of Christianity requires the acceptance of divine limitation and kenosis.

In the face of the theology of process —we insist— a new type of theology was born in and around the 1960's and 70's called *theology of secularization* or *the death of God*, which is characterized by its radical choice to be a-religious (Robinson, Van Buren, Hamilton, etc.). However, *the theology of process* and *the theology of secularization* do not coincide: the latter is not born out of the former (although it is without a doubt influenced by it) nor is it a school that has been derived from it, at least from our point of view. They are, in effect two independent yet connected movements differentiated by their basic roots. The *theology of secularization* assumes a new analysis of the way that the absence of divinity was extended in the world and as a consequence, a new anthropology. Nevertheless, in this article our attention will only centre on the philosophy-theology of process.

## 1. ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE PROCESS PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

*Precedents and initial context.* The cosmos or universe is not a static reality but rather a dynamic universal *process*. In contrast to the static and stable, this philosophy confirms processual transformation as the essence of the universe. In contrast to the classical metaphysics that had followed preferentially in the footsteps of Parmenides (the stable Parmenidian being transformed into the «eidos» of Plato and then to Aristotelian «form» while action is only attributed to matter) an alternative conception is being considered in the line of Heraclitus which establishes the process —and is some way action— as the metaphysical essence of the universe. As a consequence, there is no doubt that the history of philosophy (as well as science) allows for the finding of numerous antecedents to the philosophy of process: we have mentioned Heraclitus but we could also cite modern authors such as Henri Louis Bergson, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James or John Dewey. In reality, it is science that gives a processual (this is the real term and should be used previously...) description and itself constitutes the most important manifestation of processual thought. This is what Whitehead understood and as a consequence had the desire to construct a «processual metaphysics» that was in agreement with science.

However, as mentioned before, in this article we are only referring to one of the episodes in the philosophy of process: that which is characterised by Alfred Whitehead and some of his followers in the creation of the *philosophy-theology of process* in the Anglo-Saxon, and especially American world. In reality, theology has been the true place where Whitehead's ideas (which were not theological but rather philosophical) have had the most impact: these have been theologies that have valued and cultivated their philosophy and have extended it to establish a hermeneutical outlook that allows for the understanding of human life and for the construction of a new theology that could explain Christianity in a way

that could be understood from modern culture (principally from modern science). Lastly, Whitehead constructed a metaphysics of process because he understood that modern science described the world as a process: his metaphysics of process was, as a consequence, the only metaphysics that sciences allowed. It was the metaphysics of science that the modern world needed and Whitehead consciously wanted to shape.

### 1.1) *The roots*

*Alfred North Whitehead.* Whitehead was born in 1861 (died in 1947) and his scientific career began while at university as a mathematician oriented towards physics. He was a lecturer in mathematics in Cambridge until 1911; in mathematics and physics in London until 1924, when he moved to Harvard as a professor of philosophy. His first period stands out for his collaborations with Bertrand Russell; above all in the *Principia Mathematica* (3 volumes, 1910-1913) where the logical foundations of mathematical reasoning are justified. However, the first works that introduce us to his nascent philosophy, come later on: *The Organisation of Thought* (1917), *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919) y *The Concept of Nature* (1920). One of his most important books, *Science and the Modern World*, SMW (1925), was written during his time as a professor at Harvard. It is the first book where references to God appear, although it is in a strictly metaphysical context as a reference to «divine limitation». Whitehead, nevertheless, thought that the most fruitful way to gain access to God was through the religious experience of humanity. This was treated later on in his *Religion and Making* (1926). But it was with the *Gifford Lectures* in 1927-28 that he derived the preparations for his main work, which was published under the title: *Process and Reality*, PR, (1929). In it, he explains his processual metaphysics in complete detail: not as pure science or objective description but as a «metaphysic cosmology» that always refers to a subject, a privileged witness to the flowing process of reality. This is what is now known as «organic philosophy» (*philosophy of organism*).

Four more books, which were written in the same period or before, are also important in order to interpret and compliment *Process and Reality*. In *the Function of Reason* (1929) the role of reason in the process of evolution and culture are explained more simply. *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927) is a wide-ranging epistemological refection, from primordial perception to higher representational processes. His work *Adventures of Ideas*, AI (1933), in which he studies how ideas drive social evolution and create human values, is also very important. *Modes of Thought*, MT (1938), his last book, in which he offers a general presentation of his philosophy that more revealing, less technical and accessible is probably one of his most important works<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> I will cite Whitehead's works following the acronyms found in the text, like SMW for *Science and Modern World*. Works not cited in the course of the article do not have their own acronyms. I will put inside parentheses either the page of the edition used or the corresponding part or chapter, the latter being difficult to identify because of the various available editions.

*First followers in America.* It is evident that Whitehead arrived at Harvard with an already established reputation. Many important people came to study under him, attracted by his reputation: On some, for example Willard Van Orman Quine, Whitehead did not leave a particularly strong influence. This however, was not the case with his other followers, with whom his influence was a determining factor, although without impeding the specific biases of each one. His students, with his help, were able to escape the control of the positivist philosophy that was dominant at that time. Some of his main students were Paul Weiss, F. S. C. Northrop and Susanne K. Langer. In Yale, Paul Weiss held a prestigious professorship and defended an original metaphysics with many publications that were inspired by Whitehead. His last work was *The God We Seek* (1964). Northrop also worked at Yale, in the philosophy of law. There, he put forth a perspective that was influenced by Whitehead but also tried to find connections with eastern philosophy. In 1961 he published an anthology on Whitehead's ideas. Lastly, Susanne Langer, friend and student of Whitehead, applied his ideas to the philosophy of art, culminating with the work: *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (2 volumes, 1967-1972). Among his students of theology, Nels Ferré stands out as probably one of the first to contribute to the creation of a theology based on Whitehead's ideas by insisting on a more transcendent idea of God and the autonomy of the world (*Reason in Religion*, 1963; *The Living God of Nowhere and Nothing*, 1966; *The Universal Word: A theology for a Universal Faith*, 1969). Victor Lowe, another of his students of theology, wrote one of the best introductions to Whitehead, still valid today (*Understanding Whitehead*, 1962). Lastly, we cannot forget to mention Dorothy Emmet, personal friend of Whitehead, who wrote *Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism* (1932) and later on, an important work dealing with a metaphysics that was in line with Whitehead's ideas: *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (1945).

## 1.2) *The theology of process*

*Charles Hartshorne.* Without a doubt, Charles Hartshorne was the other great theological student of Whitehead's. It is probable, that without his support in the beginning and his efforts to appropriately extend the consequences that were implicit in Whitehead's philosophy to theology, the process philosophy and theology would not have been born. Because of this, it is fair to say that the American philosophy-theology of process began with Hartshorne just as much as with Whitehead.

Apparently, Hartshorne (1897-2000) had already finished his PhD and had already developed, to a large degree, his personal ideas, when in 1925, he began to hear Whitehead's lectures at Harvard and began to teach with him. From 1923 to 1925 he had a fellowship in Germany where he could have heard lectures from Husserl or Heidegger, but they did not interest him so much. He did however have interest in C.S Peirce whose *Collected Papers* were edited by Weiss and Hartshorne. We can imagine that Hartshorne found, in the positions of Whitehead,

a way to deepen his own intuitions on gestation. As the years past, his identification with Whitehead's metaphysics grew as can be seen by his explicit recognition of related works and the acceptance of the same terminology.

Despite this, while Whitehead preferred to orient himself toward the *metaphysics of science*, Hartshorne oriented towards the *philosophy of religion and theology*; which explains how each ones work mutually compliments the others. Hartshorne was always a professor of philosophy; in Chicago, between 1928 and 1955; nevertheless, he drew his main influence from the *School of Divinity*. Ever since, Chicago has been a centre of the process theology and future home of the journal *Zygon*. From 1955 to 1962 he worked at Emory University and from 1962 to his death he was at the University of Texas in Austin, as emeritus professor. Although Hartshorne himself recognised his influence in theology, he felt himself as more of a philosopher or philosopher of religion.

His body of work is made up of 22 books, all with different significance. We will mention several of them with the purpose of gaining access to his most meaningful works and at the same time reaching a unified vision of the beginnings of his philosophy (theology). *Man's Vision of God* (1941) y *The Divine Relativity* (1948) represent the first criticisms of the unmoving nature and omnipotence of divinity in classic metaphysics through the perspective of his «*neoclassic metaphysics*» (this is what he called it based on Whitehead's metaphysics of process). In *The Logic of Perfection* (1962), he defends the ontological argument of Saint Anselm (which is studied later in another monographic work: *Anselm's Discovery*, 1967) and offers a global synthesis of his processual metaphysics. His evident link with Whitehead is professed in *Whitehead's Philosophy* (1972). The following is a list of books that clarify his ideas during the last part of his life: *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (1967), *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (1970), *Aquinas to Whitehead* (1976), *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (1984), *The Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne* (1991) and the last book he wrote, three years before his death, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (1997).

### 1.3) *The eminence of Whitehead in distinct schools*

The ideas of Whitehead had a much wider influence than people under his direct tutelage. This can be seen in academic theses (that of Charles Hartshorne being of note) and published works in America and other countries from the 1930's up to and including the 1960's and 70's. In order to follow what these scholars have offered, it is necessary to describe their specific bibliographies.

*The schools in Chicago and Claremont, CA.* The profound influence that Whitehead and Hartshorne had over the theology professors in the *Divinity School* of the University of Chicago is one of the decisive factors that confirmed the prestige of the philosophy-theology of process in America. Nevertheless, the Chicago school already existed, even before Whitehead's arrival at Harvard. It

was in 1926 when Henry Wieman, in Chicago, began to become interested in Whitehead. Wieman's identification with Whitehead was complete throughout many published works until 1958. Daniel Day Williams also followed the theology of process; but it was Bernard Loomer who was most influenced in this way. Bernard Meland and Schubert M. Orden who also contributed to the theology of process in Chicago through many works (*Christ without Myth*, 1961; *The Reality of God*, 1966) created some extremely interesting ideas under the direct influence of Charles Hartshorne who consequently participated in the theological movement of the *Divinity School*. It is also worth mentioning another of the most important students in Chicago, John B. Cobb, Jr., who soon went to California to spread processual ideas.

It was California —the *School of Theology at Claremont University*— that ended up assuming the forefront in America of processual thinking. The founding of the *Centre for Process Studies* in Claremont gained stature, in effect, in 1973 because of the work of John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin. Later on, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Mary Elisabeth Moore y Philip Clayton came to be co-directors. The founding of the journal *Process Studies* was in 1971 and was edited by Lewis S. Ford and co-edited by the same John B. Cobb, Jr.

*An open field of productive discussion.* Here we have presented a short revision of some of the extremes regarding the genesis and evolution of the process philosophy and theology (not meant to replace revisions or bibliographies that are more specialized) for one reason: to open an understandable perspective of how the true dimension, from its beginnings with the arrival of Whitehead at Harvard and his encounter with Hartshorne, has achieved and influence that has encompassed the last two thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues on our times.

When one considers the themes that the philosophy-theology of process deals with, its relevance cannot be denied. It has dealt with the new «metaphysical ontology» that could reconcile Christianity with modern science; it has dealt with the revision of Christianity in order to adapt it to the present culture and make it understandable to modern man; it has dealt with important theological questions such as the problem of Evil and human suffering; it has tried to represent the Christian God through a renewed theodicy that is congruent with the modern world; it has dealt with the problem of divine limitation or self-limitation and of divine kenosis; and it has also reconsidered innumerable moral questions.

All of this is encapsulated in a theology that is theistic, Christian and centred on religion. Catholic theology, in its time during the 1970's, took the interpretation and discussion of the theology of secularization seriously. However, it was always reluctant (more in Europe than in America) to undertake a profound dialogue with the process theology. We are aware that many of the affirmations of the theology of process enter into conflict with the basic principles, not only of the Catholic Church, but also other Christian denominations such as the Church of England. Despite this, a greater interest in the process philosophy and theology



would have enriched many of the contents of the philosophy and theology of modern Christianity<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. THE METAPHYSICS OF ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

Whitehead began his career as a mathematician in order to enter, at a later point, into the field of physics and at last into metaphysics. It is in this last field where his ideas become densely cryptic; perhaps not so much for his ideas (which, in the end, are understandable) as for his style, his terminology, a certain degree of disorganization in his presentation and his inability to be understood clearly. In this article, we are not looking for a new review of his metaphysics. Rather, our intention is to present an evaluation and discussion that is oriented towards what we feel is important: the discussion of his cosmology and theology of kenosis. However, in order to do this we need to make our points of view fit in with a line of thought that makes reference to his metaphysics and philosophy of religion (a reference that is perhaps more necessary for the reader that is not used to following an author as difficult as Whitehead is to read).

### 2.1) *Whiteheads view of metaphysics*

*Mathematics and physics: the image of the world in science.* For a large part of Whiteheads life, he was centred exclusively on the study of science. His dedication to metaphysics came later: it began to develop in the 1920's and reached its zenith with his arrival in America as a professor of philosophy at Harvard and the publication of his two fundamental books (*Science and Modern World*, SMW, 1925, y *Process and Reality*, PR, 1929). It is clear that when he began with metaphysics, he already had the image of the modern world in his

---

<sup>2</sup> From the variety of cited authors and schools, we see that process philosophy-theology is much more than the literal interpretation that Whitehead gives it. It is actually a philosophico-theological school of thought constituted by various authors united by common principles, but who differ in terms of the significant influence of their personalities. Hartshorne, Cobb, Vanstone and Griffin are the principal personalities of this school. Process philosophy-theology has three strong points: 1) Seeking to be in harmony with modern science by means of an evolutive metaphysics of process grounded on Whitehead. 2) Explaining the problem of evil by admitting the limitation of divine power and omniscience, thus liberating God from the moral responsibility of not being a «responsible creator» and considering him rather as a «companion who contributes to controlling and overcoming evil». Whitehead also considered God as such, but his ideas about it were not fully developed. 3) Presenting moral principles founded on a «naturalist enthusiasm» inserted in the experience of life as something positive, thus overcoming some Christian groups' morals that are rigid and in some manner «quasi-manichean». Whitehead did not contribute much to this last point, unlike later authors like Cobb or Griffin. Aside from these three points, we also consider as significant Whitehead's contributions to the theology of kenosis, which we will discuss after presenting his thought. One can say that, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theology of kenosis has found in process theology one of its principal supports.

mind. What's more, it gives the impression that the critical factor that causes him to crossover into metaphysics is the idea that science had turned traditional metaphysics head over heels and that it was necessary to create a new metaphysics that was congruent with it. It was in his 1925 work (SMW) that he says that science demands a transformation of the world in order to make it «modern»: it is science that makes the world modern requiring both a metaphysics and religion that are «modern».

In SMW, he presents the scientific image that conditions the philosophy of Whitehead. One should keep in mind that the «matrix mechanics» of Heisenberg and the «wave mechanics» of Schrödinger are formulated between 1924 and 1925, the same time as this work. Upon writing PR in the following years, until 1929, he had time to follow the deliberation of quantum mechanics during his most creative years: it was however still a preliminary period when, for example, they only knew of the existence of the proton and electron (the existence of the neutron was not even experimentally proven). Nevertheless, upon reading chapter VIII of SMW about quantum mechanics (throughout the history of the development of scientific concepts analyzed in previous chapters) we understand that, for Whitehead, it was enough, given that science had worked well enough up until 1925 to reach a precise intuition about the nature of the physical world that would be confirmed in the future development of science up until present times.

Physical reality (SMW, chapter VIII) consisted of a corpuscular material that was made up from individuality, discontinuity, distance and interactions between things (that could be described by mechanics); but this corpuscular matter was at the same time a wave (that demanded a field physics in the framework of physical continuity). Primordial microphysical events (e.g. the electron in its quantum orbit) could not be attributed to a stable temporal identity. Nevertheless, the flow of microphysical events constituted and gave certain stability in time to macrophysical objects. These objects were nevertheless open, in their interior, to continual development and transformation. For Whitehead, it was obvious that the physics of the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century describes a world in «flux» with unstable events that interacted with each other by way of physical *prehensions* in order to construct real entities in the same way that societies of organized events dynamically transformed a continuous process.

*Metaphysics.* The 19<sup>th</sup> century had introduced a perspective that was radically new to the understanding of the world: the evolutionary point of view. Classical metaphysics and philosophy (up until Kant) responded to the world in a «constructed» state; evolution, in turn, imposed the view of a dynamic world continually in process. To understand the general properties of this new world described by science, the «first philosophy»: graeco-scholastic or cartesian-mechanistic metaphysics was not enough. Many thinkers noticed this trend. Because of this, the philosophy of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was full of attempts to create a new metaphysics; the metaphysics of a new image of the world born out of science. One of the trends of this new philosophy was made up of vitalism. In effect, the world up until this point was

understood from the point of view of a static, dualist graeco-scholastic philosophy or from the scientific paradigm of the machine (cartesian mechanicism). It was urgent to build an understanding of the world from an *organic paradigm* of life in evolution. This gestating vitalism was present throughout Europe, mainly in France and Germany but was also an essential ingredient of the so-called North American pragmatism.

Whitehead therefore formed part of a movement of the times that was clearly following the trend of «vitalism». We do not believe, as it is sometimes said, that authors such as Santayana, Spengler o Ralph Waldo Emerson influenced him significantly. Nevertheless, we are convinced that authors such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and above all the French philosopher Henri Bergson did have a large influence on his work.

When Whitehead arrived at philosophical maturity, Bergson already had published his great works and had international fame. It is most probable that Whitehead knew him and was inspired by him. We believe this to be true (as it can be seen by Whitehead's frequent mention of Bergsonian metaphysics in SMW).

But why study metaphysics at all? Whitehead understood, in effect, that human understanding is always constructed from some metaphysical framework. Science was concrete, quantative and precise, although limited in its analysis. However, science is based on the presupposition of many (metaphysical) ideas that are anchored in ordinary understanding (these days it would be called «ordinary metalanguage»). Scientist always take on their work, understanding (and using) a natural grouping of concepts that pertain to their «primal or first philosophy» or metaphysics: the talk of objects, essence (what objects are made of), distance, cause, effect, time, properties, qualities, sensations etc. This group of metaphysical concepts were regulated by classical philosophy, by the scholastics, and through a long influence, for many centuries, by Christianity. It was the metaphysics that had reached the ordinary understanding of the people and the scientists. Because of this, a new metaphysics was necessary. There was a need for a new general conceptual framework that more precisely allowed for the explanation of both ordinary human experience and the new scientific image of the world.

Bergson, in effect, clearly tried to tackle the construction of a metaphysics derived from the new image of a work based in science; he wanted to do so based on a dynamic idea of «life» and «evolution». Whitehead also saw the necessity to construct this new metaphysics, revising bergsonian thought, giving it more precision, adjusting it to fit in better with science, taking out the more lyrical passages and formulating a new terminology that was less poetic and more technical, although much more «cryptic». In place of «life», Whitehead used the concept of organism and he talks about an «organicist» philosophy. To sum up, Bergson as much as Whitehead, at least for our understanding, move within the same vitalist-processural intuition that responds clearly to the feeling of belonging to a specific time in history. The Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri (1898-1983) also felt the need for a new metaphysics or a «first philosophy» and also constructed his own proposal.

## 2.2) *The method: intuition and experience*

*Method.* So, now, how is metaphysics constructed? There are two different questions: how a normal person would create it (where does an intuitive metaphysics come from) and how a philosopher would create it. Science is created through effort that is rational, organized systematic and quantitative. Metaphysics, however, cannot be constructed like that. Bergson said that metaphysics was the fruit of «intuition»: it was an intuition of the profound nature of vital movement by way of immediate experience. It is intuition that perceives life as *duration* of a continuous *future* (in a similar way to William James' «current of conscience»). Whitehead also thought that metaphysics was born out of intuition. However, he thought it was an intuition based on experience.

Alix Parmentier<sup>3</sup> has convincingly systematized his metaphysics and his defence of an intuitive access to it through experience; he has even studied the description of those contents of immediate experience that Whitehead considered essential for gaining access to metaphysics (Parmentier, o.c., 141ss). Human experience is *one* form of *prehension*; man has an «apprehension perspective of the world», and feels a part of the world because of this prehension that anchors it in a world that transcends his own existence (*Adventures of Ideas*, AI, 1933, 293). Going up against the conventional abstractions of the epistemology in use at the time, in order to express the concrete fact of experience and prehension, Whitehead uses the term *feeling* which has the merit of implying the double meaning of «subjective form» and «apprehension of an object» avoiding the *dissecta membra* that comes out of abstraction. It will be seen that this sentient-apprehension, when it is seen as understanding, is not limited to the use of the five senses. Whitehead tells us that the living organ of experience is «the living body in its entirety», being itself continuous with the rest of nature (AI, 1933, 290; Parmentier, 160).

Experience is not arrived at through «data» (as is said in modern epistemology) but rather through sentient-prehensions that unifies the body at one with nature. What, then, is the bodily experience that is at the base of human existence and of metaphysics? Whitehead specifies that: *a*) it is the experience of the insertion of our body into a nature that is forms part of; *b*) it is the experience of our bodily unit; *c*) finally, it is the experience of the fine coordination between our bodies and its experiences, in the sense that we understand «as a unifying function of a plurality of things that are distinct from ourselves» (*Science and Modern World*, SMW, 1926, 210, referenced by Parmentier). This unity with the world as a functional dimension of our own bodies is for us, the fundamental experience<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> PARMENTIER, ALIX, *La Philosophie de Whitehead et le Probleme de Dieu*, Bibliothèque des Archives de Philosophie, Beauchesne, Paris, 1968. We think this is one of the books whose 645 pages offer a broad, profound, and correct presentation of Whitehead's synthetic vision.

<sup>4</sup> Whitehead's phenomenology of psychic experience presents extraordinarily interesting features: the unity of consciousness and a holistic experience connecting the experience of one's body to an external field of reality. In this way, his «sentient» focus, also emphasized correctly by Parmentier, also has clear similarities with the «sentient» philosophy of X. Zubiri and, generally, with the importance of sensation and emotion in modern neurology (cf. Damasio).

*Objectivist realism.* Whitehead claims that humanity has a fundamental intuition that is present in the daily life of everyone and that the poetry of romanticism strongly claims this intuition, as it is explained in the commentaries of Wordsworth and Shelly (CMM, chapter V). In this way, natural experience is not the result of the subject's cognitive actions. Our body is the «organism» whose state regulates our «sentient» knowledge of the world. Whitehead defines perceptual knowledge as the conscience of *prehensive* unification that connects us to the world through sensation. This functioning of our senses in determined spatial places reveals to our awareness, as said by Whitehead, some aspects of a distant medium. This therefore, produces the knowledge of the existence of things «beyond us». If this awareness transmits knowledge of a transcendent world, it must be because the bodily event unifies, in and of itself, these aspects of the universe (SMW, 128-129, referenced by Parmentier). It then gives the impression that for Whitehead, experience is not the world represented in the mind (created by subjective actions) but rather that the objective reality of the external world is felt directly in itself. In experience, man perceives sensory «fields» open for the subject to organically integrate prehensions in an external world that he is a part of. The intuition of Whitehead is therefore gibsonian<sup>5</sup>.

*From intuition to metaphysics.* Metaphysics is thus reached by way of intuition. It comes from experience as from the perception of ones own body in an objective world that is organically open. Nevertheless, while philosophy is based on «intuitive experience», it is something more: it is a rational and reflective construction of general concepts that refer to reality that are applied to the understanding of all concrete situations; in addition, they give meaning to precise and particular knowledge whether it is in daily life or in the sciences. Metaphysics can be arrived at «intuitively» but it is not formulated without rational and philosophical reflection. Metaphysics, for Whitehead, is an abstraction that tries to create universal concepts that are general and cover all possible manifestation of reality. Natural man approaches his life from a metaphysical «background», but this is also done by scientists by constructing science on top of reality.

Whitehead's metaphysics did not come about like a passing emotion accompanied by a feeling of satisfaction: it was created during hours and hours of reflection, formulation adjustment and correction of concepts. In this rational reflection, without doubt, four factors, that cannot be forgotten, were present: first, intuition based on experience, of the organic self in the world (in this sense, it is true that metaphysics is born out of experiential intuition); second, his knowledge of the surprising scientific image of the world in the beginning years of quantum mechanics; third, his knowledge of the authors that were trying to

---

<sup>5</sup> The connections with James J. Gibson and his theory concerning direct experience and ecological optics are also clear. Whitehead's «holistic» thought is along the same line, and expressed by concepts such as «occasion for experience», prehension, concrescence, and the like. Whitehead's holism is not only physical, but is simultaneously psycho-bio-physical. Evolution is a holistic process culminating in man.

formulate the general concepts of a new metaphysics that integrated this «experiential intuition» with modern science (we can recall vitalism, Bergson, Pierce or James); fourth, his original elaboration of a system of concepts that allowed the integration of all of our ordinary, religious and scientific experiences in a unified metaphysical system.

Whitehead knew that scientific knowledge had changed drastically in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because of this, he searched for a new metaphysics that overcame the static nature of graeco-scholastic philosophy as well as the mechanistic nature of Cartesian perspectives. In SMW (chapter IX) he reconstructs the role philosophy has played in the last centuries up until, in his time, there is a need to have a vitalist and «organicist» metaphysics (here we can cite Bergson). Whitehead wants to contribute to the formulation of this new metaphysics in order to help the modern world in its intellectual education and creativity, integrating experiential intuition and science. Without being constructed or taught, this metaphysics could not serve its function of education the creativity of modern man (SMW, chapter XIII).

### 2.3) *Basic metaphysics*

It would be necessary to systematize the, more radical, fundamental metaphysical concepts that permit the understanding of the real world, both for the natural person and the scientist. It is clear that the metaphysical concepts created by Whitehead looked to be congruent with the image of the real world in science.

*Actual entities.* This is, without a doubt, Whitehead's basic concept, although it does cover a wide range of existing realities. This actual entity is organized in a tree, an elemental particle and also God. Despite this, an entity as a tree, for example, is real because of a complex association of a large number of more basic entities. In scientific terms, we would say (and this is what Whitehead had in mind) that all objects are the result of the interactions between multitudes of microphysical events. In this way, the first entities would be the primordial microphysical events, the basis of more complex entities (that Whitehead called «societies» or «nexuses»). There exists, therefore, degrees in the actual entities: those that can be found in «empty space»; those that are found in stable objects that are not alive; and finally, those that are found as moments of stable objects with conscious awareness. Throughout his work, however, we find an evolution in terms that refers to, one way or another, the same concept of «actual entities» (actual event, actual occasion, occasion of experience, actuality, *res verae*, etc.); this absence of terminological unity is another reason it is difficult to understand how Whitehead is thinking. Whitehead establishes some principles that clarify how to understand reality from «actual entities». The «*ontological principle*» affirms that everything that is real is always produced by actual entities; it is produced by the entity, from the *ente*, from something that exists. Furthermore, there are multiple existent entities and they come from their own existence to interact amongst themselves in multiplicities: the universe can be understood

as solidarity of actual entities. This is what is formulated in the *beginning of relativity* (or, we should say, «out of reference» or using a zurbirian term, «out of respectivity»). This actuality of the entities is also presented as «dynamic», as active existence, like a process. Therefore, the *principle of process* tells us that actual entities are not static but in process. All entities are open to «possibility» or «potential» for their dynamic processual evolution in solidarity with other entities.

For Whitehead, all actual entity is a *process of experience* that is constructed through its relationship with other entities: this solidarity is always «sensed». Whitehead calls this the *reformed subjective principal*: the elements that the universe is constructed out of are discovered in this sentient subjective experience. It is experience that, in effect, «senses» the human subject in its connection with the world and it is experience that Whitehead universally attributes to all processes of relationship between other entities and themselves, including those that are the most primordial. There are no actual entities that are lacking in some degree of «subjective experience». This principle can be seen in the universal Whiteheadian panpsychism and holism that ends in man.

*Eternal objects.* For Whitehead, entities can be actual (real things that exist) or ideal (pure forms that do not exist but are able to define existent realities). These ideal entities are known as «eternal objects». They define a realm of possibilities, of conditional potentials of existent reality and therefore of actual entities and their dynamic processes of association in their complex evolution. There is a terminological diversity that revolves around this concept: forms, ideal identities, abstract entities, universals, potential forms, etc. Man comes to know eternal objects by experiencing them in action through actual entities or by conceiving of them abstractly, discovering pure formal potentialities that could perhaps be realized in the real processes of actual entities. Whitehead formulated his «metaphysics of forms» in his theory of eternal objects: the abstract world of pure forms accessed via experience of the real world. It is, at its root, his metaphysics of the formal sciences and above all mathematics, which is an essential part of modern science; but not only mathematics because for him «blackness» or «colour» are abstract forms that may or may not be manifested in the world. Eternal objects do not, by themselves, form a harmonic world but rather a multiplicity of potentials that may or may not have an effect in the real world.

*Concrescence.* A genetic study of actual entities tells us that they are the result of the process of «concrescence». This term comes from the vocabulary of biology: it is the union and the growing together of parts that were originally separate. It is the constitution of unity in the universe of multiple things until the final result of a new unitary entity. The evolutionary process of the universe has been a process of concrescence because the original actual entities are dynamic and produce a process that is made up of continual relationships between entities. This is therefore a natural result of processual nature and «solidarity» (respective) of the actual entities that make up the primordial nature. Concrescence, for

Whitehead, is an open process without limit in which all the entities of the universe are set out in a unitary process of growing convergence. The universe is then a unitary all. This is where the individuality of classical metaphysics breaks down and where every entity «lives» its connection with the unity of all and produces its effects over it. This is how Whitehead's own «organic» (vitalist) metaphysics manifests itself.

*Prehension.* Concrecence describes a genetic process in which multiple things in the universe organically «unify». «Prehension» is a term that describes the activity of each of the actual entities when they make a concretion or unit with other entities. The unity of the universe is constructed by way of the «prehension» of entities upon others. It is the active essence of the actual entity: to be dynamic in a process that configures the concrecent unit with other entities. A) The process of the union of entities to others or «prehension» is on one hand physical, given that it makes up a relational union between diverse actual entities. B) On the other hand, it is also an «occasion of experience»; that is to say, a «pulsation of actuality» (a term probably inspired by William James) or a «drop of experience». Therefore, for Whitehead, by attributing everything to prehension, including the most primordial and primitive actual entities, the quality of «experience» continues to move within an evident panpsychist concept. This «prehesive» dynamics as an «occasion or event of experience» is a necessary metaphysical consideration for a unitary vision of the universe. Without it, a metaphysics that understood the harmony between human and animal life as «processes of experience» open to the universe as a unitarily lived environment (in the style of Gibson) would not be possible. Terminal psychic experience is possible because actual entities are always produced (*a radice*) by a «germinal occasion or event of experience».

*Representative apprehension and feeling.* Nevertheless, the «occasion of experience», attributed by Whitehead to all actual entities in their prehensive dynamic, should not be confused with given and eventual representative and cognitive apprehension in the higher animal and of course in the human world. The general concept of prehension does not include, therefore, consciousness, thought or knowledge (nor the «psychic subject» derived of these). Knowledge can be thought of as a higher «a-prehension» or «con-prehension» that unifies complex groups of actual entities that mutually imply and modify one another. However, the perception of knowledge is founded in the germinal primordial «prehesive unification»; it is already perceptive, a «complex occasion of experience». So, for Whitehead, all knowledge is formed in a «non-cognitive» prehension united with the primordial actual entities.

Prehension is «to sense» sensation. It is the operation by which the prehended produces and effect in the subjectivity of the actual entity. Experience, which is the same as sensing, is likewise a state of «affective tonality» (to notice) produced for what is prehended (object or data) in the actual entity that prehends (active subject of concrecence). Whitehead therefore is not Kantian: it is not the subject that constitutes experience but rather the experience (sensation) that constitutes



(a posteriori, dynamic, through evolution, through concrescence) actual entities as subjects. Therefore, if prehension always implies «sensation», the knowledge built on top of complex groupings of previous prehensions is always knowledge built from sensation. It is always in some way, a representative knowledge or apprehension that is «sensitive» or «sentient» (this is also what X. Zubiri thinks).

*The organic prehension of the universe.* The actual entity is dynamic and creator, by way of concrescence, of the unity of the universe. But this unity is organic, systematic and open to the whole universe; and in this sense, it not individually isolated, closed, localizable in a simple way in time or space apart from everything. Prehension refers an actual entity to other places and other times. The experience or sensation of this prehensive entity is the experience of space and of time. Because of this, the experience or sensation of spatial distance or the reference to the past or future, overflowing the non-organic singular here and now, are produced by the fact that the actual entities are bound to the whole universe by prehension. An actual entity, be it man or animal, from its senses, is open to the sensation of the existent outside world; and this can only be explained by the fact that the animal or human body is open, or prehensively unifies in itself the different contents or environments of the universe. Whitehead describes this (in SMW, chapter V) appealing to the experience of the romantic poets and their integrating experience of outdoor space, as we have previously mentioned.

*Factors of the structure of prehension: the physical and mental spectrum.* Prehension is therefore the essential process of the universe. Concrescence up until its integration and growing unity are produced by it. Whitehead indicates that there are three things in all prehension: *a)* the subject or actual entity which is doing the prehension, *b)* the data or content (another actual entity) that is being prehended and lastly *c)* the subjective form (sensation) given in the prehensive assimilation (physical) of the data on the part of the subject. These three factors must also refer to the prehension that the subject performs on eternal objects, whose content is specifically prehended and the *feeling* that this assimilation (here only conceptual) produces. It is here in his metaphysics where Whitehead distinguishes between the «physical pole» and the «mental pole» of the concrescence of the prehensions. But the conceptual feelers and the eternal objects are the mental pole at the same time. So, the human dynamic of concrescence is open to a physical pole and a mental pole.

### 3. THE THEISTIC METAPHYSICS OF WHITEHEAD

The «original metaphysics» of Whitehead has always been theistic, at least since he introduced the idea of God, for the first time, in his system (in SMW, 1925). The fact is, he considered God as an essential element that could not be substituted, in the coherence of his metaphysical image of the physical world. He does not try to «religiously» apply the concept of God, but rather presents it as a

coherent metaphysical element (rational and ultimately, even physical) of the universe. Without God, the coherence of the «basic metaphysics» shown in the previous point could not be maintained. As God was necessary for the Aristotelian system, Whitehead considered that is was necessary for his metaphysics as well. The truth is, however, that it is not always easy to admit —or even consider permissible— what Whitehead, as we will see, says about God.

### 3.1) *Arguments for a theistic metaphysics*

*God as a coherent factor of metaphysics.* The metaphysics espoused here is a response to the image of science (the quantum image that Whitehead had in 1925) but also responds the «vitalist» intuition (Bergson) of the universe in process that produces the «psychic experience» because it is part of its ontological basis. Up to this point, everything is permissible. Why introduce in this the real presence of a divine being? In Aristotle, in scholastic writings or in any other classical philosophy, it was always necessary to have an argument that justified the introduction of theistic elements. In Whitehead, we also clearly find, in all its detail, arguments that justify his theism.

*The first argument* is based on the «ontological principal». Actual events are always the origin of what exists: everything that exists necessarily derives itself from real entities. However, these entities are by their own nature limited: they are what they are and they cannot be more than what they are by their own nature (ontological principle). Nevertheless, nature as a process is continual springing forth of new things by way of prehensions and concrescence; in this springing forth, there is a configuration of a surplus of being that goes beyond the being of the entities that which prehension is made up of. Because of this, in the evolutionary process of the general potentiality of the universe, its creative rise towards newness must be founded in a special non-temporal actual entity that is always given as the ontological base of the universe. This is what Whitehead calls God. Nothing can come from non-being to be introduced in the actual world: God is the fundamental actual entity that gives birth to the (ontological) potentiality of the universal process.

*The second argument* that Whitehead puts forth is also related with the «ontological principle», although now it refers to eternal objects. These are by nature of their pure potentiality, abstract forms without realization and without relation to actual entities; above all if we pay attention to their most germinal and primogenital forms. Nonetheless, eternal objects have been made by way of an evolutionary process: how could they then have entered into the creative process of actual entities? Whitehead responds to that by saying God is precisely the mediation between the potential (eternal objects) and the actual (its actualization in the world as a concrescent process). The existence of God as the ontological basis of the world therefore explains that the eternal objects have in God, as an eternal actual entity, an ideal, representative conceptual actuality.

God is the guide of the realization of the «eternal objects» (formal) in the concrescence of the actual entities<sup>6</sup>.

God is, therefore, that fundamental entity that allows for the transformation from potentiality to actuality, including ontological potentiality (the first argument) or as formal potentiality, eternal objects (second argument). God as the foundation of the possible transformation of formal potentiality into actuality appears to us as «primordial nature» (like for example the «mental pole» of God). At the same time, considered as the foundation of the produced transformation from ontological potentiality to physical actuality in time, we would be referring to the «consequent nature of God» (its «physical pole»).

According to the conception of Whitehead, God is eternal like the world (reality is finite and limited but lacks a beginning and an end). However, God does not form part of the world because its fundamental functions are always alleged to be the «ontological basis of the world»; a «ground» where actual entities assume their temporal role. God is, in this sense, above time or in a non-temporal condition that makes the space-time of the world possible by way of its formal and ontological being. God is the foundation of the world without being a part of it.

*God as an unexplained but necessary explanation.* The world of actual entities, in the «first metaphysics» of Whitehead, is insufficient to explain «what they have produced by themselves» in the process of concrescence in the history of the universe. They are insufficient and need to have reference to a fundamental basis, understood to be God, which contains, representatively, the universe of formal possibilities (mental pole) and ontologically, the universe of the physical possibilities of concrescence in the enriching evolution of the universe (physical pole). Therefore Whitehead thinks in a similar way to traditional theist philosophy: the world is insufficient to give reason to itself and it is necessary to postulate the existence of God as the basis of being. To metaphysically conceive of the world and go toward its ultimate fundamental roots, we arrive at *the ultimate limitation*, which is God. There is nothing beyond that limit; it is the last thing, ontologically stable and without time which confers to the world a basis. This

---

<sup>6</sup> Note that Whitehead's arguments are worthy of attention. The first is congruent with something that modern physics has noticed from many perspectives. Quantic flow —the appearance and disappearance of particles— assumes an ontological background as reference, which is currently called «quantic vacuum». Whitehead understands this «ontological background» as necessary, and identifies it with divine reality; in contrast, modern science limits itself to the hypothesis about an impersonal background from the fluctuations of which emerges reality. Whitehead's presupposition that God is the «ontological background» is also justified because the organization of the world in its concrescence process should be regulated by «eternal objects» that could only be in «God's mind». With the same presupposition, modern science sees things differently: It is the nature itself of matter that, according to its ontological properties, blindly determines the rational structure which gradually, through an evolutive Darwinian process, shapes the complex structure of the world. Modern science thus explains the process as autonomous: God or a «soul of the world» that guides the natural process is not necessary for science. We will refer to these extremes later.

basis, God, is the beginning of determination and the concrete nature of nature but is not in itself derived from anything. It is «the last» in the sense that it is necessary to postulate metaphysically of an entity that is the basis for and determines unstable events without itself being founded or determined. We refer to God as being «necessary»; as the necessary principle to base the world (the real and the formal).

God is, then, the fundamental explanatory factor. Nevertheless, at the same time, God is not a possible as a rational explanatory object. It is the ultimate irrationality that rationally explains the universe. In a famous quote from the last page of chapter eleven of SMW, we are told in a slightly cryptic way: *God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality... God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature is the ground of rationality* (SMW, cap. XI). How can we understand what «divine irrationality» means? My personal interpretation is the following: The world, in the previous sense, is not self sufficient or absolute: it must be based on an entity that is neither concrete or determinable from a subsequent dimension: it must be the last, the ontological basis, sufficient and non-temporal: we can infer that it is the basis and we can attribute to it necessity (the necessary permanence in being once we know that it exists). However, this entity that is the basis for the rationality of the world is not, in turn by itself rational because we cannot explain it. We know that God exists but not how or why. We cannot speak rationally about the ultimate limit. We cannot say, for example, that God is that whose essence is to necessarily exist; we do not know what God is like or what its essence is. The world, for Whitehead tells us that god should exist and as the basis for being we consider it necessary.

But if the world does not bring us to God but rather to another explanatory entity (like for example, a pure world, without God), we should also postulate the need for that entity. Nevertheless, classical questions such as «why does something exist instead of nothing?» do not have a rational answer and belong to the last realm of the irrational (what we can not explain) of which Whitehead tries to explain<sup>7</sup>.

This is the interpretation that is also offered by Alix Parmentier. As can be seen from the following quote: «Whitehead, at the same time affirms the need

---

<sup>7</sup> I emphasize in the text some considerations about the metaphysics of the natural mind that I deem important. 1) Human reason primarily seeks to explain empirical facts by situating them within a reference system considered as «sufficient», «self-sufficient», or «absolute» from the viewpoint of maintaining its own existence. 2) The attribution of necessity is produced in a second moment: whatever is established as «absolute» (pure world or God) should be considered as «necessary». 3) Thus, reason, in principle, could attribute necessity both to God and to a «pure world» without God. In our opinion, the principle of some schools of classical metaphysics is not acceptable, since it considers «necessity» as attributable only to God. These considerations are essential in order to understand that man, situated in the interior of an enigmatic universe, remains equally open to a «God-creator» hypothesis and to a «pure-world-without-God» hypothesis.

for human intelligence to be guided, to establish the existence of God and the impossibility to find a way to form a concept (of God). We can metaphysically discover that God exists (and this is the ultimate requirement of human intelligence and its grandeur) but we cannot know what it is. We can know its existence but not its determination» (Parmentier, 491ss). He also observes that to put God as the beginning of necessary determination does not imply that we should give him a «reason»: it is the ultimate limitation, that it is not possible to give a reason it escapes all rationality that is on top of it and is able to explain it. From there, «God does not allow itself to be deduced» (Parmentier, 492) and it is the ultimate irrational that is necessary in order to confer rationality to the world.

*The primordial nature of God.* The primordial nature of God is considered to be the basis of absolute universal potentiality. Nevertheless, as pure potentiality, God does not yet have any real physical entity; as a consequence, God does not have consciousness, it is unconscious. It is really difficult to see Whitehead's point of view. It is clear, if we think that God, although eternal and non-temporal, does not have identity apart from the world: it is realized through the actual identities that make concrete and real being and the formal possibilities based in the formal and ontological potentiality of divinity. The evolutionary process of the universe comes up through the basic potentialities that are sustained by divinity. The ontological rise, the new perfection in the creation of the eternal objects as well as the subjective aspiration (feeling) of all the actual entities make God (both ontologically and formally) the object of desire in the universal process.

*The consequent nature of god.* It is not possible to understand Whitehead if God is attributed a «primordial nature» that maintains an existence at the margin of its «consequent nature». God eternally keeps primordial nature and consequent nature like an untiring base of the world. The distinction that a philosopher makes when describing the does not suppose a real distinction between them (God has never existed as pure primordial nature at the margin of its consequent nature).

Enjuto Bernal<sup>8</sup> explains the nature of Whitehead's God in similar terms to other authors (e.g. Alix Parmentier). «God created the world by way of his primordial nature, although we should not interpret create here in its classical sense: it is more akin to make possible. The continuing process of creation that is given in the temporal world, made possible by the principle of divine materialization, makes it possible to continue the enrichment of that phase of Divinity» (153). God then, from the perspective of eternity, is based on the actual entities in «concrecence»: only in them the transfer from potentiality to actuality is produced and God does not have an actual being apart from the world. This physical actualization of God is given through the world, in both actual entities and their process: it does not have another form of physical actualization and only in it does it come to make its formal and ontological potentialities concrete.

<sup>8</sup> ENJUTO BERNAL, JORGE, *La filosofía de Alfred North Whitehead*, Tecnos, Madrid, 1967.

These are made actual by way of the impulse that God offers to the process of the world. God therefore does not create the world: god and the world have always existed. However, the work of God brings the best out of the world and tries to act over it to make it perfect<sup>9</sup>.

Through this «consequent nature», God prehends each and every one of the actual entities. They are able to be distinguished because God is not another element in the world but rather its formal and ontological basis. God is a personal being, actualized from and by the actual entities. Whenever Whitehead speaks of God, it seems that he is talking about a personal being that somehow responds to what everyone calls God and gives meaning to religion. But its consequent nature is incomplete, new born and processual, actual and conscious, constant and eternal, without beginning or end; God is in «process» by way of the «process of the world». However, because of the process of the world, God is open to the potential realm of its primordial nature; potentiality that only by way of consequent nature makes god real and conscious as such.

*The «superjective» nature of God.* Whitehead considers that the vision of the universe, in order for it to be congruent, attributes a pole of subjective experience or *feeling* to all actual entities. When we refer to lower actual entities, we cannot attribute to them the condition of being a psychic being (and a fortiori consciousness). However, they should possess a certain primordial *feeling* or experience. From this ontological condition of the actual entities, the complex psychic experience in biology and humanity can be derived. Whitehead is to some degree panpsychist. The experience is united with the physical construction of the actual entities and to the process of the prehensions that integrate one another in the universe's unitary process of concrescence. A *feeling* of satisfaction, fruition or ontological enjoyment can be attributed to this experiential pole of «process». Because the process is a realization of ontological and formal potentialities that are founded by Divinity, the process is a «fruition» of Divinity. Life, whether it is known or not by the one living it, is a fruition of the divine.

---

<sup>9</sup> In our opinion, the idea that God is not a creator and should be conceived as the «soul of the world», understood in a more or less platonic sense, is one of the principal weaknesses of Whitehead's thought. 1) In the first place, such idea makes it difficult for traditional Christian theology, whether Catholic or Protestant, to accept his metaphysics. 2) Furthermore, this idea of God entails a mode of understanding divine kenosis that is basically insufficient. The divine limitation before the world is not a full «self-limitation» because it is imposed by a cosmos that is eternal like God and that imposes the constrictions (to which God is subject) of its own ontology. It is true that, for Whitehead, this God that is subject to the world seeks to relate with man not by imposition but by persuasion. But there is a manner of understanding kenosis that is richer than presenting the creation of an autonomous world that presupposes God's absolute self-limitation before human freedom and history. In our opinion, which we will explain later, one should speak of an «epistemological kenosis» (the creation of an autonomous world where God creates freedom by not imposing himself on human knowing) rather than an «ontological kenosis» (which presupposes the real loss of God's omnipotence and omniscience). The development of process philosophy-theology towards a new understanding of God and kenosis would be necessary for its full integration in the mainstream Christian Churches.

Applying God to the subjective nature of the world, given that God makes it happen by way of its consequent nature in the «physical pole» of the actual entities, results in God taking on the global subjectivity present in the process of the world and creating it from that. This is, for Whitehead, the «superjective nature» of God. That in which Divinity takes on the fruition created in the totality of the process. With respect to whether God is one thing or another, rather than the base of all things, it can also be said that this divine *feeling* is integrated within the pure formal and ontological potentiality present in divinity; it is universal subjectivity physically constituted in the real process of the world and the opening to the horizon to the next enrichment by way of the process of concrescence. In this superjective nature of god, which opens everything and all has a real presence; all subjective individual experience is assumed or integrated. This is what happens with human beings and it is one of the ways to approach the problem of immortality from the perspective of Whitehead's philosophy.

*Theistic metaphysics as an option for congruence.* It is important to note that Whitehead constantly rejected the idea that his metaphysics could be something like the object of a «demonstration». It seems that Whitehead only attributed a certain proven value to the ontological argument (that which Hartshorne later gave so much importance) and even then, it was not so clear. So then, what value should we attribute to his «primary metaphysics»? One must admit that it is the work of reason and therefore should be presented as a rational option for congruence to fit into the world. Man intuitively responds to this metaphysical framework: it is congruent, rational and illuminating but it cannot be demonstrated. Because of this, we can say, in line with Whitehead, that it has even more value when man can freely place himself in this congruence. It is a congruence that is assumed but cannot be demonstrated. It is what happens with philosophical viewpoints given that demonstrations are things of science, and even then it is difficult.

### 3.2) *Religious metaphysics*

Whitehead, in the context of metaphysical congruence, argues for an idea of God that is quite different from that of the Christian religion and theology (both for protestants and Catholics). Nevertheless, he does maintain the idea of a personal God similar to the idea of God in Christian theology. In fact his metaphysics is religious and based on the so-called Christian theology of process.

*Criticism of the religious idea of God in Christian theology.* We can find in Whitehead, in effect, a recurring and radical critique of Christian theology (Parmentier, 447ss). This critique is based on two reasons: first, his connections with Greek philosophy; second, his connection with society in his times, referring socio-politically to an absolute monarchy (in the world of the Romans or in Mesopotamian despots). But, faced with this theology that induces a false idea of God, the modern world and processual metaphysics offer a distinct image of God. We will be able to see how closely Alix Parmentier will be able to explain it.

The God that comes from the teachings of Christ is «instead of a Despot-God, a Loving God that works for love and persuasion. Instead of Motor-immobile, a Loving God that endures the suffering of the world. In place of a Moralistic God, a loving God that saved the present immediacy by way of constantly assuming it within its own harmony». «God is the Eros that communicates with every actual entity, freely and without imposing its subjective tendency, its finality and the ideal of its pure realization (primordial nature). God is that which receives the reaction of the physical world and transforms, upon accepting it, all suffering (consequent nature). God is that whose loving immanence penetrates the immediacy of all experience; the end of which his providence orders all, is an immediate fruition (superjective nature)» (Parmentier, 453-54).

For Whitehead, the traditional Greco-roman Christian theology assumes the metaphysics of an absolute being that is all powerful and omniscient, the only source of all being, immutable, existing independently and indifferent before all relation with the world. This idea of God that has subsisted up till now must be substituted by the idea of a God of process, inside the bounds of time and space, that gives space for a better reinterpretation of the same Christianity; that is to say, of the teachings of Christ.

*Divine persuasion.* The idea that God does not works upon the world in a coercive way but rather through persuasion, is a meaningful formulation of which Whitehead constantly repeated in the theology of process. This discovery makes him realize that God works by way of persuasion which is one of the greatest advancements in the history of religious thought; it is the advance that pretends to break away from the classical philosophy-theology of Christianity, which in its grand theological systems always worked within the framework of god as a dominator that always imposed by way of reason and moral order and as such constituted a coercive principle that dominated the lives of individuals. We can see this idea in many of his works, but above all others in *Adventures of ideas*. The continuous action of God is to move, from within, the concrescent opening of beings towards the achievement of their formal and ontological growth: it is an action that is persuasive, loving and gentle because it does not interfere with or put conditions on the freedom of movement of nature and only comes from itself, although under the impulse of a divine force that is persuasive and not coercive which tries to bring the world to better itself. The action of God is the victory of persuasion over force. This is the way of thought that introduced Whitehead to the philosophy of Plato, but he thought it should constitute one of the axes of the modern reform of religion.

*Evil and the divine limitation of omnipotence and omniscience.* The God of Whitehead is not a creator: this is the type of God that belongs to classical Christianity and should be rejected. Whiteheads metaphysics does not have a divine being that lives transcendentally apart from the world and that decides to «create» at a certain time. For Whitehead, the Christian God is the God-Foundation of a world that is understood as eternal. God and the world, the process, are what they are and he did not create them. He is, therefore, not responsible for the



process of the world. God is the foundation that makes the formal and ontological process possible and moves it forward towards good, towards the optimal. However, God is not the designer nor creator of process. God must abide by what is: he is not omnipotent to interfere, without limit, with process. God is only the ultimate limitation necessary and the beginning of the concrescence of process. What's more, in the same way, he is not omniscient with respect to the final development of the process, given that it depends on itself and its own impulses and in ultimate terms, its freedom. The God of Whitehead is a God limited by the world, and in this sense, cannot be characterized as «self limited» given that he is not the creator of designer of his own limits. Evil, then, is inherent in the universe in the sense that disorder and disorientation of process can be derived from order, harmony and the good of process by way of its own autonomous and free dynamic. God, in some sense, suffers evil in the same way that actual entities do, by seeing the impulse towards good blocked. God, immersed in process (by way of its primordial, superjective and consequent nature) is not responsible for Evil but rather the *fellow sufferer that understands*, the faithful friend that suffers as we do, who accompanies us and who understands us.

*Whitehead as a religious thinker.* The way in which God is, in effect, justified and described in Whitehead's metaphysics can arouse doubts. There are doubts as to whether the God that is described is a personal being and also as to whether the personal life of man is individually saved in an afterlife. There is no doubt, however, as to what Whitehead believes with respect to congruence, within his system, of a personal God that assumes and saves for eternity the survival of all personal life. He is conscious of it being argued in a new form of religion, more appropriate for the modern world, but definitely a way of religion that assumes the original form of human religion that has always been and in all cultures.

«Whatever Whitehead is—according to Parmentier—he is a religious thinker. There are three main reasons that we consider sufficient to make this claim. For him, the universe would not now how to exist without God (although God did not create it *ex nihilo*); without God, the reality that would exist would be unintelligible. A metaphysics without God would be contradictory. He has seen that the religious attitude was a fundamental dimension of man; a dimension without which man would not know how to be himself. He has seen that the essential part of religious attitude was adoration. Evidently, this adoration, for Whitehead, is not directed at a “creator” in the strong sense of the term; what's left is nothing less than that man, for Whitehead, could not exist without God and that the recognition of this relationship is translated as adoration and the adoration of love. He has understood that the religious attitude was not intrinsic in metaphysics but rather that there not only could be but should be cooperation between religious intuition and speculative intelligence. Underlining this has nothing to do with wanting to assimilate Whitehead into Thomism or even into the teachings of Aristotle or wanting to make him a believer of orthodoxy. He would not even be allowed to his system of thought into a church or the traditional philosophy of Catholicism» (Parmentier, 537).

#### 4. CRITICAL SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The complex «adventure of ideas», proposed by Whitehead has been the object of enthusiastic evaluations —from these, the philosophy-theology of process was born— and negative critical judgements, as much from the perspective of classical protestant theology (for example the Church of England) as from catholic theology. However, before evaluating the theological aspects it is convenient to consider Whitehead from a purely scientific and philosophical perspective.

##### 4.1) *The processually autonomous universe of science*

Whitehead's «first metaphysics» or «basic metaphysics» is easily integrated into modern science: the world is presented as a complex structure of «actual events» that order themselves in physical, biological and human systems within the evolutionary process of the universe oriented towards unitary concrescence; science also respects (as does Whitehead, we believe) the margin of entropy and negantropy of the ascendant processes that empirical evidence must admit.

*The theistic science of Whitehead.* Whitehead's metaphysics is essentially theistic. Starting from the potentiality open in the formal and in the ontological, divine reality is postulated as a condition of possibility of this «universal potentiality». Thus, God is necessary: a metaphysics without God would not be viable because the universal process could not be given without a potential base, without a formal and ontological «founding force» (God). For Whitehead, it is the same science that explains the world that must be «theistic». It is true that Whitehead does not pretend to «demonstrate» or «impose» the existence of God but he defends that only a theistic «open hypothesis» towards the universe is truly able to be explained by the same science.

Nevertheless, the norm in modern science is the explanation of the ontological and formal power of the universe away from theistic hypotheses. Science conceives of a universe that contains intrinsic principles (non theistic) that have their own explanation. Because of this, it is difficult for a «first metaphysics» that is congruent with modern science to be «theistic».

*Ontological sufficiency of the universe.* It is evident that today we do not think that the universe is explained for a fixed number of particles that have existed since the beginning and that for blind interactions have produced the advance towards a higher natural order. The universe is today, on a microphysical level, that strange world described by quantum mechanics: with superposition, apparition, annihilation of particles, uncertainty, balance and electrodynamic interactions, strange fields, action at a distance, non local causation, quantum coherence and holistic phenomenon, etc. In this context, science has searched for an ontological base to refer to that acts like a profound stage from which the phenomenological scene of the empirical world is born. Before it was called

ether and today it might be called «quantum vacuum» (remember the concept of «implied order» in the heterodoxical philosophy of physics of David Bohm). This background field, that is purely physical and impersonal, this offers the ontological resources that are necessary for the evolution, apparition and disappearance of particles, order, novelty, creativity and ontological ascent of the universe. However, how is the universe born out of the primordial ontology of the universe? We can know things, but we do not know the last theory. String theory and superstrings are an example of the huge speculative effort of modern theoretical physics to conceive of the primordial properties of matter that—beyond the era of Plank— generate the universe and produce both quantum mechanics and classic relativist mechanics.

*Formal sufficiency of the universe.* Modern science also explains why evolutionary processes have moulded complex formal structures (what Whitehead called «eternal objects»). The reasons that have driven their evolution in the way that science has shown depend on the very same ontology as that of matter. Matter, in effect, presents certain properties by default that are measurable as constants and variables that respond to certain values; from there, their progressive organization is born and the laws of this organization respond. The laws are, therefore, the description of the factual result of evolution: they are not a previous presupposition. In this way, matter has gone on producing forms that do not depend on a quasi-platonic world of «eternal objects» but rather they bud from the same dynamic of structural organization in function of their primordial properties. Form and structure is born from ontological material. However, man, because of reason (as it is explained in epistemology), being inspired by the structures that have already been produced, can imagine other possible forms and structures. This is how formal sciences are definitively born as products of the human mind; they do not reflect an intuition of eternal objects (in the platonic style of Whitehead) but rather they are an imaginative product constructed by human reason that is inspired by real structures.

*The evolutionary-processual sufficiency of the universe.* In any case, modern science offers a description of the universe as a consistent and congruent system in itself like the structure of dynamic interactions in space and time. For modern science, it is very difficult to introduce God as an immediate and precise factor of intelligibility for the universe. To put God into the world is to put him in a secular context where science builds its explanations without the need for theism.

#### 4.2) *Philosophical evaluation of Whitehead's metaphysics*

*Classical Christian metaphysics.* Recall how classical metaphysics was constructed based on Christian philosophy. For this, facts were always the world of experience, understood as a basis for argument. If something is real and exists, it should have a fundament for its being: that is to say, it should be based in something «sufficient» or more specifically «auto-sufficient» (it is enough in and

of itself) to be real and existent. The foundation of being should be «absolute», in the sense that it should not need external references to give «sufficient reason» for its own real self. «Necessity» should also be an attribute of this «absolute foundation of real being»: it should be real in the past, present and future, given that if in some moment it stops existing, it would not be possible to explain its movement from nothingness to real being.

The expectation of an auto-sufficient and necessary foundation is not only part of classical (philosophical) metaphysics but also of scientific reasoning. This search, in effect, describes phenomenon and fits them inside structural systems in cause and effect interactions that are sufficient. If this sufficiency is not accounted for in certain real systems, it would then refer these systems to each other in order to reach more and more complex sufficient causal interaction systems (an atomic particle is in a molecule which is part of a physical or organic object... and so on leading up to the ultimate system of the universe). However, while looking for «sufficiency», science reached frontiers that, with their own methods, cannot keep on looking and end up being referred to by other arguments; for example philosophy. This is what happens in philosophical speculation of what happened before the *big bang*.

Classical Christian metaphysics, according to this, is constructed with clarity: the real being does not have «sufficiency» as such (it is «contingent») and must infer existence from a foundation of being (given that it is contingent and must be founded in the being by something that is not part of the world). From there, Christian metaphysics postulates transcendent existence (which does not form part of the world but rather transcends it) of a «foundation of being» which is absolute and necessary and must produce the world through creation. In creation, only the existence of that which creates (God) is presupposed (with its own ontology). The rational argument to admit the existence of God is that this «being» can «found» the universe for creation. This is where the rational foundation to think of God in a specific way is: as personal, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. If God wasn't like that (for example, was not transcendent or personal), it could not be the «creative foundation».

*Whitehead's metaphysics.* Whitehead proposes a different analysis. In the first place, the world is not «contingent» in the previous sense. It is eternal and was not created nor can a beginning be attributed to it. It advances forward in an unprescribed way. The world is absolute and auto-sufficient. However, this absolute universe is not intelligible if the existence of God is not postulated. God is an essential explanatory element to found, as Whitehead said, both the ontological and formal potentiality in the universal process of concrescence. However, the God that Whitehead postulates is not the classical God of transcendence but rather a God that «forms part of the world». This God is something like the «soul of the world» or platonic Demiurge. It is the foundation of the universe and contributes essentially to this so that it is in effect what it is. God is something like an essential cog in the functional and evolutionary gears of the universe. Because of this, Whitehead said that his metaphysics needed God

in the same way that Aristotle needed the «unmoving motor». In reality, the God of Aristotle like that of Whitehead is a part of a universe that is eternal in itself. This theistic reasoning—distinct from that of classical Christianity—prompts certain considerations. These will follow below.

*Problems of Whitehead's metaphysics.* Classical metaphysics considers the world to be contingent; that is to say it is not sufficient, absolute nor necessary. In order to justify its point of view, Christian metaphysics has a modern dialogue with science. It takes into account facts like the origin of the universe, its development in time towards the future, its eventual consistency and stability as a system, the rationality of its design, etc. The universe does not seem to have in and of itself, as it is constructed, absoluteness or sufficiency. Because of this, it makes sense to place them in a transcendent reality in the universe. A reality that should have sufficiency, absoluteness and necessity, as well as the ability to found and produce the universe through creation attributed to it. This classical metaphysics therefore understands that God, as said by scholars, is not found in «secondary causes» but rather as the «primary cause»; this is when ultimate absoluteness and necessity are searched for within a proper philosophical, not only scientific, discourse. Because of this, the world is a system of coherent secondary causes that present a functional autonomy and sufficiency. The universe, once created, «works by itself»; without a God that needs to correct errors. In this way, classical «theistic» arguments float on the metaphysical edges of science.

Whitehead in turn, does not question the world at this ultimate level of «primary causality» (in its absoluteness and necessity) given that the world is eternal: that is absolute and necessary. Whitehead's problem is that of explaining the system of «secondary causes», because they do not seem to constitute a system that is sufficient but rather introduce the reference of God and an element of the world that contributes to what the world is from the inside.

Here is an example to understand the idea better, although we are aware that it presents it in a simplified way. Consider a complex device (a computer, a car, etc.). Classical metaphysics does not question whether this device functions autonomously in a congruent and sufficient way, as it is presented here. It would question these things in ways that science could not answer: their undefined persistence in time, their origin, their ration design, etc., focusing on the problem of their ultimate absoluteness and necessity. In turn, Whitehead would take for granted that this device is absolute necessary and eternal in time. Because of this, he would not ultimately question the sufficiency of the world. Nevertheless, his argumentation would say that this device does not show an intelligible function if the existence of a God that forms part of its internal ontology is postulated. According to our image, God would be necessary for the functioning of the device whether it be a computer, a car or whatever.

Whitehead's way of thinking, according to my understanding, presents many difficulties. A) The first is that today, science shows its ability to explain how and why the universe has evolved from the initial properties of matter. Science

constructs, in a continuous way without gaps, an explanation of the evolutionary process: of matter, of the universe, of life and of man. It is autonomous. It is not possible to introduce a «soul of the world» (God) as an explanative factor that forms part of the world. B) The second is, nevertheless, that although the process of evolution is autonomous, there are certain enigmas that persist and that science can not resolve with certainty: the origin of the universe in time, sufficiency, rational design, the causes of physical and biological order, anthropic design, the existence (or not) of multiple universes, the nature of «consciousness» and psychist, etc. However, these enigmas do not permit the argument for a «soul of the world» God (Whitehead) but rather a «transcendent foundation of being» God. This is to say, that the possible arguments for admitting the existence of God seem to more plausibly guide towards a transcendent God (in the classical sense) than towards a «soul of the world» God (in the sense of Whitehead). C) The third reason is that the explanatory autonomy of the universe, from the viewpoint of science, even allows the argumentation of an absolute auto-sufficiency (and as a consequence, necessity): therefore, the arguments in favour of a credible explanatory hypothesis of a «transcendent foundation of being» God does not eliminate the possibility that science constructs a credible atheist hypothesis, without a God, that can explain the enigmas of the universe. This would mean that the hypothesis of a «soul of the world» God (in Whitehead's sense) would be even less credible from the perspective of science and philosophy.

## 5. WHITEHEAD FROM THE THEOLOGY OF KENOSIS

Assuming that God exists and is real, for both Catholic and Protestant Christian theology, it would be the «fundamental reality» and «origin of being» that transcends the universe and to which we attribute creation. Therefore, God would have created the universe that our reason understands (in science and philosophy). The universe, according to this, is presented as an enigmatic universe that (from the point of view of science and philosophy) permits arguments that make the atheist hypothesis, without God, credible (as well as being agnostic). Therefore, if god exists, it has created a universe in which his existence is not evident (given that atheism is possible). Therefore, God, the creator, has not «rationally» imposed its presence in the world (although there are arguments that make his existence rationally «credible»). Therefore God the creator has renounced the creation of a theocentric world, in which his existence is imposed by evidence: God has been hidden (kenosis)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> I defended many years ago the importance of a theology of kenosis as a means to re-think Christianity within a scientifically modern world. My article entitled *Kenosis: Towards a New Theology of Science* is found in *Pensamiento*, vol. 63, n° 238 («Science, Philosophy and Religion», Special Series, n° 1, 2007), pp. 637-658. The explanation of how I understand kenosis in this article can complement the comprehension of the value I give to the thought of Whitehead and his theology of kenosis.

The theology of kenosis can be reconciled with the classical idea of God in Christianity. The real God should be thought of as omnipotent and omniscient (including the knowledge of the previsions of probabilistic, statistical, and chaotic development of an autonomous universe created in time). God should be understood as a foundation of the universe in the modern panentheistic sense (Arthur Peacocke). God created the autonomous universe that, from the point of view of human understanding, appears enigmatic and by which man should decide the path of his life by way of a free and personal commitment. The kenosis of God in creation is not «ontological» (because god never loses his omnipotence) but rather «epistemological» (because he creates an enigmatic world for human understanding). The Christian God is the God which through kenosis (not having imposed its presence) creates a universe that makes human freedom possible.

One of the things that Whitehead's thinking has given has been the rethinking of kenosis and the auto-limitation of God in the world. God, insists Whitehead, does not seek to impose himself but rather seeks a relationship with man based in offering, friendship and persuasion. In addition, his idea of the union of the world with God has allowed for the presentation of a positive vision of morality, based on the enthusiasm of natural experience. God, for Whitehead, is also not responsible for Evil because he does not create the world; on the contrary, he is subject to the conditions established in the same world and tries to overcome it and guide it to perfection. Kenosis or divine auto-limitation, for Whitehead, is only partial because a large part of divine limitation is imposed by the nature of the eternal world (not created) of which God form a part. If we consider Whitehead from the point of view of his possible harmony with classical Christian theology (both catholic and protestant), the most important problem is the idea of a non-creator God, limited by a conditional and eternal universe. In our opinion, not only is it difficult to find a balance between this «soul of the world» God and science and philosophy but also with theology and the traditional religious experience. In our understanding, this is the crucial point that the theology of process must revise and develop (by trying to avoid, shall we say, being confined within its own «scholasticism»). If it develops, the theology of process would not only be compatible with traditional Christian theology but would mean an unquestionable enrichment for this theory both in the essential idea of Christianity as freedom and in substantial questions of moral theology and in theology related to Evil in personal life and in history.

c/ Universidad Comillas, 7  
28049 Madrid  
jmonserrat@res.upcomillas.es

JAVIER MONSERRAT

[Artículo aprobado para publicación en abril de 2008]

