Spiritual Capital – Observations in Process

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Abstract

This article outlines some observations and recommendations derived from a study of the experiences of people who understand themselves to work for the 'common good'. Drawing on theological analysis of a series of surveys and interviews, this article sets out some key observations which are framed as having potential for practical application. The work draws on an underpinning of process-relational theology, which is, broadly, an extension of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Recommendations for action are intended to provide suggested ways for the church, and wider elements of civil society, to grapple with some of the apparent challenges presented by the context of a post secular society.

Keywords

Process – relational – Christianity – becoming – perishing – spiritual capital – common good – lure – struggle – suffering – compassion – solidarity – Bourdieu – Whitehead

> "Our situation calls for a different way of conducting ourselves as theologians... We need to work in a collegial fashion, realizing that we contribute only a tiny fragment. Feminists have often suggested a "quilt" metaphor as an appropriate methodology: each of us can contribute only a small "square" to the whole. Such a view of scholarship may appear alien to an academy that rewards works "totalizing" others in the field and insisting on one view."[1]

The following article is a summary revision of a chapter of my PhD thesis, "Experience(s) of Spiritual Capital: Towards a process perspective on embodiment and enculturation." In the project I carried out original research into what I came to describe as the embodied spiritual capital of a range of spiritual and social activists. Research participants ranged from workers with projects that

[1] Sally McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," *The Christian Century*, 2-9 January 1991, p12.

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helped those without adequate housing, to founders of projects supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The research was carried out in two stages, an initial survey stage followed by series of interviews with participants purposively selected from the survey responders. I was primarily interested in the notion of 'spiritual capital' deriving from Bourdieu's theory of practise in which he notes that for every field of struggle there is an associated capital[2]. For spiritual struggle, then, there is a spiritual capital. My background is in 'practise' – I'm a practitioner who has come to reflect on the work practitioners like me are engaged in theologically. As such, I'm interested in spiritual struggle, in particular the struggle to love our neighbours, and to extend our efforts into compassionate action in solidarity with those who are suffering.

Data from the research was analysed through the lens of process theology, a philosophical theological tradition within (broadly speaking) liberal theology which effectively begins with the philosophical insights of Alfred North Whitehead who proposed, summarily, that what we might customarily consider to be 'being' is, in fact, 'becoming'. (I do violence, here, to Whitehead, whose complex and voluminous work expands his system of ideas in a depth to which I have neither the space nor the wherewithal to do justice here.) While Whitehead had things to say about religion, he was not a metaphysician as such, the theology that develops from his work stems largely from the work of Charles Hartshorne and his contemporaries, this theological tradition has cascaded down to contemporary thinkers perhaps more familiar to readers of this journal – Catherine Keller, Monica Coleman and Thomas Jay Oord among them.

Process theology is a diverse tradition, there is not one 'theology', rather there are 'theologies' – among the things that unite them though is a commitment to both relational and open theology[3], and my reflections on the research data were necessarily couched in these terms. In this article I set out as a series of 'observations' – I then use these observations to offer a series of recommendations, first practical then theological. It is not my intention to make any assertions, one of Whitehead's principal concerns, and something to which he refers in both 'Adventures of Ideas'[4] and on numerous occasions too in his best known work 'Process and Reality' has to do with what he terms the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" which we might understand to be any point where we

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 226
[3] Relatio1nal theologians understand the divine as being in a 'giving and taking' relationship with the world. This means that God is affected by (for instance) the suffering of the world. Open theologians, meanwhile, consider that the future is not 'closed', as such they reject a determinative teleology and consider that God experiences each moment with 'us'. Process theology is both open and relational, but there are also various expressions of both open and relational thinking to be found in different theological streams.
[4] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Toronto, Free Press, 1967), 66

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"mistake the abstract for the concrete." We may recognise this fallacy in any of those moments when an idea is simplified so thoroughly that its inherent complexity and nuance is diminished: I have no wish to enter into such territory myself.

In 'For The Common Good' Cobb and Daly consider the way in which wealth is measured. In doing so they observe: "The very existence of a measure *invites* the fallacy of misplaced concreteness"[5]. Measurement, they suggest, steers us towards the idea that there is 'substance' to be found. Such an idea is anathema to the process thinker, so instead they seek to draw us away from substance and back to a mindset of process. The problem with any idea of capital, be it economic, social or cultural is that it does, or can do, precisely the same thing: it presents an objective idea into the midst of our deeply complex subjectivity.

In my research I sought to develop fruitful theoretical links between the realist philosophy of Whitehead and the quasi-materialism of Bourdieu in developing an understanding of what spiritual capital is, by way of process thinking. The danger in such an endeavour is that one can, effectively, oversimplify the inherently complex by seeking overly definitive answers. McFague's reference to the quilt methodology, in the article's epigraph, is helpful in reminding us of what Whitehead might have described as the kind of 'prismatic' thinking required if we are to approach anything resembling a truth claim. There are many squares to be stitched together before the quilt begins to take its true, or full, form. Perhaps the number is infinite. Whitehead's view was that the "ultimate metaphysical truth is atomism"[6]: when we speak of truth, we are really speaking of a nexus or society which in itself may be further analysable into various intermingled 'strands' of truth. We perceive these in the light of our experience, and as such the past events which have gone to form our experience are increasingly revealed in their *Vielseitigkeit*, their multi-faceted formation.

What I will attempt to do in this article, therefore, is make a series of observations that help to describe the experience(s) of spiritual capital that were identified in the research project. Those observations will be followed by some recommendations both for those seeking to make practical use of this research and for those seeking to reflect on it theologically.

[5] John B Cobb Jr & Herman Daly, *For the Common Good* (London: Green Print, 1990), 84
[6] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 35

Observation one: Spiritual capital is developed as an embodied process as we follow the 'lure' of God to love others.

> "I suddenly realised I'd gone two months without having an argument with my dad… I find [sic] that I've got a compassion for other folk…. My sister tells me I was always bringing people home…" (Interviewee)

The primordial nature of God is love which, Norman Pittenger reminds us, is 'indefatigable'[7] and as we pursue the divine lure[8] however weakly, we, along with God, are forever experiencing and being changed by experience. For Whitehead the lure is seductive and persistent, it proposes and solicits our engagement. It does not force or command, Oord [9] bluntly asserts: "God can't." Hartshorne makes the argument with greater subtlety:

> "Anything that could be actual God could divinely have, but what God actually has depends partly on creaturely decisions. This is the social structure of existence."[10]

Hartshorne and Oord present something like a process orthodoxy: what the divine can do is restricted according to the extent to which living entities respond to the lure. This lure calls us into forms of becoming which arise from the prehension of that which has been and leads us to adventure into the novel. It transcends boundaries of religion and philosophy, and is offered freely to all.

> "It's an empathy for other people and the situation that they're in and knowing what's right and what's wrong, and not from a religious point of view, but just from a moral point of view, it's about the human condition…" (Interviewee)

These experiences make up who we are becoming, they are embodied. As the experience alters, so too does the lure, which always draws toward the primordial nature of God, but is shaped by the consequent. Our spiritual capital, therefore, is developed by our response to the lure and it helps to energise change and movement. It plays a part, along with, and entirely inseparable from, the ongoing process of experience, in enabling a shift of mindset that leads to the development of a practice of solidarity and reconnection – a move to behaviour that seeks to demonstrate the re-integrative love and compassion that the lure of the divine consistently calls us towards.

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[7] Norman Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered* (Bristol: SCM Press, 1970), 21
[8] 'Lure' is a Whiteheadian term which corresponds somewhat to the idea of 'God's leading.'
[9] Thomas Jay Oord, *God Can't* (N.L. Amazon P.O.D., Sacrasage, 2019)
[10] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 45

Observation two: Following this lure leaves us vulnerable to the pain of perishing (suffering), as we endure this we engage in the field of spiritual struggle.

> "I am paid part-time, but the nature of the work is more about investing with our whole lives in a marginalised area. So the costs include time, career progression, isolation, emotional toll." (Survey response)

Liturgia, from which we derive 'liturgy', may be translated as 'the work of the people'. The Hebrew prophetic tradition offers a helpful perspective on worship, also involving work.

> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
> Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'
> He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
> and what does the LORD require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?[11]

Engaging with, or following, the lure into a place of authentic, compassionate, solidarity requires some form of sacrifice and this leaves one vulnerable to the experience of suffering (the pain of perishing). To paraphrase Whitehead[12] 'it is as we perish that we are immortal'. Perishing then is not to be feared, but to be accepted as part of the process that will lead us into the consequent actual occasion[13]. Perishing is a natural part of the process of internal struggle. The development of spiritual capital is inextricable from the multitudinous momentary experiences of life, in fact it is the prehension of these momentary experiences, which inevitably involve some form of perishing, and therefore suffering, that provide us with the resources which then help us as we struggle in the spiritual field – a struggle which in itself is also a form of suffering. In other words, if we seek to avoid this struggle, then we do not build the capital required to endure it.

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[11] Micah 6: 7-8

[12] Alfred North Whitehead, *Symposium in honor of the seventieth birthday of Alfred North Whitehead (*Cambridge, Massachsetts: Harvard University Press, 1932), 27

[13] An 'actual occasion' or 'actual entity' is the only fundamental 'reality' that exists. In process, specifically Whiteheadian process, thought this is characterised by 'events', also termed 'occasions of experience' which are constantly in the process of perishing and becoming. For Whitehead God is an 'actual entity' although not momentary in quite the same way. God though is constantly experiencing change so in that sense exemplifies the reality of such occasions.

Observation three: In order to maintain the struggle, we must draw upon our spiritual capital.

> "I've seen Muslims in October, when it's wet and cold, on a pallet, wash themselves in a standpipe and pray in the rain in the open air; and I've seen people build shrines in the woods. And I'm like going, right, so that's proper faith, their faith's not being swayed by their circumstances. They have gotten nothing but that faith, you might argue, and I found that really humbling." (Interviewee)

To be humbled is, literally, to be brought 'down to earth' – sometimes with a bump. It is a form of suffering itself, as human pride begins to perish. Here an interviewee reflects on the way that this experience of the faith of 'others' caused the perishing of pride, and became a motivational factor in their life. This highlights the fact that the field of spiritual struggle is an internal one. Although from the perspective of a three-tiered universe the heavens have traditionally symbolised the cosmic battleground in which the forces of good wage war on the forces of evil, as philosophers like Arendt and the teachings of the Vedic and Christian mystical traditions so adeptly demonstrate, this spiritual battleground is truly internal, the struggle is embodied.

It is internally that we must fight against the urges toward vices such as selfishness, cowardice and malice. It is in this internal field of spiritual struggle that we need these unbounded resources of joy, peace, kindness, and long suffering. Here too we must make decisions, again these occur moment by moment. They are instances of perishing and becoming. Decision making involves prehension and subsequent becoming – to 'de-cide (cut off) is to see the perishing of other options and eventualities. A person is informed by their experiences in that moment, and to a greater or lesser extent they are also informed by awareness of divine imminence/involvement. When that decision is taken, the person must then employ whatever stock of spiritual capital they have available to them in order to make a movement in their field which results in practise. If they have sufficient spiritual capital, then they may make a move toward what we might begin to consider 'orthopraxis'.

Observation four: Loving others requires us to undergo forms of suffering on their behalf, or in solidarity with them, this may be understood as compassion.

In various places, including 'Pluriform Love', Oord defines love as follows: "To love is to act intentionally, in relational response to God and others, to promote overall well-being"[14]. My observation is that this intentional activity seems, necessarily, to lead one to suffer in solidarity with, or on the behalf of, others. This is a spiritual struggle, it is hard to give up privilege, to go without in order that another may benefit. Struggle in the spiritual field requires a spiritual capital to sustain it. We might say, then, that spiritual capital enables one to undergo suffering on the behalf of another. Engaging in this form of co-work with the divine means that we experience transformation. We may note, too, the way that routes into this co-work often involve another instance, or instances, of suffering.

> "My mum kicked me out when I was 14/15 and luckily a friend's family took me in long-term after I had bounced around different friends. This experience is probably the first thing that influenced my decision to work in this field. But also everywhere I look I see low income, poor living conditions, people without homes. There's a crisis and it needs to be tackled." (Survey response)

This form of capital is unlike that of conventional, competitive capitalism, which may take one in another direction altogether. A way to make this conceptual turn, and learn to delight in the happiness and health of others when it comes at a cost to us, is to reject the goals of social competition in favour of cooperation. Kenneth Leech sought to make this move by means of a faith fuelled leftism, invoking the "old socialist slogan, 'An injury to one is an injury to all'"[15]. This invocation calls for a new (or perhaps renewed) sense of human solidarity and interconnection, one which reprioritises the needs of those who are most marginalised and disadvantaged. Something approaching this left-wing political ideology of solidarity (with or without a faith element) was also apparent in a number of the project's survey participants.

This observation may lead us to consider that when we speak of spiritual capital, we speak of that which develops in us, taking the form of qualities which we have sought to name as 'compassion' and 'love' amongst other things. It can be seen in the willingness and ability of the individual to 'offer their bodies as living sacrifices,' which is to say to suffer in solidarity with, or on behalf of, others. Indeed, there is an apparent paradox to be found in that this process of purposeful

[14] Thomas Jay Oord, *Pluriform Love*, (N.L. Amazon P.O.D., Sacrasage, 2022)
[15] Kenneth Leech, The Sky is Red (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), 248

suffering that (in the right circumstances at least) leads to the replication of spiritual capital. Love poured out leads to more, not less, love; compassion expressed leads to the development of compassion; seed sown lead to the production of more seed.

Observation five: The process of suffering for, or in solidarity with, others is an act of communion with the divine.

Bonhoeffer famously contended that suffering is part of Christian discipleship: *passio passiva* [16] – suffering because we have to suffer. Although it is not possible to develop on it properly in this article, suffering was a key thread throughout the project. Unprompted, one interviewee insightfully remarked:

> "Church can be so middle class. It has lost touch with a lot of the suffering of local people." (Interviewee)

Choosing to leave aside complex issues of intersectionality, it is this issue of the extent to which the Church is able to identify with the suffering of what the interviewee calls 'local' people which is helpful to reflect on briefly here. Where the Church has 'lost touch with suffering', because of its preference for comfort over its opposite, it has diminished in a number of ways, principally morally and spiritually. God, meanwhile, has not lost touch with suffering, for God experiences everything that we experience, thus God remains actively engaged with the life, and crucially the suffering, of the whole world even when the Church does not. We may add that this observation also casts a light on the numerical decline in the contemporary Church in western Europe and north America. Removed from suffering by its accrued comfort and wealth, the church is apparently perishing. "The modern world has lost God and is seeking him," opined Whitehead in 'Religion in the Making'[17]. 'The contemporary Church has lost touch with suffering and is dying,' we might reflexively respond. Summarily: God, the field of spiritual struggle, and suffering are inextricably intertwined.

Suffering in solidarity with others should therefore be recognised as an act of communion with the divine – that this is so clearly physically represented in the ritual that Protestants so often call 'Communion' should, I contend, be considered significant: 'shed blood' and a 'broken body' are a constant symbol of how it is we commune with the divine and how we are to live. This, we remind ourselves as we share in the ritual, is Christian orthopraxis.

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[16] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 2015), 45
[17] Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: Meridian, 1960), 72

This suggests, then, that while the sociologist may perceive ‘capital’ as a secular concept, devoid of a sense of ‘ultimate’ meaning, it may be re-understood by the theologian as full of ultimate meaningfulness. It further suggests that what the classical theist understands as an act, or series of acts, of God’s power being worked according to divine will without necessary referent to another’s agency is further re-understood as an entirely relational process. The divine is deeply engaged, along with us, in the process of both the aggregation and the deployment of this capital. This idea of co-creativity also shifts the idea of what capital is, moving it away from the scarce resource that the wealthy can exploit others to store up, to something which can be enjoyed by all, perhaps even particularly, or peculiarly, by those who are otherwise excluded or marginalised, which is perhaps to say those for whom suffering is not a stranger.

Observation six: We may enculturate this form of capital by the modelling of purposeful, conscious, and transformative, engagement with suffering.

> “When I was a young lad growing up, we got the support we got as a family, you know, as individuals, as young people, I never forgot it, I never forgot it… It’s really, ultimately, I think, shaped my life.” (Interviewee)

The powerful recollections of this interviewee demonstrate the way that he ‘experienced’ the spiritual capital of others at a formative stage, and the causative impact that it had on him in terms of enculturation. Note for instance the way that he unconsciously moves from the words ‘as individuals’ to ‘as young people’. In so doing, here he actively recalls or ‘re-members’ the reality of community as becoming in the young mind. Although it is yet to be perceived at this early stage in his life, it would go on to shape a life heavily given to care for, service of, and solidarity with, others. From a process perspective this is the work of the ‘lure’ of God – the constant draw to ‘re-integrate’, to ‘re-pair’ or ‘re-connect’ – all creative acts again. This is the drive to move from isolation to integration.

Similarly in the narrative of another interviewee we can see enculturation taking place by means of gift.

> “I can remember times when people would leave shopping on the doorstep, you know, that we didn't know who it was. And we always said, you know you can’t… you can’t pay this back. What you need to do is pay it forward.” (Interviewee)

We can observe how, for this participant, this capital moved them from a place of private, interpersonal, obligations, to a sense of universality: a need or a compulsion to 'pay it forward' to others who, like them, have suffered difficulties or hardship. This is a religious movement, both in the way that Cantwell Smith[18] conceives religion, which is to say effectively as the outward manifestation of inward belief, and the way in which Whitehead speaks of it in Science and the Modern World where he describes it as "the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest."[19] The 'ultimate ideal' is a fair summation of the challenging task facing the interviewee who conceives of it in terms more prosaic, effectively: 'we have an obligation to attempt to pay this forward, because there is no way in which we can ever pay it back.'

Suitably, for a process-based theory, enculturation is a term which implies growth and change rather than stasis. In the strict sense it is usually taken to mean the process of socialisation, but it contains within it the key concept of 'culture' which may too be understood as an organism. Enculturation is a process, indeed it is *the* process by which we together develop dispositions and understandings, themselves subject to change of course. Addressing ideas of spiritual capital through the lens of ongoing enculturation means that it too can be perceived as a living, changing organism, a process which is constantly subject to growth and therefore also to perishing. A surprising advantage of this kind of capital is that it remains impossible to measure – no metric adequately assesses amounts of compassion.

Instead of relying on inadequate economic language, perhaps, we might (re)conceive (of) spiritual capital as a symbiotic organism which lives and grows in, through and with us. Spiritual capital in this sense is something much closer to a living being than an inanimate substance, indeed it becomes an element of what it is that 'animates' a person. This reversal is directly analogous to the way that Whitehead inverted the Cartesian 'substance' way of understanding the role of thought and thinker:

> "Descartes in his own philosophy conceived the thinker as creating the occasional thought. The philosophy of organism inverts the order, and conceives the thought as a constituent operation in the creation of the occasional thinker. The thinker is the final end whereby there is the thought. In this version we have the final contrast between a philosophy of substance and a philosophy of organism."[20]

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[18] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978)
[19] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (London: Pelican, 1938), 222
[20] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 151

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Observation seven: Spiritual capital is evidenced in the ongoing process of developing qualities such as compassionate love, sometimes termed 'the fruits of the Spirit'.

Paul, writing to the Galatians, describes the 'fruits of the spirit'. Famously these include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so on. We may note that some of these 'fruits' also form what Paul would later describe as "*hē basileia tou Theou*"[21] – a concept which has traditionally been translated as 'the kingdom of God' but which, acknowledging the problematic classical theism heritage of the term, I prefer to describe as 'God's upside-down kingdom' (good alternatives: Rieger and Kwok[22] use 'anti kingdom'; Graham Adams[23] prefers the term 'Holy Anarchy'). These terms more readily align with the, sometimes subversive, nature of process theism which can reject classical theism from two directions, as set out by Hartshorne:

> "Classical theology was a compromise between a not-very-well-understood Greek philosophy and a not-very-scholarly interpretation of sacred writings." [24]

These concepts (spiritual fruits and anti/upside down kingdom) share an emphasis on recognising the imminence of the divine presence, the 'being-here' of God, specifically opposing the sense of God's ultimate transcendence that belongs to a classical approach. This imminence, which subverts the power structure inherent in the top-down order inspired by the concept of an entirely transcendent deity, is what this process informed sense of spiritual capital draws upon. It supports the idea that spiritual fruits evidence the sense in which God may be said to be active in the world. This way of thinking posits that the divine is constantly seeking to be, and is, in co-operation with the rest of reality – God's action is in, through and crucially 'with' us, rather than separate and unilateral.

The conceptual link with the 'fruits of the spirit', although imperfect, is helpful for a number of reasons. Firstly it is intrinsically related to the way in which we interact with the divine who, as Fuller[25] reminds us, stands in 'solidarity' with us. Just as we may experience God when we are loved and accepted, so we also experience the same when we experience the pain of perishing (suffering). We may experience these things either in ourselves, in others, or both. It is helpful too to understand that fruits both become and perish, this reminds us that they must be put to use if they

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[21] Romans 14: 17
[22] Joerg Rieger & Pui-lan Kwok, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012)
[23] Graham Adams, *Holy Anarchy* (London: SCM Press, 2022)
[24] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 43
[25] Tripp Fuller, *Divine Self Investment* (N.L. Amazon P.O.D.: SacraSage, 2020), 154

are not to be wasted. We can extend the metaphor to recognise that their purpose is to spread seed – in other words to multiply by perishing. In either case the nature of experience is that it is not static, it is a constant ongoing process of prehended experience leading to perishing and becoming. There is no option of stasis, Whitehead again reminds us of this: "Advance or decadence are the only options…"[26] and this too should be a helpful reminder to the Church as a whole, there is no point in trying to hold on to the past, we must embrace the process of perishing and becoming.

A fruit is a process, rather than a substance. It is in constant development, just as facets of it become other facets perish, leading to the fruit, as a nexus of these individual occasions, to visibly become and then, just as visibly, perish too. This ongoing process of the development of 'fruit' is the evidential outworking of the divine in our lives.

Practical recommendations for churches

Recommendation one: Accept that perishing is a necessary precondition for becoming.

The first recommendation comes with the reiteration of the concept which is absolutely fundamental to process theology, clearly emerges in the data, and is also a cornerstone of Christian thinking: perishing leads to becoming: "…unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"[27]. This applies at all levels, including the institutional. There is perhaps an irony in the fact that such a fundamentally physical image has so frequently been given an almost exclusively spiritual interpretation in the Church – physical perishing, whether it is of an individual, a congregation or a tradition is looked upon with fear and a concern of finality. But all perishing, no matter for little we may desire it, is necessary. Perishing is the harbinger of becoming. The concern of so many about the vulnerability of the Church in a post secular society is that it will perish, which is to say die out altogether. Perhaps more urgent is the concern that it will keep going but no longer fulfil its purpose.

Process thinking allows for advancement or change in all things at all times. When we observe that a system or institution is perishing the answer is not to simply try and 'stop the bleeding'. Rather we must look to the becoming that will follow the perishing. If these structures are now perishing then what is coming next? How might we adventure onwards? In doing so we may look to new things, even in the knowledge that these too are provisional and must eventually perish too in order to facilitate further creative 'advance into novelty'. In as much as any ideas or initiatives are new, all novelty carries with, and within, itself the antecedent ideas that have helped to form it,

[26] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Toronto: Free Press, 1967), 274
[27] John 12:24

constantly made new by the experience of the present. To paraphrase Heraclitus, one cannot have the same idea twice: in the first place it is not truly the same idea, and in any case we are not the same people 'now' as we were 'then'.

Perishing is a necessary precondition for becoming, let's reassert this. Rather than focussing first on the fear, or prevention, of perishing, we might suggest that it would be more fruitful to actively look, instead, to adventure into the novel becoming that follows any sense of perishing, the strength that is only found in weakness and vulnerability. One might seek to develop the argument that just as when vulnerability is protected against spiritual capital cannot be successfully enculturated, so when perishing is artificially prevented becoming too is stifled. Ironically an institution concerned with its own survival can stop doing the very things which keep it alive, the fight against perishing risks stifling the development of the new because it actively seeks to get in the way of becoming. The stories told by research participants make this process clear, but the same story can be found readily in literature and stories from a host of sources: “My spiritual life began the day my daughter died,” writes Mirabai Star who found that even after years of spiritual practise, her life was utterly transformed at the moment that she felt the immense pain of parental loss[28].

Let us not to be desperate to protect ourselves against vulnerability (and consequent suffering) and instead learn to accept that all things die away in their time, while trusting that this perishing of the old will indeed lead to the becoming of the new.

Recommendation two: Dedicate resource to ensuring positive formative experiences for young people.

If the moral case for working to ensure that young people are supported, encouraged, and have compassionate love modelled for them is not sufficient to motivate us, then the voices of my research participants provide a practical one: it is this kind of intervention which encourages future work for the common good.

> “they've very much brought us up to, to think that serving others is what we should be doing… that money is not important, but how we treat other people and how we make life fair.” (Interviewee)

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[28] Mirabai Star, *Caravan of No Despair, a memoir of loss and transformation* (Boulder: Colorado: Sounds True, 2015)

Parents, teachers, church groups, youth groups, uniformed organisations – all of these were credited by research participants with having a positive impact. There is no common structure, just consistent reports of the positive impact of supportive and encouraging adults on the lives of children and young people.

Accordingly making these deposits in childhood should continue to be a practical priority for any institution, church, family, or other group seeking to encourage orthopraxis in adults. This is, historically, an area in which the Church could be said to have been strong – as witnessed by the development of initiatives such as the Sunday School movement, and organisations such as the Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade and so on. As culture has shifted though, some of these sorts of structures have dwindled in numerical terms as they have been found to no longer be such a 'good fit' for the needs of contemporary society, so some of this work has dropped away (perished). Rather than attempting to fight or prevent this perishing, those who are in a position to do so should now seek to develop routes by which the new may purposefully become.

Crucially, then, we should note in particular that young people can benefit from the experience of positive adult engagement at times of formation and difficulty, and so where possible churches and other interested bodies and institutions should urgently seek to develop work which maximises this – it might involve the creation of safe and encouraging spaces for young people, it may involve the development of activities that serve as templates on which the young people can model future behaviour, it is the positive support and encouragement of their becoming which seems to be of paramount import.

Recommendation three: Churches should seek to develop means by which young people feel active and engaged as part of the whole church community, rather than as separate from it.

This idea follows God's way of co-creation and comes across particularly clearly in the remarks of one participant who argued from experience that churches should not seek to exclude the participation or agency of young people in their corporate life. A famous model of this is to be found in Lukan account of Jesus' ministry when the disciples attempt to manage the chaos and disruption caused by children, and find themselves rebuked by Jesus.

> "People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom

of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”"[29]

An emphasis on creating a separate ‘other’ space where children can be noisy and disrupt nobody may emphasise the sense that they are not truly welcome in ‘normal’ services. The participant’s experience indicates that churches should carefully consider, and where possible aim to ensure there are, ways to engage young people in, and give them ownership of, the ‘mainstream’ of the life of the church, rather than to effectively exclude or side-line them – here we might think of the becoming of community as being particularly important.

Perhaps churches might take the lead from the Hebrew creation myth in which God engages with the chaos and turbulence of ‘the deep’ and allow the chaos and turbulence of ‘the kids’ and, to repurpose Hartshorne a little, the “disorder inherent in [their] freedom”[30] to take shape in their midst. Both, after all, are the point from which the future is already actively becoming. There is a direct link to the first recommendation here too, for it can serve to ensure the ongoing evolution (becoming) of new forms of life together, rather than preserve (prevent the perishing of) more traditional models which instead favour the preservation of one generation’s experiences, ideas and traditions and effectively refuses room to those of a different cultural outlook (prevents perishing, and thus stifles becoming). By ensuring that all ages are engaged, and included, in primary worship settings churches may actually be better able to secure the ‘hand on’ of the ecclesial body from one generation to the next.

Recommendation four: Actively promote initiatives and ideas which aim to engage with suffering.

Just as a theme of the importance of underpinning ‘positive’ childhood experiences arose in the survey and interview stage data, so did the activating factor of ‘negative’ adult experiences. The data indicated that seeds that were planted in childhood germinated in adulthood in response to these issues: once they found themselves in the field of spiritual struggle, they found they had the capital to aid them in beginning their struggle. We might consider that they heard or felt the lure of God in this heightened state. In some cases this was in relation to something external to them, e.g., being confronted by the poverty or homelessness of others; or something internal, such as personal

[29] Luke 18: 15-17

[30] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 45

illness, or other difficulties. We may say that this is the response to the co-suffering of God, but we are left to ask how the Church should respond to this in a positive way.

Perhaps churches which can provide people with routes to stand in solidarity with their local communities (addressing that need to be connected with the suffering of local people) may find that they are more readily able to engage with those who find themselves motivated to respond to perceived need. In keeping with process philosophy this should not become too readily petrified, rather there should be a sense of dynamism: creating space for new needs to be addressed as they arise, and for people to feel empowered to work alongside others for the greater good. Crucially, churches should seek to avoid this becoming 'separate' to their identity as a religious community. Rather this work should be at the core of their identity as gathered people, such that they can honestly say: 'loving, serving, and being solidarity with others is an integral part of who we are as people.' This kind of support and commitment can be influential for young people to experience (and have agency in) too, sowing the seeds for future iterations of service and innovation.

This is not the preserve of churches alone, it can be applied to any group of people – it is an atomic truth, from the smallest unit (family) to the largest (society). Nor does it need to be couched in the terms of, or articulated as part of, a spiritual or religious tradition – whether Christianity of any other.

Recommendation five: There should be a move towards working in partnership with all those who seek the common good.

A straightforward critique of these four practical recommendations is that they rely upon an individual church having 'strength in numbers' – and therefore having the ability to enact these strategies by dint of power. We may refute this, though, by responding that this is a classical theism model of thinking. It stems from the idea that, like the God of classical imagination, we should be able to do things unilaterally, without recourse to cooperation with others. It suggests that we too should be 'strong' and 'powerful', an idea which is contradicted by the sense in process theology that God is in fact weak and achieves change by means of persuasion and cooperation rather than mighty power. Elijah found that God was not in the great wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the whisper.[31] It is for the Church to reconfigure its thinking, and to reflect instead the sense of consistent persuasion that God models. The Church should forever be pulling toward the good, as God does, just as it continually experiences itself and is changed by that experience. The powerful Church of Christendom which could effectively enact its will by diktat is not the Church of the poor

[31] 1 Kings 19: 11-13

and downtrodden, rather it is the Church of the powerful – the Church of the oppressor and not of the oppressed. This is precisely the point Whitehead makes in 'Religion in the Making' when he comments on the phrasing of Psalm 24, saying:

> "This worship of glory arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God. I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the bones of those slaughtered because of men intoxicated by its attraction."[32]

In this era of a smaller, perhaps more humble, British Church, we have the opportunity to move away from this mindset, so well formed around the incontrovertible power of an almighty, classical, omni-deity, to a process orientated way of thinking that leads us to recognise and value the power of weakness.

If we are to ask how best the Church, as it exists in post secular society, can follow the lure of God we can simply refer to the way in which it can model the insistent, persuasive, power-in-weakness of the divine. How might this express itself practically? Perhaps in partnership: just as God works with whoever will respond to the lure, so can the Church work with all those who (knowingly or not) are persuaded towards the divine will for peace, justice, love and harmony. Where organisations and bodies exist to stand in solidarity with all and any who are downtrodden or disenfranchised, the Church has the opportunity to support and enable their work. A deliberate, conscious, engagement with charitable causes could serve to heighten and strengthen these links, as may an openness to working with charities and organisations that don't necessarily 'belong' to the same religious or spiritual tradition as 'us'.

Theological recommendations

Having sought to make some practical recommendations, we may briefly reflect the dual role of this project and further extend to three brief theological recommendations, particularly concerning the fundamental ideas (and crucially the realities) of suffering and cost.

We should not downplay the role of suffering in the Christian life.

We have already clearly observed that for those who draw upon spiritual capital to work with or on the behalf of others, issues of suffering and cost are necessarily present. This is the pain

[32] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian, 1960), 54

of perishing. Responding with compassion to the suffering of others which, as we have already considered, serves to move us into the field of spiritual struggle and may then lead us to follow the divine into work to alleviate or transform that suffering. The Church must not seek to ignore or downplay these issues, after all they remain core parts of Christian doctrine and tradition. The Matthean gospel account has Jesus instruct his followers that they should "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"[33], a warning that to be like Christ will necessarily involve some suffering. The Lukan account expands further, warning: "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." The writer goes on to add: "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions"[34]. Some form of personal perishing is necessary for further becoming to be enabled. Sacrifice and suffering are, therefore, not an optional extra according to this teaching, and this is born out in the experience of research participants, many of whom demonstrate this reality in their lives. The Church must continue to grapple with this if it is to develop and mobilise the kind of spiritual capital that is necessary to develop orthopraxis.

We should seek to store 'open access' treasures.

The writer of 'Matthew's gospel' urges his readers to abandon a focus upon earthly treasures (wealth in the form of social or economic capitals) that might be hoarded in exclusive 'barns or storehouses' and choose instead to seek wealth that may be stored in *Ouranos* (οὐρανῷ: the heavens/sky).[35] A conventional or classical reading leads some to imagine an alternative form of wealth that may be 'banked' in some divine ledger, maintaining a sense of exclusivity. That, multiply problematic, reading ignores an otherwise obvious alternative: The heavens – understood as the sky above us, are of course wide open, un-walled and unprotected. This is a sort of treasure which is all the more precious precisely because it is abundant and cannot be contained in a bank. Store it where everyone can access it – it grows by being given away.

The multiplication of 'heavenly' treasure happens not by means of competition but, rather, in free cooperation. The materially disadvantaged may not have the monopoly on this, but they are arguably less encumbered. Witness Jesus' advice to the wealthy young man which appears in each of the synoptics, that he rids himself of his wealth and in doing so gains access to 'treasure in the heavens'. This is not simply implicit in the Christian tradition, rather it is fully explicit. Consider such

[33] Matthew 16:24
[34] Luke 14:27
[35] Matthew 6:19-20

cornerstone dictums as “love one another”; “love your enemies”; “forgive”; these are core Christian ideas and apparently have been from the earliest times of the Jesus movement. That they run counter to the narrative of empire which Whitehead says has usurped the Christian message is no surprise. Adventuring further still, concepts such as the persistent persuasion of the divine ‘lure’ are much more adequate to the task (actually one of theodicy) of expressing the sense in which the weak power of God is employed to lead us towards the good, than the classical idea of the divine, characterised by absolute power fitfully enacted in apparently arbitrary bursts.

We should seek to develop a greater awareness of interconnection.

This, ultimately, speaks of the way that there can be no fundamental removal of humanity from the imminent divine, nor vice versa.

> “God alone has enjoyed the entire past and will enjoy all the future. He-She is both physical and spiritual, and the divine body is all-surpassing and all-inclusive of the creaturely bodies which are to God as cells to a supercellular organism.”[36]

In this phrasing of Hartshorne’s is the clear indication that process philosophy and theology lead us to think in a way that prioritises interconnection. It leads us to perceive a world which is alive, and in which the divine plays an active and inextricable part. This theological point, perhaps, is the ultimate outworking of a philosophy of organism. That *all* things are seen as processes, as living parts of a greater whole, intermingled and ultimately, utterly, inseparable.

Conclusions in the making

Although apparently ‘remote’ and inaccessible, Whitehead was not as detached as it may seem from the world in which he lived. Indeed, he was a committed political campaigner, he stood up to authorities and argued passionately over important issues with friends, even sharing a stage with Kier Hardie and being pelted with fruit for his trouble. He fell out with his best friend, Bertrand Russell, partly over the issue of political ideology, and he gave up a beloved job and home in protest at the treatment of a colleague[37]. His may indeed have been a privileged life, but he was not untouched by hardship or tragedy. In particular I believe that the profound suffering he experienced

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[36] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 44

[37] Norman Pittenger, *Makers of contemporary theology: Alfred North Whitehead* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969)

when his son Eric was killed in the First World War jolted him away from the world of complex number theories and into deeper questions of meaning. Like my interviewees he drew on early experience to transform personal suffering into a search for the lure of God. He took an intellectual leap that others dared not, embracing the philosophy of process and applying that same great intellect to the question of how this could change the way we understand our relationship to the divine. Most importantly perhaps he was not one to accept stasis, rather he sought out adventure – he urged others to dare to think new thoughts, and to act upon them.

As someone who is fundamentally a practitioner, I'm well aware that a frequent, and important, critique of theorising is that it doesn't help 'get the job done'. Getting the job done is the primary concern of the majority of the people who took part in this research, many of whom are much less concerned about the why, than the how. There's some value in this way of thinking, reflecting concerns that it's vital to remain 'earthed'. Practical application and its associated risks, though, may certainly be understood as part of what Whitehead terms 'adventure' – which he believed to be vital to any work of theory. Effectively his concern was to ensure that ideas were progressed, that they weren't left to grow stale and hardened, the longer they are left alone the more they come to appear as fact, and the harder it becomes to challenge them. This applies to the ideas and recommendations expressed here too, of course. They must be subject to iterative re-evaluation in the light of ongoing experience.

As I conclude I would like to introduce one final thought concerning 'stasis'. We may note that the etymology of the term has an interesting perspective to share. Στάσις (*stasis*) is, in the Greek, a standing place, or an incidence of civil strife or war. This sense of *stasis* is not a position of peace – it is not a resting place or a place of calm. Rather it actually reflects a physical place of resistance, it is a stubborn refusal to accept the implications of the process of change. I suggest that we reject stasis and embrace the self-evident constancy of perishing and becoming. We can do this by being constantly open to change and the opportune challenge of the new, for this is the fundamental nature of reality. Although this is often difficult and uncomfortable, it is powerful. Such fragility of existence is paradoxically powerful (in weakness) because of the way it subverts conventional, classical, ideas of order and hierarchy. Rather than conform to the methodology of empire we should seek to an existence where a culture of unconditional love and inclusivity, which concerns itself with the dogged pursuit of justice, peace, and joy, remains eternally consistent, but where the way that we operate beyond this is constantly informed and changed by occasions of experience. This might be said to constitute the extraordinary, upside-down, ('kenarchic'), kingdom of God.

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