Faith And Spiritual Discipline: A Comparison Of Augustinian And Process Theologies

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The fact that many who are currently interested in spirituality turn to non-Christian sources is related to Augustine's view of divine omnipotence, which was expressed supremely in his anit-Donatist and anti-Pelagian writings. Distinguishing cosmological, theological, and axiological freedom helps us see Pelgius as right on the second even though Augustine was right on the third. Process theology, by defending cosmological freedom against modern thought, theological freedom against pre-modern thought, and an element of truth in Donatism, provides the basis for a post-modern spirituality.

This paper arose out of request that I compare Augustine and process theology on the nature of Christian faith.[1] Such "comparisons" are usually sterile affairs, leaving one at the end with the question: "So what?" If I was to have any chance of not boring my audience, and myself, to distraction, I had to do this comparing in a way that related it to some concerns that were vital to my thinking and that might also be of interest to my intended audience. Hence I begin by setting out, in Parts I and II, the contexts in which I find this topic—faith in Augustine and process theology—important and interesting enough to address.

I. Medieval, Modern and Post-Modern

I can most quickly indicate my perspective by referring to "medieval," "modern," and "post-modern" thought. Augustine's synthesis of classical and biblical thought provided the most important foundation for that remarkable period in the West now known as medieval. The modern period was dominated at root by the type of thought associated with Galileo and Newton. From the modern perspective, given its ideas of what is real, efficacious, and hence possible, most of the beliefs of the medieval period had to be judged as without foundation—as false, in fact superstitious—and many of the medieval concerns came to be regarded as unimportant. "Medieval" even became an adjective of reproach.

In the post-modern period, the best of modernity is retained, but many of the beliefs and values of the medieval period are given a new foundation, by using the very methods developed in the modern period. Ideas about what is real, what

exerts causal power, and what is possible, that were considered hopelessly out-dated by the modern mind are again taken seriously by the post-modern mind.

Now what is that post-modern period? Is it already an emerging fact, or is it a pious hope? It is in part both. To some extent one can objectively point to signs that it is already emerging. Twentieth-century physics has done quite a bit to soften up the dogmatism of modernity that reached its peak in the latter half of the 19th century. Open-minded anthropologists and students of religion have increasingly undermined the absolute confidence in the adequacy of the dominant modern paradigm to arbitrate between the credible and the incredible. And the facts, both spontaneous and experimental, reported by those involved in the study of psychosomatic relations and psychical research show that there is much more going on in the world than allowed by the narrow philosophies of modernity. The movement of humanistic psychology, the various transpersonal psychologies, and the interest in developing a *science* of consciousness reflect ideas and interests that fully "modern" psychologists would have labelled "medieval." So to some extent the post-modern world is already a fact.

But to a great extent it is still a pious hope. It remains to be seen whether the signs to which I've referred are really the beginning of something new, or just a transitory wave of discontent that will be buried by the onslaught of the modern paradigm, which is still dominant in most academic, business, governmental, and even theological circles.

This is where, in my thinking, process theology comes in. It is a truism by now that an old paradigm is not rejected just because it is inadequate. It is only defeated by being *replaced* by a new paradigm that seems more adequate—in particular, that seems more adequate to the new interests of the era.

I believe that process theology provides the best available basis for a post-modern paradigm. This is a *huge* claim, which I cannot even begin to justify here. It does show that I have rather grandiose hopes for the future of process theology—hopes that would make it parallel in importance to the thought of Augustine. And this of course sets an enormous challenge before process theologians: to provide a foundation for the post-modern world as effectively as Augustine did for the medieval world.

In any case, this is the over-arching perspective from which I approach this comparison of Augustinian and Process Theologies. As Augustine synthesized old and new so as to provide a theistic foundation for a most remarkable period, so I believe that process theology is in the best position today to synthesize old and new into a new theistic foundation for the post-modern world.

II. *Spiritual Discipline*

Now that I have registered this over-arching perspective, I will turn to the

particular issue around which I want to orient this comparison of Augustine and process theology on the nature of faith. This is the issue of spiritual discipline. I choose this because it is an issue that was central to Augustine, and it is an issue that is today becoming increasingly important in our culture, being on the upswing for the first time in 300 years. This upswing in interest is one of the practical effects of the beginnings of a post-modern culture.

The practice of spiritual discipline was on the decline during the modern period, since the presuppositions of modernity made it irrelevant at best and impossible at worst. Modern thought made spiritual discipline *irrelevant* by denying that the soul and the spiritual values were important in the scheme of things. Our religious drive is to be in harmony with what is most real in the nature of things. Medieval thought said that God, the soul, and the spiritual values were the most real, the most effective, the most important things there are. Modern thought said matter in motion was the one real thing; insofar as there were any virtues, they were the attitudes that helped one to control as much matter as possible. And many of these attitudes, such as greed, do not require a lot of self-discipline to develop! Modern thought made the practice of spiritual discipline seem *impossible*, insofar as it suggested that our beliefs, attitudes and practices were totally a product of the motions of the molecules in our bodies.

Now that these assumptions are being rejected in the post-modern world, there is renewed interest in practicing some form of spiritual self-discipline. A more complete analysis of this trend would have to discuss the recent disillusionment with the various "quickie therapies" with which people had been experimenting, but I cannot go into this here. The main point is that a significant portion of our culture which has understood modernity and recognized its values has moved beyond it into some form of post-modern consciousness, and that this has involved an awakening of interest in the serious practice of some form of spiritual discipline, whether one of the traditional spiritual paths of humanity or some new form.

The other reason I gave for choosing this topic is that it was at the center of Augustine's concerns as a Christian thinker. Peter Brown[2] has argued that Augustine's major criticism of Manicheanism was based not on its dualism *per se*, but on the fact that this dualism made the good passive and impotent, leaving only the evil as active and aggressive. This meant in effect that the soul was on the defensive, simply trying to ward off the potentially evil influences of the body and the surrounding material world. Neo-platonism helped him come to see evil not as an active substantial force but only a privation of the good, thereby providing the basis for putting good on the attack. In his Neo-platonic Christian perspective, all substances are intrinsically good: there is only the one God, who is totally good, and all the substances created by this good God. If this interpretation of Augustine is correct, his ability finally to affirm monotheism over cosmic dualism was first of all the affirmation of a view that supported spiritual

discipline. Even his later stress on predestination, which to the Pelagians and the monks seemed to undercut self-discipline, was in Augustine's mind a support for continuing the battle against evil. The doctrine of predestination gave the guarantee to Augustine and his fellow Christians that their efforts would be effective. It was the ultimate expression of the meaning of monotheism to him— that the good is active and powerful, and will be ultimately victorious, so the battle against the *apparently* superior forces of evil is not in vain. In his later years, Augustine was not as optimistic as he had been in his early years as a Christian about the degree to which the passions of the flesh and the other effects of original sin can be overcome in this life; but he never gave up the belief that one should work toward that end. Augustine would have been very unhappy to think that his thought would in part undermine, rather than completely promote, a life of spiritual discipline.

However, this does seem to be the case. In fact, since Christianity in the West has been so heavily Augustinian, many who are now developing a concern for spiritual discipline assume that they can only get guidance from non-Christian, even non-theistic, sources. I suggest in Part III how two of Augustine's most distinctive emphases tend to undermine spiritual discipline. In the final part, I suggest that process theology provides a post-modern understanding of reality which overcomes those ideas within both modern and medieval thought which undermined spiritual discipline.

III. *Augustinian Anti-Donatism and Anti-Pelagianism*

Augustinian theology has undermined concern with spiritual discipline within the Christian tradition. It is important for us to understand this fact. For, preachers and theologians have long been blaming the growing lack of interest in Christianity, especially among the educated, on the materialistic assumptions of modern thought. But now we have seen that the growing interest in things spiritual during the past two decades within the educated portions of our culture has not meant a great revival of interest in Christian thought and practices. (The apparent revival which has occurred comes from other portions of the culture and/or for other reasons.) Rather, the thirst for some kind of spiritual discipline has largely meant a turn to Eastern forms of spirituality. The assumption in most people's minds seems to be that Christianity has little to offer in this regard. This is based in part upon the different issues that are addressed by Christian theologians and ministers on the one hand, and by books rooted in the East, on the other. But it is also based in the image of Christian priests and ministers. Seldom are they looked upon as spiritual giants. To find a spiritual guide means finding a guru, which means someone who has attained Wisdom from the East. Also, Christians who participate actively in the life of the churches are not perceived as attaining

much spiritual growth.

Now to some extent this public perception is based upon the tendency to see only the weaknesses of the old, familiar, home-country religion, and only the best in the religions of far-away countries. But to a large extent, I suggest, this public perception corresponds to the reality. And there is a historic connection between this situation and the influence of Augustinian theology.

Although I believe there are several ways in which the Augustinian under-standing of faith has served to undermine concern for spiritual development, I will limit this discussion to two. The first one concerns the Donatist controversy, the second the Pelagian controversy.

The Donatist controversy involved a mixture of social, political and theological issues too complex to review here. But at the center of the controversy, theolog-ically, was the question as to whether the virtue of the priest affected the validity of the sacraments he administered. The Donatists said Yes, that if you received sacraments from a wicked priest, they might not be efficacious for salvation. Augustine said No, the sacraments ordained by God through Christ have a kind of objectivity about them such that their efficacy is not dependent upon the subjective moral and spiritual qualities of the priest administering them. Augustine had a number of personal and political motives for rejecting the Donatist position. But *theologically* he rooted his argument in the omnipotence of God. To say that the priest's lack of virtue could prevent God's grace from being effective through the sacraments would be to say that "heretics had the power to pollute" what belongs to God,[3] that is, that human power could distort what God intended. He argues specifically against the Donatist attempt "to show that the man who is baptized is made to partake of the character of him by whom he is baptized."[4]

Now, Augustine was speaking about the mediation of grace specifically through the ordained sacraments, not about whether the character of a priest in general has an influence upon the lives of his parishioners. But the anti-Donatist verdict of the church has had the effect of down-playing the importance of the spiritual stature of Christian ministers. For the generalized message of the anti-Donatist verdict was this: God is omnipotent. The efficacy of God's grace is not essentially dependent upon the quality of the human instruments through which it is mediated. Accordingly, the priest or minister need not purify himself in order to perform his essential role. The ordained means for communicating God's grace work *ex opera operato*, from the very fact of doing the act, whether this be primarily administering the sacraments or, with the Protestants later, primarily preaching the word.

This issue lies behind a common generalization about the difference between East and West which, after all the qualifications that need to be made, retains some validity. In the East, it is assumed that a person's philosophical-theological-psychological *ideas* are not worth paying attention to unless that person has

attained a certain degree of holiness; in the West we take seriously the ideas of people whose lives have been major disaster areas. In this regard, the East has been far more "pragmatic" than the West. In the East it is assumed that you can be aided in spiritual matters only by a spiritual person. In the West it has been officially held that the effectiveness of divine grace is independent of the human medium. Of course in practice we all know this Western view is largely false: it is quite often the character of a particular Christian through whom we are either led to experience divine grace, or to turn away from things spiritual. I do hold that there is an element of truth in the Augustinian position—how could it have been so influential otherwise? But the challenge is to formulate it in such a way that the element of truth in the Donatist position can also be retained, i.e., that God's transforming grace is mediated through others, and that it is colored, for good or ill, by the nature of the medium. Accordingly, spiritual discipline may increase one's effectiveness as a minister, i.e., mediator, of God's grace.

Augustine's anti-Donatism was theologically rooted in his understanding of faith—that it is faith in the omnipotence of divine grace. From the Manichean position, that the power of good is totally on the defensive against the power of evil, he went to the other extreme, that the power of good not only is active but *encounters no real resistance*. This anti-Donatism is the first way in which Augustine's influence has undermined the concern for spiritual discipline within the Christian tradition.

The second way involves Augustine's anti-Pelagianism. Augustine's controversy with the Pelagians involved a very complex set of interrelated issues. On most of these issues Augustine was much more profound than the Pelagians. But there was one issue—the central issue for them—on which they were absolutely right: *human beings must have some freedom in relation to God or else the spiritual life is nonsense and God's fairness and hence absolute goodness must be denied.*

Augustine's early writings, before the Pelagian controversy arose, seemed to affirm human freedom—so clearly in fact that Pelagius was able to cite many of Augustine's statements for support. And yet Augustine rejected the Pelagian position totally, saying that *every* aspect of our relation to God is *totally* determined by God. If we have faith in god, that is totally God's gift. Even the first movement of our mind in that direction is due to God's irresistible grace. Any of our good works arising out of faith are themselves totally due to God. Being concerned to rule out the possibility of any human boasting or pride in achievement, Augustine never tires of repeating the rhetorical question from St. Paul, "What hast thou, that thou didst not receive?" (II Cor. 4:7), and several other proof-texts, such as: "It is God who worketh in you, even to will!" (Phil. 2:13), and "The will is prepared by the Lord" (Prov. 8:35). Neither our faith nor our

work is partly due to God and *partly* to us: they are *totally* due to God. And yet Augustine maintains that he has not denied his earlier insistence on human freedom. In a late writing, *Grace and Free Will*, he stresses over and over that the exhortations in the Bible would be meaningless unless human freedom were presupposed. How can he say both of these things?

We can best make sense of the apparent confusion by introducing a three-fold distinction in the idea of human freedom: the aspects can be called cosmological freedom, theological freedom, and axiological freedom. *Cosmological* freedom is the freedom of the human soul in relation to other (finite) things in the cosmos, such as the planets, angels and demons, and the human body. You believe in cosmological freedom if you believe that the human soul or mind has at least some power for self-determination over-against all the cosmological forces acting on it. *Theological* freedom is the freedom of the human soul in relation to God. You believe in theological freedom if you believe that you have some power of self-determination in relation to the divine reality. *Axiological* freedom is the ability of the soul to actualize whatever ideas or values it consciously wants to actualize. You affirm that you are free in this sense if you believe that, by deciding to live a better life, you can get yourself to do it.

The debate between Augustine and the Pelagians is confused because these three meanings of "freedom" are not distinguished. By distinguishing them, we can agree with the consensus of the church that Augustine got the better of the debate, and yet perhaps see that there was an element of truth in the Pelagian position which got brushed aside in the confusion.

Both parties affirmed *cosmological* freedom. Augustine as much as the Pelagians agreed that our fates are not determined by heavenly bodies, demonic beings, or the passions of the body (although Augustine at least knew that the latter could be *very* strong). When Augustine affirms human freedom across the board, for elect and non-elect alike, it is freedom in this cosmological sense that he has in mind.

Theological freedom was the main concern of the Pelagians. They believed as much as Augustine that God would condemn sinners to hell. They were not "liberals." They were in fact more rigorous, limiting salvation to those who achieve perfect obedience to the Christian law. Given this assumption, they rightly saw that God would be unjust, hence evil, if God unilaterally decided who would and would not fulfill the law. Accordingly, the human soul must be free in relation to God; whether or not we live a worthy life must be at least partly determined by our power, not by God's alone. Divine grace must be seen as providing only the context and pre-conditions for the good life, not as unilaterally providing both our faith and good acts, as Augustine said.

In regard to *axiological* freedom, the Pelagian position was rather naive in comparison with Augustine's. For one thing, the Pelagians had a less profound

grasp of the Christian ideal, thinking of the Christian life as primarily a matter of external obedience to individual commandments. Augustine understood that the ideal concerns the whole orientation of one's life, that this involves loving God and all other things in God, and that this is *not* under the simple control of our conscious wills—that there are all sorts of semi-conscious and unconscious factors, all sorts of long-ingrained habits, all sorts of influences from our physical and spiritual environments, which work against our loving the good of the whole instead of loving ourselves selfishly. He understood that when we are enabled genuinely to love, this comes as a gift from being loved first. And he understood that even the healing of those tendencies that are rooted in distorted love is usually a very slow and partial process. The Pelagians, wanting to hold both to God's condemnation of sinners and God's absolute fairness, had to deny that the Christian life was too difficult for the human will to fulfill. "Ought" must imply "can" if God is justly going to condemn you to everlasting torment for not fulfilling the oughts. Hence, having a superficial understanding of the Christian ideal (as the external fulfillment of a set of laws), they spoke as if fulfilling the ideal were quite within the capacity of every person. No additional divine grace was even needed—God's grace in giving the Christian law as a feasible means of salvation was sufficient.

Accordingly, Augustine was able to demolish their position quite easily. He only had to point to St. Paul's writings, and to his readers' own experience, i.e., in relation to the Christian ideal understood as perfect love of God and our fellow creatures. The tragedy of this discussion is that the two meanings of "freedom" that were at issue—theological freedom and axiological freedom— were not distinguished. It was, of course, to Augustine's advantage *not* to distinguish them. By writing as if there were only one meaning of "freedom" at issue, or at least by writing as if a refutation of the Pelagian idea of axiological freedom implied a refutation of their idea of theological freedom, Augustine was able to gain a complete victory. In his writings, almost all of the attention is given to showing that their idea of axiological freedom is simple-minded and un-Biblical. What needs to be considered is the possibility that Augustine might be closer to the truth in regard to axiological freedom while the Pelagians were closer in regard to theological freedom.

There was in Augustine's own time much concern that his doctrine of absolute predestination and irresistible grace would undermine spiritual discipline and give support to sloth. This, along with protecting the fairness of God, was the prime concern of the Pelagians. Also the monks, who were not involved in ecclesiastical politics, but were dedicating their whole lives to the injunction "Be ye perfect," were disturbed by Augustine's writings for this reason. They knew full well that sloth was at least as dangerous a tendency as pride, which Augustine seemed to be going overboard to rule out. In trying to prevent pride

in the *later stages* of spiritual development (as they saw it), Augustine had undermined the great effort it takes simply to *get started* on the spiritual path. If we can do *nothing* without God's grace, and if God's grace in fact *totally* affects every act of faith and love, and if it has been *predestined* from the creation who will receive this grace, self-denying effort would seem to be futile.

The irenic John Cassian took up the case of the monks. The issues were much debated. Finally, in 529, at the Synod of Orange, an unstable compromise was reached. The more horrible implications of Augustine's position, such as the predestination of the non-elect to hell, were rejected. However, the compromise was unstable, since what was rejected were only some of the logical *implications* of the Augustinian position. The basic doctrines, from which these horrible implications followed logically, were not reformed. It was like my wanting to deny the conclusion that I am mortal without denying either of the premises, "All humans are mortal," and "I am human."

This unstable compromise was maintained throughout the middle ages, with only occasional outbreaks of consistency. The Thomistic synthesis embodies this compromise fully, insisting explicitly on the reality of human freedom while maintaining a doctrine of God that makes theological freedom impossible. This compromise was unmasked by the Protestant reformers, who stated even more openly than Augustine that we are not free in relation to God, and that our eternal destiny is solely determined by God. (See Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, in which the *philosophical* points are articulated with utmost clarity. He may have been wrong, but he was logical.) I cannot but believe that this doctrine has had a significant impact upon Protestant Christianity, and therefore upon countries in which the ethos has been largely determined by Protestants; the logical implication of the Lutheran and Calvinistic positions was that our fate is not at all in our hands. And, as much as can be said on the other side, *some* people *are* affected by logic.

The logic of this position worked itself out theologically in our century, in the so-called neo-Reformation theologians. "Christian faith" is contrasted with "religion." *Christian faith* humbly accepts what God has done for us, which we learn through revelation. *Religion*, on the other hand, is seen as the prideful attempt to climb up to God. The idea of "co-operating" with God is treated with disdain. The effort to achieve a mystical union with God is treated as the worst sin, since it denies that God has already done everything for us. Whether or not the authors meant to say this categorically, the effect of their writings was to discourage spiritual discipline as un-Christian. A good number of the professors teaching in Protestant seminaries, and ministers serving Protestant churches, were educated in seminaries and graduate schools in which these neo-Reformation ideas were dominant. And it is my impression that these ideas have not been without effect in Catholic circles. In any case, I think this 20th-century revival

of Augustinianism, in conjunction with the effect that the Augustinianism of the Protestant reformers has had during the previous four centuries, helps explain why those who are today interested in spiritual discipline assume that they must turn to non-Christian sources for guidance. Most of Christian theology has implicitly opposed spiritual discipline, and some of it has done so explicitly.

And this helps explain further why many sensitive people, in both the East and the West, have assumed that spiritual discipline is in conflict with belief in God. As long as the word "God" conjures up the idea of an all-determining power, belief in God will be antagonistic to concern for spiritual discipline—at least for people who are somewhat consistent in their thoughts. St. Paul seems to speak paradoxically about these matters. He says, "I..., though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (I Cor. 15:10, R5V); and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you" (Phil. 2:12). Unless these paradoxical statements can be understood differently than they have been understood by Augustinian theology, Christian theism cannot logically support a concern for spiritual discipline.

IV. *Process Post-Modern Theology*

I now turn to process theology—which does provide another way to understand these Pauline statements.

There are several respects in which process theology agrees with Augustine. In the first place, Augustine defended cosmological freedom against the Manicheans; process theology defends it against modern thought. Augustine's concern, you will recall, was to portray the human soul not as an impotent, passive thing, hedged in by and on the defensive against the material world, but as a reality with power to shape itself and its environment. Process theology rejects the claim of the modern paradigm, according to which only the most elementary physical entities or forces, such as electrons and protons, have causal influence. Process theology portrays a hierarchy of creative cosmological powers, with cells above molecules, and psyches above cells. And there is increasing evidence that this is not mere speculation based on wishful thinking. The facts of psychosomatic studies and psychical research can now be added to our own common experience to support the notion that the human soul, far from being an impotent spectator, is the, or at least one of the, most powerful of the finite actors in the cosmic drama.

There is a second major way in which process theology provides a new basis for Augustine's concerns. Against the Pelagians, who affirmed God's grace only in the establishment of the basic conditions of human life, Augustine insisted that divine grace was present and effective in every moment. Modern thought, insofar as it has been theistic at all, has been analogous to the Pelagian position

on this point, affirming divine influence only "once upon a time," in the creation of the basic structure of things. Process theology affirms God's gracious influence in every moment of the world process, especially in every moment of human experience. Process theology can with Augustine sum up the position of Christian faith with the cry "Emmanuel!"—God is with us!

But when we come to the question of the *relation* between this divine activity and our own freedom, process theology parts company with Augustine, and precisely on those points at which Augustine's understanding of faith in divine grace undermined the concern for spiritual discipline.

As process theologians understand faith in God's providential guidance, it does not entail that our relation to God is unilaterally determined by God. Rather, this relation is a joint product; it is due to our co-operating, our working together.

Now I have deliberately used the term "co-operation," which suggests synergism. This has always been anathema to Augustinians. But many other Christians have felt uncomfortable with it too, insofar as it suggests that divine and human power and effectiveness are on the same level. The problem here is that most theologies have set up the problem as if we and God were competitors. On this model, the more efficacy God exerts in our lives, the less freedom we have; and the more freedom we affirm for ourselves, the less we can see ourselves as influenced by God. Accordingly, Augustinian theology fears that the affirmation of genuine human freedom in relation to God would demean the sovereignty of God. And in reaction, many views, including atheism as an extreme, think that the affirmation of genuine human freedom necessitates the denial of all divine efficacy in our lives. Finally, synergism has usually been a compromise position within the competitive model. It limits the divine input in order to make room for some human freedom. Pelagianism is one version of this compromise, as it limits God's creative input to the past establishment of the basic conditions for life and salvation.

But should we continue to presuppose this competitive model? Should not the intuition of the radical otherness of God lead us to consider a noncompetitive relation between God and the Creatures, in which the *greater* efficacy of God in our lives might mean *more* rather than less freedom? Now this was surely Augustine's own deepest intention. True freedom comes only through bondage to God; divine determinism does not conflict with human freedom. And yet his way of formulating this intention did deny our freedom.

Some modern theologies have tried to overcome the competition between God and the creatures. Tillich says we must transcend the theistic God, to the "God beyond God," which is Being Itself, if the affirmation of God is not to conflict with belief in human freedom. But this is done at the cost of denying individuality and personhood, and hence all causal influence whatever, including prevenient grace, to the divine reality, and equating God with what in Aristotelian language

has been called the "material cause" of all things—the basic stuff of which actualities are composed. And Christian theologians have usually recognized that this vision is profoundly alien to the Biblical vision.

Process theology provides a way of understanding the divine-human relation as noncompetitive that does not deny divine personhood and influence. Prevenient grace consists in the provision of possibilities that free us from the necessity of being simply determined by the past. Accordingly, it is precisely *God's causal influence on us that provides us with both cosmological freedom and the possibility of axiological freedom*. And yet this divine causal influence works in such a way that *we also have theological freedom*—freedom in relation to God.

I will try to explain this difficult idea briefly. According to process theology, our soul is not an *enduring substance* that is what it is, and has the powers it has, prior to its relations with other things. That kind of idea leads to the competitive model: we must become less of ourselves if God is to become more in us. Rather, our soul is really a *series of momentary experiences*. Each experience is a synthesis of its relations to other things; each experience includes those other things into itself in a sense, making itself out of them. Given this misunderstanding, I am not in competition with my environment; I need not shield it out to be authentically myself. Rather, I am the richer the more of my environment I can take into myself, making it my own.

But, if my environment were limited to everything we normally call our "environment"—our bodies, the things we experience through our bodies (both natural and cultural), the ideas given to us through books and other people—we would not be free, no matter how "rich" our experience might seem. We would be condemned simply to take into ourselves the data that came our way, and to weight it according to the strength with which it forced itself upon us. We would have no cosmological freedom. This would be the situation if our "environment" were limited to *actualities*, if actual facts were the only things given to us as the basis for each moment of experience.

But our "environment" includes something else: we find that *possibilities* are also "given" to us. There are usually many possible ways to synthesize the actualities that are given, so this synthesis can be a *creative* synthesis. And we sometimes experience as given rather *novel* possibilities that allow us to transcend the actual past quite dramatically. But how are "possibilities" given? As mere possibilities, they can hardly take the initiative to give themselves. According to process theology, they are given by God. Our freedom is due to the truth that our environment includes God and thereby includes possibilities. God constantly calls us with these possibilities, calls us not simply to accept actuality, but to respond creatively to it, and especially to respond in terms of those possibilities that will embody and promote truth, beauty, goodness, adventure, and peace.

This is prevenient grace. It is always there, prior to every move on our part.

But this grace is not irresistible. We resist it to some degree in most moments of experience. Process theology, while not being Pelagian, does agree with the protest of the Pelagians—and of countless Christians through the ages—against the view that Christian faith means a denial of theological freedom. We are partly free, not only in relation to the stars above and the molecules below, but also in relation to the encompassing divine reality.

So, from the point of view of process theology, St. Paul's paradox—Work out your own salvation, for it is God who works in you—does not involve a contradiction. God is working in us every moment, but this does not mean that we do not need to work. For, although it is God who offers us freedom, we decide how and to what degree to respond to this offer. We decide to what extent God is present in us. And how we respond to God's grace in one moment determines the nature of the gracious invitation that can be extended to us in the next moment. To the degree that we develop a *habit* of responding positively to the divine initiatives, higher divine possibilities can be presented. Spiritual growth is possible.

I have been discussing process theology's agreement and disagreement with Augustine's view that God acts upon us directly in each moment of our lives. This involved the issue of Pelagianism. But God also acts on us indirectly, through other creatures. This involves the issue of Donatism.

A question in recent theology has been whether God affects us directly, or only through our neighbor. Much modern theology has suggested that we encounter God only through the neighbor, never directly. This kind of approach is geared to foster an ethical as opposed to a mystical form of Christian faith. It has much to commend it. But this type of theology is ultimately self-defeating. For one thing, if you never encounter God directly, then neither does your neighbor; so how do you encounter God through him or her? Presumably because he or she encountered God through someone else; but this leads to an infinite regress. I have already suggested that process theology affirms a direct relation to God in each moment of experience. But this does not mean that the indirect relation to God through others is unimportant. To the contrary. For God is related to you in each moment in terms of the best possibility that is open to you in that situation. What determines what the best possibilities for you at that moment are? To a great extent, this depends upon the way your life has been shaped and is presently being shaped by the influence of other people. These can be influences that were based upon positive responses to God in their lives, or they can be influences based on responses that rejected the divine initiative in favor of actions based on egoistic passions such as greed, hate, anxiety. Accordingly, your encountering God in the neighbor is a matter of degree. And the degree to which God is mediated to you through the neighbor influences the way in which God can be directly present to you.

It is on this basis that process theology has something good to say about Donatism. The kind of person you are, as a minister to others, does make a difference to their relation to God. The way God's grace can affect your neighbor is not independent of your relation to God. In fact, psychical research provides strong evidence that you affect others for good or ill not only through what you say and your bodily movements, but directly, one soul to another. If so, this undermines the modern notion that our inner state is unimportant, as long as our outer actions are proper. Ethics cannot be divorced from spirituality. What you are will come through, in spite of your best efforts to be hypocritical.

This ends my comparison. I have placed this comparison within the context of the possibility that process theology might provide the foundation for a post-modern form of human thinking, feeling, and living. With process theology as the foundation, post-modern life would be theistic, and would support spiritual discipline, thus reaffirming the central belief and concern of the medieval period, after the modern interlude. But, I have suggested, process theology would do this without the inconsistency which vitiated Augustinian theology, and which has contributed to the present situation, in which those wanting to get help for spiritual discipline assume they need to turn to non-Christian sources, and even to adopt a non-theistic perspective. In process theology there is no tension between theism and the affirmation of the importance of spiritual discipline.

I should perhaps add that my comments about not needing to turn only to the East for sources is not based upon any exclusivistic desires. The post-modernism which I favor will involve syntheses of East and West and North and South as well as of ancient, medieval and modern. My concern is only directed toward the widespread feeling that an adequate basis for serious discipline can only be provided by an orientation that is Eastern as opposed to Western, and non-theistic as opposed to theistic.

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NOTES

1. This paper was first presented at a symposium on medieval philosophy and 20th-century thought sponsored by the Department of Philosophy at Marquette University, September 25-27, 1981, to celebrate the Marquette University Centennial. I have revised it somewhat for publication.

2. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 51-53.

3. St. Augustine, *On Baptism: Against the Donatists*, Bk. 3, Ch. 19.

4. St. Augustine, *Answer to Petilian*, Bk. 3, Ch. 50.