

Article

## The Changing Image of God in Process Philosophy

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Seeing is a matter of perspective. A perspective is the vantage point by which we view the reality or the world around us. That is why it is called a worldview or paradigm. In other words, what we see is a by product of how we look at the reality around us based on our idea and image of ourselves. Thus, a philosopher once said that if a bird is given the necessary intelligence and the faculty to express its idea of God it will speak of a God that majestically sings and flies with His mighty wings.

The Christian Bible purports that man is created in the image and likeness of God. If this is true theologically and philosophically, it goes without saying, that God's image is adequately reflected by man's image.<sup>1</sup> In other words, anthropomorphism is an inevitable way of looking at God because we are human. Our nature and essence as human beings determines our perspective and the image by which we ascribe to God. This does mean however that everything is subjectivism. We cannot subscribe to absolute subjectivism. That is an intellectual suicide. What we are saying is that human knowledge cannot do away with subjectivism in sense that the subject knower is always involved in the process of arriving at knowledge. Subjectivism is checked or rather tempered by the very nature and dynamism of knowledge itself. Absolute subjectivism is not knowledge, and therefore it is a form of ignorance because it lacks the essential and constitutive features of knowledge that is ought to be present. Knowing is essentially relational and "adequational" (correspondence). To know is to enter into a relation with an object of knowledge. In other words, knowing presupposes two things; the subject-knower and the object to be known. At first glance, the object to be known seems to be passive, that is, the subject is the one that decides everything about the object. For example, the scientists from all over the world gathered to decide that Pluto is no longer a planet. Thus, the updated solar system is constituted by eight planets only. However, a deeper look into the object itself, like in the case of Pluto, reveals the fact that an object of knowledge is never absolutely passive. The subject knower, once he/she enters into the realm of knowing, is affected by the object.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible recognized the splendor of God being reflected by His creations, especially man who is created in the image and likeness of God himself.

For centuries the Japanese believed that their emperors were divine in origin until the Americans revealed the shocking truth that they were ordinary mortals like the rest of us. After this earth-shattering discovery, their lives as Japanese were never the same again. What we know affects us. The object of knowledge influences the subject-knower. Consequently, far from what is commonly perceived, the object of knowledge is not a passive reality but actively affects the subject-knower. And not only that, once the subject-knower relates with a particular object of knowledge, the dynamic relation between the subject and object begins to spin continuously. This dynamism is an on-going process of exploration.

Knowledge is an ongoing process of exploration because once the subject-knower relates with the object, he or she is forever affected by it. Now, this relational aspect of knowledge is always verified by “adequation” in order to determine the truth-content of knowledge. Knowledge is true if it corresponds with reality, that is, the idea of the subject-knower adequately corresponds with the object at hand. Now, the truth about a reality is understood through a process of abstraction according to the basic theory of “ideogenesis” – the process of arriving at the knowledge of the essence of a thing. This ideogenesis is possible only through the acquaintance of the knower and the object to be known. In other words, every knowing is relational. We know the things around us because we relate with them. This relational and adequational features of knowledge point to the truth that knowledge is a matter of seeing things from one’s vantage point. Now, if every point of view is always determined by one’s relation with the object at hand, then our image of God is determined by the way we look at God based on how we relate with Him.

Our idea of God’s image as omnipotent, omniscient, good and perfect is based on a particular philosophical paradigm that looks at God from the vantage point of philosophy of being that negates the reality of becoming in God. This philosophy of being is identifiable with the classical philosophy that was started by Aristotle and was greatly expounded by the angelic doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas. The Church’s teachings were greatly influenced by Saint Thomas’ philosophy. However, the late and saintly Pope, John Paul II, who was both a theologian and a philosopher, stated the general principle concerning the Church’s utilization of philosophy in the following:

The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any particular philosophy in preference to others. The underlying reason for this reluctance is that, even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods. Otherwise there would be no guarantee that it would remain oriented to truth and that it was moving towards truth by way of a process governed by reason. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 1988), 49.

Although this is the general principle concerning the Church's basic attitude towards philosophy per se, yet in practice the Church dominantly remains "Thomistic". Canon Law, in particular, mentions Saint Thomas as the teacher by which students for priesthood are to be educated.<sup>3</sup> Understandably, the interest of the Church concerning St. Thomas' philosophy is based on its presumed perennial validity.<sup>4</sup>

### Discontents on Classical Philosophy

Although, strictly speaking, faith is outside the realm of philosophy, yet the content of what we believe also belongs to the realm of philosophy, particularly on the truth-content of our vision concerning the image of God. In other words, our faith needs to be expressed in philosophical language in order to ascertain its authentic veracity. This approach is not only Hartshornean, but also fundamentally "Justinian". Saint Justin, one of the Christian apologists in ancient times, utilized the language of philosophy in order to dialogue with the pagan intellectuals. From then on philosophy became the handmaid of theology.

Classical philosophy adheres to the fundamental assumption of Aristotle's God as the unmoved-mover and the uncaused-cause. This philosophical assumption about God considers **being** rather than **becoming** as the fundamental definition of reality. Being and being alone is the only concern of Classical philosophy. In fact, classical philosophers cannot philosophize without resorting to the concept of being and with the other categories related to it. The ground by which they stand is founded upon being: being is the beginning and end of classical philosophy to the effect that everything is explained in and through being, especially God. This explains why our vision concerning God's image is based on the notion of being.<sup>5</sup>

What is wrong with the concept of being? The concept of being<sup>6</sup> in classical philosophy is connected with the concept of substance, which is defined as that which exists by itself and in itself.<sup>7</sup> Thus, by virtue of God's very nature and essence, He moves all things, yet He is unmoved and remains unmoved forever because He alone is the Substance without any accidents.

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<sup>3</sup> ". . . the students are to learn to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of salvation, with St. Thomas in particular as their teacher." The Code of Canon Law (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), Canon 252 paragraph 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Philosophical formation must be based on the philosophical heritage that is perennially valid, and it is also to take account of philosophical investigations over the course of time." Canon, 251.

<sup>5</sup> "Aristotle calls metaphysics 'first philosophy'.... It is the philosophy which studies being *as being*, and the properties of everything that is *real*.... Without the concept of being, the intelligence would not be able to know anything: there would be only *sensible* knowledge, not intelligent knowledge." Joseph M. de Torre. *Christian Philosophy*. Third Edition (Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, 1980), 46.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of "being" that we are talking here signifies the abstracted aspect of all realities as "something" – both the necessary being (God) and contingent beings.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph M. de Torre, 80.

Classical philosophy maintains that God is immutable, because He is absolutely perfect. This notion of a perfect and unchanging God was started by Saint Thomas utilizing the metaphysical categories of “substance and accident,” “matter and form” and “act and potency” that is philosophically Aristotelian. Substance, form and act belong to the category of permanence, while accidents, matter and potency to the category of change. Substance is etymologically defined as *that which stands under* or *that which exists by itself*. Accident is *that which exists in the substance*; it has no independent existence outside the substance. Form is the *principle of determination* that determines the matter, which is the *indeterminate but determinable principle*. It is said that a being or reality is constituted by substance and accidents; matter and form; and act and potency. These metaphysical principles are thought to be the ultimate “co-principles” of reality – nothing escaped from this totalizing principle of “permanence and change”. Act is said to be the *perfection* of being, while potency the *imperfection, limitation* and *possibility* of being because it belongs to the process of becoming – what becomes is not yet complete, hence it is imperfect in its being. Thus, the God that changes is imperfect, because accident, change and potency connote incompleteness. Following the distinction made by Aristotle, Saint Thomas applied the notion of “*actus purus*” with the divine nature of God - God is pure act. Hence there is no potentiality in God, because potentiality is understood as imperfection, since God is perfect, therefore, His nature is pure act. This simply shows that “the heart of classical theism is the denial of potentiality in the supreme being.”<sup>8</sup>

Hartshorne, a process philosopher, argues that God’s perfection is just an abstracted aspect of God. The abstract aspect refers to all absolute attributes of God, which is based on God’s concrete aspect that speaks of God’s relativity. Santiago Sia wrote succinctly this point in the following manner:

Hartshorne regards God’s absoluteness as an abstract aspect of God’s reality because God in his philosophy is dipolar: he has an abstract aspect (pole) and non-abstract aspect which he calls concrete. Neither can be comprehended apart from the other. The abstract aspect of God is what is absolute, immutable and independent while the concrete aspect is what is relative, changing and dependent.<sup>9</sup>

Classical philosophy maintains, on the other hand, that God’s perfection is simple and nothing changes in Him – he is the same “*yesterday, today and forever*” (*herie, hodie et semper*) as the Bible says<sup>10</sup>. Yet a simple believer

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Wayne Viney. *Charles Hartshorne and the Existence of God* (Albany: State University of New York, ), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Santiago Sia. *God in Process Thought: A Study in Charles Hartshorne’s Concept of God* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1985), 43.

<sup>10</sup> See letter to the Hebrews

may ask, what will be the value of our prayers and sacrifices, if God does not change? Is the God who revealed himself to Moses as the one who knows the sufferings of His people and was moved by their prayers had reached His ultimate perfection that He no longer changes? Saint Thomas tried to harmonize the conflict by giving a distinction to the change in our perception of God and the immutability of God's eternal plan. Yet his answer contradicted the dialogical nature of God. God in His essence is One, yet Three Persons. God is a community in Himself – He is dialogical and relational by nature. His eternal plan in general does not change for He is omniscience, but He is changing in Himself in the process of relating and correlating with His creatures and with Himself as a Trinitarian God. The experience of the believers in the Old Testament tells us that God relates with them and is affected with their actions and reactions. God is in constant dialogical relation with His people Israel. And Saint Thomas was an inheritor of the Israelites' Sacred History that constitutes the Old Testament. His philosophizing was supposed to be an elucidation of the very nature and essence of God, yet he used the categories of Aristotle and imprisoned God in his fossilized *Actus Purus*. God is dynamic in Himself even without us; God is by nature and in essence relational.

Hartshorne contends that our philosophical knowledge about God does not necessarily contradict our religious faith as Blaisé Pascal purported that there are great discrepancies between the philosopher's concept of God and the believers' experience of God. Hence, the God of the philosophers is not the God of the believers. But for Hartshorne, the God of the believers and the God of the philosophers is one and the same God – there is only one God. And according to him, the starting point of any philosophical inquiry about God is religion. In fact, he also argues that religion matures when its conceptualizations becomes philosophical.<sup>11</sup> Again we must remember that philosophy is considered by the Church as the handmaid of theology. Many of the theological categories are philosophical terms. As a theist-philosopher Hartshorne wants to solve the issue of discrepancies concerning the philosophical conceptualizations we ascribed to our religious experiences about God; and one of this discrepancies is the notion of change in God, which is always negated in classical philosophy.

### **The Ever Changing God of the Old and New Testament**

To discuss adequately the centrality of change in God from the perspective of Hartshorne's process philosophy, we need to revisit the Old and New Testaments' religious vision of God and how it was carried on into the Western consciousness via the Christian God with some elements of Aristotelian metaphysics.

The God of the Old Testament is a God who reveals Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. From the very beginning, this God who later on

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<sup>11</sup> See Santiago Sia, *God in Process Thought*, 9.

became the God of the Christians is relational. In due time, the religious experiences of the fathers (of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) became the source of faith and common heritage of the Israelites. This relational God knows the sufferings of His people Israel and is moved by their prayers; God reveals Himself to Moses to liberate the Israelites from the clutches of Egyptians' oppressive and exploitative slavery.

The relational nature of God seems to be highlighted in the Old Testament. God enters into a covenantal-relation with His people Israel. Moses received the Decalogue from God himself that would guarantee the blessings that God had promised to them if they remain faithful to the covenant.

The religious experiences of Israel as God's chosen people were committed into writings and become the whole corpus of the Old Testament. Needless to say, the Old Testament was written in various literary genres (story, poems, songs, history, etc.) to express the richness and depth of their religious experiences with God who always manifests Himself in various and varied ways. God's self communication and revelations simply show His relational nature or social nature - God is a "Social Being". Many biblical scholars and exegetes affirm the notion that the covenant is the central theme of the Old Testament - God enters into a relationship with Israel.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the book of Hosea speaks about God's nuptial relation with Israel proving that God is capable of intimate relationship with His people; and casual friendly conversation for He even chatted to Moses as a friend.<sup>13</sup>

In the Old Testament, the notion that God never changes is less emphasized; permanence in God is always understood in the context "*hesed*" or God's loving-kindness. God never changes in His faithful-love. If permanence in God is ever emphasized this is always understood that God is ever faithful - God changes not in His faithfulness - His loving-kindness can never be doubted.<sup>14</sup> It is in this context that the people of God are always secure in His love: God is the rock; a stronghold; a sure refuge at all times and especially in troubled-times. Again, God's relational nature is emphasized even if the idea of permanence is applied to Him.

However, later history of the Israelites was tarnished with other elements. The idea of human king was introduced into their experience as a

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<sup>12</sup> Other biblical scholars have the opinion that the Old and New Testament can only be understood or deciphered properly in the context of the Messianic Promise - the coming of the Savior. Saint Jerome said that "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" - no Christian can fully know and love Christ without reading the Bible and the opposite is also true from the Christian perspective - no one can understand the Bible without Christ. As Saint Augustine also said: "the New is hidden in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New" - Christ is the key of both Testaments.

<sup>13</sup> "Yahweh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend." Exodus 33:11.

<sup>14</sup> See. Malachi 2:6; James 1:17 "The doctrine that God is immutable and impassable is firmly at odds with Biblical perspective. From the process perspective too, it is unacceptable... to be actual is to be relational and dynamic; this can be no less true in the case of God." Norberto Schedler. *Philosophy of Religion: Contemporary Perspective* (New York: McMillan Press, 1974), 436.

people during the time of Samuel. The transition from *theocentric* into a *monarchic* social system provided a new way of looking and experiencing God in there midst. The relational God is now understood in the context of kingly fashion. The king has an absolute authority and no one ever question his divine-right-authority. To disobey the king is to disobey God. All are expected to be generous and loyal servant of the king. However, not all kings were good rulers; some of them were insecure tyrants.

The time of kings marked the glorious era in the history of the Israelites. This was the time of peace and prosperity - the time of the United Kingdom under King David and King Solomon. The religious leaders reflected their religious history and formulated their own version and vision of creation. God was depicted as the creator of all things. This God is relational from the very beginning – He created all things and finally made man in His image and likeness. According to the Catholic catechism, man was created in order to know and glorify God. In other words, man must worship God; and the act of worship constitutes the essence of religion according to Hartshorne because God is worshipful.<sup>15</sup> In fact, to worship God by offering a sacrifice is the very reason that Moses gave to Pharaoh in order to allow the Israelites to go to the desert.<sup>16</sup>

After the creation, however, man was tempted and fell into sin and God sent man away from paradise into the world. It is clear from this creation story and the story of man's fall that God's action adjusted to man's condition. God in a way is affected by man's action either good or evil – God is glorified by our good actions and saddened or angered by our bad or evil actions. This seems to be anthropomorphic, but nonetheless they speak warmly concerning God's nature as experienced by the Israelites than the cold categories of classical Philosophy about God's attributes.

God's relational and worshipful nature became more vivid in what Whitehead refers to as the Galilean vision of God. This vision of God was recorded in the New Testament. The Galilean vision refers to Jesus' vision and teachings about God who is not only the God of the fathers (of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), but God as *Abba*<sup>17</sup> – God is our *Daddy* – He is our *Father!* Jesus magnified and intensified God's worshipfulness by this intimate relation with God. He even radicalized the Decalogue and synthesized it into two-fold commandments of love: "Love God above all things and love your neighbor."<sup>18</sup> And He perfected the second commandment with this final instruction: "Love one another as I have loved you!" Jesus' vision of God's

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<sup>15</sup> "The content or essence of religion, as far as Hartshorne is concerned is worship. Accordingly, he defines religion as 'devoted love for being regarded as superlatively worthy of love.' He agrees with Tillich that the great commandment to love God with all one's being amounts to a definition of worship. Although this formulation sounds Christian, Hartshorne claims that it also sums the belief of the higher religion since they too are concerned with loving God totally." Santiago Sia. *God in Process Thought*, 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Exodus 4:18-19.

<sup>17</sup> See John 14:1-12.

<sup>18</sup> See Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:25-28.

worshipfulness is understood in the context of love and filial relation with God as Father. It is Jesus' teaching that enabled the writer of the first letter of John to profess this profound truth: "God is love"<sup>19</sup>.

The God of love is a reliable God: God is absolutely and completely reliable. In this sense God never changes – God is absolute in His love and goodness. But "since God is love, He cannot remain unmoved by the attempts of His worshippers to please Him. Likewise, He cannot but be saddened by their misery and sin."<sup>20</sup> Love is relational – to love is to be related to another – no one loves alone. Love operates not on the oppressive force and tyrannical power for love thrives alone in freedom. Thus, the Galilean vision of God is devoid of tyrannical element whatsoever, because God is essentially love. However, the Galilean vision of God was tarnished and stained by the effort to translate the religious experiences of the Israelites of the Old Testament and the early Christians of the New Testament into philosophical categories of the middle ages, which was basically Aristotelian philosophy. Although we do not deny the fact that many scholastics were Platonic rather than Aristotelian because of the influence of Saint Augustine, yet the Church after the lead of Saint Thomas is Aristotelian in her exposition of what she believes.

But what about the New Testament admonition; "you must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect."? The perfection that is referred to by Jesus according to William Barclay, a New Testament biblical scholar, "has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, metaphysical perfection."<sup>21</sup> The kind of perfection that Jesus urged his disciples was perfection in living a moral life, that is, perfection in love. Perfection in love is never static – love is ever dynamic reality. To be perfect in love is to keep on loving. God is love, according to the letter of Saint John, that why He cannot stop loving us even though we are sinners and we are urged by Jesus to imitate this perfection in loving one another. Again, even in the perfection of loving, God remains dynamic.

### The Ever Increasing Perfection of the Unsurpassable God

Perfection according to Hartshorne is "a poor word to describe the divine reality"<sup>22</sup> when it is understood in its usual sense as something

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<sup>19</sup> I John 4:8, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Santiago Sia. *God in Process Thought*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> William Barclay. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Vol. 1 (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 204.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hartshorne. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984), 6. In the same vein Kretzman made an arguments against the notion of perfection concerning God in the following manner:

- (1) A perfect being is not subject to change
- (2) A perfect being knows everything
- (3) A being that knows everything always knows what time it is
- (4) A being that always knows what time it is, is subject to change
- (5) A perfect being is therefore subject to change
- (6) A perfect being is therefore not a perfect being



“completely made” and “finished”. In this case God’s perfection logically implies absolute immutability. Hartshorne argues that mutability or change is two-fold: change for the better and change for the worse. And change for the worse is absolutely out of question here, for God cannot change for the worst – God cannot become bad or less holy, less knowledgeable, etc. Change for the better may not fit well with the classical notion of perfection applied to God, but Hartshorne insists that this type of change is not a negation of God’s nature; on the contrary, *change for the better* explains well God’s nature than *perfection* does. It must be clarified that God’s continues becoming does not in anyway contradict his omniscience. God knows all things not once and for all. Divine knowledge is becoming. God knows all things, yet He knows them as they are in the context of time as they are temporal realities and objects of divine knowledge.

Change is also understood as becoming and according to Hartshorne, “growth is inherent in the every meaning of becoming, and being is only a potential for becoming.”<sup>23</sup> The notion of perfection is always connected with the notion of being and since being is understood as *what is*, the perfect being is always *what is* and never undergoes change whatsoever. But this is only the case if look at reality from the perspective of being; from the vantage point of becoming, it is change that is essential in reality and being is just a moment in the entire course of becoming. In this sense, God’s worshipfulness essentially refers to His relational nature, because God is delighted with our act of worship and unhappy with our ungratefulness (remember that God was displeased with Adam’s sin and all bad actions for that matter).<sup>24</sup> According to Hartshorne, there is no point of worshipping God if He is not affected by our worship and moved by our prayers. We must remember that God revealed Himself as Trinitarian - God is Three Divine Persons. God is the one who revealed Himself to Abraham. He initiated the covenantal relationship that should go on and on until the end of time. By doing so, God opened the conversion by allowing man to have access in Him, that is, to be affected by man’s prayer. The Divine life is now unlocked for man to engage in God’s eternal plan.

The Old and New Testament tell us that God is worshipful and is delighted and moved by the prayers of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and we can go on and on with our list of people in the Bible who prayed and praised God and God responded accordingly. In other words, God’s worshipfulness does not refer to His perfection if the word perfection is understood in the sense of unchanging, but perfection must refer to God’s all-surpassing nature – God can surpass all things even Himself, this is the reason why He is worshipful, according to Hartshorne.

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(7) Ergo there is no perfect being. Anthony Kenny. *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 40.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hartshorne. *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1970), 35.

<sup>24</sup> Asking God for pardon because of our sins does not make sense if He is not affected by our evil actions.

Perfection is indeed a poor category to describe God's essence because paradoxically it limits God's creative and relational nature; but the concept of perfection needs not be totally abandoned; it must be qualified to fit the essential nature of God. God for example, according to Hartshorne God is absolutely perfect in His infallibility, righteousness and holiness.<sup>25</sup> He does not argue against this notion of divine perfection. These are abstract aspect of God that never changes. Hartshorne drops the classical notion of perfection and replaces it with the idea of "surpassable." According to him, we, worshippers of God, cannot think of Him as less than our selves – we cannot worship our co-equal. God in order "to be worthy of worship, must excel any conceivable being other than itself: it must be unsurpassable by *another*, exalted beyond all possible rivals. Hence all may worship God as in principle forever superior to any other being."<sup>26</sup> The idea of unsurpassable is crucial. Classical philosophy understood the idea of unsurpassable not only that God cannot be surpassed by possible rivals but also by himself, thus God never changes. However, Hartshorne uses the term unsurpassable to refer only to possible rivals of God's perfection but not to God Himself. In this sense he maintains that God is unsurpassable by possible rivals but "surpassable" by Himself<sup>27</sup> e.g., in terms of divine knowledge - Divine knowledge increases as there are new things to be known, because "God is the immortal one; God is the one who can go on forever with new experiences."<sup>28</sup> In other words, God is worshipful because He is unsurpassed by no one, but always surpasses Himself in His knowledge. However, we may argue that this implies that God exists in temporality.

Hartshorne is not afraid to assert that God exists in temporality. Temporality does not limit God's essence as beyond time. Hartshorne's finds no contradiction in a God who exists before time, in time and beyond time. If we look at the Christian perspective, God is believed to be incarnated in time. We must never forget that the God who is before time chose to be born in a particular place and time in the person of Jesus.

## Omniscience and Human Knowledge

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, have some passages pointing to the universal knowledge of God that even man's deepest secrets do not escape from His divine notice (e.g. Psalm 139, Matt. 19:28, Heb. 4:13). Many theologians believe that God perfectly knows the thoughts of men and knows in advance the choice of the human will, because God is omniscient.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Charles Hartshorne. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Randal E. Auxier. "Interview with Hartshorne, December 1, 1993." *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process and Persons* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 94.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> "Some theologians thought that God, possessing as He does a perfect knowledge of the human will, can know with certitude which actions the various free individuals would elicit under any set of circumstances. This certitude, they claim, should result from God's exhaustive knowledge of the cause of these free operations, that is, from knowledge of the created will.

However, Saint Jerome, one of the Fathers of the Church and the father of biblical scholarship, “at one point says that it is absurd to suggest that God knows at every moment how many gnats are born or die, how many fleas are there in the world, and how many fishes in the sea.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps, he had forgotten that on one occasion Jesus assured his listeners that God knows even the number of our hair. The other Fathers of the Church like Origen and Augustine maintained that God knows all things - all things from the past, at present and even in the future. Augustine further elaborated on God’s knowledge of actual things “that God knows them, it is because he knows them that they are what they are.”<sup>31</sup> The great Saint Thomas followed the lead of Augustine and concluded that “God’s knowledge is the cause of things.”<sup>32</sup> It is very interesting to note that God’s knowledge is inseparable from His action or creation. Since God causes all things, therefore, it necessarily follows that He knows all things.

God knows before hand in Himself anything that will happen, because His knowledge and will is the cause of all things. And Saint Thomas wrote: “From this it is further apparent that God understand all things together.”<sup>33</sup> Since God knows Himself perfectly He also knows all things all at once. Thus, we say that everything that will happen is in the hands of God – by seeing His essence, God sees Himself and all things outside Himself. God is therefore omniscient because He knows all things all at once. In the same line of thought, Saint Thomas made a conclusive remark:

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This doctrine is erroneous. Now no one has ever defended the freedom of the will in a more comprehensive and absolute manner than Aquinas. For in the doctrine of St. Thomas until the free act is elicited, if one were to consider the cause of this act, that is, the will of man, no certain knowledge can be had as to what the act will be. Indeed, no matter how perfectly he may understand the nature of the cause of the free act, which causes the will of the creature, no one – not even God – is able to know with absolute certitude what the free operation will be. At best, he can guess with greater or less accuracy; he can conjecture with greater or less probability. He simply cannot be absolutely certain. For the freedom of the will means precisely that until the act has been elicited, the will is capable of not placing it or of eliciting another operation. Hence, concludes the Angelic Doctor, a future free act ‘considered as contingent is not yet determined to one, for a contingent cause [the free will] has a relation to opposites *sec habet ad opposita*], and in this sense a contingent thing is not subject to *any certain* knowledge. Hence *whoever* [even God] knows a contingent effect, in its cause only, has merely a conjectural knowledge of it.’ To say, then, that God knows the free futures in His knowledge of their cause, namely, in the created will, is to deny implicitly that the will is free.” Henri Renard. *The Philosophy of God* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1952), 132-133. See also *Summa Theologiae*. I, Q. 1. Art. 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. See Saint Augustine. *De Trinitate*. XV, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Kenny. *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Claretian Press, 1979), 34. See also *Summa Theologiae*. I, Q.1, Art. 14. “Some theologians thought that God, possessing as He does a perfect knowledge of the human will, can know with certitude which actions the various free individual would elicit under any set of circumstances. This certitude, they claim, should result from God’s exhaustible knowledge of the cause of these free operations, that is, from a knowledge of the created will. Henti Rebard. *The Philosophy of God* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1951), 132.

<sup>33</sup> *Summa Theologiae*. I, Q. 1, Art. 55, 1.

Now, all the things that are in the divine knowledge must fall under one intention. For God intends to see His essence perfectly, which is to see it according to its whole power, under which are contained all things. Therefore God, by seeing His essence, sees all things together.<sup>34</sup>

Diverting from the classical tradition concerning God's omniscience, process philosophy believes otherwise. Santiago Sia vividly expresses Hartshorne's idea concerning God's omniscience in the following manner:

Being omniscient, God knows everything there is to know; being infallible, his knowledge is as adequate as possible to the object known. He knows as actual whatever is actual and as potential whatever is potential and in an adequate fashion as possible. Infallibility and omniscience mean clear, certain, adequate knowledge whose content is all *as* it is. Hartshorne argues that this interpretation is consistent with the fact of change. It asserts that whatever happens in the world, God knows it in an omniscient and infallible manner.<sup>35</sup>

Hartshorne's notion of omniscience cannot be separated from his idea of change in God – that God undergoes changes within Himself. The distinctions made by the Scholastics and Saint Thomas on God's will and divine knowledge and even Descartes' affirmation that God's knowledge and will are the same is considered by Hartshorne as superficial or merely mental construct, because they are not grounded on reality.

The idea of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas that God's knowledge is the cause of things and elaborated by Descartes that God's knowledge is the same with his will and therefore, whatever there is and will be is because God knows and wills them in existence has a bad implication concerning God's omniscience and the problem of evil in the light of Hartshorne's neoclassical theodicy. If nothing can escape from God's knowledge, because His knowledge is the ultimate cause of all things, how and in what manner are we going to account for all the evils in the world? It seems that if we follow the classical notion of omniscience that what God knows He wills them too, for willing and knowing are one in Him, we will be attributing to God all evils in the world, because nothing escapes from God's knowledge and nothing exists unless He wills it to be. Again, if we maintain that God knows all things because He is the cause of all things, then evil also comes from God, because there is evil. Unless we deny that there is evil, then there is no problem about God's omniscience. But since there is evil, and God's knowledge is the cause of all things, so classical theodicy is problematic. Thus, Hartshorne is

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, I, Q. 1, Art. 55, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Santiago Sia. *God in Process Thought*, 68.

proposing a solution to the enigmatic problem of God's omniscience and evil in his own brand of theodicy – neoclassical theodicy. Hartshorne recognizes that there is evil, but He denies that God is the cause of evil. God is in no way the cause of evil, for His divine action is always in conformity with His absolute goodness. Evil is an “accident” according to the classical philosophy in relation to “substance”; and Hartshorne recognizes this also, but in the context of dynamic creativity and in the sense that it comes as a by-product of chance because of creative freedom. Evil is an accident because it is an unfortunate outcome that is not intended by any purposive agent: evil is a by-product of multiple causalities.

However, not all chances and accidents are evil; an outcome that is not intended is sometimes good – unintended but fortunate outcome are good outcome. For Hartshorne, both good and evil are by-products of the exercise of creaturely freedom.

### **Omniscience and Time**

The contention of classical philosophy that God knows all things once and for all presupposes a chronological dimension in the negative manner. God's knowledge is beyond time, because there is no time in God. Time ceases to apply in divine omniscience: time does not count because it is an accident. Since there is no accident in God, therefore there is no time in God. It is interesting to note that even the Greek mythology shares this assumption. Zeus, the greatest among the gods and goddesses, was able to escape from the grasp of his father, Chronos – Zeus is outside time. Secondly, things are only subject to time because of their corporeal constitution and since God is pure spirit, therefore, there is no time in God whatsoever. Thus, God's knowledge is not subject to time – divine omniscience is timeless. Process philosophy argues that God knows perfectly all things to be known and therefore He is omniscient, but it must be qualified that there are things that are yet to be known by God in time.

Contrary to the affirmation of classical philosophy, Hartshorne claims that God's knowledge is temporal. After God had created the world, divine knowledge necessarily implies temporality, because God has to deal with the world which He had created. Though God in relation to Himself is not subject to time, but His knowledge inevitably must recognize and understand the process of creation that is taking place and the movements of all things in time and space. God knows all things, but not once and for all. He knows the past and the present things and knows them perfectly, but things of the future are yet to be known by God. This statement directly negates the concept of “Eternal Now” that is understood as the simultaneous occurrence of the three chronological successions of time. If God sees all things once and for all in the “Eternal Now” then God's creation is at rest. Everything is already determined. This is not the teaching of the Church. Since the ancient times, God is believed to be the God of liberation. God provides freedom for His creation and is

thrilled to “wait and see” what will be the outcome of the exercise of this precious gift in the future.

This does not imply that God is ignorant of future realities, but simply points out the fact that the future realities are not yet determined and therefore they belong to pure possibilities and God knows them as such – as pure possibilities. Hartshorne’s argument is designed not to destroy the idea of divine omniscience, but simply to qualify and elucidate it in order to show its pristine clarity. According to Hartshorne, omniscience does not imply a predetermined future because of the very nature of the future as pure possibility. “The future is irreducibly potential rather than actual, and this means in some degree, however slight, indeterminate rather than determinate.”<sup>36</sup> God’s knowledge of the future is not fixed as He knows the past to be fixed and accordingly entails that God’s knowledge is not beyond time but subject to time.

God is omniscient because He knows all things by participating in the feelings of all things, but this applies only to the past and present division of time. Now, since the future is not yet fully determinate, it follows that God’s participation in the feelings of all things in the future is also not fully determinate and therefore God has no determinate knowledge of the future. When the future comes into present and eventually become an event in the past, God knows it fully and perfectly. Thus, for Hartshorne, God’s omniscience is temporal and limited only to the determinate nature of past and present. In contrast to the future, the past is already a frozen reality – fully determined: it cannot be altered nor changed – it is forever permanent and God knows it perfectly.

Hartshorne conceives time as linear both on the part of God and man in contradistinction to the notion of classical philosophy that since God is beyond time and space, it follows that God can see all things all at once. Consequently, the classical notion about God’s omniscience implies not only foreknowledge, but also considers in effect the three dimensions of time (past, present and future) as simultaneous in God – God is omniscient because He is able to see all things in the past, at present and in the future in a single gaze. If this is true then, perhaps Peter Damian is correct by the implication of his philosophy that God can cancel the past. But this is impossible, for no one can undo the past not even God.

### **The God that Learns Constantly**

Again, Hartshorne’s notion of divine knowledge conflicts with the traditional notion of God’s omniscience, which is usually understood as perfect in the sense that God knows everything once and for all - divine knowledge does not increase. But, Hartshorne dares to say that this is not so. Experience rectifies this false assumption, because the world is not the same yesterday or a

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Hartshorne. *Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Willet, Clark & Co., 1948), 30.

moment ago; something had changed and it is not the same forever; and the world will continue to change for better or for worst. God experiences us as we experience his creation. Experience is not the exclusive privilege of man. We may have different experience depending on our perception of the realities around us, but the truth about every experience is the same, that every experience is always a learning process. We may not have access to the peculiar experience of God, because every experience is unique and unrepeatable – and more so because He is God. There is an abysmal gap between His divine and omniscient experience and our mortal and finite experience, yet nonetheless God learns from His own Divine experience as we learn from ours.

Hartshorne qualifies that God's perfect knowledge of all things refers only to the past and present events, but not to the future – He categorically denies God's perfect knowledge of the future in same manner and in the same respect with the past. According to him, God knows certain things as certain; the past as past and present as present. The past and the present are determinate – thus God knows them exactly and perfectly as they are determinate. In the same manner, God knows the future as future, but not in the determinate way, because the future is not yet determined. "There is nothing fully concrete that will happen tomorrow; there are just various possibilities, things may happen."<sup>37</sup> The future is about to happen – the future is essentially indeterminate. "Charles Pierce was the first one to say that clearly. The future is irreducibly a matter of potential. What may happen is what defines tomorrow."<sup>38</sup> Thus, God knows the future indeterminately because it is indeterminate. Now, if God knows the future determinately as He knows the past, then God's knowledge about the future is false because the future is indeterminate. To know the indeterminate as determinate is false knowledge, according to Hartshorne. And if God already determined the future, his knowledge about the future as determinate is correct. But this assumption gives no room to freedom and logically leads to predestination and determinism – a view that even the classical philosophy abhors.

The future is an open possibility and God knows all possibilities. However, He cannot determine for us which among those possibilities we are going to choose. God is still waiting for the future – He is also thrilled by the future (Karl Popper). I am hungry now and it's already 11:58; a couple of minutes from now the bell will alarm to signal the time for lunch. I may or may not take my lunch in the rectory. God knows these possibilities and other possibilities that do not come to my mind at this moment. But what course I am going to take remains to be done, yet. If I choose to go down to eat for lunch I'll be late for five minutes, for the bell had just rung and I have to change my clothes. And, what clothes I am going to wear at this very moment

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Randal E. Auxier. "Interview with Hartshorne, December 1, 1993," 96. "Karl Popper said that the whole of cosmic history wouldn't be very interesting to God if he knew all that would ever happen. And the Socinians, a little sect that was exterminated (except a branch of it survived in Transsylvania) said God is not immutable, and does not know future events, because events that haven't happened – there *are* no such events." *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

remains a possibility for the next few seconds, although a very limited possibility for I have only two choices (the rest of my clothes are in my laundry bag). Again, nothing is definite about the future and God knows the future as it is - God is also thrilled by what the future would bring.

### The Omni-beneficent

Process philosophy's contention concerning God's goodness is basically similar with the perspective of the classical philosophy – God is supremely and absolutely good. Saint Thomas considered goodness to belong to God in a preeminent degree and as the absolute essence of God.<sup>39</sup> Process philosophy contends that God is maximally, absolutely and perfectly good always. However, it must be noted that process philosophy considers that God's perfect goodness does not imply the actualization of all possible good. Hartshorne wrote that:

No truth is more absolute than this: you cannot have all possible good things. This truth applies even to God (who has all actual good things), though for 2000 years many theologians refused to admit this restriction, or failed to realize its implications.<sup>40</sup>

All possible goodness is not possible because this will contradict the element of time. For example, if Roy is confronted with the option to become a priest or get married; two good possibilities are open for him to decide. It is good to be married and it is also good to answer a call to become a priest. But he must choose only one. The moment he decides to get married, Roy closed the possibility of becoming a priest. The good possibilities in Roy's life are always open, but not all these possibilities can be realized and actualized. Roy may choose, among others: Grace, Sharon, Sarah, Karen, Yryne, Gwendolyn, Rhederia, and so on and so forth as his possible bride. But again, he may only choose one of them as his wife. We can infer from this example what Hartshorne means by his contention that “you cannot have all possible good things” and this applies also to God.

Hartshorne does not deny that God is supremely good, but he is simply stating a neoclassical truth that not all possible good things are realized by God. This contention is even presupposed in Leibniz's philosophy. God created the best possible world. This implies that there are other possible worlds that God can create. But He chose this world, because this is the best possible world. For God always choose the best among the many possibilities, according to Hartshorne. Thus, we may conclude that pure possibilities of the

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae*. I, Q. VI, Art. 1, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Hartshorne. *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made It Possible* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 368.



future are always resolved by the present choice and God is not exempted from this. He remains the supreme and absolute good – God is omnibeneficent, but not all possible goods are realized by God.

### Conclusion

We see the changing image of God according to process philosophy of Charles Hartshorne. The author does not claim that the process perspective is the ultimate philosophical vantage-point by which we ought to understand God in His fullness. However, we have demonstrated that the traditional and philosophical concepts that we ascribed to God based on the perspective of Classical philosophy are “inadequate” in many ways if we look at God from the philosophical foundation of becoming. We therefore, conclude that our knowledge of God no matter how philosophically sound and theologically correct is nonetheless incomplete picture of the mysterious image of God, for every perspective is just a single perspective that is limited by time and space.

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