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THESIS ABSTRACTAn examination of W. Norman Pittenger's understanding of 'salvation'

This thesis examines Pittenger's reinterpretation of Christian theology with the aid of Whiteheadian process philosophy, with special reference to his understanding of salvation. The question it faces is what does salvation in Christ mean in a theology which stresses God's operation within the creative process, luring it towards its fulfilment? The main emphases of Pittenger's thought are developed to show how they contribute to his view of salvation.

In Chapter 1 he is shown to reject any understanding of sin which implies that there is a breach between God and man, seeing sin rather as the failure of the individual to fulfil his God-given aim and thus co-operate in the divine intention for creation. In the following three Christological chapters Jesus is seen, in Pittenger's account, as the only man who fulfilled this aim; and therein lay his 'decisiveness'. There was in him a marriage of divine grace and human response whereby he became the focus of the divine loving activity in the world. Since, however, his difference from other men was a matter of degree rather than kind it follows that what was fulfilled in him is potential in all men. Thus salvation is that wholeness of living which comes from seeking to fulfil one's God-given aim. In subsequent chapters various ramifications of this view of salvation are discussed. In Chapter 5 the process view of how God overcomes evil is considered and related to the cross. Chapter 6 examines the experience of salvation in terms of responding to the example of Christ and knowing him only through the Church. Chapter 7 shows that Pittenger's talk of salvation excludes reference to an after-life.

This understanding of salvation is principally criticized as inadequate on the grounds of its denial of any divine salvatory initiative in Christ.

AN EXAMINATION OF W. NORMAN PITTINGER'S UNDERSTANDING
OF 'SALVATION'

Alan Hubert Nugent

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CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	1
Title page	2
Contents	3
Abbreviations	7
Introduction	8
<u>Chapter 1. Pittenger's Understanding of Sin and Human Nature</u>	16
1. Sin not simply a refusal to obey divine or natural law	16
2. Original Sin and the nature of man	17
(a) The fall	17
(b) His rejection of some modern interpretations of original sin	18
(c) Criticisms of St. Augustine	21
(d) Pittenger's view of human nature	22
(e) Pittenger's incarnationalist stress and its relation to sin	24
(f) Pittenger's sociological analysis of inherited sinfulness	26
(g) Possible examples of sin viewed sociologically	28
3. Pittenger's definition of sin	32
4. The Concept of aim	34
(a) Subjective aim and the purposive nature of life	34
(b) The subjective aim in each actual occasion	35
(c) God and the concept of aim	38
(d) God and initial aim	39
(e) The nature of God's operation through aim	42
5. Pittenger's use of the concept of aim	43
6. Summary and Comments	47
<u>Chapter 2. Pittenger's Christology - The Humanity of Christ</u>	52
1. Introduction	52
2. His approach to the Gospel narratives	53
(a) The critical study of the Gospels	53
(b) Double historicity	56
3. Pittenger's portrait of Jesus	60
4. Pittenger's interpretation of the 'heightened' elements in the Gospels	61
5. The life and ministry of Jesus	63
6. Some further implications of Jesus' humanity	66
7. The Sinlessness of Jesus	72

	Page
<u>Chapter 3. Pittenger's Christology</u>	80
1. Introduction	80
2. A Matter of Degree	82
(a) Its relation to the humanity of Jesus	83
(b) Its relation to the Cosmic Process	85
(c) Its relation to Emergent Evolution and Salvation	88
3. The Uniqueness of Jesus	91
4. The Union of the Divine and Human in Christ	94
(a) His approach to a Christology of 'personal union'	95
(b) Theodore of Mopsuestia	97
(c) Pittenger's understanding of 'personal union'	99
(i) The action of the Word	100
(ii) The human response	101
(iii) Two false trails	103
(iv) The interpenetration	105
(v) The process perspective	107
(vi) The implications of this 'personal union'	108
 Chapter 3. Appendix	
A Critique of Pittenger's Degree Christology by Hick and McIntyre	110
1. John Hick	110
2. John McIntyre	113
 <u>Chapter 4. The Decisiveness of Christ</u>	 115
1. His rejection of the concept of finality	115
2. The 'importance' of the Christ event	116
3. Pittenger and Thornton contrasted	119
4. The location of the Incarnation	130
(a) Focus and locus	133
(b) The influence of J. M. Thompson	135
(c) The 'Christ-event' in a process perspective	138
(d) Criticisms from a process angle	140
(e) Critical summary	142

	Page
<u>Chapter 5. Pittenger's Understanding of God's Saving Work</u>	144
1. His preference for the Exemplarist atonement theme	144
2. How God overcomes evil	150
(a) Introduction	150
(b) The process background	152
(c) The fact of evil	158
(d) God's consequent nature and the overcoming of evil	164
3. The cross in God's overcoming of evil	167
(a) Introduction	167
(b) The cross as the work of Christ	168
(c) God is reigning from the Tree	170
(d) The Resurrection victory of God's love	171
(e) The divine victory in Christ	172
4. The Cross in Pittenger's Christology	174
(a) His reliance upon other Process writers	174
(b) The Cross within Pittenger's immanentist world-view	177
5. A divine initiative?	180
 Chapter 5. Appendix	
Pittenger's thesis compared with Jurgen Moltmann's 'The Crucified God'	187
 <u>Chapter 6. The Experience of Salvation</u>	200
1. Wholeness	200
2. Jesus and the experience of salvation	201
(a) Jesus as our example	202
(b) Jesus the source of grace	204
(c) Salvation within Pittenger's immanentist scheme	206
3. The Church as the vehicle of salvation	208
(a) The influence of John Knox	211
(b) Pittenger on the atoning work of the Church	213
(c) The Church as future prehension	219

	Page
<u>Chapter 7. Pittenger's Interpretation of the Eschatological Dimension of Salvation</u>	221
1. The Immortality of the Soul	221
2. Sin and Judgement	223
(a) Sin and its appraisal	223
(b) The process background	226
(c) The divine appraisal	227
(d) Heaven and Hell	229
(e) Appraisal within the divine purpose	231
3. Immortality	232
(a) Subjective immortality rejected by process writers	232
(b) Objective immortality	234
(c) Personal immortality?	236
<u>Chapter 8. Pittenger's Understanding of 'Salvation' - Conclusions</u>	245
1. Summary	245
2. Pittenger's theological style	247
3. Pittenger's Christology and Soteriology criticized	249
4. Pittenger's evolutionist view of salvation	252
5. The exemplarist atonement theme and the tragic dimension	259
6. Sin and Salvation in Pittenger's scheme	264
7. Concluding comments	269
Bibliography	272

ABBREVIATIONSBooks by W. Norman Pittenger

- W.I. The Word Incarnate,
Welwyn, Nisbet, 1959.
- C.R. Christology Reconsidered,
London, S.C.M., 1970.
- G.P. God in Process,
London, S.C.M., 1967.
- P.T.C.F. Process Thought and Christian Faith,
Welwyn, Nisbet, 1968.
- G.D. Goodness Distorted,
London, Mowbrays, 1970.
- L.T.P.P. The Last Things in a Process Perspective,
London, Epworth Press, 1970.
- Human Nature The Christian Understanding of Human Nature,
Welwyn, Nisbet, 1964.

Books by Alfred North Whitehead

- Whitehead: Process Process and Reality,
New York, Free Press Paperback, Macmillan,
1969.
- Whitehead: Religion Religion in the Making,
New York, World Publishing, Meridian Book,
1960.
- Whitehead: Adventures Adventures of Ideas,
New York, Free Press Paperback, Macmillan,
1967.
- Whitehead: Modes Modes of Thought,
New York, Free Press Paperback, Macmillan,
1968.
- Whitehead: Science Science and the Modern World,
Cambridge, The University Press, 1953.

INTRODUCTION

In many of the books and articles that he has written Norman Pittenger has sought to express the Christian faith in terms of process thought, a system based on the philosophical writings of Alfred North Whitehead and his disciple and interpreter Charles Hartshorne, taking an evolutionist and processive view of the cosmos. The volume of his writings in this vein has increased since 1966 when he left the U.S.A. and settled in Cambridge as a senior resident of King's College. Most of these writings were intended for 'a general educated public rather than for philosophical or theological experts', (1) and thus when compared with the writings, for example, of John Cobb Jnr. or Peter Hamilton are clearly non-technical in their use of process thought. Indeed Pittenger's general yet enthusiastic approach hardly bears comparison with the increasing number of highly technical articles in the process vein being published in philosophical and theological journals, and particularly in the quarterly published from the School of Theology, Claremont, California, 'Process Studies'. During his career, however, as the Gompf Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary, New York, he did make a significant contribution to process theology in the field of Christology. In 1944 he published 'Christ and Christian Faith', which was his first foray into the interpretation of the doctrine of Christ in the light of process philosophy. This was in many ways a precursor to his major study, 'The Word Incarnate', in 1959, which he describes as 'an extended essay in the interpretation of the person and work of Jesus in process-

(1) P.T.C.F., p. ix.

terms'.(2) This was followed by 'Christology Reconsidered' in 1970 in which he sought to answer his critics, though he did not significantly develop the main thesis of the earlier book.

In an illuminating and frank article offering 'A Strictly Personal Account', Pittenger tells of his 'conversion' to process thought early in the 1940s. Being aware of the lack of some conceptuality upon which to ground his theological thinking and being dissatisfied with most of the current options, he was introduced to the writings of Hartshorne, which he found exactly what he needed. He moved on to reading Whitehead and this completed his 'conversion'.

'I can almost date the day, like a convert in a revivalistic mission, my glad acceptance of this new way of looking at things. It was in the middle of the war years, I was working with a small group of ordinands exempted from the draft, and I had to give a short talk on what Christian faith in God as love had to say in a tragic and desperate time like that through which we were then living. To my astonishment, I found that what I then was impelled to say was nothing other than a presentation of the "process" view that God is involved in, suffers with, receives from and shares with our human anguish, and in a world where things go wrong saves whatever is salvable; that his transcendence is the inexhaustibility and faithfulness of his love; that what the Christian faith points to in Jesus Christ, is exactly such suffering love disclosed in human suffering and love - and that the whole world goes that way.'(3)

Such a conversion led inevitably to the work of propagation. As Pittenger admits, he is more than just a believer in the process conceptuality; rather he says, 'I am fairly close to being an evangelist for it', because it seems to him to be 'true, so far as this can be said of any metaphysical vision of the world' and 'it fits in with the

(2) *ibid.*, p. viii.

(3) W. N. Pittenger: 'A Strictly Personal Account', Process Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1971, pp. 131-132.

deepest deliverances of the Christian faith'.(4) Pittenger, then, is suggesting that there is 'a "fit" between process thought and the articulation of the Christian faith which we know as theology'.(5) This means that the Christian faith is being interpreted in terms of the evolutionary perspective which is the central conviction of process thought. It is a system which stresses that this is a 'changing, moving, living, active world, in which we have to do not with inert substances, but with dynamic processes, not so much with things as with events.(6) Certain consequences flow from this attempted 'fit'.

Firstly God is related to such a processive world view by being understood in terms of his activity. Further, as against 'classical theism' and theological systems which speak of God's absoluteness and aseity, process theology emphasises the divine relatedness to the world.(7) Pittenger even suggests that it is process theology alone which has grasped the truth of the loving relatedness of God.(8) Thus the phrase 'the loving activity of God' will be repeated often in the course of this study, because it reflects a major element in Pittenger's thought and in his interpretation of Christian theology in process terms.

'Hence their (i.e. process theologians) conception of divine Reality ... is not that of an unmoved mover or changeless essence, but rather of a living, constantly creative, infinitely related, ceaselessly operative Reality; the universe at its core is movement, dynamism, activity, and not sheer and unrelated abstraction.

(4) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited', Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 220.

(5) *ibid.*, p. 216.

(6) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Thought: A Contemporary Trend in Theology', Expository Times, Vol. 76, (1965), p. 270.

(7) Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited', p. 212.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 213.

Whitehead's view, that the cosmos is "alive", is basic to the whole enterprise of process-thought; and this carries with it a conviction that the only reasonable explanation of the living cosmos is in fact "the living God".⁽⁹⁾

Secondly, human life is described in terms of its becoming, but a becoming known only in terms of mutuality and inter-relationship.

'Man is a dynamic becoming ... Man is on the move bound together with his human brethren in one bundle of life and organic to the natural order of which he is a part. ... He may make or he may refuse to make his proper contribution to the creative advance which is the purpose of God. Above all, man is made to become a lover in the mutuality which is giving and receiving in respect and tenderness.'⁽¹⁰⁾

Thirdly, it is in effect an amalgam of these two points that directs Pittenger's Christology. He believes that the process conceptuality offers an attractive and viable understanding of the person of Christ, as being the supremely 'important' clue to and unveiling of that loving relationship with man which characterizes the nature of God. Thus he speaks of Jesus as the one in whom the perfect marriage of divine activity and human becoming was effected. He is the one in whom that love which is at once the divine intention and human fulfilment is manifested.

Fourthly, in a system such as process thought which emphasizes persuasion and love as being 'more profoundly indicative of the dynamic drive in the creative advance than coercion or sheer power',⁽¹¹⁾ the Christian theologian, Pittenger suggests, will be greatly aided in his attempts to interpret the saving work of Christ. Particularly significant for Pittenger in this regard is that in process terms

(9) Pittenger: art. 'Process Thought: A Contemporary Trend in Theology', p. 270.

(10) Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited', p. 219.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 215.

salvation can never be viewed as a narrow individual concern.

'For this conceptuality sees not only the centrality of persuasion and the use of every occasion towards growing good, but also emphasizes the societal quality of the world with its interpenetrative and relational manifestation. The Christian conviction that through Christ God has achieved something which can be shared by others is illuminated by such a world view. To be "saved" is to find "the life which is life indeed", life truly in shared Love.' (12)

The purpose of this study is to examine Pittenger's theology built upon these process insights and particularly his understanding of the saving work of Christ and then to ask whether he safeguards what Christian theology has sought to contain of Christian experience within a doctrine of salvation. This will also raise the question of whether an evolutionist scheme has sufficient areas of compatibility with traditional understandings of salvation. Process theology is becoming more widely known and influential and thus, though few of its adherents have discussed salvation or atonement doctrines, it is right that its underlying insights should be examined in terms of this crucial area of Christian thought. This examination of Pittenger's work might be seen as a small contribution to this end.

Two preliminary points must be made. Firstly, although Pittenger's work may not be technically definitive of process thought and though the criticism will be made that he enlists process insights in a theology whose presuppositions betray the influence of the theological school of English Modernism yet his faithfulness to the process insights and his desire to interpret Christian theology in processive and evolutionist terms must be acknowledged and thus his approach to an understanding of salvation taken as representative of the conceptuality he espouses.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 216.

An examination of his understanding of salvation in the process vein will expose the dangers attendant upon any attempt to understand salvation within an evolutionary world view.

Secondly, though Pittenger makes many references to salvation and though he clearly believes that process insights offer profound illumination for understanding salvation he nevertheless presents no separate and sustained discussion of salvation in a process vein, thus making it necessary to extract his understanding of it from a consideration of his theology in general. This accounts for the subject order of this thesis, for it is from an investigation of his understanding of sin and of his Christology that the main emphases of his understanding of salvation will emerge. Hence the thesis begins with a consideration of his understanding of sin, not only because his view of salvation is dependent on that definition, but primarily because in the course of that chapter several distinctive elements of his theology which will determine his interpretation of salvation will be outlined. These are taken up, developed and consolidated in the subsequent Christological chapters.

A précis of the chapters and their sequence will indicate the course this study will follow.

In Chapter 1 I try to show that Pittenger does not accept any view of sin which implies that the relationship between God and man is thereby broken or that man is thereby prevented from displaying those characteristics of goodness which indicate that, even as a sinner, the word of God is operative in him. Using a Whiteheadian concept he reinterprets sin as the failure to fulfil the God-given aim of life whose characteristic is love. By this device he seeks to maintain the essential dignity of man as made in the divine image and yet recognise that he fails to live up to that dignity. Salvation thus becomes a

matter of restoration, a way of living in which wholeness comes through seeking the fulfilment of that aim. The concept of aim is important for this study and is taken up in the three Christological chapters as being explanatory of the significance of Jesus; being the only man who truly fulfilled the God-given aim of his life.

A distinctive feature of Pittenger's theology is that he places heavy emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus and interprets his 'divinity' only in the light of that humanity. This is discussed in Chapter 2. The significance of this chapter for the thesis is not only that it is the basis for Pittenger's understanding of the significance of Jesus and his accomplishments but primarily because it grounds all talk of salvation in Christ in the human situation. The two specifically Christological chapters that follow seek to show that in Pittenger's scheme the 'decisiveness' of Jesus is to be accounted for as the special marriage of divine grace and human response that was to be found in him; his difference from other men being a matter of degree rather than of kind. Jesus' full-hearted response to the divine aim meant that he became the 'important' clue to the divine nature, the 'focal' manifestation of the divine activity. It is thus that Pittenger is able to speak of a revelation of the divine love in Christ within an evolutionary and processive world-view, and God's involvement in it. One consequence of such a Christology is that salvation becomes essentially a matter of the person living in response to the example of Christ and to the divine loving activity as seen in him and thereby moving towards the fulfilment of his God-given aim. It is thus the exemplarist atonement theory that accords with Pittenger's theological position.

An essential aspect of Pittenger's process view of salvation is his emphasis upon God's ability, through the operation of his love, to

overcome evil. For this he employs the Whiteheadian dipolar concept of God, seeing his transmuting of evil being effected through the operation of his consequent nature. This is discussed in some detail in Chapter 5, where it is also related to the cross. Pittenger's belief that Calvary is symbolic of the divine loving activity is criticized, though it is recognised as being consonant with his theological approach. In Chapter 6 the experience of salvation as wholeness is related to responding to the example of Jesus and also to the Church; for Pittenger believes that it is within the Christian community alone that this way of wholesome living in Christ can be known, for it is only in the Church that Jesus is remembered and experienced thus making response to him possible. A further chapter shows that despite some reservations Pittenger regards salvation as exclusively a this-worldly affair with reference to an after-life excluded.

In the final chapter it is suggested that although Pittenger offers a coherent and self-consistent view of salvation yet he does so only at the expense of ignoring or muting those elements of traditional Christian thought that he finds uncongenial. His reductionist approach to theology, which will be demonstrated in the course of this study, leaves him with a view of salvation which neglects certain elements which Christian thought would claim to be essential for any full understanding of the divine initiative in Christ 'for us men and for our salvation'.

CHAPTER 1PITTENGER'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND HUMAN NATURE(1) Sin not simply a refusal to obey divine or natural law

This chapter must begin with Pittenger's summary and unsubstantiated dismissal of what he regards as inadequate definitions of sin. Thus he says that sin is 'not the breaking of Commandments which have been handed down from on high; neither is it failure to conform to some static law, given once for all'.(1) He acknowledges that it would be 'easy enough to classify certain human acts as sinful' if one believed in a 'list of things that had been revealed as contrary to God's will'. 'If one regarded the Ten Commandments as having quite literally been given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, then obviously the disobedience of any man to any of these commandments (would be) a sinful act'.(2) Since, however, he considers that Old Testament scholarship has shown the Decalogue in origin to be a 'summing up of tribal mores ... influenced by other codes in the Near East', (3) he is unable to accept it as a satisfactory framework for a modern understanding of sin. Secondly, whereas it was possible for a mediaeval theologian, 'who worked with the idea of "natural moral law", to label as sinful those acts that could be categorized as unnatural, in the sense that they were contrary to what was willed by God as part of the normal behaviour expected of a human being and in accord with the "nature" of man as distinctively human';(4) such a philosophy does not hold sway today

(1) C.R., p. 51.

(2) W. N. Pittenger: 'A Fresh Look at Christian Moral Theology', Religion in Life, Vol. 38, 1969, p. 550.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 551.

(4) *ibid.*, p. 550.

and thus does not provide a basis for a contemporary definition of sin. Indeed Pittenger finds the whole concept of 'moral law' inadequate because of its apparent attempt to provide a narrow categorization for human nature and behaviour. He believes that an adequate contemporary view of morality must take account of the dynamic, 'becoming' nature of life which modern philosophy, especially process thought, is so aware of. His own understanding of sin seeks to take full account of this.(5)

He talks about sin, however, as 'man's root problem', as a 'situation or state or condition which requires attention', to which he attaches the epithet 'disease'; of which sinful acts are only symptomatic.(6) Significantly though, he refuses to understand this 'disease' in terms of original sin.

A consideration of his reinterpretation of original sin and its implications for human nature is important for this study.

(2) Original sin and the nature of man

(a) The fall

His critique of the concept begins by rejecting the idea of a fall with which original sin is usually associated. Pittenger like anyone who takes evolution seriously and who regards creation as an on-going process moving from simple to more complex life-forms does not accept as in any way historically trustworthy the biblical picture of the fall of man, with its undeniable implication of a fall from a once perfect and harmonious state. If there never was in the past a state of perfection then the notion of a fall is inconceivable. Thus Pittenger would only use the fall story as an existential description

(5) *ibid.*, p. 551.

(6) Last Things, p. 39.

of human life.

'If we use the Fall story at all, it must be as a story told about each of us, not as an historical account of how sin came into the world. But what is true of each one of us is that there is a defection from the excellence which is the divine intention for us ...'(7)

Pittenger criticizes theologians who while accepting the biblical account of the fall as 'highly mythological and dependent upon ancient legends' still treat this 'material for theological purposes, as if it were historical', (8) and who seek to employ a concept of 'fallenness'. This for Pittenger is no live option. Not only does he not accept the validity of the fall narratives in Genesis for historical reasons, he also rejects the view of man and sin implied in them. For him sin is not 'natural to man' (9) in the sense that it is endemic to his nature, yet this is what, he suggests, those who interpret original sin in fall terms are saying. This reference is aimed particularly at certain 'modern attempts to refurbish the traditional theory' of original sin by presenting a 'quasi biological way of stating' it. (10)

(b) His rejection of some modern reinterpretations of original sin

He dismisses, for example, N. P. Williams' attempt 'to get at the problem by postulating a pre-mundane fall' as 'patently' belonging 'in the realm of the fanciful and the fantastic'. (11) Pittenger is not alone (12) or wholly unjustified in this criticism but in concentrating upon one aspect of Williams' thesis he neglects an important underlying

(7) G.P., p. 60.

(8) Time for Consent, p. 54.

(9) W.I., p. 208.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 211.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 211.

(12) e.g. J. S. Boys Smith, review, in J.T.S., Vol. XXIX, 1928, pp. 305-310.

emphasis in the latter's work.

N. P. Williams' exhaustive study of the concept of the fall concludes with his own redefinition of 'inherited infirmity'; a redefinition which does not rely upon any supposed historical value in the Adam story. Williams postulates that the creation originally was purely good but prior to the appearance of man what he calls the World-Soul turned from God and by that rebellion evil originated.

'The World-Soul was created good; but ... at the beginning of Time, in some transcendental and incomprehensible manner, it turned away from God and in the direction of Self, thus shattering its own interior being, which depended upon God for its stability and coherence ...'(13)

Thus creation became apostate. As Williams says, it is this 'remote and mysterious event', 'this primaeval catastrophe', which should be seen as 'the true and ultimate Fall' whose effect is 'the continuity and homogeneity of evil throughout all ranks of organised life, from the bacillus up to Man'.(14) This final comment is significant, for although the accusation that Williams moves from the realm of theology to fantasy has some force, in leaving his criticism at this point Pittenger is neglecting the motive behind Williams' theorizing. By postulating that the fall consists in a 'pre-cosmic vitiation of the whole Life-Force when it was still one and simple',(15) Williams was trying to account for 'the congenital weakness or disorder of human nature';(16) 'its inherent moral weakness or bias towards sin'.(17)

(13) N. P. Williams: The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin, (Bampton Lectures 1924), London, Longmans, 1927, p. 526.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 524.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 523.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 491.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 456.

This 'inherited infirmity', (a phrase Williams prefers to Original Sin), (18) this 'weakness of will', (19) 'inheres in the human stock as an hereditary character transmitted from parent to offspring through biological and not merely through what is called social heredity'. (20) This final phrase is significant, for Pittenger is one who offers a social definition of original sin. Yet Williams and Pittenger are not only divided by the former's implied rejection of the latter's approach but, as will be demonstrated, Pittenger totally repudiates any suggestion that there is a biologically transmitted weakness or moral infirmity and tendency towards evil in man. This would be his real quarrel with a position like that of Williams, and not simply the latter's fantastic concept of a pre-mundane fall. Pittenger clearly believes that a position such as that of Williams runs counter to his own view that sin is not 'natural to man'. (21)

He similarly criticizes William Temple for finding in man's 'self-centredness' 'the real meaning of Original Sin'. (22) Such a view seems to Pittenger to be 'in real danger of confusing what I take to be the necessity for biological and psychological selfhood and its assertion as the condition of selfhood at all with violation of the will of God'; though he recognises that 'Temple tried carefully to avoid any such thing'. (23) An example of this would be a baby's screaming and kicking at its mother to get attention or food. Such an exhibition of selfhood, Pittenger suggests, is of the essence of human

(18) *ibid.*, p. 458.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 457.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 460.

(21) *W.I.*, p. 208.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 211.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 211.

biological and psychological make-up and necessary if the child is to survive.(24)

This, however, is to miss the point Temple was making. Temple was speaking of 'self-centredness' in terms of 'self-seeking' which might 'express itself as aspiration after wealth, or power, or popularity, or any other occasion of self-gratification'.(25) Temple was thus seeking to account for the 'unquestionable bias or tendency to evil in human nature' which 'theologians have called Original Sin'.(26) He admits that this 'self-assertion'(27) is allowed for in the manner of God's creation, in the sense that 'it must be regarded as falling within the divine purpose that finite spirits should make choices contrary to that purpose',(28) but in that they do 'follow their own apparent good without reference to God', and thus their actions are 'contrary to God's will and their own real good'(29) does not alter the fact that such a tendency is deeply embedded in human nature and as such is the 'vital truth and importance of original sin'.(30) Pittenger, however, disputes that there is such a bias or tendency to evil in human nature. This is further shown by his criticisms of St. Augustine.

(c) Criticisms of St. Augustine

Pittenger's position here is simply stated.

(24) Human Nature, p. 39.

(25) William Temple: Nature, Man and God, London, Macmillan, 1935, p. 424.

(26) *ibid.*, p. 363.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 365.

(28) *ibid.*, p. 501.

(29) *ibid.*, p. 501.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 502.

'I should not wish to defend St. Augustine's conception of man as a "mass of perdition" or his view of "original sin" as totally laming man and making him impotent ever to choose any good that is really good.' (31)

He accuses St. Augustine of 'making shocking statements' about man's 'utter depravity', (32) suggesting that man is born guilty with a corrupted nature prone to sin and therefore incapable of communion with God. He specifically rejects the suggestion that such is transmitted to subsequent generations through the sexual procreation of the human race, or worse that concupiscence lies at the heart of the problem. (33) Whether Pittenger accurately reflects the Augustinian position or merely presents a caricature is not a matter that need be considered here. What is significant, though, is what his reactions indicate about Pittenger's own understanding of original sin. Two main emphases may be detected which will be considered in more detail. First his strenuous rejection of any hint that man's nature is 'depraved' in the sense that his natural tendency is to evil requires a consideration of his alternative understanding of human nature. Secondly his denial that the 'race of man is infected by sin' and that 'this kind of infection is taken to be almost biological in nature - as may be seen in the thought of St. Augustine', (34) leads into an examination of his re-appraisal of the original sin theme.

(d) Pittenger's view of human nature

Disputing the view that because of his sinful condition man in his natural and unredeemed state is incapable of fellowship with God,

(31) Human Nature, p. 150.

(32) W.I., p. 213.

(33) G.P., p. 60.

(34) C.R., p. 32.

Pittenger allies himself with the catholic view that sees man, even in his natural state as 'capax infiniti'. Although as he says:

'It is true that sin has seriously damaged this 'capacity'; to use the Thomist phrases, man is not only 'privatus boni' but 'vulneratus in naturalibus'. But Catholic Christianity at least, in Anglican as well as Roman and Orthodox dress, has consistently refused to see man as 'non capax infiniti'; for this reason it has been accused by some modern Protestant theologians of a lack of realism about sin. In my judgement, the truth is that Catholic Christianity has been truer here to the biblical teaching that man is made in the image of God than have the modern theologians who somehow seem to think that they honour God by denigrating his creation.' (35)

A few lines later Pittenger emphasizes this more clearly. For him not only has sin not rendered a relationship between man and God impossible, but rather in spite of sin relationship between God and man remains.

'If man is what the Bible says he is, some unbreakable ontological relationship must continue between him and God, and between the Saviour and those whom he came to save.' (36)

This high estimate of man, based upon the view that he is made in the image of God, is crucial in Pittenger's thought. Man can only truly be understood when he is set in the context of the operation of the word of God, the agent of creation. This per se precludes the possibility that man can ever be thought of as depraved, as having no spark of the divine in him.

'Man is 'grounded' in the Eternal Word, who in divers manners and in varying intensity works in and through him, realizing or making actual the perfection of manhood which is the divine intention for the creation of man. The Word, as 'ground' of man, is of course not identical with man; man is not himself divine. But the Word is the divine creative energy which calls man into being and holds him in being; the Word is the power working in man, 'the light lightening every man', 'the life which is the light of man' - thwarted by sin, denied by self-will, rejected but never ejected from the life of the creature.' (37)

(35) W.I., p. 239.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 239.

(37) *ibid.*, p. 240.

It must be emphasized again that this description of the dignity of man, because he is in God's image, is not of man after he has been saved or redeemed, rather it is of man in his natural, indeed sinful state. Sin is not able to destroy the ontological relationship between God and man. The 'imago dei' in man may be distorted, but never nullified, and this is because the divine Logos is present. This for Pittenger is of utmost significance. The Logos at work in the creative process is a key-note of his theological understanding and determinative of his Christology. How it affects his understanding of sin must now be set out more clearly. Pittenger's definition of sin will be presented later, in section 3.

(e) Pittenger's incarnationalist stress and its relation to sin

Pittenger summarizes his espousal of the Logos tradition in Christian thought with its emphasis upon the activity of God in the whole of creation seen most clearly in Jesus Christ, by describing this as an 'incarnational' world.

'This World, then, is an incarnational World ... I am sure that there is no other Christian way of describing the creation. As Cardinal Bérulle once wrote, the incarnation is the manner and mode of all God's work in the world: supremely we should add: it is the manner and mode of God's work and way in and for and with men.' (38)

In relating this to the discussion of the nature of man in respect of his sinfulness Pittenger's grounding in the Logos tradition requires that the 'imago dei' in all men must be given its full weight. Thus he can say:

'The confident assurance that man is in God's image is the guarantee for Christian theology that man in his essential nature is 'salvable', however he may have fallen into sin

(38) *ibid.*, p. 6.

and remain in a sinful state; it is the guarantee that he is the child of God who is nowhere without the loving care of his heavenly Father and is always welcomed home when he turns to the Father from wickedness and wrong. Furthermore, this assurance makes it possible for the Christian to claim with confidence that God 'has nowhere left himself without witness', and that in all the 'good' done by men, however partial they may be in their goodness, as well as in every truthful thought and loving deed and creation of beauty, God has been and is at work. In man's moral sense, in his search for truth in any field, in his courage and devotion, in his making of things lovely and harmonious, there is something of the divine operation. All of this is the work of the Logos who undergirds human life in its historical situations, moves through nature and history to achieve his great ends, and makes 'even the wrath of men' to praise the God who created and creates, who revealed and reveals, and who wills to crown this continuing action by bringing his creation into personal union with himself.' (39)

Pittenger clearly intends that his incarnational stress with its suggestion that since 'man is undergirded by God' there is 'in man even as sinner' 'sufficient of God's operation' and 'sufficient reflection of God's true intention for man' (40) to stand in contrast to any view of sin which speaks of man having a bias or tendency towards evil. He repudiates those theologians who imply that sinfulness is the most obvious and determinative characteristic of human nature. (41) For himself he stresses that he does not wish to minimize the gravity of sin (42) yet he sees it in no sense endemic or natural to man but more, as the title of one of his books suggests, a matter of 'goodness distorted'. No sin however grievous can destroy the relationship between God and man. Thus sin can never be regarded as holding the ultimate truth about human nature. The consequence of this for

(39) *ibid.*, p. 5f.

(40) *ibid.*, p. 5.

(41) *ibid.*, p. 238.

(42) *ibid.*, p. 5.

Pittenger's theology will be considered after his alternative to a biological view of original sin has been considered.

(f) Pittenger's sociological analysis of inherited sinfulness

Although he rejects any biological interpretation of original sin and any view of inherited sinfulness which would suggest that a man is born with a corrupted nature prone to sin, Pittenger does not wish to minimize the recognition that sin is 'tragically serious'.(43) He says that 'through the long history of man, there has accumulated a great mass of wrong-doing, which affects every new-born member of the race'(44) and thus admits a validity to the concept of 'inherited sinfulness', though only when interpreted in strictly sociological and never biological terms. In this he acknowledges that he is following a clue from F. R. Tennant who concluded that 'the generality of sin finds its sufficient explanation in the moral psychology of the individual and in the solidarity of the race in respect of conative propensities'.(45) It is with this latter suggestion that we are concerned here and the following quotation draws out its implications.

'If it be true ... that man's sociology is as much a part of his 'nature' as is his biology, we ought to be able to see that what Tennant calls 'the solidarity of the race' has a great deal to do with the situation in which we find ourselves. 'We are members one of another' both in our evil-doing and in our right-doing. What we do has its enormous consequences for those who are around us and for those who come after us; similarly, the evil-doing of our own ancestors has helped to build up a state of affairs in which tendencies are implanted in us, from earlier days, such that the less worthy path appears the more attractive, and the securing of our own immediate desires, at the expense of better and more richly rewarding ends, is more readily accepted.'(46)

(43) *ibid.*, p. 212.

(44) *ibid.*, p. 212.

(45) *ibid.*, p. 211, quoting F. R. Tennant: The Concept of Sin, Cambridge, The University Press, 1912, p. 272.

(46) *ibid.*, p. 212.

It is clear then that Pittenger's 'sociological interpretation of 'inherited sinfulness'; by which he means that 'man as a sinner is not a solitary sinner; (rather) he sins as a member of society, and the sins of his brethren in the corporate life of society are reflected in him and work upon him', (47) has two aspects. Firstly in the contemporary situation an individual's behaviour and attitudes are to a large extent determined and conditioned by the society in which he has been educated and brought up. Thus the 'sinful' aspects of that society will be an element in this conditioning. Secondly the profound influence of past upon present must be recognised. Thus in the present discussion 'the evil-doing of our own ancestors' is recognised as a present influence on society in respect of being a major factor in the conditioning and creation of present attitudes. The actions and attitudes of ancestors, both for good and evil, have played their part in the construction of contemporary society. The evil ones, however, have their potency in that they create the situation in which a man is caught up in this sinful conditioning so that 'he is in a state of alienation from God's will for him, (and) is not acting as human nature is intended to act'. But Pittenger stresses, 'this is not true of him as an isolated monad ... it is true of him in his deep social rootedness'. 'To understand this', he asserts, 'is to come closer to grasping the real meaning of the miscalled doctrine of original sin'. (48)

In laying such emphasis on this social understanding of sin, Pittenger is employing one of the basic insights of process thought, built upon the concept of 'mutual prehension'. In process philosophy

(47) Human Nature, p. 99.

(48) *ibid.*, p. 99.

the world is an inter-related society of 'occasions', which means that:

'A man does not and cannot exist in complete isolation from other men, or from his present environment, or from his own past history and the more general history of the human race of which as a man he is a part, or from the natural order to which he and his whole race belong, or from the possible developments which are before him and mankind in general. Each man is a focusing, a concretizing, of all these. Thus in being himself he is not himself alone; he is all that has gone to make him up, all that surrounds him, all that presses upon him, all that he himself enters into and in which he shares, all which he may be.' (49)

(g) Possible examples of sin viewed sociologically

Since Pittenger's societal interpretation of inherited sinfulness is crucial to his view of original sin, before offering any critical comments about it, to pursue its implications with the aid of examples, should indicate more precisely what Pittenger is saying.

It is undeniable that each individual is conditioned by the society in which he is nurtured; which would include the influence of home, family, school, social grouping, neighbourhood, environment, religion and nation. From this social environment many beneficial effects would be imbibed; but, what Pittenger is saying is that the evil aspects of such conditioning are the essence of inherited sinfulness and can be equated with what traditional theology has called original sin. For example an individual's attitude to other people will be largely determined by his social conditioning and if this is coloured by envy, prejudice or unreasoned fear then his attitudes will inevitably be sinful. Similarly his attitude to moral values, to the purpose of life, to the pursuit of material advantages will largely be

(49) P.T.C.F., p. 13.

determined by his social conditioning.

An illustration of this might be of a child brought up in an atmosphere which elevates the pursuit of material wealth, and the comforts and pleasures that flow from it, with small concern for consequences to others. Such a child will almost inevitably grow into a person who grossly displays these selfish attitudes. This inevitability is clearly a feature of the conditioned alienation deep in man's social rootedness to which Pittenger points. This is where his re-interpretation of original sin might seem to have most force, for there is clearly a sense in which people are caught up by that social conditioning, including its sinful evil aspects, so that they became conformed to it and it would appear that there is nothing they can do to break from its fetters.

An obvious, though extreme, example of this would be the conditioning which creates an Afrikaans South African. Here ancestor influence is very marked. The system of Apartheid, universally condemned as evil, is the product of many years of Boer culture, of a struggle to make a living out of a largely hostile environment, of constant attempts to maintain mastery over the native population in order to secure their own position, of a peculiar belief that they were enjoying the blessing and guidance of divine providence, of a determination to maintain racial purity and rigorous standards of personal morality in pursuit of prosperity and security. These and many other motivations, some originally noble, some harmless, some dangerously wrong have created the present situation in which it is almost impossible for an Afrikaner to question or criticise let alone escape from, the social atmosphere in which he was nurtured. Indeed few in that society would countenance the possibility that their social system is in any sense evil; such is the power of the conditioning.

When someone, however, like Beyers Naudé, does come to recognise the inherent evil of his society and seeks to free himself from its clutches in order to seek its transformation, the personal doubt and agony involved and the consequent pressures and odium are enormous.(50)

Such can be the dreadful imprisoning inevitability of sinful social conditioning which Pittenger would believe is true of every social environment not only the more extreme situations like South Africa. There is further no doubt that such a reinterpretation of the all pervasive vicious grip of sin with its tentacles stretched out through a person's entire social environment lends valuable new insights to an existential awareness of the power and subtlety of sin. The question, however, must be asked whether Pittenger is correct in offering this as a complete reinterpretation of original sin. On analysis all he has said is that human beings are involved in their social environment and that it is through the sinful conditioning inherent in that, that individuals are caught up in a sin situation. Yet those theologians who were quoted earlier in this chapter were clearly seeking to say something more about original sin. For them original sin was sociologically invariable. They were pointing to an endemic flaw in human nature and were seeking to describe it and account for it. N. P. Williams indeed was quoted as making this specific point that 'inherited infirmity' is 'transmitted' through the 'human stock' 'and not merely through what is called social heredity'.(51) However variously it might have been expressed traditional Christian theology in speaking of original sin has used the language of biology. The

(50) The Trial of Beyers Naudé, London, Search Press, 1975.

(51) *op.cit.*, p. 460.

taint of sin; a corrupted nature prone to sin are examples of this. F. R. Barry says that 'a tendency to sin is inherited', that 'a propensity to commit sin must be recognised as innate in all of us'. (52) These are but indications that there is a widespread theological opinion which would doubt that Pittenger's sociological interpretation of inherited sinfulness is exhaustive or even adequate.

Although I think Pittenger is mistaken to claim that his sociological analysis is 'the real meaning of the miscalled doctrine of original sin', yet I do not find it necessary to pursue the contrast between Pittenger and other more traditional theologians on this matter further. It is, I think, enough that the point of difference has been defined. His main emphasis and the contrasts that he himself draws with other views have been established.

It would be valuable, however, to indicate at this point where his understanding of original sin will lead his theology. Firstly a view of man which denies his innate bias towards sin and which stresses his essential 'dignitas', (53) albeit distorted by sin, will propose the need for the restoration of man to his proper place of honour through the loving operation of God. It will be indicated that such is Pittenger's view of salvation; namely being restored to communion with God, which is the essence of man's dignity, by being in the fellowship and following the example of the one in whose life the 'imago dei' was fully visible. Secondly his view that sin comes basically through sinful social conditioning will lead into the search for a society from which sinful conditioning has been eradicated and where men and women may experience the way of God's love. This is the position the Church

(52) F. R. Barry: The Atonement, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, p. 55.

(53) Human Nature, p. 82.

plays in Pittenger's theology; even, as will be shown, to the point of making the Church part of the process of salvation.

Having now established the basis for Pittenger's understanding of sin we will proceed to examine his distinctive teaching about sin and its process background.

(3) Pittenger's definition of sin

The foregoing discussion has intimated that Pittenger's definition of sin should be expected to cover three main areas of his understanding of the subject. First it must affirm what he calls 'the true nature of God's human Children', (54) primarily by showing that despite sin an ontological relationship remains between God and man made in his image. Secondly since an important aspect of his emphasis on sinful social conditioning is that men are 'impeded and distorted through antecedent human conditions' (55) and themselves have a deleterious effect upon others in their own and subsequent generations, then the fact of sin distorting human relationships must be a factor in his definition. Thirdly since, as was indicated earlier, Pittenger believes that his own understanding of sin takes account of the dynamic, 'becoming', quality of life in a way earlier theories of sin were unable to, then such a 'change of world view' which its 'vision of the world in process' (56) must be integral to his definition. The device by which Pittenger holds these dimensions together within a definition of sin is the concept of 'aim', which he borrows from Whitehead's conceptuality. This primarily is a positive emphasis. Against those whom he accuses

(54) C.R., p. 46.

(55) *ibid.*, p. 51.

(56) *ibid.*, p. 46.

of implying that sin is the most significant factor about human life, Pittenger believes that it is God's aim for man that is his prime characteristic.

'But the reality of our manhood, as each of us is a man, is the actualizing of deep, all-penetrating, all-integrating love, uniting us with our brethren; and through that uniting, uniting us also with the source of love, himself Love, namely God. This is the achievement, through our free human decisions, of the initial aim (to use once again the language of process thought) which God, the cosmic Love seeking ever to diffuse itself more fully and widely, has provided for each man - the initial aim which each man may take and make into his own subjective aim.' (57)

Sin is the failure to fulfil this God-given aim.

'Sin is a condition or state or situation in human existence in which men find themselves impotent before the requirements which they see, however dimly, are laid upon them simply by virtue of their being men. It is a 'grace-less' state, as one might put it; because it is a state in which there is failure in harmonizing the ideal and the actual, failure in integration of the self - always, mind you, the self in relation with others for we know of no other human selfhood - and failure to move towards the actualization of the possibilities which are present as the 'initial aim' of our lives is made into the 'subjective aim' (in Whiteheadian language) whose realization constitutes our 'becoming' in manhood ... God's purpose for us, his will is nothing other than that we should become ourselves as he initially aims us to become - and I have put it in this somewhat clumsy way because I wish to stress the aim which is integral to human nature. Sin ... is a religiously freighted term whose purpose is to point to that state: our failure to become what we are created to become and hence our failure to 'obey' God's commands which is precisely that we shall become what we are created to become.' (58)

Since Pittenger alone amongst process theologians interprets sin so specifically in terms of aim his use of the concept must be regarded as representing a distinct development beyond Whitehead's original intention. Because of this, and also because the concept figures prominently in Pittenger's Christology, his use of the notion of aim

(57) *ibid.*, p. 50.

(58) Last Things, p. 37.

must be set in its process background.

(4) The concept of aim

In the preceding quotations Pittenger may be noted to have drawn a distinction between subjective aim and initial aim. The former being the more generalized concept indicating that life has aim and purpose, the latter being descriptive of the mode of God's operation within life. That distinction will be maintained in this discussion and will be treated in that order.

(a) Subjective aim and the purposive nature of life

By employing the concept of subjective aim Pittenger seeks to substantiate his assertion that each man is a 'process of self-realization and self-actualization', 'a dynamic creature with a thrust or drive towards the realization of potentiality'.(59) He even says that 'each man finds his identity through his movement towards the actualizing of his subjective aim'.(60) He does this by setting humanity within the purposive and processive view of human life which is of the essence of Whitehead's conceptuality. Recognising that there is 'an element of teleological concern in all process thought',(61) he indicates that 'subjective aim' is the mechanism by which this is expressed. This is his definition.

'This 'subjective aim' which is proper to each series of occasions ... has always about it a directive quality, (it) is to be understood as the goal or end towards which a given process moves, yet it must also be seen as in some sense immanently at work in that process moving it towards its goal or end or actualization.'(62)

(59) C.R., p. 46.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 46.

(61) P.T.C.F., p. 15.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 15.

The phrase 'series of occasions' needs explanation. In process thought an actual occasion or entity, being in effect an instant of experience, is the basic constituent of living. A human life is, for example, thus seen as a series or routing of such occasions. Now although, as will be demonstrated presently, it is necessary to speak of the subjective aim of a single actual occasion, the concept of aim is made clearer if initially it is seen in the context of a series of occasions. This is where Pittenger is placing it in the preceding quotation. That quotation also indicates that process references to 'aim' mean more than that life is in general purposive. Rather it is saying that every 'series of occasions' has within it a directive quality; that every human life has immanently at work within it an aim which moves it towards its fulfilment. Pittenger clarifies this further by saying that although in human terms this aim is conscious, in lower forms of life it need not be so. He gives an example of this when he speaks of an acorn not being aware of the aim which keeps it moving towards its proper development into an oak tree; yet conscious or not it is indeed its 'subjective aim' which keeps it on the course of its proper development. (63)

The significance of the subjective aim, however, can only be fully grasped when seen in relation to each actual occasion.

(b) The subjective aim in each actual occasion

Whitehead states simply that the subjective aim 'controls the becoming of a subject'. (64) With greater complexity he says:

(63) *ibid.*, p. 15.

(64) Whitehead: Process, p. 30.

'The 'objectifications' of the actual entities in the actual world, relative to a definite actual entity, constitute the efficient causes out of which that actual entity arises: the 'subjective aim' at 'satisfaction' constitutes the final cause or lure, whereby there is determinate concrescence; and that attained 'satisfaction' remains as an element in the content of creative purpose.' (65)

In order to clarify how the subjective aim controls the becoming of the subject two comments must be made on this quotation. First, in Whitehead's thought 'satisfaction' is in effect a generic term for the fulfilment or completion to which an actual occasion or series of occasions aims. This will be variable. For an acorn it would simply be to become an oak. For a man a variety of 'satisfactions' will present themselves with each new experience, beyond which there is the ideal of a life's fulfilment. The aim towards satisfaction is thus a crucial element in the becoming both of an actual entity and of a subject. For, secondly, it is the mechanics of aim vis à vis actual entity, which that quotation speaks of as concrescence, that determines how any actual entity and thus subject will become. In a series of occasions each new occasion is influenced by its predecessor and then influences its successor through mutual prehension. The analogy of a reel of cine film helps to describe this process. But what is crucial, is that these occasions in series are not loosely but intimately connected. In process thought there is a strong emphasis on interdependence, upon entities influencing and affecting each other. An 'actual entity' is made up through the prehension of other entities. Concrescence is the word used for this coming together, this assimilation of the effects of actual entities or occasions to form a new occasion. Concrescence is the name given to the whole process of becoming when it

(65) *ibid.*, p. 105.

is found in a single actual entity. Thus Whitehead can say that concrescence is 'the real internal constitution of a particular existent'.(66) It is 'the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity'.(67) A new occasion is thus a multiplicity of influences of other occasions come together to form a new unit of experience. On the broader scale this means that in process thought a person is made up of a multiplicity of various factors and influences. But as the quotation upon which these comments are being made indicated, 'subjective aim' at 'satisfaction' is a determining and essential ingredient in every concrescence. Whitehead's interpreter Donald Sherburne explains why.

'The subjective aim of an actual entity is the ideal of what that subject could become, which shapes the very nature of the becoming subject. The doctrine that each actual entity is causa sui means that there is not first a subject, which then sorts out feelings; it means, rather, that there are first feelings which, through integrations, acquires the unity of a subject. Process doesn't presuppose a subject; rather, the subject emerges from the process.'(68)

This is highly significant for understanding 'subjective aim'. It is very different from thinking in terms of a person who has an aim or goal. Rather here it is the aim which in effect creates the person. In process thought 'subjective aim' is the determining factor in the concrescence of prehensions from other actual entities to form the new occasion.

It may thus be concluded that as it is the subjective aim which determines the make up of an actual entity from the number of prehensions

(66) *ibid.*, p. 242.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(68) D. W. Sherburne: A Key to Whitehead's 'Process and Reality', Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press Paperback, first pub. Macmillan, 1966, p. 244.

that come together to form it, so it is subjective aim which must be acknowledged as the principle whereby those 'congeries of occasions, events, pressures, movements and routes', (69) as Pittenger calls them, which make up our life's experience come together in the particular focus they do. It is the principle of subjective aim which explains why this and not 'some other possible occurrence' has been brought 'into this particular concrete moment of what we commonly call existence'. (70)

(c) God and the concept of aim

Donald Sherburne comments that it is 'subjective aim' which is 'the mode of God's operation in the world'. (71) Whitehead himself offers as a basic principle of his conceptuality that 'the world is self-creative'. Together these epitomize the process view of God's involvement with creation, which at the same time guarantees its freedom. The extended quotation from Whitehead is this.

'The world is self-creative; and the actual entity as self-creating creature passes into its immortal function as part-creator of the transcendent world. In its self-creation the actual entity is guided by its ideal of itself as individual satisfaction and as transcendent creator. The enjoyment of this ideal is the 'subjective aim' by reason of which the actual entity is a determinate process.' (72)

Here several basic process motifs are employed to indicate how God can provide life with its aim in a manner which allows for maximum freedom. For aim is the manner in which the coming together of prehensions in concrescence to form a new occasion is 'guided by

(69) P.T.C.F., p. 15.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 15.

(71) *ibid.*, p. 244.

(72) Whitehead: Process, p. 103.

its ideal of itself as individual satisfaction'. It is thus that a new occasion is created; self-created, that is by its assimilation of previous occasions in response to its aim.

God's primary involvement in this process, as a quotation from Pittenger earlier in this discussion showed, is to provide the initial aim for each new occasion, thus seeking that that occasion might create itself according to its highest possibilities. But as Pittenger also acknowledged in that quotation, relating the discussion to the meaning of sin, the new occasion need not actualize these possibilities. In the process of self-creation it can choose to reject God's initial aim and thus modify its own subjective aim.

(d) God and initial aim

At the opening of this section the point must be made that one not two aims are under discussion. The initial aim is best understood as 'the initial phase of each subjective aim', (73) or the 'initial subjective aim'. (74) It is the means suggested by process thought by which God becomes involved with the subjective aim of each actual entity. Indeed so close within this conceptuality is the relation of God to initial aim that sometimes Whitehead comes close to equating them. (75) It is through 'initial aim' that Whitehead can speak of God creating the 'creativity' by which a novel concrescence, or new actual occasion, comes to being. God offers the initial push from which the process of self-creation starts. (76) Thus Whitehead can say of God:

(73) *ibid.*, p. 406.

(74) *ibid.*, p. 287.

(75) *ibid.*, p. 286.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 286.

'He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim.' (77)

Thus the character of any new occasion is constituted by prehensions from the actual world in which it is situated and by the initial creative impetus it receives from God. How it employs that initial aim will depend upon its own subjective aim, or how God's initial aim has been received by previous occasions in its related series. Yet it is through 'initial aim' that God urges the creative process forwards into novelty. Whitehead is clear that 'the novel feelings derived from God are the foundations of progress', (78) and that 'apart from the intervention of God, there could be nothing new in the world, and no order in the world'; indeed apart from God 'the course of creation would be a dead level of ineffectiveness'. (79)

John Cobb in a survey of the development of Whitehead's concept of God (80) provides the background for understanding how 'initial aim' is integral to the process view of God. A brief consideration of this will help to clarify this discussion. Cobb suggests that in 'Science and the Modern World' Whitehead finds it necessary to posit the metaphysical principle of concretion or limitation in order to account for the orderliness of the world'. (81) The culmination of the argument of this book is that it is God who effects this limitation, being himself the 'Principle of Concretion'. (82) In 'Religion in the Making'

(77) *ibid.*, p. 406.

(78) *ibid.*, p. 289.

(79) *ibid.*, p. 288.

(80) John Cobb Jnr.: A Christian Natural Theology, London, Lutterworth Press, 1966, pp. 135-175.

(81) Whitehead: Science, p. 221.

(82) *ibid.*, p. 216.

Whitehead goes beyond this initial metaphysical statement by supplementing it with concepts drawn from religious thought, thus enabling him to be more positive about the divine activity. So he introduces the notion of creativity(83) and God is seen as the one who harmonizes and thus directs the possibilities of creativity in the universe. The technical method by which Whitehead does this in this book, is to posit God as an 'actual entity'(84) albeit a very special one. Cobb comments that by suggesting that God is an actual entity, and that in the advance of creativity, God is seen as offering to the world 'the vision of ideal possibility' as an important factor in the making of any new entity.(85) Yet the questions remain how does God direct creativity?, how does he make available to each occasion its appropriate ideas? Cobb suggests that Whitehead only answers this when in 'Process and Reality' he presents the concept of 'initial aim'. There he introduced the idea of 'subjective aim' by which a novel actual entity takes account both of its predecessors and of the possibilities that are open to it and then brings in that of 'initial aim' which describes the nature and origins of this aim as being of God.

Thus God in process thought is seen both to bring creation to order through limitation and to encourage movement towards novelty and creativity by providing the initial aim of any actual entity. God is therefore described by Whitehead as 'the organ of novelty, aiming at intensification'.(86) This God-given initial aim operates through proffering a lure towards fulfilment and satisfaction. Each new occasion

(83) Whitehead: Religion, p. 114.

(84) *ibid.*, p. 146.

(85) Cobb, *op.cit.*, p. 149.

(86) Whitehead: Process, p. 83.

is presented with a 'realm of pure possibilities' albeit only such as are relevant to that occasion's actual situation and environment. In such terms creative movement towards novelty is procured and yet freedom is maintained and the world remains self-creative. As Whitehead says; 'each temporal entity ... derives from God its basic conceptual (i.e. initial) aim, relevant to its actual world, yet with indeterminations awaiting its own decisions'. (87)

The character of this God-given aim must now be described and then the question of whether its denial constitutes sin, as Pittenger believes it does, must be asked.

(e) The nature of God's operation through aim

John Cobb offers this evocative description of the divinely proffered aim, from, as it were, the human viewpoint.

'We are thus offered a vision of something beyond ourselves and our past that calls us forward in each moment into a yet unsettled future, luring us with new and richer possibilities for our being. That something is an ever-changing possibility which impinges upon us as the relevant ideal for each new moment. It is the power that makes for novelty, creativity and life. Its power is that of an ideal, a power which is not coercive, but not, for that reason, ineffectual.' (88)

Such a picture is consonant with Whitehead's own view of God. In a celebrated passage in 'Process and Reality' Whitehead dismisses those three theistic views which he suggests have misled countless generations and stresses instead the simple 'Galilean origin of Christianity'.

'It does not emphasise the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present

(87) *ibid.*, p. 262.

(88) John B. Cobb Jnr.: God and the World, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1969, p. 55.

immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious to morals.' (89)

Donald Sherburne's comment should be noted that in this passage Whitehead is 'implicitly referring to his doctrine of God as the source of subjective aims'. 'God works slowly because there is no compulsion upon an actual entity to accept the proffered lure'. (90)

It is in such terms, then, that Whitehead employs this concept of aim to describe the fact and the character of God's involvement in the ongoing process of creation; an involvement which guarantees maximum freedom within the process for its self-creation. Further, there is no evidence that Whitehead ever went beyond this usage. For him the concept of aim was restricted to creativity. Pittenger, however, while recognising the concept as descriptive of a dynamic view of life, develops it in such a way that its negation can be interpreted as sin. Pittenger's distinctive use of the concept, therefore, must be accorded a separate discussion.

(5) Pittenger's use of the concept of aim

Pittenger's development of the concept of aim can be accounted for in three phases. Firstly, although in a few places he speaks of 'the initial aim given by God' to 'each entity or occasion' in response to which that entity 'achieves its own genuine satisfaction'; (91) yet his predominant use of the concept is more generalized. Instead of restricting the concept to actual entities or to the idea of creativity, he speaks of it as expressive of God's intention for the whole of a

(89) op.cit., p. 404.

(90) Sherburne: op.cit., p. 244.

(91) C.R., p. 83.

life. Thus he can write:

'To each human life God offers a purpose, an intention, a direction to follow ... providing for each actual human life its initial aim; by accepting this that life will be able to realize its potentialities.' (92)

The use of the synonyms 'purpose, intention, direction' are evidence of his generalized use of the aim concept. The peculiar use of the word 'actual' relative to 'human life', (Whitehead uses it of 'actual occasion') might be interpreted as a camouflage for his broadening of process terms. By this broadening he can equate God-given aim with 'vocational lure' (93) as being the highest intention for the fulfilment of any human life. Pittenger also speaks of God's aim for human life in general. Again using a synonym for aim he can refer to, 'the basic God-given motif (sic) of man's life', being to 'realize himself, in and with and for his brethren ... to become the expressive agent for the deepest and highest love, God himself'. (94)

By broadening the concept, however, beyond Whitehead's initial notion he is able the more readily to interpret it in terms of his theology. Thus secondly he relates the broadened concept to the work of the Logos. In speaking of a single identical God-given aim presented to every man, which he defines as the aim for a 'completely realized manhood with the brethren and in God', (95) he is also able to posit that it is 'the Logos who provides both the divinely given pattern for fulfilment and also the driving power which awakens the response of the creation moving it towards self-realization as the actualization of

(92) *ibid.*, p. 139.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 143.

(94) *ibid.*, p. 54.

(95) *ibid.*, p. 58.

potentialities'.(96) This is the essence of his incarnationalist emphasis. The character of the divine activity and its relation to mankind, seeing God as love operating through lure and solicitation and allowing maximum human freedom, is encapsulated for Pittenger within the concept of aim. Further within that dynamic view of God's involvement with humanity there is guaranteed for Pittenger his high estimate of the essential dignity of man. Thus he can translate the God-given aim in terms of the imago dei.

'Man made 'in the image of God', is intended to reflect in creaturely love the 'Love which moves the sun and the other stars' when and as he loves - or ... when he freely consents to let the cosmic love work through him as a personalized agent - he is on the way to his realization of possibilities in that concrete fulfilment about which we have spoken. This is man as God created him to be, meant him to be, wants him to be.'(97)

This quotation leads directly into the third aspect of Pittenger's interpretation of aim, namely that 'man is a thrust for love who seeks fulfilment in loving and being loved, in giving and receiving, and this in richest community'.(98) It is the divine aim, in words already quoted, that any man should become 'the expressive agent for the deepest and highest love, God himself'. Aim then becomes identified with love. The corollary of which is that its denial must constitute sin. For when man is in defection from his true aim of love,(99) and when 'as a lover man is both frustrated and also liable to distortion and twisting', then this 'is his sin'.(100)

It should be noted here that Pittenger's definition of sin in

(96) *ibid.*, p. 113.

(97) Love is the Clue, p. 47.

(98) *G.D.*, p. 94.

(99) *G.P.*, p. 60.

(100) Time for Consent, p. 44.

terms of failure to fulfil the God-given aim of life not only covers all forms of human wrongdoing but also is offered as an explanation of the fact of evil. Pittenger nowhere discusses any distinction between sin and evil, and in chapter five it will be demonstrated that whatever discussion he does offer of evil is dependent upon the concept of aim.

Pittenger's use of the concept of aim, however, is clearly an extension beyond Whitehead's suggestion that God's involvement in ongoing creation is characterized by love. There is no evidence that Whitehead intended or would have countenanced such an extension as Pittenger makes. Nevertheless Pittenger's use of the concept of aim is a major element in his thought, and will therefore play an important part in this thesis.

Pittenger, it was noted earlier, seeks to find a 'fit' between process thought and Christian theology. The concept of aim, albeit modified beyond its original usage, is a major tool in this attempted 'fit', being important not only for his definition of sin but also for his Christology and understanding of salvation. Understanding aim in a broad incarnationist sense, as a universal God-given thrust for love, salvation will be seen as the process whereby man is restored to his true loving self in fellowship with God and in relationship with his fellows. This will be effected as men come into communion with Christ, the one in whom God's aim was fulfilled, the one in whom the Logos was fully operative.

It is here, in Christology, that Pittenger's interpretation of aim in incarnationist terms is at its clearest. For 'the Incarnation of God in Christ' which is 'our clue to the nature of God and the purpose which he has in his world', is also 'our clue to the divinely-intended nature of man ... to the potentiality which by divine creation

is implanted in man'.(101) The various strands of Pittenger's thought, which will be developed in subsequent chapters, are held together within an implicit concept of aim, interpreted in incarnationalist terms, in this quotation.

'We need to revise our doctrine of man so that what classically is styled "the Incarnation" illuminates human nature generally as well as describes Jesus Christ specifically. This will mean that doctrines of the atonement, for example, must be seen in terms of true "at-one-ment" where man, created to be a lover, is given the capacity to love and is himself a place where divine love is ceaselessly at work evoking some sort of response in loving activity. Man will then be known as "co-creator" with God, as Whitehead put it only a few days before his death; this is man's dignity, his glory, his purpose for existence.'(102)

Before, however, moving on to a study of Pittenger's Christology, which this quotation leads into, a few interim comments will be made about Pittenger's understanding of sin.

(6) Summary and Comments

A summary of the two major sections of this chapter indicates that having rejected any suggestion that sin is endemic to human nature Pittenger's alternative is to speak of man's failure to fulfil his God-given aim; a failure to realize himself as the lover God intends him to be, a failure to be accounted for largely by his social conditioning. The implication to be drawn from this, which will be substantiated in the course of this study, is that should a human being be brought into a new situation, both personal and social, in which love was supreme, then he would be enabled to live in accordance with his God-given aim.

Stated thus Pittenger's understanding of sin is inadequate and

(101) W.I., p. 243.

(102) W. N. Pittenger: 'Towards a More Christian Theology', Religion in Life, Vol. 36, 1967, p. 504.

naive. Its inadequacy is demonstrated by the recognition that it seems to be oblivious to the tragic dimension of sin. Despite his protestations that he in no way minimizes sin or evil or its horrific effects in the world(103) the impression his view of sin leaves is of one wholly unrelated to the real world, wholly unconscious of its tragic power and effect in the world. Even his simple presupposition that all of life is purposive is strangely unrelated to the real world. These preliminary observations must be expanded into more detailed criticisms.

Firstly his insistence that there must be 'a drive or a thrust or a dynamic in human nature which cannot be forgotten if we hope accurately to describe what it means to be human', seems to be unnecessarily harsh on those whose lives have no sense of the dynamic; the aged infirm, the deficient, the starving, the deprived. No doubt Pittenger would respond that his reference is to a thrust of love which is applicable in every situation of life and therefore such criticism is to misunderstand his intention. Not only, however, do I think such a criticism has substance but it also demonstrates in real terms the difference between Whitehead's and Pittenger's use of the concept of aim. Taking the example of an aged and chronic infirm person, Whitehead's concept of aim would simply say that at each moment of that person's daily life God presents an ideal for satisfaction but only one which is strictly related to that person's situation, ability, environment and physical and mental condition; with no sense that failure to realize that aim could be considered sin. Pittenger's broader application of the concept, however, in terms of the fulfilment

(103) G.D., p. 21.

of God's purpose for love, not only ignores the simple application of Whitehead's concept but in so doing makes the whole idea at best inappropriate, at worst cruel, for those whose lives cannot truly be describable in terms of thrust for love. There must be many millions in the world whose life's expectations are so circumscribed as to make Pittenger's description of human life seem so unreal as to be callous.

This conclusion is confirmed when, secondly, the tragic dimension of sin is considered; a dimension which affects both the victims and the perpetrators. In respect of victims there are vast areas of human experience which testify to the tragic effects of human wrongdoing. History is littered with the victims of war, oppression and persecution. The names Dachau, Belsen, the Gulag Archipelago and Hiroshima symbolize such horror in this century. Now although in a later chapter Pittenger's understanding of how God overcomes evil in the world will be discussed there can be no doubt that part of the human tragedy is that sin breeds sin. Something of outbreak of violence and urban guerilla warfare, for example in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and South America, can be accounted for as the reaction of those who for years and generations have smarted under oppression. The victims of injustice have become so embittered that by their reaction sin gains new force. It may be to parody Pittenger to say that the advice to an urban guerilla that he seek to fulfil the God-given aim of his life and become a lover would be utterly naive, but that parody underlines the weakness of Pittenger's position.

Further, though, there is the deep tragedy of those who know their deeds have been evil. This is a theme which has been the core of the tragedian's art through the centuries. I offer three examples. First there might be the picture of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, semi-

crazed, oppressed by the murders to which she has been party, in a sleep-walking attempt to wash her hands of blood.(104) Secondly in Dostoyevsky's novel with the significant title 'Crime and Punishment', Raskolnikov's punishment lies in his deepening alienation from himself after the murder of an old moneylender. His private torment reaches its climax when before surrendering himself to the authorities he confesses his guilt to Sonia, the girl who cares for him.

'"Was it the old hag I killed? No, I killed myself, not the old hag. I did away with myself at one blow and for good. It was the devil who killed the old hag, not I. But enough. Enough, Sonia, enough! Leave me alone!" he suddenly shouted in a spasm of black despair.'(105)

Evidence of similar torment of the wrong-doer is found in a modern popular novel. In John Braine's 'Room at the Top' Joe Lampton, the anti-hero, seduces the daughter of a wealthy factory owner and the marriage resulting from her pregnancy assures his entrée to the Top. Meanwhile he also comes to know Alice, a married woman, and their relationship grows into genuine love. Both affairs mature almost simultaneously. Shortly after Joe finishes their liaison, Alice gets drunk and is killed when her car crashes at speed into a wall, at a beauty spot where she and Joe had come to know each other. Joe recognises that she has died trying to escape the grief he had brought her. The book ends with Joe lying in the road in drunken remorse, crying, "I murdered Alice". To the assurance of his friends, "Nobody blames you", he replies, "Oh my God, that's the trouble".(106)

(104) William Shakespeare: Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 1.

(105) Fyodor Dostoyevsky: Crime and Punishment, Penguin Classics Edition translated by David Magarshack, London, Penguin Books, 1951, p. 433.

(106) John Braine: Room at the Top, Paperback Edition, Penguin Books, London, 1959, p. 235.

These three examples illustrate the deep personal tragedy that can follow evildoing. This is infinitely more than some failure to fulfil a God-given aim and the exhortation to seek to become a lover and thus fulfil your aim would seem to be crass to such characters. Their actions were deeply irrevocable, in one sense irredeemable, and this they themselves recognised. Pittenger's view of sin seems far removed from the deep tragedy which sin breeds so often in human experience and which these examples from fiction illustrate.

Quite simply Pittenger's understanding of sin seems best suited to some ideal world, which this world patently is not. At this point of the thesis one might wonder, granted that Pittenger's diagnosis of the human situation is right, why the Christian Church has laid such stress in its worship and preaching upon the death of Jesus upon the Cross for the sins of the whole world. The Cross, indeed, seems to point to and highlight a tragic dimension of human experience which Pittenger's system ignores. But in order to see how Pittenger interprets the Cross it is necessary first to examine his Christology.

CHAPTER 2PITTENGER'S CHRISTOLOGY - THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST(1) Introduction

A strong emphasis on the humanity of Christ is the mark of Pittenger's Christology, and only in the light of that emphasis does he interpret his 'divinity', with Jesus' difference or 'speciality' from other men being seen as a matter of 'degree' rather than of 'kind'. In the concept of 'aim' he finds a ready tool with which to explicate this, for it is in that Jesus fulfilled the God-given aim of life that he is distinguished from others who fail to do so. The corollary of this for salvation is that it is as people move, in the fellowship of Christ, towards the realization of God's aim for love that they will know wholeness of life. Thus Pittenger's stress on the 'genuine, complete, normal manhood of Jesus', (1) has essentially a soteriological motive, for he fears that if Jesus is 'removed from the concrete human situation which we men share together', then he becomes 'irrelevant' to us. (2) He therefore insists that the action of God seen in Christ is not in contrast to 'that of God in every man', and he criticizes classical theology for regarding his saving work as 'done to us rather than done in us', thus making Jesus 'a strange visitor from some other sphere, rather than the victorious participant in our human condition'. (3) This final phrase encapsulates Pittenger's approach to Christology. Jesus is the one who victoriously fulfilled life's God-given aim and

(1) C.R., p. 2.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 3.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 3.

who enables others to move towards such fulfilment. This approach requires a human Jesus.

His emphasis on Jesus being truly man is confirmed by his opposition to all docetic tendencies in Christology, implicit 'in much of the popular dislike for a strong emphasis on the total reality of Jesus' humanity', which he finds particularly amongst 'those who think of their view as rigidly orthodox'.⁽⁴⁾ He recognises that 'it was perhaps inevitable that the overwhelming Christian experience of God made available to men in Jesus would lead to a less vigorous insistence on the manhood which was his';

'yet the failure to stress to the full the reality of that manhood, in all its royal splendour and in all its necessary limitation, has led to an impoverishment of Christianity in age after age. It is only within the last hundred years that the thinking of Christians has been able to give right value to that humanity.'⁽⁵⁾

Reference here is to advances in Gospel criticism over the past century which, he implies, have made possible a clearer picture of the human Jesus. It is with a discussion of how Pittenger uses the Gospels that his description of Jesus' life and ministry and its significance for his Christology must begin.

(2) His approach to the Gospel narratives

(a) The critical study of the Gospels

It was primarily the 'Jesus of history' movement that made possible an unequivocal emphasis on Christ's humanity. Donald Baillie says of it:

(4) W.I., p. 8.

(5) G.P., p. 31.

'The present situation in Christology is one which could not have emerged before the 'Jesus of history' movement, but only after it ... If the historico-critical movement, with its rediscovery of the historical Jesus, laid a new and sometimes startling emphasis on our Lord's humanity, and took it more seriously than it had ever been taken before in their interpretation of the Gospel story, the present tendency is not to shrink back again from that interpretation, but to carry it further still, to go all the way with it. And not as a matter of unwelcome historical necessity, but as a matter of faith, of theological truth ...' (6)

Now while Pittenger would agree with Baillie that the 'Jesus of history' movement began a process of thought which served to make the docetic position untenable, not least because it started from the 'hard facts' of the human Jesus instead of from 'speculation and theories' about his divinity, (7) yet he also is critical of it because, especially in its more extreme guises, it led to a theology which was 'far removed from the deepest insights of the Christian faith', (8) namely that form of Liberal Protestantism which reduced Christianity to being in essence, 'the teaching of Jesus about God's Fatherhood and Man's brotherhood and the possibility of living "eternally in the midst of time"'. (9) Such a view Pittenger accuses of not being sufficiently 'historically grounded' in that an 'exaggerated insistence on the Jesus of history' excludes recognition of the historical validity of 'faith in his person'. (10) Whereas he requires that 'interpretations of Jesus in higher terms', (11) which find expression in the supernatural and miraculous elements in the Gospels, should be recognised as historical data since they are a reflection of 'the reality of the continuing

(6) D. M. Baillie: God was in Christ, London, Faber, 1948, pp 9-10.

(7) W.I., p. 8.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 8.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 77.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 8.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 9.

experience of his presence and power in the life of the Christian community'.(12) He finds support in this from the insights of Form-Criticism.

He suggests that the most significant conclusion obtained from the Form-Criticism of the Gospels is that they are theological and kerygmatic documents written to evince faith in the living Lord and not simply to present an account of the life of Jesus; that 'our information concerning our Lord comes to us through the experience of the primitive Christian community'.(13) Thus the faith of the Early Church is seen as an important historical datum for any understanding of the person of Jesus.

'Everything that we know about him is mediated to us through the faith-interpretation of the primitive Christian community; and while theoretically we may speak of the 'days of his flesh' without any such interpretation, the truth is that this 'uninterpreted' figure is in its detailed portrayal almost entirely a figment of the critic's imagination.'(14)

Yet this does not mean that he regards the historicity of Jesus as insubstantially based, with total reliance being placed upon the Church's interpretation. Despite his own emphasis upon the Church as the vehicle for knowledge of Jesus he criticizes those who suggest that 'there is nothing known about Jesus which has any valid claim to being historical' and that we must simply accept the Gospels as 'the Church's interpretative story of the figure whom it worships'.(15) Such scepticism seems to Pittenger a mistaken use of Form-Criticism. For himself Form-Criticism has provided a 'different way of getting at the historical figure' which need not in any way make 'the historicity of that figure questionable'.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 77.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 49.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 9.

(15) C.R., pp. 28f.

'We can only get at Jesus through the eyes of those who already believed in him to be highly exalted as their risen Lord. But this does not necessarily entail either that we must accept their particular mode of interpreting him or that we must reject any possible interpretation of him.'(16)

So towards his understanding of the human Jesus, Pittenger seeks to hold together two strands which help him to establish the historicity of Jesus; first, there is the experience of the Christian community, secondly, there is the ascertainable historicity of the person of Jesus which can be discovered within and beyond the Church's interpretation of him found in the Gospels. He calls this approach 'double historicity'.

(b) Double historicity

By this device Pittenger seeks to maintain two truths about the human Jesus. Firstly, it makes it possible to talk about Jesus as an historical figure; for he is in no doubt that if any emphasis is to be laid upon the humanity of Jesus then this must be firmly grounded in the events of history, 'however uncertain we may be about the details of that history', for unless one is 'able to say something about his human life at a given time and place the humanity claimed for him vanishes into thin air'.(17) Secondly, double historicity gives grounds 'for saying that Jesus was not simply an instance of manhood but that he was 'important' in the ongoing life of the human race'.(18) Pittenger employs this word 'importance', borrowed from Whitehead, to indicate the significance of Jesus both for the early Christian community and for his effect upon subsequent history. Jesus was thus a man but a

(16) *ibid.*, p. 29.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 22.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 25.

very special one whose life has to be judged in terms of his total impact. Both of these factors of historicity have, in Pittenger's view, to be held together if a complete understanding of Jesus is to be gained. This is his definition of historicity.

'The word historical can mean at least two things. It can mean that there was, as a matter of reasonable induction from the available evidence, such an historical event or person or act. I suppose that this is the commonly accepted sense of the word. But historical can also mean that the results of some supposed event, the precise details of which are not anything like so clear as we might wish them to be, are such that they have been ploughed into succeeding ages, resulting in modified attitudes, awakening new convictions, giving new insights into how things go in the world.'(19)

Pittenger insists that 'the Christian theologian must affirm of Jesus of Nazareth both meanings of the term historical'.(20) Thus, on the one hand, 'Jesus did live' and 'he was the kind of man' that 'the total impression' of the 'available evidence' portrays him to be'.(21) (What he means by this will be considered in a moment.) Then, on the other hand, he is also historical in the sense that 'he has been remembered ... in such a fashion that his impact upon the world has wrought enormous changes in the attitudes which have been taken in succeeding ages, in the convictions about God and man and their relationship which his existence has engendered'.(22) The medium for this has been the Church, for borrowing a phrase from John Knox which will be examined in a later chapter, it is the task of the Church to 'remember' Jesus.

(19) *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 25.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 25.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 25.

Now while Pittenger is right to say that 'it would be quite impossible ... to make assertions about the 'importance' of Jesus, if we had no good reason to think that historicity in our first sense did not apply to him', (23) yet he lays such emphasis upon the faith-experience of the Church and its task of remembrance that it might be suspected that his double historicity is a somewhat unbalanced device. Clearly for him the faith of the Church is a more significant historical datum than the life of Jesus, for without the former the latter would not be what it is.

'It is the living community alone which brings the fact of Jesus Christ before all succeeding generations of men. Without that community he would be an historical figure, but he would not be the figure that in Christian experience he has been seen to be.' (24)

This should be a recognised factor in any reading of the Gospels.

'The New Testament itself is rightly read only when it is seen as the account of the way in which the Jesus of history was apprehended in the days of his flesh as prophet and perhaps 'more than a prophet', became the Christ of the Church's faith through the event of the Resurrection, and through the continuing communion of the disciples and others with him, now risen, experienced in the early days of the Christian community.' (25)

It is thus by a process of accounting for and removing those elements in the Gospels which reflect 'heightening' due to the apologetic and evangelistic concerns of the early Church and which describe the importance of Jesus in the mythological thought forms of the first century, that he is able to detect 'the over-all impression (of Jesus) which the Gospels convey', (26) and upon which his stress on the humanity of Jesus depends. The operation of this principle will be

(23) *ibid.*, p. 26.

(24) *W.I.*, p. 78.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 78.

(26) *C.R.*, p. 31.

noted in subsequent pages. However, by making the historical Jesus wholly dependent on the experience of the Church, while at the same time stressing that the human Jesus, however little may be known about him, is vitally important, Pittenger could be accused of wanting to have his cake and eat it. Yet perhaps this device of 'double historicity' should be recognised as a genuine attempt to hold together both the faith of the Church and the fact of Jesus, against tendencies that would lay exclusive stress on one or the other. The whole tenor of Pittenger's theological approach would lead one to suspect that he would tend towards a good deal of scepticism about the details of the life of Jesus, and although in subsequent pages his picture of Jesus will be shown to be a heavily reduced one, yet he holds back from total scepticism primarily because he recognises that any stress upon the humanity of Jesus must be dependent upon some knowledge of the historical Jesus. 'Double historicity' might thus be seen as the boundary that Pittenger erects to prevent excessive scepticism about the human Jesus. Indeed the residual picture of Jesus that emerges after the operation of this principle fits neatly into Pittenger's theological scheme. Pittenger is thus enabled to speak of Jesus having a strong sense of mission relative to the coming of God's kingdom, which he is able to translate in terms of the fulfilment of his life's aim.

Despite, however, my contention that this 'double historicity' is unbalanced, that the faith of the Church is clearly for Pittenger the more significant historical datum and that the picture of Jesus he presents is a much reduced one, after the heightened Gospel elements have been accounted for, it is interesting to note that one criticism that is laid against him is that he lays too much emphasis on the historical figure. In a later chapter, John Knox, whose scepticism

about the historical Jesus is more marked than Pittenger's, will be quoted as saying that Pittenger lays significantly less stress upon the Church than he does himself. It will then be suggested that this might be accounted for as resulting from the approach described by Pittenger as 'double historicity', which, in a somewhat clumsy manner, seeks both to stress the Church's role and also emphasize the historical figure. It is then to the portrait of Jesus discovered beyond the application of this device of 'double historicity' that we now turn.

(3) Pittenger's portrait of Jesus

This is Pittenger's description of Jesus' life, gleaned from the 'over-all impression' the Gospels convey.

'He went about doing good; he preached, taught, healed, lived in such a manner that many were drawn to him; he boldly announced the coming of God's kingdom of justice and of love; he was finally brought to the end which the gospels describe: arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And he was believed by those who had companied with him, and later by thousands of others, to have been raised from among the dead; the conviction is written plainly over all the material and no matter how we may feel impelled to understand the mode of the resurrection ..., the fact of the primitive belief that he was 'let loose into the world' ... is entirely unquestionable.' (27)

Although in that quotation the two aspects of double historicity can be detected, the Christian experience of the Resurrection is clearly regarded as 'determinative of the whole New Testament picture of Christ', (28) and so before any details about the life and ministry of Jesus can be discussed the heightened elements of the story which betray the concerns of the Church have to be accounted for.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 31.

(28) *W.I.*, p. 52.

(4) Pittenger's interpretation of the 'heightened' elements in the Gospels

Speaking of these 'heightened' elements Pittenger quotes with approval these words of Bethune-Baker from his 'Way of Modernism':

'To dismiss these stories of Christ's miracles, the virginal conception, and the empty tomb as worthless, when we are seeking a true valuation of Jesus and the whole experience of which he was the centre, is to shut one's eyes to some of the bits of evidence we have about him and the impression he produced.' (29)

That this is also Pittenger's understanding is clear, as it is quite consistent with his general approach. Stories associated with the Nativity, the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus he categorizes as 'legend'; by which he means;

'... tales told about an historic person or event, with the intention (perhaps never consciously formulated as such) of heightening the testimony to the significance which this person or event is believed to possess.' (30)

It is not necessary to investigate these events of the life of Christ in any detail; rather what is significant for this study is Pittenger's general approach to them, recognising as he does the significance of the experience of the Church in them. Although, for example, Pittenger would allow himself a good deal of scepticism as to just how much historical fact lies behind the Birth stories, yet he believes they are important for Christological thought because 'they are indicative of the high valuation which early Christians placed upon the person of Christ and their conviction that he was not to be explained solely in terms of human perfection - God was supremely and specially involved in the life of their Lord'. (31) He treats the Virginal Conception in a

(29) *ibid.*, p. 53.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 68.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 66.

similar way. Believing that 'Christology does not demand or imply the conception of Jesus without human paternal co-operation', he prefers to think of this story as 'poetic and imaginative, rather than historically (and biologically) veridical', (32) seeking to express the high significance of Jesus. This same approach is applied to the narratives of the Empty Tomb. Pittenger speaks of them as 'carriers for the primitive Christian community's conviction' that Jesus who had lived and who had been crucified, 'was alive again with his disciples'.(33) Yet while for Pittenger the stories of the Empty Tomb are not of absolute significance the Resurrection is central to the Christian faith.

'On the basis of New Testament evidence we must say that the Christian faith includes at its heart the assertion that Jesus, though he died, is yet alive for ever more; and that he is alive, not in some vague sense of survival of the soul after death, but in the fullest and richest sense possible - namely, in the whole integrity of his human nature as well as in the divinity which is his by virtue of his intimate and 'personal' relationship of that human nature with God.' (34)

The important point to be noted here is that Pittenger takes the humanity of Christ deep into the Resurrection, which he interprets as the affirmation that in Christ, in virtue of his relationship with God, there is seen life which not even death can conquer. Indeed the believer's relationship 'in Christ' makes this life available to them.

'That Jesus is alive, in the full integrity of his divine-human personality, that he is both 'with God' and 'with men', and that he energizes in his disciples: these assertions are essential to the Christian faith ... our present relationship with him is itself an entrance into his own risen life, for as the believer responds to him in faith, love, and worship, Christ gives him the power to share in his own life with God.' (35)

(32) *ibid.*, p. 66.

(33) *ibid.*, p. 67.

(34) *ibid.*, p. 68.

(35) *ibid.*, p. 69.

This view is confirmed by Pittenger's view of the Ascension. The significance of this narrative which he regards as legend is that;

'The Lord, known in faith and risen from the dead, is with God and of God. His Spirit and his life, his very self, are regnant at the centre of all things. As Jesus Christ lived in our humanity as a true man, so humanity is enthroned in Godhead: God knows human life and shares in human experience in and through that relationship with manhood established in Christ, shown to be indestructible by his rising from the dead, and now 'throned' with God in heavenly places.' (36)

By thus understanding the 'heightened' elements of the Gospels Pittenger seeks to safeguard the humanity of Jesus. He rejects any interpretation of the miraculous as evidence of the divine at work in Christ's life overturning natural laws since such would imperil Christ's humanity.

'The Incarnation neither demands nor implies 'miracle' in the vulgar sense of the disruptive violation of the relatively settled order of nature which is God's way of working in the world.' (37)

Thus he concludes:

'The humanity of Jesus is truly human; and to historical study, in its strict sense, he yields nothing but humanity ... The works of healing which he performed are the work of a man, related to God as intimately as man can be related; they are not contradictions of the potentialities of human nature.' (38)

Various aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus the man must now be considered.

(5) The life and ministry of Jesus

Pittenger discerns the life of Jesus only within the context of normal human, social, cultural and religious conditioning. If he is truly human he must be a man of a specific time, place and culture.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 69.

(37) *ibid.*, p. 184.

(38) *ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

Thus Pittenger emphasizes his Jewishness.

'Whatever may have been different about him, his Jewishness - and that the Jewishness appropriate to someone living there and then - is an unquestionable fact. What he taught, how he looked at the world, his conception of God, and the like, did not have about it the sort of originality which might be supposed if he had appeared as a bolt from the blue. All of it is set in the context of the Judaism of his age. Jesus' originality, which is certainly marked, was of another sort.' (39)

This originality he finds exemplified by Jesus' references to the Kingdom of God. He shared with his contemporaries 'those eschatological ideas concerning the Kingdom and its manner of coming which are commonly summed up under the heading of "apocalyptic"'; meaning the hope that the Kingdom would come within the near future. Pittenger stresses that 'the "residual" picture of Jesus' in the Gospels 'is of a man who conceived his mission to be the announcement of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God'. (40) This was the underlying theme of his preaching, teaching and miracles. Against nationalistic views of the Kingdom, he spoke of the coming of the 'reign of God, which would replace the kingdoms of this world, marked as they were by a sinful defection from God's will'. (41)

Further Jesus was the 'living embodiment of all that he taught and did'. In his life there was expressed 'submission to the will of God, acceptance of God's kingly rule, and ... the faith, hope and love which would mark the Kingdom when it came'. (42) Pittenger stresses also that the 'general impression' of Jesus in the Gospels shows that he regarded himself not only as the bearer of God's message but also

(39) C.R., p. 35.

(40) *ibid.*, p. 35.

(41) W.I., p. 60.

(42) *ibid.*, p. 61.

as the instrument of its working. He speaks of 'the indubitable historicity of Jesus' sense of divine vocation and his statement, both in word and deed, of the demand which God makes for radical obedience'.(43)

This is perhaps Pittenger's fullest Statement of Jesus' consciousness of his vocation:

'There seems no doubt that he felt himself to be the central actor in a great drama which would usher in the coming Kingdom. God had sent him to undertake this role and he fulfilled it to the end, even when it became apparent to him that the will of God for the achieving of this end involved his own submission to death as the supreme act which would have its essential place in establishing the Kingdom - the act for which, on the one hand, God waited, and which, on the other hand, he had ordained as a necessary part in the accomplishment of this purpose of making his Kingdom a reality in the affairs of men.'(44)

This identification of Jesus with the Kingdom of God even to the Cross Pittenger rightly asserts is found deep in the New Testament. Although he is unwilling to define Jesus' self-consciousness, believing that the Gospel records do not provide sufficient evidence for such an enterprise; yet he is sure that the 'general impression' is of one whose task was to bring about the fulfilment of God's purpose and the establishment of his kingly rule among men',(45) and this included 'obedience to the point of death'.(46)

This picture of Jesus as being dedicated to God's will and purpose is an important element in Pittenger's Christology because it provides corroboration for his suggestion, which will be discussed more fully later, that Jesus actualized the God-given aim of life, which is the furtherance of the divine will of love.

(43) C.R., p. 36.

(44) W.I., p. 61.

(45) *ibid.*, p. 61n.

(46) G.P., p. 35.

(6) Some further implications of Jesus' humanity

It is a basic principle of Pittenger's insistence on the full humanity of Jesus that he lived 'a human life under the same human conditions as face any one of us'; (47) meaning that he was subject to hunger, thirst, disease, tiredness, physical stimulation and all other natural concomitants of the human condition. This also means that he grew to maturity physically, emotionally and mentally according to the normal human time scale. Now although Pittenger accepts that few if any theologians today would quarrel with this insistence on the maturing physical humanity of Jesus, since the docetic heresy which speaks of Jesus only 'assuming the appearance of manhood' has long since been rejected, yet he is not so sure that the more subtle docetic tendency which accepts 'the humanity of Jesus so far as his physical body is concerned but hesitates at allowing to him a 'genuine human centre of personality' does not still have support'. (48) Pittenger himself believes that it is important to insist on the full reality of Jesus' human psyche; (49) in which he would include the limitations of knowledge for a man of his time, the natural development of his mental and emotional capacities and the growth of his consciousness. Possibly Pittenger's most detailed statement of this position is when he quotes the following from John Knox:

'The really authentic marks (of Jesus' humanity) must be found in his consciousness. Unless he had a human consciousness, he was not a man. If he did not think and feel, about himself and others, as a man does; if he did not take man's lot for granted as being intimately, entirely and irrevocably his own; if he did

(47) *ibid.*, p. 24.

(48) *C.R.*, p. 22.

(49) *ibid.*, p. 35.

not share at the very deepest levels of his conscious and subconscious life, in our human anxieties, perplexities, and loneliness; if his joys were not characteristic human joys and his hopes, human hopes; if his knowledge of God was not in every part and under every aspect the kind of knowledge which it is given to man, the creature, to have - then he was not a true human being, he was not made man, and the Docetics were essentially right.' (50)

The necessity of insisting upon the human consciousness of Jesus is brought out in Pittenger's comments on H. M. Relton's 'A Study in Christology' (London, S.P.C.K., 1917). Pittenger here outlines Relton's doctrine of 'enhypostasia':

'The essence of this theory is that the personal centre of the life of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God is to be found not in his humanity, but in the Divine Word who is incarnate there. Dr. Relton insists that the humanity of Jesus must be full and real; and he also insists that it must have a proper 'centring' in a personal ego. But whereas in men generally this 'centring' is in a human hypostasis or person, in the incarnate Lord the humanity is given its personal centre by the Word who takes to himself the human nature in and through which he lives among men.' (51)

There is no doubt that this doctrine of enhypostasia means that the manhood of Jesus has no independent personality of its own but that it receives it by its assumption by the Logos. Enhypostasia seeks to maintain the humanity of Christ by insisting that the human attributes were not lost but rather included within the hypostasis of the Godhead. Yet in spite of Relton's intention of affirming the full humanity of Jesus and of avoiding anhypostasia, the danger is clearly present. Pittenger points this out.

(50) W.I., p. 10 - John Knox: The Death of Christ, London, Collins, 1959, p. 71.

(51) W.I., p. 100.

'While it is said that this theory does not in any sense deny the full humanity of Jesus, some of those who accept it have realized that an inevitable corollary of the doctrine is anhypostasia, or impersonality, so far as the humanity is concerned. That is to say, the human nature of Jesus in fact must lack any strictly human personal centre.' (52)

Pittenger will have none of this, insisting that Jesus must 'possess a human centring such as is common to the rest of us'. (53) Indeed

Pittenger goes beyond this and interprets hypostasis as a centre of human experience. This point of view, however, is questioned by John McIntyre, who is just as aware of the failings of enhypostasia.

'It would perhaps be a little too premature to follow too closely Pittenger's interpretation of hypostasis as the centre of human experiences; for ... it is not immediately justifiable to translate what is a strictly logical concept into psychological terminology.' (54)

This criticism evoked the following reply from Pittenger:

'He fails to see that precisely because I refuse to interpret the Father's' use of the term hypostasis as signifying such a centre of human experiences (which would be to misinterpret them) yet argue that we today are bound to interpret it in precisely that fashion. I found it impossible to accept either an anhypostatic (no human hypostasis) or an enhypostatic (the only hypostasis of the human nature is in the divine hypostasis) christology. In such a christology, for us today, our Lord would have no human centring or would find that centring of his human experiences in the divine word - and that would mean, in the light of our way of seeing human personality and human nature and human existence, all three, that he was not fully human at all.' (55)

It is clear from this discussion that when Pittenger speaks of the humanity of Jesus that he means a human personality within a human

(52) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(53) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(54) John McIntyre: The Shape of Christology, London, S.C.M., 1966, p. 97.

(55) C.R., p. 43f.

psycho-physical organism. Some further implications of this must now be listed.

Firstly, Pittenger stresses that Jesus' knowledge could not have been more than was available to any man living in Palestine in the first century. His awareness of events, his fund of information were strictly limited. He was conditioned by the thought-forms and beliefs of his day. As an instance of this Pittenger mentions Jesus' belief that emotional and mental disorders were due to demonic possession.(56) Secondly, like any other human being, Jesus must have developed towards maturity in every aspect of life over a normal time scale. Pittenger's use of the process conceptuality requires that he views any human being, Jesus included, as a developing creature in a process of becoming. When a life is viewed as a 'routing of occasions' and experiences are seen as its basic ingredients, then development towards maturity is the natural concomitant.(57) So the third conclusion Pittenger draws from this is that Jesus' spiritual and moral understanding were also the products of a process of maturing. Thus, for example, his awareness of a special commission to usher in God's kingdom must have developed during his maturing years, with several moments of special spiritual insight as occasions within that process. Pittenger suggests that the Gospels provide evidence 'of the fact that Jesus did not come to his acceptance of vocation without a struggle'.(58) The Temptation story he sees as an example of this and he interprets the agony in Gethsemane as a 'poignant testimony to some memory within the primitive community that the figure in whom they reposed their faith had not found it easy to

(56) *ibid.*, p. 38.

(57) *ibid.*, p. 47.

(58) *ibid.*, p. 37.

accept the vocation which led him to death'. (59) It should be commented, however, that these Gospel narratives are susceptible of alternative interpretations. I would suggest that the Temptation narrative is descriptive of a Jesus who though sure of his divine vocation had at the beginning and indeed throughout his ministry to counter subtle and plausible attempts to lure him from what he recognised to be his true path; as H. E. W. Turner describes the Temptation, 'an inner wrestling with wrong ways of fulfilling His Messianic Call'; (60) while I would suggest that the agony in the Garden is expressive of Jesus' genuine human frailty. While maintaining his submission to God's will, he realized that the moment of terrible ordeal was upon him. Pittenger's interpretation of these passages is altogether too slanted towards his theological presuppositions.

The fourth point he makes is the corollary of all this, namely that Jesus did not have some automatic goodness, but rather the quality of goodness which marked his life 'had to be acquired' (61) as he matured. Here his antithesis to docetism is at its plainest. He is not saying that Jesus once was bad and then improved, rather he is making a Christological point against those who would speak of Jesus as being perfect because God was in him. He is asserting that like any other human being it was as Jesus developed physically and mentally that his moral awareness also grew, though for him this was sharpened by his simultaneous growing awareness of a special vocation to make God's rule effective in the world. Of course the scriptural evidence

(59) *ibid.*, p. 37.

(60) H. E. W. Turner: Jesus Master and Lord, London, Mowbray, 1953, p. 99.

(61) C.R., p. 37.

for such an estimate of Jesus is scanty. He presents in evidence the meeting of Jesus with the Syro-Phoenician woman in St. Mark Ch. 7 vs. 24-30, and in a slightly different version in St. Matthew Ch. 15 vs. 21-28, both for Jesus' personal moral maturing and his growing awareness of the implications of his ministry. Jesus' first ungracious reaction describing the Gentiles as dogs and implying that 'salvation is for Jews only'; a reaction later repented when 'confronted by human despair, moved by human need and even ... attracted by the wit of the mother's response'; is evidence for Pittenger that Jesus himself had to learn that 'salvation has a wider sweep' than just the Jews and also that his response to human need was not automatic'.(62) However, despite in the same context suggesting that 'we do not need to make of the story a psychological account portraying internal development in Jesus' mind or feelings', Pittenger seems to come perilously close to that. Further, despite his preference for the 'over-all impression' of Jesus to be found in the Gospels, which would preclude any possibility of a psychological portrayal of Jesus, Pittenger does seem to lay undue emphasis upon every detail of this particular story. In this I think he is guilty of a piece of exegetical special pleading which is inconsistent with his general understanding of the Bible. This, however, is itself a significant piece of evidence about Pittenger's Christology; namely that he is at pains to stress that in every respect Jesus was a man like other men. Whatever might be said about Jesus' distinctiveness must be said strictly within that context and without prejudice to it. This will become clearer as the various strands of this chapter are drawn together in a consideration of the 'Sinlessness of Jesus', with

(62) *ibid.*, p. 37.

which this chapter will close.

(7) The Sinlessness of Jesus

Five preliminary points which indicate the nature of Pittenger's opposition to the idea of the 'Sinlessness of Jesus' will be made.

First, Pittenger's approach to the Gospel narratives means that he considers it impossible 'to demonstrate from the available material that Jesus was absolutely sinless', (63) in the sense that at no time in his life had he ever performed a wrong action or cherished an unworthy thought. The kerugmatic nature of the Gospels and the 'vast areas of Jesus' life about which we know nothing at all', (64) preclude the possibility of making any historically satisfactory statement about whether Jesus did or did not commit actions that could be deemed sinful. It is not possible to argue from silence either way. (65)

Secondly, Pittenger suspects any doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ of being docetic. To expect that every action, word and thought of Jesus was perfect is, to Pittenger, tantamount to believing that 'Jesus lived, acted and spoke in a non-human manner altogether'; (66) such a sinless Jesus would be 'too spiritual, too ideal, too inhuman, too unnatural'. (67) (Pittenger is here meaning sin in its more usual senses and not according to his reinterpretation.)

Thirdly, emphasis on the humanity of Jesus requires the recognition that he shared in all the deficiencies of the human situation. 'He could not have been human had he not done so: he would have been inhuman

(63) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(64) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(65) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(66) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 61.

if he had not been exempted, automatically so to say, from that kind of participation'.(68) Two considerations follow from this. Firstly, recalling Pittenger's 'sociological' view of sin, Jesus' participation in the human situation meant that his life and outlook were to a large extent 'socially conditioned by virtue of his living in that time and place'.(69) That, for example, he shared the attitudes and prejudices of the 'narrow Judaism' in which he was brought up is shown, Pittenger believes, in the story of his encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman.(70) But, it should be noted, Pittenger does not regard such conditioning as making Jesus sinful. Recalling his definition of sin he would say that although this conditioning might and probably did involve Jesus in less than fully worthy actions or sentiments yet this did not of itself entail that the 'aim' of his life was distorted or subjected to variation'.(71) The second point relating to Jesus' full participation in the human condition concerns the question of his being tempted to sin. Simply stated Pittenger, following John Knox, believes that any admission that Jesus was tempted undermines any possible talk of his sinlessness. The very fact of temptation on this view presupposes the presence of sin. Temptation would mean the submission, perhaps only momentarily, to the allurements and enticements of the particular sin, but sufficient to make the idea of sinlessness inapplicable to someone who has known temptation. As John Knox writes:

(68) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(69) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(71) *ibid.*, p. 57.

'Is not sin the presupposition and precondition of temptation even when our resistance or God's grace keeps it from being, in overt act, its consequence? Am I really tempted if I do not, however briefly or tentatively ... consent? ... Can we think of Jesus as tempted - and moreover tempted in all respects as we are - and yet as not knowing from within the existential meaning of human sinfulness?' (72)

Temptation here clearly is not thought of as coming from without, but is the working of the person's own mind through conscious or subconscious desires and as such the tendency to sin which is part of human conditioning is presupposed. Thus in that Jesus knew temptation his 'sinlessness' is called in question yet his complete participation in the human situation, including those aspects of human conditioning which would be characterized as tending to evil, is affirmed. Talk of the human Jesus must include the recognition that he knew 'the presence of evil in the human heart and the poignant reality of temptation'. (73)

As Pittenger says, the admission that Jesus shared 'the human condition as it actually exists' means that he shared 'in a situation characterized by sin and its consequences'. (74)

The fourth reservation that Pittenger has to talk of the 'sinlessness of Christ' is that those who use this phrase often seem to imply 'that sinfulness was almost the determinative characteristic of human nature', (75) as though in Christian thought 'the concept of sin is more central than God himself'. (76) This viewpoint could not allow Jesus to be one with sinful human nature for that would be to compromise his divinity and his redeeming work, hence his 'sinlessness' must be

(72) John Knox: The Humanity and Divinity of Christ, Cambridge, University Press, 1967, p. 46f.

(73) *ibid.*, p. 69.

(74) C.R., p. 45.

(75) *ibid.*, p. 46.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 63.

rigorously adhered to. Pittenger's objection to this estimate of the 'radical nature of sin' is that,

'it contradicts the doctrine of God's creation of the world and hence the goodness of that world which God creates - as the Genesis story should have made plain. Sin cannot be called radical in any soundly biblical theology ... (for this) is to say that evil is at the root of things, in the very fact of creation. This is not Christianity but a species of Manicheism.' (77)

The final preliminary point is that although Pittenger has reservations about the concept of the 'sinlessness of Jesus' and what this is usually thought to imply, and although his stress on the humanity of Christ requires his full participation in the sinful structures of the world, yet he refuses to admit that Jesus was 'sinful in concrete willed action'. (78) Speaking of the humanity of Jesus Pittenger says:

'Nothing that men possess - save the sin which possesses them - is absent from the life of the incarnate Lord.' (79)

This unwillingness to admit that Jesus consciously sinned or allowed sinful desires to dictate the course of his life is expressed by Pittenger in process terms when he says that the fact of Jesus' social conditionedness does not entail that the God-directed subjective aim of his life was 'distorted or subjected to variation'. (80) Indeed Pittenger believes that so closely did Jesus 'actualize' the divine aim and will that it was 'precisely such a response as made him the entirely adequate instrument for the Word - and so made him the 'incarnation' of that Word'. (81)

(77) *ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

(78) *ibid.*, p. 45.

(79) *W.I.*, p. 237.

(80) *C.R.*, p. 57.

(81) *G.P.*, p. 27.

This reference to Christology is deliberate, for in the next few pages the significance of Pittenger's understanding of the 'sinlessness of Jesus' both for his Christology and for his picture of salvation will be demonstrated.

He considers that most discussion of the 'sinlessness of Jesus' has been approached in the 'wrong way', based upon an inadequate idea of sin. (82) Sin for Pittenger is a failure to actualize the God-given aim of life. It is a failure,

'... to move in the right direction - outwardly towards one's fellows, forward along the path of true self-realization in community, inwardly in actualizing one's own possibility, and hence towards God who energizes in human life to create and nourish love-in-action.' (83)

Pittenger believes that Jesus' life was a fulfilment of this way and it is in this positive sense that he would reinterpret the 'sinlessness of Christ', suggesting that this picture is consonant with the 'general impression' of Jesus to be found in the Gospels.

'... We have sufficient material in the gospels to assure us that in the life that was remembered and reported by the primitive Christian Church there was an out-going, active and creative goodness ... (that) ... the general impression which emerges from taking that portrayal as a whole shows us a man who was recalled as being utterly loving in his relationship with others, however exacting and demanding may have been his words as he spoke of God's Kingdom and its requirements ... (that) ... the total impression which the historical data give us ... conveys to us the picture of a man who can properly be described as embodying love-in-action.' (84)

The earlier discussion of Jesus' total, personal commitment to the Kingdom of God can be seen as corroborative evidence of this conclusion.

Secondly, Pittenger sees Jesus as the one who fulfilled the God-

(82) C.R., p. 46.

(83) *ibid.*, p. 51.

(84) *ibid.*, p. 55f.

given 'aim' of his life and he would consider the foregoing estimate of his life and character to be an expression of this. What is significant about Jesus for Pittenger is the intention of his life.

'A man is to be judged, then, in terms of where he intends to go, the direction of the movement which is his existence; our evaluation of sin is to be made through considering the future aim or purpose or goal, rather than through concentration on the material with which any man inevitably must work.' (85)

Pittenger's evaluation of the life of Jesus is that its motivation and direction was the fulfilment of God's will and the bringing in of his Kingdom and that this overcame whatever deficiencies there were in his social conditioning. The nub of Pittenger's reinterpretation of the 'sinlessness of Christ' is that he was the one whose life was wholly directed to the fulfilment of God's will of love.

Two related points remain to be drawn out relating Pittenger's interpretation of Christ's sinlessness to atonement thought and Christology. Firstly Pittenger suggests that his understanding of Jesus' relation to human sin not only provides the clue 'to the nature of Jesus' own accomplishment' whilst sharing in the human situation, but also shows that Jesus,

'can be for those whom he called his brethren a source of that grace which empowers them to become the lovers they are meant to be - or, in theological idiom, to be saved.' (86)

Just as Jesus overcame the limits of the human situation and did not succumb to sin so he in turn can be the source of victorious living for his followers because the 'positive, creative outgoing love and goodness of Jesus is shareable and is shared'. (87) This is the essence of his

(85) *ibid.*, p. 58.

(86) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(87) *ibid.*, p. 63.

understanding of salvation. What is crucial about it, though, is his suggestion that it is within the limits and deficiencies of humanity which we and Jesus completely share that this salvation is known. Secondly, this is made possible only through grace. Pittenger is clear that the only way in which a person can realize the God-given aim of his life and thus overcome sin is through the operation of the grace and love of God. This emphasis on grace is so strong in Pittenger's writing that the charge of Pelagianism which is sometimes laid against him is wholly unjustified.(88) He constantly stresses the 'priority of God's grace and love operating in the world'.(89) It is a man's dependence 'upon that highest and deepest love' which alone makes possible the realization of the 'basic God-given motif and aim' of his life.(90)

This is how Pittenger approaches the significance of Jesus. It was as the divine love united 'his freedom, his intelligence and initiative as well as his human creative capacity with the aim or will of his heavenly Father',(91) that he was able to be recognised as the one 'in the integrity of whose full humanity God's action was found'.(92) Pittenger can thus identify the love seen and known in the life of Jesus with 'the divine love which moves the sun and other stars',(93) and it is in sharing in this love and grace as seen in Jesus which for him is the essence of salvation.

(88) *ibid.*, p. 64.

(89) *ibid.*, p. 64.

(90) *ibid.*, p. 54.

(91) *ibid.*, p. 62.

(92) G.P., p. 32.

(93) C.R., p. 63.

'To be caught up into and to be grasped by Christ's love is to live in Christ. To live in Christ is to participate in the creative love, thus active in human loving, which is the very reality of God himself.' (94)

This priority of grace in christology and salvation will be considered more deeply later. At present, though, in the final paragraph of this chapter it is necessary to emphasise again that for Pittenger what is so crucial is that this grace and salvation are known in our normal human lives just as

'he who went through the world on fire with the love of God - (who) was indeed the true Prometheus who brought the divine fire to men ... did (so) in our own human terms, under our own conditions, and as one of ourselves.' (95)

(94) *ibid.*, p. 63.

(95) *G.P.*, p. 32.

CHAPTER 3PITTENGER'S CHRISTOLOGY(1) Introduction

Pittenger's insistence upon Christ's humanity and his rejection of all forms of docetism make him somewhat tentative when speaking of his 'divinity', as is indicated by his use of parenthetic commas whenever he applies the word to Christ.(1) He prefers to speak of his speciality.

'My own interest is to try to find a way which will preserve the full humanity of Jesus, on the one hand, yet not deny that speciality which the Christian experience insistently claims it has found in him.'(2)

This approach, starting with the humanity of Jesus and then interpreting how God acted on and in him can be identified with the Antiochene tradition of Christology, which Pittenger acknowledges as his own.(3) It has, however, been the opposite Alexandrine interpretation which has largely determined Christological thought since the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

John Cobb, who is also sympathetic to the Antiochene approach, because 'they were more faithful to the Bible in their insistence on recognising the fully personal humanity of Jesus', suggests that:

'They lost out in part because they had available to them no conceptuality for explaining how God could at his own initiative be genuinely present to and in a man without displacing some element in the personal humanity of that man.'(4)

(1) W.I., pp. 1-2.

(2) C.R., p. 65.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 41.

(4) John B. Cobb Jnr., 'The Finality of Christ in a Whiteheadian Perspective', The Finality of Christ, Ed. Dow Kirkpatrick, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1966, p. 139.

He goes on to say that the deficiencies inherent in the Antiochene position can be supplied by new possibilities of thought offered by the philosophy of Whitehead. From a Whiteheadian perspective,

'a Christian can affirm the special presence of God to and in a man without reducing the man's full personal responsible humanity on the one hand or minimizing the divine initiative on the other.' (5)

Pittenger similarly recognises the value of process thought in the Christological enterprise, in overcoming the deficiencies of traditional ways of thought.

'The doctrine of Christ conceived and stated in process terms ... makes sense as the traditional does not, while it also secures ... what I believe was the intention of classical theology when it spoke of Jesus as 'God-man' and believed that in him God had indeed 'visited and redeemed' his people.' (6)

Pittenger's Christology in a process vein, then, concentrates upon 'God's act in manhood - or perhaps better, the activity of God in the man Jesus'. (7) This primary stress upon the activity of God means that Pittenger's Christology is best categorized as belonging to an 'event' type which asks 'what was God doing in Jesus', (8) in contrast to 'substance' or 'person' Christologies which have 'thought of Jesus as a pre-existent supernatural being made flesh and have asked by what process he became incarnate'. (9) Such an 'event' approach to Christology fits exactly with what has been seen to be Pittenger's general incarnational emphasis. Thus the basis of Pittenger's thesis is that it is only 'in the context of (such) an incarnational presence

(5) *ibid.*, p. 139. (Cobb's approach though is different from Pittenger's.)

(6) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Doctrine of Christ in a Process Theology', Expository Times, Vol. 82, 1970, p. 8.

(7) C.R., p. 135.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 134.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 134, quoting Dennis Nineham: 'Jesus in the Gospels', Ed. W. N. Pittenger, Christ for us Today, London, S.C.M. Press, 1968, p. 64.

of the Word of God in nature, in history and in human life' that the Incarnation of God in Christ can be understood, (10) because in Jesus there is 'focused' that divine operation which is 'diffused' elsewhere. (11)

It is in such a way that Pittenger explains the union of God and man in Christ. It is not a matter of substances. Rather his incarnational stress requires first that he acknowledges that 'there is always union between God and man, of some sort and in some way'; then secondly he can proceed to say that 'in Jesus Christ, there is the union, to which all others point and from which they are seen in all their rich potentiality yet in all their tragic failure'. (12)

It follows from this that Jesus' difference from other men can only be a matter of degree. Any suggestion that he is different in kind 'from other instances of God's presence and activity in the affairs of men and in their experience', would make him 'to all intents and purposes, an anomaly'. (13)

(2) A Matter of Degree

Pittenger admits that 'the chief reason that the notion of a 'difference of degree' has been rejected is that it has been assumed that it would make our Lord only slightly different from the rest of us'. (14) He insists, however, that this need not be the case; for a difference of degree could be between one and an infinite number and he quotes in support Hastings Rashdall's dictum that difference in

(10) W.I., p. 240.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 241.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 241.

(13) W. N. Pittenger: Art. 'The Doctrine of Christ in a Process Theology' in Expository Times, Vol. 82, 1970, p. 9.

(14) W.I., p. 241.

degree 'can amount to a difference in kind'.(15) Elsewhere he says that 'a difference in degree, if it is sufficiently large, can make a very great difference';(16) and his conclusion is that:

'The difference in degree between our Lord's actualization of union between God and man, and our own pitiful approximations to it, is a difference so great that it leads us to adore him, to find in him both our Lord and Saviour, and also our Master and Pattern, and hence one whom we can love as Brother and worship as Lord.'(17)

Pittenger expounds the intention of this degree Christology with the following considerations.

(a) Its relation to the humanity of Jesus

When discussing humanity, with reference to Jesus, Pittenger draws a distinction between 'ordinary manhood' and the distinct individuality of each person. 'No man' is 'run-of-the-mill'; 'simply identical with every other man'. In each man there is something which is irreducibly himself'.(18) It is the broad psychological and physiological similarities between men to which Pittenger refers as 'ordinary manhood'.(19) Jesus was of this 'ordinary manhood'; he was a man like any other; the Gospels providing no evidence of 'some special area of his manhood where Jesus was entirely different from other men'.(20) Yet his marked individuality would have impressed those who knew him making him 'one who was ordinary, yet in another sense out of the ordinary'.(21)

(15) *ibid.*, p. 241.

(16) *C.R.*, p. 112.

(17) *W.I.*, p. 241.

(18) *C.R.*, p. 117.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 118.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 116.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 118.

This dual definition of humanity supports Pittenger's degree Christology; particularly when allied to this concept of the fulfilment of life's aim. In Jesus the speciality of the individual was most marked and this was largely to be accounted for by the fulfilment of his potential, the actualization of his God-given aim.

'Thus we may say that Jesus, in the dynamic existence which was his, fulfilled the potentialities which were also his in a manner that impressed those who companied with him as being extraordinary without being a violation of the ordinary conditions of manhood. His life, so far as we read about it, was an integrated whole in which his living, loving, knowing, self-awareness, and relationships with others were at their best and most complete. His degree of realization was not the same as that of other men whom his companions knew; it was immeasurably different yet not utterly removed from the experience of manhood elsewhere seen.'(22)

Pittenger goes on to suggest that this way of speaking of Jesus being lifted out of 'the general ordinariness which attaches to all men as such' is consistent with what the Fathers, with their very different idiom, tried to say about Jesus when they insisted that Jesus was 'of one substance with us, as touching his manhood', but also sought to speak 'of the eminent degree in which his manhood was realized'.(23) This they did by reference to his complete, perfect manhood, and 'their to us incredible insistence on the miraculous qualities which they saw in him as the gospels portray Jesus, and their unfailing stress on the representative nature of the manhood which was his'.(24)

The significance of this in Pittenger's thought is that the Incarnation becomes 'our clue to the divinely-intended nature of man himself, to the potentiality which by divine creation is implanted in

(22) *ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 120.

(24) *ibid.*, pp. 120f.

man'.(25) Jesus, thus seen as the one in whom human potential is realized to the highest degree, can be described as 'the proper man, the representative man'.(26) This relates to talk of salvation; for the purpose of life is thus to realize life's divinely-intended aim as seen in Christ; or as Pittenger expresses it, quoting the New Testament, we are called 'to grow up in all things unto him who is the head, even Christ'.(27)

(b) Its relation to the Cosmic Process

Pittenger employs Whitehead's conceptuality to define more closely this difference between Jesus and other men. In process thought the universe is characterized by ongoing movement through events, by movement into novelty through creative advance. Thus 'every occasion, occurrence or event in the creative advance which is the Cosmos'(28) is different from every other occasion because it is a new creative moment.

In Whitehead's terminology each actual entity of occasion is a concrescence of prehensions. That is it is made up of various factors, of previous occasions and their make-up, of present feelings or influences, and of the subjective aim which is present to each occasion and which might be accepted or rejected. Pittenger summarizes this, which was accorded a fuller discussion in an earlier chapter, by saying:

'Each occasion ... has its own prehending or grasping of the organic process at that special focal point which it is, ... yet each has such prehensions or graspings, with the giving-receiving which this entails, in a mode appropriate to its own particular level of becoming.'(29)

(25) W.I., p. 243.

(26) *ibid.*, p. 244.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 244.

(28) C.R., p. 121.

(29) *ibid.*, p. 121.

In terms of human life Pittenger interprets this as meaning that 'each instance of manhood is qualitatively different from each other instance'.⁽³⁰⁾ This difference is accounted for in part by that person's past, which would include the historical, cultural and ideological background as well as the natural setting in which he finds himself. He is also affected by present factors, his relationships and environment in which he lives, so that he both modifies and is modified by them.⁽³¹⁾ Further he is 'qualitatively different from other men' in 'consequence of the subjective aim which he has taken as his own'. 'A man's 'vocation', as we might call it, is a determinant of his own specific quality as a man. What he sets out to do, above all what he sets out to become, whether in vivid awareness as in a more diffused and unconscious manner, will work towards making him the particular self that he is.'⁽³²⁾

Pittenger makes these generalizations about human life from the insights of process thought. It is because each instant of experience, each actual occasion, is a novel focusing of various factors including its subjective aim, that it possesses a 'qualitative distinctiveness'. These insights are then applied to a 'routing of occasions', in this case human life. It is in the light of these considerations and their application to human life that Pittenger understands the specific qualitative difference of Jesus' life.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 123.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 123.

(32) *ibid.*, p. 123.

'In Jesus Christ, since he is truly a man, the same complex of factors will necessarily be in view when we wish to see him in his specificity. In the series of occasions which constitute his human existence, a character appears which is qualitatively different from that found in other such series of occasions. Yet this is not in contradiction to, nor utterly unlike those other occasions of human existence in their routing. The event of Jesus Christ takes place in history: it falls into the pattern of human occasions and historical occurrences. But it is distinctive and it is qualitatively different from other events, since this distinctiveness and qualitative difference is the mark of all events.' (33)

That conclusion is merely saying that each human being, indeed each instant of human experience, is unique. Pittenger, however, goes beyond this and speaks of Jesus having a more distinctive 'speciality' which he accounts for by saying that Jesus 'accepted his vocation made his decision and his subsequent decisions, and set about fulfilling the aim which was his aim'. (34) In other words whereas in every other human life or routing of occasions negative decisions towards the subjective aim are determinative, in Jesus alone is that God-given aim fulfilled. Thus, as was noted in an earlier chapter, whereas other men pervert their God-given aim, which is sin, the life of Jesus was marked by victory over sin, in that he fulfilled the aims proper to himself. Thus the conclusion is again drawn that Jesus is different from other men, only in degree, in terms only of his fulfilment of his God-given aim. His difference is not one of kind in the sense that he is 'utterly and entirely sui generis' for that would be to remove him 'from the realm of the human and the historical. (35)

(33) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(34) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(35) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(c) Its relation to Emergent Evolution and Salvation

A further quotation, which in effect concludes Pittenger's discussion of difference of degree, raises two further interesting points about his theology. He writes of the event of Jesus:

'It is different in degree from other events, in a degree that is by us immeasurable but with results which establish its difference in the consequences for other men which it has brought about.

A. E. Taylor once spoke about this as the quality of life which was released into the world through the event of Christ. And to use that word quality is to add that the degree of difference is such that in an eminent fashion there is qualitative distinction which in one way or another is true everywhere in the world of occasions. Difference in degree produces difference in what the specific instance includes and produces.' (36)

From this it is clear that Pittenger intends it to be understood that although the difference of Jesus to other humans is only one of degree nevertheless when judged by its results the difference is very significant indeed.

Firstly the phrase 'event of Christ' has a special place in Pittenger's thought. By it he means that total event with Jesus Christ as its focus which is the manifestation of the divine loving activity beginning from Israel and including the Christian Church. What Pittenger is implying here is that the event is wholly reliant upon that difference of degree between Jesus and other men, namely his fulfilment of his aim. If Jesus had not done so then that event and the consequences that flow from it and in part constitute it could never have been conceived. Part of those 'consequences for other men', that are brought about in that event, are that men can share in that total Christ event. They can become participant in the gracious, continuing life of Christ,

(36) *ibid.*, p. 124.

sharing in his victory, so that they might come to move towards the fulfilment of their God-given aim. This would be the experience of coming to be at-one with God in Christ and this is the path of salvation.

Secondly, and allied to this, the consequence of Christ's difference can be set in a broader, indeed cosmic, context. Alongside his use of process thought Pittenger also is attracted by the insights of 'emergent evolution' associated particularly with Professor Lloyd Morgan. This view, which represented a marked change in understanding evolution when it was first propounded, simply suggests that 'within the on-going process of evolution it is an 'observable fact' that there is 'the appearance of the genuinely new'; (37) that there is creative movement into novelty. This leads to 'what we may call a graded world-order' which traces 'a continuity of process' 'from matter up through life to mind and on to spirit or apprehension of value'. Yet 'each higher level is very much more than the mere resultant of that which has gone before'; indeed 'each higher level 'emerges' with a genuine element of novelty about it'. (38)

Pittenger sees the incarnation as just such a novel emergence which took the creative process to a distinctly higher level; in the words of the preceding quotation, the difference of degree marked in Jesus 'is such that in an eminent fashion there is qualitative distinction which ... is true everywhere in the world of occasions'. This quotation expresses more fully Pittenger's opinion on this matter:

(37) W.I., p. 150.

(38) *ibid.*, p. 151.

'Jesus Christ is 'emergent' in the world process, continuous with that order at its human and historical level. He is a genuine emergent, for he is the bringer of a 'new being' into which men are taken for enlarged and enriched life through the self-commitment consequent upon genuinely and vitally meeting him in the life of the Christian community. If we describe this by calling Jesus Christ the emergence of God-manhood, then those who are thus 'taken into him' are made participants in that order of God-manhood. But this neither demands nor implies divine intervention in the sense of an irruption of God into his world; the world itself is constantly informed and moulded by the same Word who in Jesus is thus fully emergent so far as we men can apprehend such emergence. He is the unique focus for a universal presence and operation. But that focus is the act of God who nowhere leaves himself without witness and everlastingly works with love and compassion for his creatures ... (being) deeply involved in the affairs of the world and so ... shapes it into conformity with the purpose for which he has brought it into existence.' (39)

In that quotation almost every nuance of Pittenger's theology gets an airing. The divine loving activity operating through the creative process and human history, focused in the Christ event in a manner that did not necessitate any intrusion ab extra, is the broad context. The marriage of the divine and human in Christ, with its consequence of a new way of being, represented in a new community of those who have met with Christ and have had their self-commitment (i.e. fulfilment of their God-given aim) strengthened in his total self-commitment, is the essence of the new emergent. Such participation in new being in Christ is for Pittenger salvation, as will be demonstrated. Further that this really did represent a new emergent in the creative process would be confirmed by Pittenger by pointing to the great strides made in human advancement in knowledge, education, medical services and emancipation in association with Christ's Church. This is the basic thesis of his book 'The Christian Church or Social

(39) *ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

Process'.

In the light of all this the question whether Jesus was in any sense unique must now be asked.

(3) The Uniqueness of Jesus

Defining the word unique as 'absolutely and completely different from anything else', Pittenger refuses to use it of Jesus: but employing a distinction, borrowed from Professor Moule, between a uniqueness of inclusion and one of exclusion he finds that the former sense can be employed while still maintaining the difference between Jesus and other men to be one of degree.(40) A uniqueness of exclusion, in this context, permitting no parallels or similarities, would imply that the event of Jesus was absolutely and completely different from any other and would thus remove it from genuine human and historical circumstances.(41) Such would be open to the criticism Pittenger levels against 'difference of kind' Christologies, that of making Jesus anomalous to human history, which amounts to a docetic view of Christ.(42) A uniqueness of inclusion, however, would allow for 'values or characteristics or qualities' found in a person 'in some eminent manner', also to be found in others 'but in a much less adequate fashion'.(43) Thus, recalling previous discussions, the uniqueness of Jesus lies in the consummate degree to which he fulfils the potential requirements of his humanity. All men are in some sense unique but Jesus raises this uniqueness to a new special level.

(40) C.R., p. 125.

(41) *ibid.*, p. 125.

(42) *ibid.*, p. 126.

(43) *ibid.*, p. 125.

Pittenger illustrates this inclusive view of Jesus' uniqueness by reference to his Jewishness. Jesus, he says, was a Jew and can only be understood in terms of Jewish religion, culture and tradition. This Jewishness was the essence of the 'inclusiveness which was proper to him'.(44) Jesus' uniqueness within this tradition, Pittenger suggests, lay in the 'radical criticism' of it; in the sense of a 'creative' 'grasping of that tradition's most profound intention' and an 'urgent desire, to insist on such changes (within that religious tradition) as would make what had been learned viable in a new situation'.(45) He says of Jesus that he was in fact:

'a true radical, who penetrated to the heart of the Jewish awareness of God and God's will as it had been worked out in history, who provided a fresh but not totally discontinuous beginning in the understanding of man vis à vis that God, and who in doing this (both by what he said and by what he did, as well as by what he was) established a new intensity in the relationship between God and man. This is what is intended when we speak of life in Christ; yet we must always be clear that this new life is not in utter contradiction to the communion of God and man which the Jewish tradition had itself enabled and out of which Jesus had come.'(46)

This example makes it clear that in Pittenger's thought the difference between Jesus and other men lies in the intensity of degree not only to which he fulfils his own God-given human potential but also fulfils the divine will and intention of his religious and cultural tradition. His uniqueness is more marked than that of other men because he fulfils God's will in every area of life. This is particularly true when seen in relation to the divine loving activity which is such a keynote in Pittenger's theology. He speaks of 'the biblical picture of

(44) *ibid.*, p. 127.

(45) *ibid.*, pp. 127f.

(46) *ibid.*, p. 128.

the yearning love of God, urgently seeking a response, finding value in the beloved, desiring the returning love of the other, and essentially concerned to establish a relationship between the two'.(47) He relates this 'root attribute' of God to Christology by insisting that 'in and through' the human loving of Jesus Christ, the divine love is manifested in all its glory'.(48) This fits in to his whole theological approach which he would explain by saying that since God is love then 'wherever love is ... there God is present, God is active'.(49) He goes on, 'I have also insisted that God is present and active not in spite of, in contradiction of, in denial of, against, all human loving but precisely and exactly in that human loving, which he completes and corrects'.(50)

This is a further example of his incarnationalist approach, which here relates to his degree Christology, for he stresses that 'the love of God, or God as love in Jesus Christ is most certainly not absolutely different in kind from the love of God, or God as love wherever this is seen in the history of the human race and in the experience of the sons of men'.(51) The 'very great difference in degree of intensity' between 'the divine love that is active in the human loving of Jesus Christ and the other persons and events in which the divine love is active' is to be accounted for primarily by the different 'quality of response' in the life of Jesus which enabled a new effectiveness of love in his life.(52) Any view that implies the

(47) *ibid.*, p. 130.

(48) *ibid.*, p. 130.

(49) *ibid.*, p. 131.

(50) *ibid.*, p. 131.

(51) *ibid.*, p. 131.

(52) *ibid.*, p. 131.

divine love in Jesus is different in kind from that in other men would for Pittenger be 'to render the divine love in Jesus Christ unintelligible to us', indeed to make it 'unavailable to us: for it is only in our human situations as men that we can be loved of God'.(53)

Here again there is a hint of Pittenger's view of salvation, which is known 'within our human situation' and is essentially allowing the divine love to fulfil our human lives, raising our response to God and our fellows to a new level in the fellowship of Christ, which would be to fulfil the divinely intended aim of loving as it is seen in him. If the love of God in Christ were different in kind from that in every human occasion then such a view of salvation could not stand, thus Pittenger's understanding of atonement and salvation is seen to be anchored to a degree Christology.

It is, however, how the union of the human and divine in Christ can be equated with a degree Christology in Pittenger's thought that remains to be considered.

(4) The Union of the Divine and Human in Christ

Pittenger describes the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 A.D. as being 'concerned to state as definitively as possible the minimum assertion which Christian faith and experience, building on the basic datum of the New Testament witness, demanded should be made about our Lord', which was that he is 'truly God, truly man, truly the personal union of these two'.(54) Characteristically he tackles the problem of this 'personal union' from the manward side finding that it was the Antiochene school, most ably represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia,

(53) *ibid.*, p. 132.

(54) *W.I.*, pp. 86-87.

whose Christology held the balance between the divinity and humanity of Jesus; 'holding the two in genuine unity without negating the reality of either'.(55) What he finds so attractive about the Mopsuestian position is that the union between the human and divine in Christ is 'conceived after the analogy of personal union' 'which allows for the most complete interpenetration' the one of the other within the single person.(56)

(a) His approach to a Christology of 'personal union'

The use of personal analogies, firstly, needs to be distinguished from the classical Christological formulation of 'two natures in one person' which Pittenger describes as 'incredible' for most people today, not least because it 'presupposes concepts that are not ours, ideas of the nature of God and of man, of the ways in which God and man may be or are related, and of the possibility of combining them in a meaningful fashion that to many of us are absurd, in the light of our awareness of these matters'.(57) He also criticizes the classical approach in that it implies 'a mechanical union in which godhead and manhood, or God and that man, are stuck together in some less than personal manner';(58) which can be and is interpreted as suggesting that the relationship between God and man in Jesus Christ is of a schizophrenic type'.(59) By this he is referring to the tendency of suggesting that sometimes Jesus was 'speaking as God and sometimes as man'. He finds evidence of this in the 'Tome of Leo' though he admits that it was 'hardly the

(55) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(56) C.R., p. 7.

(57) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(58) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 13.

genuine intention of the Patristic theologians'. Rather what must be upheld is that 'in the total being and action of Jesus Christ, both God and man are simultaneously and continuously present and at work'.(60)

Certainly Pittenger dismisses Christologies which would be categorized as Alexandrine and which imply that the 'acts of the incarnate life are theandric acts; acts of a divine person in human nature; the personal subject of these acts, not (being) a man but God'.(61) In this regard he quotes a criticism by G. C. Stead of E. L. Mascall's 'Via Media' (Longmans, 1956).(62) Mascall is accused of failing to personalize the humanity of Christ in a human person by exalting it to the stupendous dignity of being personalized in the person of God the Son. The result of such a view of 'impersonal humanity', which would imply that Jesus 'had no human character or individuality', no 'personality' in the current sense 'is to deny the humanity of Jesus'. 'God became man, he assumed human nature, but he was not a man.'(63) Any such impersonal view is unsatisfactory for Pittenger; not least because it smacks of docetism. His approach is to hold together the humanity and divinity of Christ and account for their union in terms of 'personal union'. 'It is to be conceived after the analogy of personal union such as we know in say, human marriage or the love of a lover for his beloved ... The union of God and man in Jesus is more like what we know of personal relationship ... of the "gracious" quality of such relationship'.(64) Such an approach, at

(60) *ibid.*, p. 13.

(61) *W.I.*, p. 90.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 90. (Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. VIII (NS), October 1957, pp. 382-385.)

(63) *ibid.*, p. 91.

(64) *C.R.*, p. 12.

once 'highly personal, highly moral, highly religious', is found amongst 'the thinkers who prepared for, were associated with and followed the line taken by Theodore of Mopsuestia'.(65)

(b) Theodore of Mopsuestia

It is interesting that in addition to Pittenger another thinker who uses Whitehead's conceptuality for understanding theology, Peter N. Hamilton, also values the insights of Theodore; and both admit an indebtedness of Fr. F. A. Sullivan's discussion of 'The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia' (Rome, 1956). Sullivan, Pittenger says, 'correctly states the Mopsuestian position on the unity of Christ when he says that for Theodore there is in Christ "an inhabitation" of the "divine nature" or of God in human nature or in the man which is "superior in duration and in degree, but not in essential character to that ... which characterizes the inhabitation of God by "good pleasure" (eudokia) in ... saints"'.(66) Hamilton lays out clearly how this concept of 'inhabitation' or 'indwelling' was understood by Theodore.

'Theodore is considering the relation of indwelling, which he uses to explain the union of God and man in Christ. He first considers the general mode of divine indwelling in men, and then applies this to Christ. Theodore is searching for the sense in which God's indwelling in men is not universal, being found in some men but not in all: for this purpose he rejects indwelling according to substance and indwelling according to activity (energeia = energy), both of which apply universally. He settles on indwelling by "good pleasure" (eudokia), and to show that this form of indwelling is selective (in our modern idiom) Theodore quotes Psalm 147: 11; "the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him; in those who hope on his steadfast love" (R.S.V.). This indwelling by good pleasure manifests

(65) *ibid.*, p. 13.

(66) *W.I.*, p. 90.

itself in the fact that "God is near to such men by the attitude of disposition of his will ... He is willing to grant special assistance, special co-operation, to those in whom he is pleased".'(67)

In the light of this Theodore turns to God's indwelling in Jesus which he distinguishes from other indwelling; the distinction lying in superiority of 'duration and degree'. Pittenger goes on to say:

'This superiority in "duration" is found "because the union, in the case of the homo assumptus (as Theodore consistently calls the manhood of Jesus ...) begins at the moment of his formation in the womb"; it is "superior in degree, for the grace granted to the homo assumptus was to redound to the benefit of all men; his victory over sin was to win salvation for all" (Sullivan, pp. 254-255).'(68)

Pittenger disagrees with Sullivan over whether this 'indwelling' constitutes personal unity. Sullivan thinks that it does not. He suggests that Theodore's formula 'two natures but one person (prosopon)', masks the fact that he uses the word nature in a 'concrete personal sense', which would imply rather a co-activity of the Word and man; any union would at best be one of 'honour and worship' united in a common prosopon which would really be the inclusion of two persons. Pittenger disagrees and quotes in contradiction part of a review of Sullivan's work by R. V. Sellers. Against Sullivan's contention that at best this is some 'accidental' union, rather than one which is integral and ontological, Sellers writes:

(67) Peter N. Hamilton: The Living God and the Modern World, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, p. 207.

(68) W.I., p. 90.

'Christ is the one in whom, as Theodore expressly states, the divine Word has "united to himself" a complete manhood. The union of the natures "effects" the "one prosopon", but behind the union is the Word himself who makes the first move, and, one may argue, the factors of "co-activity" and "honour" have their ground in him and his purpose of accomplishing the salvation of the world.' (69)

Pittenger accepts the judgement of Sellers that Theodore did maintain the unity of Christ's person and that in Christ there is a union through grace, through 'good pleasure', of the divine and the human. How Pittenger uses the Mopsuestian insight for his own Christological understanding must await the placing of it within the context of the divine activity. First, though, its similarity to Pittenger's whole Christological enterprise must be underlined.

Firstly, the Word's 'indwelling' in 'energeia' in all men and by 'eudokia' in the chosen few is similar to Pittenger's whole immanent emphasis, though he would probably wish to correct Theodore by stressing that God dwells through his Word in 'eudokia', in grace, in every man. Secondly, that the divine indwelling in Christ is not superior in essential character to that in other men, would accord closely with his Christology of degree not of kind. Thirdly, both Theodore and Pittenger begin from the humanity of Christ, as typifies the Antiochene position. It remains now to examine how Pittenger uses Theodore's insights.

(c) Pittenger's understanding of personal union

Pittenger insists that the divine-human union in Christ was no 'accidental' affair in the sense that it 'just happened' that 'God and

(69) R. V. Sellers: review of Sullivan in The Journal of Theological Studies, N.S., Vol. 8, October 1957, p. 341.

man were brought together here'; nor was it some mere incidental example of 'God-man togetherness', with no sort of speciality or 'importance'. Rather it has to be seen as taking place 'in accordance with the divine purpose, but with full dependence upon the reality of human response'.(70) It is precisely in terms of such a formula, the divine purpose plus the human response, that Pittenger understands the personal union through 'good-pleasure' in Christ. It is through eudokia, (God's goodwill expressed in the man Jesus) and sunapheia (intimate co-operative union in moral terms),(71) that Pittenger finds himself best able 'to speak of the relationship or union of God and that man'.(72) These two elements which comprise the union must be distinguished.

(i) The action of the Word

So firstly, this union must be set and understood within the context of the divine loving activity in the world, at once creative and redemptive, expressed in the Word. Pittenger then begins from 'the divine reality whom we call God (and who) is nowhere absent from the creation'.

'In it all, through it all, he works and moves; it is informed by him and without him it would not be what it is. God is in this sense the ground of all existence, yet he is not exhausted by this presence and operation in the created order; he is transcendent, in a fashion perhaps not entirely unlike that in which we can say a man transcends and is not exhausted by his actions.'(73)

The operative agent of this is the Logos, the Word of God, who is

(70) C.R., p. 12.

(71) *ibid.*, p. 13.

(72) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(73) G.P., p. 25.

present in each person despite his sin and failure. Pittenger then points to the Christian experience, expressed in the Gospels, that the 'same Word "by whom all things were made", and who is "also the light that lighteneth every man" ... above all is the Word who so energized in and shone through the life of Jesus their Lord, that believers could only speak of him as that one in whom "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"'.(74) The Word, however, needs to be interpenetrated by the human response.

(ii) The human response

For Pittenger every instant of human life has its God-given aim, the realization of which leads to human fulfilment, failure to do so being sin. Each man bears the imago dei, 'human nature (being) grounded in the divine Word', (75) and it is only in response to the divine Word and to the divine will which he expresses that this image of God in man will become clearer.

'The increasing moral and spiritual discernment of man, his obedience to the divine will, and his employment for the divine purpose, are all of them responsive to the movement of the divine activity, the Word, in him. He is not truly himself, as man in the fullest intention, until and unless that response is full and entire. His potentiality is to be the instrument for the divine Self-expression in terms appropriate to the human situation; the more man responds to God, the more this becomes actualized.' (76)

It is from this standpoint that Pittenger interprets the response of Jesus, as being the one who truly fulfilled the God-given aim of his life.

(74) *ibid.*, p. 26.

(75) *ibid.*, p. 27.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 27.

'In this man, Jesus, in his full and true humanity, there was precisely such a response as made him the entirely adequate instrument or vehicle for the Word.' (77)

As was noted, however, with respect to the 'sinlessness of Jesus' such a conclusion cannot conclusively be demonstrated, the Gospel records are not sufficiently complete to permit it. Thus his conclusion about Jesus is essentially a matter of belief, but this belief, originally that of the early Christians, that in this man was seen the perfect response to God, thus allowing the divine love to be fully realized in him, is more than a matter of intellectual belief since it is crucial to the whole way of Christian discipleship.

'Belief in this instance is the response which we make to what Jesus can do for us by quickening in us the self-same working of the Word and the answering or response in our human life which in traditional Christian theology is the action of the Holy Spirit. It is along such lines that we can understand the general Christian conviction that somehow, in and through Jesus Christ, God is specially and decisively present and at work, that in Christ God reconciles us to himself, and that the Self-expression (or Word of God) is in him known to us in human terms and with singular intensity.' (78)

The connection between Pittenger's Christology and doctrine of salvation is here apparent. It is as men respond to the loving activity of God manifested in Christ that they will know the 'quicken^(ness of)ing in ~~us~~ the self-same working of the Word', and then move towards the fulfilment of the divine will of love. Christ, the one in whom human response and divine grace were most perfectly married is thus the archtype of our salvation. God's presence 'known to us in human terms and with singular intensity' in Christ thus becomes the hope and goal towards which we move in the fellowship of Christ. This path is towards the fulfilment of our

(77) *ibid.*, p. 27.

(78) *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

God-given aim and thus is a rejection of sin and the way of salvation.

So, for Pittenger, there is in Christ the perfect personal union of the divine Word and human response. In order, however, to be clear what he means by this, two possible interpretations of this union, which he rejects, should be considered.

(iii) Two false trails

Firstly, Pittenger says of his approach that it is no 'deifying of Jesus the Man of Nazareth like that in pagan cults, in which a hero was exalted more and more to the position of a god'.(79) Christian experience rather has seen Jesus not as a god, nor even as one who merely 'showed God to the world, without himself sharing in that which he disclosed'; but as 'the revelation or manifestation of the one and only God', being 'linked with God in some genuine unity of person'.(80) It was with this truth that the controversies surrounding the early oecumenical councils were concerned. This was more than simply a quarrel about an iota in Greek; 'as it has been caricatured', rather 'the truth is that the whole Christian life in faith is centered in that iota which distinguishes between same substance and like substance'. Thus the reality met in Christ was divinity itself, God himself. Thus he describes the Christian conviction as being this 'inescapable truth that anyone who asks for a reality more real than that which encounters him in Christ knows not for what he asks. Which is the same as saying that this reality met in Christ is God himself'.(81)

The second interpretation that Pittenger rejects as being an

(79) *ibid.*, p. 26.

(80) *ibid.*, p. 26.

(81) *W.I.*, p. 84.

inadequate description of Christ's person, is that here we have the supreme example of human nature 'moving towards realizing a potential divinity which is inherent in it as such. This realization occurs when, in Jesus, we have a perfect human nature, which then by definition is divine'.(82) Clearly this must be a tempting avenue for someone like Pittenger who stresses the divine germ in every man, and whose view of sin and human nature would speak of the former as being the failure to realize the divinely intended aim of the latter. The reason why Pittenger rejects any understanding of the 'divinity' of Christ as being the perfection of human nature in him is significant. He does so because such a view admits of no divine transcendence, implying that God and the world are identical, which they are not. If man were to aspire to divinity both the human and the divine must at least in theory be on the same level, which they are not. However, 'the world is in God, God is in the world, he penetrates it and works through it and employs it for his purposes, but he is himself not the world nor anything in the world, not even human nature at its best'.(83)

Elsewhere Pittenger responds to any 'misunderstanding' of his 'phrases about the 'actualization' in our Lord of a human 'potentiality' everywhere found in men and in some of them 'partially realized':

'In no sense whatsoever am I asserting that these partial realizations, and above all the 'actualization' in Christ, are accomplished by some 'natural unfolding' or by the unaided efforts of manhood alone. The whole point of my argument has been that it is by the divine action, the Self-expression of God, the operation of the Word, that this occurs. In every instance of partial realization, it is the word of God at work; a fortiori in the case of Jesus Christ, the Word of God is active in full measure.'(84)

(82) G.P., p. 27.

(83) *ibid.*, p. 28.

(84) W.I., p. 244.

This is consistent with Pittenger's whole position. It accords with his rejoinders to those who accuse him, especially in respect of his view of sin, of being a modern Pelagian. He does not teach that evil can be overcome by human effort alone, that human progress is inevitable, or that human potential in any man or even in Christ can be realized by his own unaided efforts. Rather he insists on 'love's priority', on the priority of God's grace, which is 'his love operating in the world'.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Despite his emphasis on Christ's humanity and on the value of all humanity it has to be recognised that this is dependent on the prior affirmation of the divine loving activity. 'We love because he first loved us.'⁽⁸⁶⁾ So his answer to the 'how' of this union of God and the man is to speak of 'the energizing and indwelling of God in him by mutual interpenetration of the divine and the human reaching a climactic stage'.⁽⁸⁷⁾

(iv) The interpenetration

That phrase, 'the energizing and indwelling of God by mutual interpenetration of the divine and the human reaches a climactic stage' in Christ, is a succinct expression of Pittenger's Christology. It makes it clear that the operation of the divine Word is the prime factor but also that it is only when that finds a welcoming human response that new heights can be reached in divine-human encounter; that only occurred in Christ. In the following formula which Pittenger offers as a summary statement of Antiochene Christology these same points are held together:

(85) C.R., p. 64.

(86) W.I., p. 245.

(87) G.P., p. 26.

'The Eternal Son or Word so appropriated and employed the humanity which by divine providential operation was conceived and born of Mary that he possessed in that humanity an organ for self-expression which was adequate to his purposes, while the human life which was conceived and born of Mary so appropriated and expressed the Eternal Son or Word that such an organ was in fact available for the Son's or Word's purposes among men.' (88)

The context of that quotation is a discussion of Theodore of Mopsuestia and by it he not only indicates that he believes that Theodore did manage to speak satisfactorily of the union of God and man in Christ to form a single person (prosopon), but that he did so without destroying either of the two uniting natures; and from this he takes the clue for his own Christology. Indeed the foregoing is an adequate summary of Pittenger's own position. As H. E. W. Turner says:

'For Pittenger there is no decisive break, no invasion from without (the classical statement of the Incarnation), no sticking together of two utterly disparate entities (the divine and human natures of Christ) or the replacement of one entity by another (the impersonal manhood), but rather the perfectly adjusted and sufficient vehicle in and through whom the divine activity and purpose are operative in man, as man and for man.' (89)

It is thus through the 'coincidence', (90) the 'compresence' (91) or as Pittenger himself would say the 'mutual interpenetration' of divine and human acts that the unity of Christ's person is maintained in Pittenger's thought. It is through mutual response, through a reciprocity in 'good will' (eudokia) of which human love and marriage are the only possible images, that there is seen in the life of Jesus that perfect harmony of God and man. However, for the meaning of this to be fully grasped one needs to be constantly reminded that Pittenger

(88) W.I., p. 92.

(89) H. E. W. Turner: Jesus the Christ, Mowbrays, London, 1976, p. 100.

(90) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(91) John McIntyre: The Shape of Christology, London, S.C.M. Press, 1966, p. 140.

is not talking about the coming together of substances. No doubt, as was noted earlier, since the Antiochenes had only a metaphysics of substances with which to work they were open to the criticism of trying to force two into one and failing to do so creating a divided Christ. Pittenger, however, believes that process thought with its stress on dynamic becoming obviates such difficulties.

(v) The process perspective

The aspects of process thought that are of significance here are the God-given aim of each occasion in life and also that each actual occasion is a concrescence of prehensions. Both of these have already been outlined. The prevenience of the divine Logos can readily be equated with the divine aim present to each moment of life and the prehension integral to each occasion, noticeable at both microscopic and macroscopic levels, is how the mutual interpenetration of the divine and human in Jesus can be understood. Thus at each moment of Jesus' life there was a coming together of the divine aim and the affirmative response to it; a response built upon similar responses made in earlier occasions. Each moment of his life was a rich, positive concrescence of divine and human prehensions. Thus on the larger scale it is possible to say that his was a life utterly dedicated to the divine will of love, in which there was the richest possible coming together of God and man.

Although he may have borrowed insights and vocabulary from the Antiochene Fathers it is only really in the dynamic terms as supplied by process thought that Pittenger's Christology can really be understood. He is speaking of the coming together of the human response and the divine aim at each moment of Christ's experience. Indeed it is only because at each moment of his experience that he made a positive response to the God-given aim of his life that the direction of his life was as it

was and the estimate of his person was made that he was the God-Man.

(vi) The implications of this 'personal union'

Such considerations should be borne in mind in the following rather beautiful quotation where the positive response of Jesus to the divine prevenient grace is contrasted to our own desperately inadequate response.

'The fanning into flame of the divinely-implanted possibility of 'yes' to God is both our work and the work of God; but it is first the work of God. So in Christ himself. The potentiality of a man's being the adequate organon for the Divine Self-expression is the secret truth about ourselves. Its realization in divers manners here and there, is effected through God's action which expresses itself in our own free response as increasingly integrated human personalities. Its actualization in the person of Jesus Christ is therefore both the Self-expression of God in him ... and the full and free response of a genuine Man in whom God achieved through prevenient operation in preparation, creation, and continuing self-giving, what manhood itself also achieved: a human life at once everywhere truly creaturely and yet also at once everywhere the instrument for the divine Self-expression. This is neither 'from below' alone, nor 'from above' alone; it is both, or better, it is 'alongside' manhood, through and in and by manhood, bringing manhood to the truth about itself which God eternally purposed from the beginning.'(92)

Thus this 'actualization' which was accomplished in Christ and which should be the aim of life for each person must neither be thought of as from above or from below alone; that is as divine intervention irrespective of human response or human effort seeking alone to find a maturity which would approach divinity. It is only through the gracious interpenetration of both dimensions, only as the free human response to the operation of the divine Word is enriched by being accepted by the divine Word, that full actualization as seen in Christ is possible.

This it should be noted again in passing is important for salvation in Pittenger's view.

'This 'actualization' in the person of Christ Jesus, 'once' accomplished in man's history, is also possessed of a 'for all' quality - by which I mean that it is not an isolated and ineffectual matter but that it is to be shared by all men.' (93)

In Pittenger's thought it is as we share in the fellowship of Christ, that in his grace we will come to approach this actualization and that is the way of salvation leading to 'wholeness'.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 245.

CHAPTER 3 - APPENDIXA Critique of Pittenger's Degree Christology by Hick and McIntyre(a) John Hick

Hick characterizes such an approach as Neo-Arian, 'not to suggest guilt or error by association, but because essentially the issue that was raised by Arianism is now being raised again'.(1) The essence of his critique of Pittenger's incarnationism is an insistence that Christian theology has taught not that Jesus is different only in degree but that he 'is the (unique) Logos become a man or become man' which means that 'incarnation is an all or nothing event, not a general feature of human life that was more intensively manifest at this point than at others'.(2) Hick analyses a major difficulty in a theology such as Pittenger's, which speaks of the Logos being united in some degree with every human being 'from zero in an evil man to the one hundred per cent incarnation which we see in Jesus',(3) as being 'how did it come about that there has been in all history one and only one man who has responded so fully to the divine influence as to be a perfect vehicle of the Logos in our human world'.(4) This problem does not arise for classical Christology with its tenet that 'Jesus is unique both in fact and in principle', but for degree Christology which only sees him as 'unique in fact' it is a real problem;(5) for if, as Pittenger would admit, 'the creator-creature relationship between God and mankind is

(1) John Hick: 'Christology at the Cross Roads' in Ed. F. G. Healey, Prospect for Theology: Essays in honour of H. H. Farmer, Welwyn, Nisbet, 1966, p. 140.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 141.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 142.

(4) *ibid.*, p. 143.

(5) *ibid.*, p. 144.

such that God is able to cause a perfect human being to 'emerge' in history' once, why could it not happen more often, indeed, why has it not happened in every case? If the Word at all times is 'seeking to become incarnate in human beings in the sense he was in Jesus why has he only succeeded in the one case?' Hick suggests that 'the answer must be either that he did not want to do this in other cases or that he was unable to do so'.(6) He is correct, however, to say that the whole tenor of Pittenger's theology would preclude the former, so the latter must be the answer. Yet the only satisfactory reason Hick can put forward as to why this should be so is that 'God had to wait for an adequate human vehicle of the Word to emerge; and this ... is the theological essence of Adoptionism'.(7) The traditional objection to adoptionism, he says, 'is that it denies by implication the sovereign freedom of God in His redeeming activity' by making his entry into human history dependent on the chance of a suitable human instrument appearing.(8) Pittenger's particular form of adoptionism would be that the operation of the Word was attendant upon there being one who fulfilled the God-given aim of his life.

Secondly Hick questions whether degree Christology is 'compatible with the New Testament data from which any Christology ought to start and he instances those passages both in the Synoptics as well as the Fourth Gospel in which 'Jesus is depicted as speaking of himself as existing in a unique relationship to the Father'.(9) He suggests that

(6) *ibid.*, p. 145.

(7) *ibid.*, p. 145.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 145.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 146. e.g. Jn. 3:33f; 10:30; 14:6 and 9f; Mark 8:38; Matt. 10:32f; 11:25-27.

Pittenger would interpret such as evidence of 'Jesus' uniqueness in fact'; of him knowing himself to be the 'perfect human vehicle of the Logos'. Personally I doubt if Pittenger would even speak of a 'uniqueness of fact'; rather the over-all impression of Jesus to be found in the Gospels would lead him to regard such verses as betraying early church influence. Referring to such verses Pittenger says:

'In respect to the claims put into Jesus' mouth, especially those in the fourth Gospel but also those in the synoptics as well, we may be sure that he did not talk like that.' (10)

Such preconceptions would in Hick's eyes deny to Pittenger the necessary ingredients for a thorough Christology.

Hick's third argument draws upon a quotation in which Athanasius in order to safeguard the doctrine of redemption rejects any interpretation of the relationship between God and Christ which is other than of 'ultimate essence or substance'. The opposing Arian view which attributed 'adjectival deity' to Christ spoke also of the goal of men's lives as becoming 'θεοὶ κατὰ χάριν', (God's according to grace or by grace, or God's in the sense of having the divine grace within us)' - of whom the prototype was Christ. (11) There is indeed here a close parallel to Pittenger's emphasis on God's indwelling through grace or εὐδοκία. Such a view, Hick comments, 'places incarnation at the top of a continuous scale which descends through saintliness to the ordinary levels of human life. The paradox of grace, which is realized in every good man, and in every man in so far as he is good, was realized in Christ with unique fulness and consistency'. (12) Echoes

(10) C.R., p. 30.

(11) Hick, op.cit., p. 147.

(12) ibid., p. 148.

of Pittenger's treatment of incarnation are obvious here. Hick's criticism of this approach is that 'if salvation is only a matter of attaining the perfected human nature seen in Jesus, by following him, (which will be shown to be the essence of Pittenger's atonement view), then what practical (i.e. soteriological) difference does it make whether or not he is 'God incarnate'?'.(13)

Hick's dissatisfaction with a degree Christology, fourthly, is that it does not do justice to the fulness of Christian faith and worship. The attitude of worship is not appropriate to one who simply as man revealed the path of wholeness of life through divine interpenetration. Yet worship has always been the Christian's response to Christ. Hick requires that Christology should say much more than is allowed for in degree Christology; 'impelled by the inner logic of the worship he has evoked by his redeeming influence upon human life'.(14) I believe that these inadequacies in Pittenger's theology will become more apparent when his atonement views are studied.

(b) John McIntyre

McIntyre's criticisms are similar to those of Hick. He writes:

'in taking the compresence of God and man in a man striving perfectly to respond to the grace of an indwelling God, as the analogue of the presence of two natures in Jesus Christ, Dr. Pittenger fails to see that Christology has always assumed as a first premise that God is not in Christ in the same way as he is in ordinary men or even in saints; and that this difference has been the Christological problem. We do not solve that problem by ignoring it or denying it.'(15)

(13) *ibid.*, p. 148.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 149.

(15) John McIntyre: The Shape of Christology, London, S.C.M. Press, 1966, p. 140.

McIntyre recognises that this arises from Pittenger's desire to 'safeguard the genuine and complete humanity of Christ', but he suggests that not only is his solution of 'compresence' an evasion, it is also confused. Pittenger's talk about the Word so appropriating Jesus' humanity through Mary 'that he possessed ... an organ for self-expression adequate to his purposes', comes in McIntyre's view very close to Adoptionism.(16)

It is interesting to note that although Pittenger acknowledges the criticisms of Hick and McIntyre (17) he offers no 'expended reply'(18) but merely offers Christology Reconsidered as a further statement of his position. This confirms that Pittenger's attitude to Christology is based upon presuppositions very different from those of his critics. These criticisms, however, will be used later in the study when Pittenger's whole position is evaluated.

(16) *ibid.*, pp. 140-141 quoting Pittenger, W.I., p. 92.

(17) C.R., p. ix.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 18.

CHAPTER 4THE DECISIVENESS OF CHRIST

Since Pittenger's Christology is an attempt to understand Christ in the context of the incarnational presence of the Word of God in nature and history, to see him as part of the ongoing activity of God, the relation of Christ to that activity must be considered for this discussion of his Christology to be complete. Thus the first half of this chapter will be concerned with his rejection of the concept of 'finality' when applied to Christ and his preference for the idea of the 'importance' of Christ within the ongoing divine activity; a phrase he borrows from Whitehead. This will lead on to a consideration of the Church as part of the Christ event.

(1) His rejection of the concept of finality

Pittenger finds it unhelpful to speak of the 'finality of Christ', not only because it might seem to imply that God's revelation ended with Christ, which 'no responsible theologian and no sensitive Christian would wish to assert', (1) but also because it exhibits a 'false Christocentrism' implying that God's revelation is confined 'to Jesus Christ and to him alone'. (2) Such a theology which centres 'all possible salvation in an acceptance of the historical figure of Jesus Christ' would deprive 'the vast majority of men throughout the history of the world and across the globe at this moment of any hope of authentic existence'. (3) Such is unacceptable to Pittenger since it would

(1) C.R., p. 88.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 90.

implicitly deny his claim that the Logos is at work to some degree in every man with the attendant possibility of awareness of God-given truth and salvation.

If Pittenger had to use the word 'finality' at all of Christ it would only be as the 'classical instance' of God's working through creation and history, (4) and in this context what is 'decisive' (the word Pittenger prefers) about him is that he discloses and demonstrates the nature of God to be love. (5) The incarnation gives the clue to the 'incarnational presence of the Word of God in nature, in history and in human life'. (6) This decisive disclosure of the divine nature which is the central affirmation both of his Christology and soteriology, Pittenger explains in terms of its 'importance' within the creative advance. (7)

(2) The 'importance' of the Christ event

He defines the Whiteheadian concept of 'importance' by saying that it is employed;

'to indicate the fact that some specific occurrence, some particular event or series of concurrent events, some particular stance or attitude, provides for any responsible thinker the "clue" which he takes for his understanding of "how things go"'. (8)

He goes on:

'That which in this sense is "important" not only seems to sum up or to crystallize (so to say) our prior experience, but also opens up for us new avenues of possibility, leading to future interpretations which will be enriching and deepening in our experience.

(4) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(5) *ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

(6) *W.I.*, p. 240.

(7) *C.R.*, p. 99.

(8) *P.T.C.F.*, p. 18.

Even more significant, the "important" will actually inaugurate a new level of understanding and thus give rise to a new level of experience for us and for those who follow us. It has an objective as well as a subjective reference.' (9)

The objective aspect is clearly the Christian assertion 'that in Jesus Christ, in what prepared for him and followed after him' there was 'a unique, special and definitive action of God towards men'. (10) In Jesus Christ there 'is a disclosure which in the highest degree is "important"; (11) because it is a disclosure of God's activity in the world. In the 'event of Jesus Christ' 'an occurrence of crucial and decisive "importance"' ... 'something has happened which provides the clue to how the world goes and to how God acts in that world'. (12)

Referring to this belief that in the Christ event the nature of God was disclosed, he comments:

'This declaration of faith is indemonstrable, so far as strict logic goes; it must be accepted by a commitment of self to its 'importance'. Yet, so the Christian says, it 'proves itself' because of its remarkable fertility, its extraordinary effectiveness, and its capacity to enrich and 'enable' those who accept it.' (13)

It seems clear then that there is a strong subjective element in Pittenger's use of the concept of importance, for it is as men respond to the Christ event and find in it a source of enrichment that its 'importance' is asserted. This conclusion is reinforced by this definition.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(10) *W.I.*, p. 23.

(11) *P.T.C.F.*, p. 19.

(12) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Doctrine of Christ in a Process Theology', The Expository Times, Vol. 82, 1970, p. 9.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 9.

'Certain aspects of human experience strike us as having unusual significance. Through the force of their impact upon us, and through their fruitfulness for us in all of our later life, they open up new depths for our understanding, illuminate what we have already experienced, and prepare the way for what we may experience in the future. They shape us and they shape our way of experiencing the world. It is in this way that the revelation of God in Christ is 'special' for the Christian. That is, it is 'important', not merely because we choose to make it so, but because this event or series of events, as it comes upon us with such enormous impact, is fruitful for us in the interpretation of our present experience, the opening up to us of our new avenues for the understanding of truth, the ability which it gives us to grasp the significance of our own life now and in the future. In all these ways it makes it possible for us to grasp, as we may say, more of the nature and purpose of the God who ceaselessly moves in upon us.' (14)

This subjective emphasis, however, seems to be in danger of making Christology little more than a series of descriptive statements as to how Christ has been received. If Christ's 'decisiveness' or 'importance' is dependent upon it having an impact upon men, helping them to interpret their experience and grasp the significance of life, then Christology as traditionally understood has been diminished. Christology means the doctrine of Christ and has sought to express the truth of the divine-human relationship in Christ. To make that dependent, to any degree, upon its impact upon those who have received it as significant for themselves, is a marked extension beyond normal Christological boundaries. Pittenger then seems only able to interpret Christ in an evolutionary context in terms of his impact upon the creative process. If this is so, then the notion of 'importance' by which he seeks to explicate Christ's involvement in the creative process would seem to be a tool of uncertain value.

(14) W.I., p. 23.

This will become more apparent in the course of a comparison of Pittenger's Christology with that of Lionel Thornton, both of whom use Whiteheadian insights, both of whom seek to relate the incarnation to a processive view of the universe, but who reach very different conclusions.

(3) Pittenger and Thornton contrasted

Lionel Thornton's book 'The Incarnate Lord' was an attempt to present the incarnation within the context of a world-view which took seriously 'emergent evolution' and which was largely based on Whitehead's view of the universe. Within a view which held that the cosmos 'is in a process of development through time' (15) he sought to explicate how God is involved in this process and more particularly how 'the transcendent creator' has entered 'into the order or process of space and time, of nature and history, in the person of Jesus Christ', (16) which he believes the doctrine of the incarnation has traditionally asserted. This indeed is Thornton's dilemma, for while he would speak of Jesus Christ as the new emergent within the evolutionary process in which the incarnation of God occurs, so that 'the incarnation brings creation to its true end in God' thus meaning that 'the cosmic series is gathered up into the human organism of Jesus Christ', (17) yet he believes that this can only be so if something more than simple processive evolution is recognised and that is the involvement of God in the life of Jesus Christ to which traditional incarnational theology has always pointed. To this extra in Thornton's scheme Pittenger objects.

(15) Lionel Thornton: The Incarnate Lord, London, Longmans, 1928, p. 66.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 28.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 225.

He accuses Thornton of being so concerned 'to assert the Christian belief that in some sense Jesus Christ is both final and transcendent'(18) that he abandons the emergent evolution conceptuality and 'introduces into the picture an intrusion or descent of God the Word into the creative process', (19) an 'arbitrary intrusion ab extra', (20) which contradicts the whole of the Whiteheadian approach which Thornton had employed thus far. Pittenger quotes (21) several critics and reviewers of Thornton's work who agree that in his effort 'to safeguard the uniqueness and 'finality' of the revelation of God in Christ, Thornton is in effect obliged to give up the very schema which he has employed throughout his study'. (22) Others, though, who applaud Thornton believe that Whitehead's system is not strong enough to contain all that traditional incarnational theology he sought to express. A. M. Ramsey suggests that Whitehead's scheme requires the incarnation as Thornton interpreted it 'for its validity and coherence', so that it finds its 'completion in the historic faith': (23) and E. L. Mascall says that Thornton was correct 'to part company with Whitehead at the precise point where the relation of finite being to ultimate reality is involved'. (24) Thus this divergence of opinion

(18) C.R., p. 101.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 101.

(20) W.I., p. 168.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 109.

(22) e.g. Dorothy Emmet: Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism, London, Macmillan, 1966, (2nd Edition), p. 255n.

'It (Thornton's argument) in effect sacrifices the conception of an organic connection between the eternal order and the temporal series in order to preserve a finality of revelation.'

(23) A. M. Ramsey: From Gore to Temple, London, Longmans, 1960, p. 25.

(24) E. L. Mascall: The Openness of Being, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971, p. 162.

within an agreed evolutionary world-view, is essentially one of how the incarnation should be understood, which is particularly instructive for this study.

Mascall's comment, given above, although technically accurate as to the precise point at which Thornton parted from Whitehead's metaphysic also points to the general uncertainty that Thornton held about Whitehead's thought, particularly in respect of the relationship of God to the created world. Whitehead suggests that 'creativity', 'the creative advance into novelty' is the metaphysical ultimate to which both God and the world are subject and in the pursuit of which both God and the World are dependent on each other. Now although this was most fully worked out in 'Process and Reality', expressed in phrases such as God 'is not before all creation, but with all creation'(25) or 'it is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God'(26), which was published in the year after 'The Incarnate Lord', nevertheless these ideas were present in earlier works, and Thornton finds them unacceptable. His criticism is that by making God dependent upon creativity, 'God is made out to be something less than the eternal order';(27) 'the transcendent otherness and actuality of God are diminished'.(28) He proceeds:

'Creation must always be the product of eternity; that is to say, such processes as we recognise in the organic series must always be referred to an activity deriving from the eternal order ... If it be granted that God is in some sense transcendent over this creation, then this activity of self-giving has for its necessary object something less than itself.'(29)

(25) Whitehead, op.cit., p. 405.

(26) *ibid.*, p. 410.

(27) Thornton, op.cit., p. 397.

(28) *ibid.*, p. 397.

(29) *ibid.*, pp. 397-8.

Thornton's interpretation of Whitehead's general system thus leaves the way open for his departure from that system in respect of Christology, in which Mascall says, Thornton was 'altogether determined to be orthodox'.(30) Thus while following the organistic view of creation Thornton can speak of the eternal order being incorporated 'into the succession of events in space-time through an ascending cosmic series',(31) yet he refuses to acknowledge that God can in any sense be dependent upon that 'organic series'(32) and thus he is quite consistent when he claims that Christ is in no sense a product of the creative organic series but an irruption of the Logos-Creator or the absolute eternal order into the series. As he says:

'For the infinity of the eternal order does not find in man on his own level an adequate medium or agent of revelation. The Christology under consideration, however, places the Christ higher than any other man in a position beyond comparison as the agent of supreme revelation ... Consequently the argument of this book can find no place for the mediator of an absolute revelation, except his metaphysical status be altogether beyond the organic series and on the level of the eternal order.'(33)

Thus Thornton is concerned to maintain the divine transcendence and the uniqueness of Christ as part of that transcendence not least because the redeeming work of Christ is thereby safeguarded.

'The revelation of God is given in the form of a redeeming activity which is universal in scope and all-penetrating in power. A Christology which leaves the absolute quality of this saving power in an uncertain position is one which breaks with the Christian conception of God.'(34)

It is in order to safeguard this transcendence and the divine redemption

(30) E. L. Mascall: Christ, the Christian and the Church, London, Longmans, 1946, p. 45.

(31) Thornton, op.cit., p. 98.

(32) *ibid.*, p. 397.

(33) *ibid.*, p. 260.

(34) *ibid.*, p. 260.

within an 'organic-series' view of the world that Thornton upholds the uniqueness of Christ by speaking of his life being subsumed in the Eternal Word. Thornton, however, was careful not to suggest some 'central core' of Jesus' being 'which must be abstracted to make room for the Eternal Word', (35) preferring to speak in terms of 'the principles of unity which exist in any other human organism exist also in him'. The following is his distinction between Jesus and other men.

'Whereas in created human beings the highest law of being is that transcending principle of unity which is proper to a human organism on the level of spirit and which flows down from the creative activity of the eternal order; this is not the highest law of being in the Incarnate Lord. The highest law of being in his case is the law of being proper to deity.' (36)

Through this device of 'the highest law of being' Thornton is trying to say that although in Christ there is a complete human nature yet that nature is not personalized by or in itself but by and in the pre-existent person of the Divine Word.

Thornton sets this within the context of an organic view of the universe by speaking of individuality.

'In the Incarnate Lord the principle of individuality is super-organic and cannot therefore be identified with the principle of unity proper to a human organism in the organic series. In any organism the degree of individuality which it embodies is determined by its transcending principle of unity, which imparts to the organism its status in the series. The principle of unity proper to a human organism in the series determines its degree of individuality, which is the highest degree of individuality in the series, yet still created and incomplete. But the principle of unity which determines the status of the Incarnate Lord is not a partial manifestation of creative activity, but the Eternal Word Himself, who is the source of all creative activity. Consequently the principle of individuality in the Incarnate Lord is not a created manifestation of the principle of

(35) *ibid.*, p. 287.

(36) *ibid.*, pp. 237-8.

individuality, not a further development of that principle in its organic form. The principle of individuality in the Incarnate Lord is Absolute Individuality as it exists in the Person of the Eternal Word.' (37)

Pittenger criticizes Thornton in three main respects. Firstly, as has already been noted, he rejects any intrusion ab extra into the evolving universe. He would prefer incarnation to be understood within an evolutionary context. Thornton clearly believes that no evolutionary view-point will be able to do justice to all that Christian theology has sought to say about the Incarnate Lord.

Secondly, Pittenger accuses Thornton of reducing 'the fullness of our Lord's humanity'. (38) Now while Thornton's unwillingness to allow Christ to remain as an emergent which consummates the creative process and the necessity he finds laid upon him to speak of the Incarnate Lord being taken up to the level of deity makes such a criticism from someone like Pittenger, who lays such heavy stress on Christ's humanity inevitable, Thornton still rejects the criticism. He suggests that 'a being who shares our humanity, yet contradicts the normal characteristics of humanity in certain respects' (39) is not the less human for that. Thornton wishes to speak in full, dynamic terms of the speciality of Christ's humanity.

'The humanity of the Incarnate Lord is not a static metaphysical entity, but a spiritual organism ... All the principles of unity which exist in any other human organism exist also in Him. But whereas in created human beings the highest law of being is that transcending principle of unity which is proper to a human organism on the level of spirit and which flows down from the creative activity of the eternal order, this is not the highest law of being in the Incarnate Lord.' (40)

(37) *ibid.*, p. 282.

(38) *W.I.*, p. 107.

(39) Thornton, *op.cit.*, p. 237.

(40) *ibid.*, pp. 237-8.

Thornton's suggestion that in some sense Christ represents the fullness, possibly the perfection of humanity is rejected by Pittenger on the basis of what has been suggested is a low, basic view of humanity. Thornton's 'lifting the "human organism" of Jesus Christ out of the context of the emerging series' means, Pittenger suggests, that 'the reality of his belonging and hence of his being truly human in the fullest sense is denied'.(41) These two contrasting views of humanity must thus be left side by side.

The third, and, in the present context, most significant criticism that Pittenger raises against Thornton is that he was not sufficiently familiar with Whitehead's conceptuality to recognise the value of the concept of 'importance' for his attempt to speak of the decisiveness of Jesus within the evolving process.(42) Pittenger has been seen to regard the notion of 'importance' as providing the clue as to how a particular occasion can have 'special significance as revelatory of the point and purpose of the whole enterprise in which God is engaged';(43) thus consonant with his theological position, meaning that the Christ event is the important clue to the whole of God's working in the world. The fact that Pittenger lays such store by this concept to the extent of criticising Thornton for not having a sufficient grasp of Whitehead's work in neglecting it, means that this idea of 'importance' must be studied in more detail. Several points may be made.

Firstly, Thornton is not alone in not grasping the significance of the idea of 'importance'. None of the other interpreters of

(41) W.I., pp. 108-9.

(42) C.R., p. 102.

(43) *ibid.*, p. 99.

Whitehead's thought find it sufficiently significant to warrant full discussion. William Christian's thorough analysis of Whitehead's metaphysics cannot even find room for an index reference to the word;(44) John Cobb does not use the concept even in his recent Christological study;(45) and similarly David Griffin makes no reference to it.(46) Indeed the concept is not found in 'Process and Reality' at all. It arises in Whitehead's thought in a chapter devoted to it in 'Modes of Thought'. Thus it might be suspected that Pittenger's criticism of Thornton in failing to grasp the significance of this concept should be reversed. Pittenger might be regarded as having over-employed a concept which has no real validity in Whitehead's thought.

Secondly, this is implicitly conceded by Pittenger in a footnote to his discussion of 'importance' where he admits that, 'As experts in Whitehead's philosophy will observe, I am using the concept of 'importance' in a wider sense, and with a slight shift in emphasis, although I believe my use of it is in accord with the tenor of Whitehead's thought';(47) and he goes on to say that 'my particular sense of the idea is drawn from two statements' in 'Modes of Thought' in which the idea of importance 'serves as a (my italics) dominant theme'.(48) Certainly this is the most that can be said about the place of 'importance' within the book.

(44) William A. Christian: An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.

(45) John B. Cobb Jnr.: Christ in a Pluralistic Age, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1975.

(46) David R. Griffin: A Process Christology, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1973.

(47) W.I., p. 23n.

(48) *ibid.*, p. 23n.

'Modes of Thought', which was published in 1938, some ten years after 'Process and Reality', is very different from its systematic predecessor in that it offers a series of exploratory essays suggesting tentatively new modes of thinking in the vein of organic philosophy. Whitehead described the aim of the lectures which comprise the book as being 'to examine some of those characterizations of our experience which are presupposed in the directed activities of mankind'.(49) Thus he takes certain data of experience such as 'perspective', 'understanding' and 'expression' and examines them imaginatively in order to discern whether such general notions can be seen to have a wider application for philosophic thought. It is an approach to philosophy that could be described as 'descriptive generalization'. Pittenger says of this Whiteheadian approach to philosophy:

'Central to process-philosophy as Whitehead developed it, is the conviction that we must look at experience as a whole. We must also look at the world in the same way, taking account of all the data which are presented to us ... Hence we may say that unity of experience and the unity of the world in which that experience is enjoyed must be primary in our effort to understand the way in which the world goes and the meaning of our experience in the world.'(50)

'Modes of Thought' is a good example of Whitehead's doing this.

The notion of 'importance', in the sense of particular relevance, when contrasted with the 'matter of fact', is one of the data of experience that Whitehead considers. Thus a sense of 'importance' enables one to make selection from the 'multiplicity of the matter of fact'.(51) Again, in a phrase quoted by Pittenger with approval, Whitehead speaks of 'importance' in these terms.

(49) Whitehead: Modes, p. 1.

(50) W. N. Pittenger: Alfred North Whitehead, London, Lutterworth, 1969, p. 13.

(51) Whitehead: Modes, p. 7.

'One characterization of importance is that it is that aspect of feeling whereby a perspective is imposed upon the universe of things felt. In our more self-conscious entertainment of the notion, we are aware of grading the effectiveness of things about us in proportion to their interest ... The two notions of importance and of perspective are closely intertwined.' (52)

It is my contention that however interesting such a discussion might be it does not provide material for a systematic Christology. Indeed Whitehead's use of the term almost demands that it be used subjectively. His stress upon the data of experience means that 'importance' will be understood in terms of how the individual assesses what is important and significant for him. Indeed Pittenger admits this when he recommends that 'Modes of Thought' should be read, 'especially for its recognition of the part 'importance' has in moulding and shaping our experience'. (53)

Pittenger's suggestion, then, that Whitehead's concept of 'importance' is vital for Christology evaporates. He tries to show that it is possible to speak of God acting in an 'important' manner in Jesus but he cannot sustain such a position without drawing in subjective reference. Indeed Whitehead's use of the notion was wholly subjective.

When Pittenger uses this concept to interpret the decisiveness of Jesus it is most often in terms of the 'importance' that he has for us. He should only 'dare to speak of the decisiveness of the event Jesus Christ, provided I recognized the richness of that event and the objective-subjective quality of its "importance" as it impinges upon human experience'. (54)

Pittenger here clearly wishes to counter any accusation that 'importance' is simply subjective. In the following quotation he

(52) *ibid.*, p. 11.

(53) *W.I.*, p. 23n.

(54) *C.R.*, p. 110.

endeavours to stress its objective aspect; but I find his arguments unconvincing.

'An occasion may be called 'important' when it occurs within the continuing process of events, provides illumination of what has gone before, speaks to us now with a special impressiveness, and offers new ways of understanding what is happening in consequent history. We are drawn to that occasion, we are brought to respond to it, because it possesses a compelling quality that demands our attention. There is objectivity here, in that the occasion actually is present to awaken our response ... There is also subjectivity. Since unless and until we respond the occasion cannot serve its function, our experience of it is as important as the occasion itself; it is an experience of something and yet the something is other than the experience.' (55)

It is my submission that an adequate Christology requires that we can talk about the divine activity of Christ apart from human response. Pittenger's definition of 'objectivity' in the Christ event does not fulfil this. On analysis the 'importance' of the Christ event is seen to be wholly reliant upon its ability to give the clue to the meaning of human existence. Pittenger's criticisms of Thornton are thus seen to be gratuitous. Thornton believed that the organic view of the universe was not able to do justice to all that traditional theology had tried to say about God in Christ. Pittenger's counter suggestion that Whitehead's concept of 'importance' provided the necessary clue has been dissolved.

This discussion has also raised a question mark against the continued use of the word 'incarnational' with reference to Pittenger's theology. This has been employed to describe his emphasis upon the activity of the Logos in every man and throughout creation, and his placing of Jesus within that context. Thornton's critique of Whitehead's

(55) *ibid.*, p. 110.

system, however, and the necessity he saw for introducing a special revelation of God in Christ into Whitehead's processive view, raises doubts about the validity of the continued use of this word as an accurate description of Pittenger's approach. Thornton's insistence that the incarnation must be seen as a special revelation of the divine Word calls in question Pittenger's more general application of the word. To prevent confusion a differentiation ought to be made between the two uses of the word 'incarnational', uses which betray two contrasting theological approaches. Since, then, the word 'incarnation' is most often used with reference to the coming of Christ as a special revelation, and since it is Pittenger who is presenting a theology based upon a more general application of the word, its use for the purposes of this study should be accredited to that represented by Thornton. The word 'immanentist' might be suggested as being descriptive of Pittenger's approach, since he wishes to lay emphasis upon the more general indwelling of the Logos within the creative process. It is then this word that will be used of Pittenger's theology in the remainder of this thesis.

There remains, however, a further element in Pittenger's Christology which claims that the decisiveness of Christ within the ongoing activity of God cannot be divorced from the Church. A consideration of this will highlight ~~yet~~ a further subjective element in his Christology.

(4) The location of the incarnation

Pittenger uses this phrase to indicate that he 'locates' the incarnation not in the historical person alone but in the whole 'Christ event' of which Jesus is the focus.

'God's activity in the event we call by Jesus' name must be seen in the totality of that event and not simply in the discrete individual who was its centre. It is entirely appropriate that the name of Jesus should be given to the event whose central figure he is, but it would be a false abstraction to isolate the central figure from his context.' (56)

The significance of this is best introduced by reference to an apparent difference of emphasis between Pittenger and John Knox, to whom Pittenger acknowledges great indebtedness. (57)

Knox also professes his high regard for Pittenger's work, especially 'The Word Incarnate', to the extent that he would have 'difficulty in pointing to any matter on which (he) thinks in a different way'. (58) The foundation of their agreement is their presentation of an 'event' Christology which Knox with reference to Pittenger represents as an 'emphasis on the genuineness of Jesus' humanity and on the dynamic character of his divinity'. (59) Knox, however, indicates one significant difference in emphasis between Pittenger and himself.

'I believe I lay more stress than Dr. Pittenger on the 'social' character of the historical locus of God's action in Christ. He is able to locate the Incarnation somewhat more specifically in Jesus himself than I seem able to do. He can say that the word was incarnate in Jesus without the misgiving of the need of further explanation which I should feel if I used these same words. I should always need to say, if I were trying to speak precisely at all, that the Incarnation took place in Jesus - in-the-midst-of-his-own, in other words, in the nascent church. I feel sure Dr. Pittenger would not deny the truth of this kind of statement. But I see its importance and its bearing in what, I believe, is a somewhat different way. Still the word he used is always 'focus' rather than 'locus' - and perhaps his insistence on that term goes some distance in resolving even this difference.' (60)

(56) C.R., p. 81.

(57) *ibid.*, p. 46, p. 66, p. 147.

(58) John Knox: The Humanity and Divinity of Christ, Cambridge, The University Press, 1967, p. 112.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 112.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 112.

The area of Pittenger's thought in which he might be accused of locating 'the incarnation more specifically in Jesus himself', and to which Knox is probably referring, is that emphasis upon the historical Jesus which forms part of his 'double historicity'. Although this concept is only defined as such in 'Christology Reconsidered' Pittenger's attempt to hold together the two emphases of the faith-experience of the Church and the recognition that the life of Jesus is of decisive importance for the ongoing divine activity is to be found in his earlier books. Thus Knox, as he says, would have found this emphasis upon the life of Jesus as the area of the incarnation in 'The Word Incarnate'. Yet the difference between Knox and Pittenger in this matter is only one of very slight emphasis. Not only is Knox correct in recognising Pittenger's use of the word 'focus' as significant, for it is an attempt to prevent any suggestion that the life of Jesus was the exclusive area of the operation of the Word but, as has already been indicated, Pittenger's concept of 'double historicity' is very unbalanced with the faith-experience of the Church being the more predominant element. That, however, the Church when seen as part of the Christ event and the divine activity, is a most significant element in Pittenger's thought, is indicated by his reaction to Knox's comment. While acknowledging Knox's criticism he does not concede its validity though he does imply that as a result of Knox's book his own emphasis upon the Church was given clearer definition by using the concept of the 'locus' of the incarnation. (61)

A consideration of these two words 'focus' and 'locus' in Pittenger's thought will help in the definition of his Christology and

(61) C.R., p. 66.

also indicate that despite Knox's hesitation the Church plays a significant part in his theology.

(a) Focus and Locus

Pittenger says that his use of the word 'focus' is to avoid the 'fallacy of simple location', by which he means his wish to avoid any suggestion that God's revelation of himself was restricted to Jesus, and any interpretation of the finality of Christ which claims that in Jesus God's revelation was finally completed. 'The event of Jesus Christ' says Pittenger 'is not entirely and absolutely different from all other events ... this event is not so much 'the supreme anomaly' as it is 'the classical instance' of God's mode of operation in the world'.(62) As was established earlier in this chapter, the 'decisiveness' of Christ, in Pittenger's view, means that in the life of Christ God acted in such a way that he gave the clue, the definitive example of all his working in the world, of his self-revelation. Thus in speaking of the Logos as the eternal self-expression of God,(63) Pittenger says that it finds its 'focus' in the life of Jesus.

'The Word who is universally operative in the natural world, in human history, and in the depths of man's life, is focally expressed in our Lord's full and true humanity.'(64)

Pittenger brings out the full significance of this, even for the salvation of mankind, in the sense of the clue that it offers to how life should be lived, in the following quotation.

(62) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Doctrine of Christ in a Process Theology', The Expository Times, Vol. 82, 1970, p. 8.

(63) W.I., p. 183.

(64) *ibid.*, p. 219.

'In Jesus Christ Christian faith sees the pervasive and universal Activity (called in Christian theology the Eternal Word as the divine 'Logos', who is Deity in his Self-Expression) given a focus and a point, for us men and our wholeness of being. The entire movement is crowned, so far as human-kind is concerned, with an Action which shows the meaning of it all. 'This' is what God is up to. And in this focusing in Christ, men are given the truth about life, the way to live, and the life which is worth living ... Jesus Christ is the focal manifestation in Man of God who is creative power and sovereign ruler of all things visible and invisible. He is the focal manifestation of that God who is the only God, in terms of 'action'; and that action is on our 'human' plane and in our 'human' condition.' (65)

But, and here we move on to the cluster of ideas associated with 'locus', the divine action on the human plane which was focused in Jesus was not restricted to him. Thus Pittenger says;

'whatever decisiveness or finality is predicated of Jesus Christ is predicated not of the historical figure in supposed isolation from his consequences in history, but it is predicated of the complex reality of Christ in his Church, Christ with his consequences in the world of human experience and in the ongoing history of the race.' (66)

This societal emphasis, this holding of Christ and Church together, which Knox believed received less than adequate emphasis in Pittenger's writings, is, I consider, a large factor in Pittenger's Christology. It was clearly present in 'The Word Incarnate' as this quotation shows.

'The total New Testament record tells of the creation by God of a society which mediates the Messiah and his salvation. Hence it is his 'Body'. It is Christ's - that is God-in-Christ's - instrument for bringing new life to man ... It was not entirely 'de novo' any more than the Incarnation itself was an entirely novel act of God without relationship to the past history of man. Jewish religious faith and belief were essential in the preparation for that which 'was' newly wrought and newly established. But granted that, the supreme and crucial act of God for man is not Christ alone, nor is it Christ 'and' his Church: rather it is 'Christ-Church', Christ in his Church and his Church in him as its Lord and sole meaning.' (67)

(65) G.P., p. 20.

(66) C.R., p. 98.

(67) W.I., p. 273.

The final sentence of that quotation encapsulates a prime emphasis in Pittenger's theology; with significance not only for his Christology but also for his understanding of salvation. For since 'the supreme and crucial act of God for man is not Christ alone ... it is 'Christ-Church' then the church is part of the event of Christ;(68) it is 'the reflex of the act of God in Christ', 'it is therefore part of the Gospel of the Lord himself', 'it is the sphere of redemption'.(69) The importance of this will be drawn out in a later chapter.

Before, however, moving on to demonstrate how this notion of the Christ-Church event received clearer definition with the aid of process thought, certain aspects of it, which are related to biblical criticism and which are associated particularly with the name of J. M. Thompson, should briefly be considered to complete the picture of this aspect of Pittenger's thought.

(b) The influence of J. M. Thompson

Pittenger describes Thompson, one time Dean of Magdalen College, Oxford, as a 'martyr' to honest, unhampered New Testament criticism.(70) Although he died in 1956, his last published piece of theological writing appeared in 1918; an article entitled 'The Christian Faith'. Up to that time, Thompson's theological career had been marked by opposition and controversy, and he had been inhibited in the performance of his ministry by several bishops. The prime causes of his supposed offence were his views on miracles and the historicity of those New Testament stories which contain miraculous elements. The whole tenor, however, of Pittenger's references to Thompson indicates the high regard

(68) C.R., p. 145.

(69) W.I., p. 272.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 78n.

in which he holds him even to the extent of being an apologist for him. He is particularly in accord with Thompson's attitude to Christ's divinity. As Pittenger says,

'Thompson ... indicates the basis of his view - one with which the present writer is in deep agreement - that the belief in the divinity of Jesus is not apart from, added to, or contradictory of, his humanity, but is an evaluation of his significance, known to faith, in the light of the experience of those who have been in his company.' (71)

Thompson's views are summarized by Pittenger as suggesting 'that the Christian experience "created" the "divine" Christ of faith'.

'What Thompson meant by this ... is that the Christian community, living by its faith in the risen Lord and convinced of the continuity of the object of that faith with the historic Jesus, was obliged to make a religious judgement about Jesus Christ - a judgement which was in one sense a 'value judgement', since it was built upon an evaluation of the significance of Christ for the community, but in another sense an 'existential-judgement', since that evaluation was concerned with the real role which Jesus played in the actual lives of those who so believed in him and in consequence was concerned with the real role which he was believed to play in the total structure of reality interpreted in terms of that significance.' (72)

Thompson himself believed that there is a creative element to Christian Faith which is essentially an interpretation of the facts in the light of human needs and experience. In the present area of discussion this would mean that 'to a modernist (sic) the incarnation includes two essential things, the life of Jesus, and the Church's belief about it: the one an historical fact, taking its place among other incidents of the past; the other an act of religious faith with a past, a present, and a future; and both are involved in his definition of it ... The faith of the Church is still necessary to give divine value to Jesus'

(71) *ibid.*, p. 97n.

(72) *ibid.*, pp. 78f.

humanity. (73) In addition Pittenger finds support for the conclusion that what we know of Christ as 'divine' is mediated through the experience and faith of the Church, from form-criticism. In that it is possible through that critical method to detect the influence, concerns and life of the earliest Christian community within the Gospels, then further grounds are provided for seeing the whole 'Christ-event' including the ongoing life of the Church, as what is determinative of Christianity. That 'there is no such being as a completely uninterpreted Jesus'; that 'the form-critical way of studying the Gospels has made it abundantly clear that whatever is told about Jesus' acts and words is told by the community with its particular life-situation' and that 'the community has coloured the testimony by its convictions and worship' provides for Pittenger an 'unintentional demonstration' (74) of Thompson's suggestion that the 'faith of the Church is necessary to give divine value to Jesus' humanity' because Jesus as divine is unknown and unknowable apart from the Church's faith and witness.

It is thus in the context of seeing the Church as integral to the total Christ event that the insights that Pittenger finds in Thompson's work and the conclusions of the form-critics have their fullest impact. If Christ is indeed unknowable as divine except within the Christian fellowship then certainly this is corroboration for Pittenger's view that it is the life of the Church, with Christ as its focus, which is the location of the incarnation, the scene of the ongoing loving action of God. That this is Pittenger's conclusion is confirmed when he quotes some words of Nineham which state as one of the bases of an 'event'

(73) *ibid.*, p. 240 quoting from J. M. Thompson, 'The Christian Faith', art. in The Hibbert Journal, Vol. XVII, (1918-1919), pp. 229-241.

(74) C.R., p. 84.

Christology the belief that

'God was seeking to do through Jesus what he has in fact done, bring into existence a community under the lordship of the risen one, in which reconciliation with God himself and the power of a holy life should become at least potentially a reality.' (75)

These words must be regarded as characteristic of Pittenger's own position, as will be confirmed in a later chapter when the place of the Church in the economy of salvation will be discussed. Now the influence of process thought upon this aspect of Pittenger's thought will be considered.

(c) The 'Christ-event' in a process perspective

An equation of 'prehension' with 'focusing' is the basis of Pittenger's understanding of the whole Christ event in process terms; as this quotation indicates.

'Every actual entity, every occurrence or occasion, is a focusing or (in process terms) a prehending of the whole vast range of environmental and relational factors which at that point and in that way came to a specific and decisive (in the sense of cutting off other possible prehenions of possibility) moment or instance. But there is also the relationship of that instance to its own past, which itself has been open similarly to many influences; its immediate and inescapable contacts; and the future developments which come from its dynamic towards realizing its specific aim and which through decision have become directly relevant ... But if it is true, as I believe it is, in respect of all entities, it must also be true of the man Jesus.' (76)

Here again the relationship of 'focus' to 'locus' should be noted. If the whole event is the 'locus', then it is the 'focus' which gives it its character; and this is a prehending of past, present and future influences. Applying this insight, Pittenger proceeds to work

(75) *ibid.*, pp. 134-5, quoting Dennis Nineham: 'Jesus in the Gospels', ed. W. N. Pittenger: Christ for us Today, London, S.C.M. Press, 1968, p. 64.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 67.

out in detail what it means for a person's life, with special reference to Jesus. He suggests that no person can be understood in separation from the past history to which he belongs and from which he emerges; from his present range of relationships and associations and their influence; and further, the consequences of his particular impact on history must be seriously taken into account. A person can thus only be understood as a focusing of the past, of present relationships and the results of his life.(77) Pittenger explains this in rather general terms with historical examples. Churchill and Roosevelt are suggested as men who could not be understood apart from the society which reared them and who had a profound influence on future developments. Speaking of Jesus in this way, his Jewishness is emphasized which means the impact of that culture and religion upon him. Pittenger also outlines the present influences upon the life of Jesus including his family and friends; the Roman authorities which guaranteed security and even his undoubted love of the Palestinian landscape. Jesus' impact on the future is also stressed. His influence is like that of other famous men on the course of history, only more so. Not only has Jesus made a great and decisive impact upon those who met him; but this impact continued to be real after his death. The preservation of the remembrance of Jesus in the life of the Christian community is evidence of this. Yet their memory was much more than a memorial to a passed worthy; it was expressive rather of a continuing, living impact.

'After his death ... Jesus was still being received. He was remembered: and what he had said and done made their lasting impression in an even more objective way ... This process of impact-and-reception has continued down the centuries.'(78)

(77) *ibid.*, p. 67.

(78) *ibid.*, p. 77.

The significance of this discussion for Pittenger's thought is that it provides what is for him the only proper context for understanding the activity of God in the life of Jesus, namely the divine influence is seen in the whole Christ-event. Having established that 'every person is to be seen as the focusing of the past, his present relationships, and the results of his appearance at some given time and place'

Pittenger goes on to say:

'any interpretation of such a person must have regard for all these factors; and if an activity of God is said to have taken place in association with that person, however we conceive this, especially if such activity is believed to be of singular importance and remarkable intensity, that activity of God must be taken as occurring in and through the whole constellation of which the person is the centre. Thus the concept of 'event' must be applied to this totality rather than to the supposedly discrete individual who may (and usually does) give his name to it.' (79)

Support is thus provided, Pittenger believes, by process thought, for his primary Christological datum that the full significance of Jesus can only be understood within the context of the whole Christ event, which would include the Church.

(d) Criticisms from a process angle

David Griffin, whose sphere of study is Christology from a process viewpoint specifically criticizes Pittenger for his confusion of Jesus and the Church. While he agrees that 'we can never talk ... about the Church as separate from Jesus', he rejects as inaccurate 'within a Whiteheadian framework' the converse, that Jesus can never be talked about as separate from the Church'. Pittenger's fault, Griffin suggests, (80) lies in his use of Whitehead's notion of prehension.

(79) *ibid.*, p. 68.

(80) David Griffin: 'The Process Theology of Norman Pittenger', Process Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1971, p. 137.

Whitehead only employed 'prehension' for 'past activities': only past events could affect a new occasion internally, future events are wholly external to an occasion'.(81) It is, however, this mistaken use of prehension, Griffin suggests, which causes Pittenger to confuse issues of person and significance and thus fail to take advantage of the insights that process thought offers for Christology. Griffin thus disagrees with Pittenger's thought as expressed in such sentences as: 'To grasp the significance of any man ... past and present and future must be taken into account', (82) and 'The way in which I have been and shall be received ... has its essential role in establishing me for what I am on the way to becoming now and for what I have or shall have accomplished or done or effected'.(83) While the former may simply be true, nothing is thereby added to the understanding of anyone's selfhood, and the latter quotation makes the similar mistake of not making a sufficiently clear distinction between 'appearance' (or significance) and 'reality'. Whitehead's system, however, does make allowance for such a contrast and indeed concentrates upon realities for 'it is precisely this that is one of the great merits of Whitehead's conceptuality for Christology, that one can intend to talk about actualities as they were "in themselves", prior to their reception by others'.(84) From this, in the present context, Griffin draws the following conclusion:

'an adequate Christology demands, and Whitehead's realistic philosophy allows for, talk of God's activity in human events apart from any response by subsequent events, accepting or otherwise. It is certainly true that an act

(81) *ibid.*, p. 139.

(82) C.R., p. 79.

(83) *ibid.*, p. 80.

(84) Griffin, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

of God would not have been a revelation apart from an accepting response; but if God did indeed act supremely in a certain event, then this event would have been the supreme act of God even if no one had apprehended it as such.' (85)

The final sentence of this quotation refers to one of the implications of Pittenger's approach that God's activity in Christ cannot be understood or discussed apart from the response to that activity.

Griffin by contrast believes that not only does the process conceptuality allow one to do this but also that an adequate Christology depends upon understanding the work of God in Christ by itself. Thus Griffin not only debates whether Pittenger has employed Whitehead's insights adequately; he also calls in question Pittenger's whole approach with what he would suggest is its confusion of the historical person and the whole historical event.

'The task of Christology proper is to present an interpretation which is credible (historically and philosophically) of Jesus' person, meaning precisely the past reality that was Jesus of Nazareth, and which provides a justification for the decisive role he has in fact had in man's lives. To redefine 'Jesus' as referring to the total event of Jesus and his reception and then to claim finality for this complex event merely begs the question, which is whether the Christian estimation of Jesus' importance for man's relationship to the divine is based on a correct interpretation of Jesus' own relationship to God.' (86)

(e) Critical summary

Griffin here indicates the weakness of Pittenger's Christology. For it is clear from this chapter that in order to account for the 'speciality' or 'decisiveness' of Christ within a processive understanding of God's involvement in the world that Pittenger has had to recourse to making that 'decisiveness' dependent upon his reception by and continuing

(85) *ibid.*, p. 139.

(86) *ibid.*, p. 138.

significance for the Church; and that as Griffin indicates is to avoid the real Christological question. Pittenger's promise of a fresh presentation of Christology in dynamic terms, with the aid of process thought has been shown to be an uneasy passage between the threat of adoptionism on the one hand and making his significance dependent upon his reception on the other; and further a leading process technician has been seen to question the accuracy of his use of Whitehead's conceptuality.

That Christ is made so dependent upon his reception in the Church is, however, quite consistent with Pittenger's Christological approach. If Jesus' difference from other men is only a matter of degree, the degree to which he has fulfilled his God-given aim, the degree to which he made a full-hearted response to the divine love to the extent of becoming the personification of that love, then his significance must be restricted to the human plane which he shares with all other men and his significance must be dependent upon the manner in which he has enabled others to respond with fuller hearts to God's love. Thus it is only in the company of those who have been inspired by what they have seen and understood of the divine will and love in him that he will have true significance at all. This, however, is to move into the realm of Pittenger's understanding of salvation which alone can complete this discussion.

CHAPTER 5PITTENGER'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S SAVING WORK(1) His preference for the Exemplarist Atonement theme

Pittenger's own 'Strictly Personal Account' indicates that the impact of process thought upon his theology was greatest in respect of conventional atonement doctrines. These 'had to go, since they were predicated on a view of God which no christian ought to entertain'. In coming to recognise the essence of sin to be 'the breaking of a loving relationship', 'atonement could only mean the renewal of that relationship'.(1) This, however, I regard as a piece of special pleading, for it seems clear that although Pittenger may have been fortified in his views by process insights, his basic understanding of atonement theology had developed much earlier in his Modernist theological upbringing. In the following quotation in which he identifies himself with the 'moral' or 'exemplarist' atonement theory associated with Abelard, he also mentions Hastings Rashdall, the famous Anglican Modernist scholar, whose Bampton Lectures, published as 'The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology' (London, Macmillan, 1919) did so much to make Abelard's theory the accepted Modernist view. F. R. Barry comments that the Rashdall thesis caused 'liberals virtually (to) take for granted that only a "subjective" interpretation is ethical, scriptural or credible'.(2) This applies to Pittenger; as he writes:

(1) op.cit., p. 132.

(2) F. R. Barry: The Atonement, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, p. 145.

'My own theory of the atonement would be a combination of Abelard's (and Hastings Rashdall's) so called 'exemplarism', which is a poor name for so great a view, with an ontological grounding, in the very structure of reality, for what was done in Christ.' (3)

This 'ontological grounding, in the very structure of reality', with which Pittenger combines the 'exemplarist' doctrine 'for what was done in Christ', refers to his underlying concept of God as Love, which the process metaphysics confirms for him. It is because his understanding of reality takes as its key the divine love that for him only an atonement doctrine which 'placards' (4) the divine love is tenable or Christian.

'For to say ... that God is love, and to say it on the basis of love's demonstration in act in the event of Jesus Christ, is also to say that in everything we assert this truth is to be determinative. It is a truth demonstrated in act, ... to take ... one example ... atonement theology can never be mechanical, transactional, legal or juridical if this Christian insight is accepted; it must always be personal and relational, for these are the terms in which love operates.' (5)

How Pittenger understands, with the help of process thought, the divine loving activity in its atoning work will be a major section of this study, but first it must be emphasized, as the final sentence of the previous quotation confirms, that Pittenger's doctrine of atonement is confined within a subjective, and more particularly, exemplarist approach.

An objective approach sees man freed from the power of evil primarily by some transactional means such as juridical acquittal or the offering of sacrifice to God, both made possible by the death of Jesus, and represents the atonement 'as an act by which God's attitude

(3) G.P., p. 62.

(4) G.D., p. 62.

(5) C.R., p. 93.

to sinners has been changed, and by which he has been enabled to forgive them without violating the ordinary principles of justice'.(6) Such Pittenger rejects as 'horribly sub-Christian in (its) concept of God'.(7) His preference for the subjective approach stresses that it is man's relationship to God which is changed. In the cross the divine love is seen clearly and the spectacle of such suffering love is a profound incentive for sinful men to be moved to repentance and to obedience to God's will.

In a rare discussion of traditional atonement symbols, such as sacrifice, justification and payment of debt, it is clear that Pittenger's main purpose is to reinterpret these originally 'objective' categories in a broadly 'subjective' manner. The 'ransom' theory is, for example, evacuated of any 'objective' reference and translated by saying that the crisis answered by the 'ransom' theory is that 'man has sold himself to narrow selfishness ... and to all manner of evil', of which 'the devil is the symbol'. Since 'man cannot win himself back' or 'buy himself out of his captivity', 'only "the expulsive power of a new affection", the love which is able to pull us out of ourselves, can do that'. 'Christ, not merely by exhibiting God's love but by enacting it and by himself being it in action, pours that love into our hearts, and ransoms us from "the devil". His death on Calvary is the victory of divine love over the wickedness of demon-possessed men. The victory was guaranteed on Easter and made an effective reality for his followers through the Church on Pentecost'.(8) It is

(6) G. W. H. Lampe: 'The Atonement: Law and Love' in ed. A. R. Vidler Soundings, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 182.

(7) G.P., p. 61.

(8) W. N. Pittenger: Theology and Reality, Greenwich, Connecticut, The Seabury Press, 1955, p. 114.

only human beings and their attitudes who are affected by the work of Christ. This is the essence of the subjective atonement approach and is wholly characteristic of Pittenger.

At the conclusion of this discussion of 'a few of the traditional conceptions of the means by which salvation has been brought to men' he highlights the one that completes them, namely the 'exemplarist' view.

'(It) is the so-called Abelardian conception, in which, as I think, the heart of the matter is indicated. The exhibition of God's love in the life, and supremely in the death, of Jesus awakens in us an answering love to God and a desire to be obedient to the Father's will, even as Jesus Himself was obedient. Man is shown in the death of Christ as the sort of being who can kill Incarnate God; but God is shown as the sort of being who can and still does love man, and bears the consequences of that murder. So man penitently responds to this freely given love; he is morally changed, repents of his deicidal sinfulness, and strives to become like Christ.'(9)

The adjective 'deicidal' is significant, for Pittenger's exemplarism is not merely the example of a good man done to death, but essential to his view of atonement is the belief that 'on Calvary, and in the total life of Christ, the very action of God Himself on man's behalf', is to be found 'radically altering the human situation'.(10)

'So we see that the Atonement will involve action from God to man, the divine initiative, calling forth action from man to God. Inasmuch as our Lord is God-in-Man and Man-in-God, there is in Him a double movement of the divine activity for us and human activity toward God. The two are distinguishable, but in him they cannot be separated. The purpose which governs the entire process is that men might become, by the supremely characteristic and uniquely effectual action of Divine Reality in Christ, that which they were intended to be, that which their deep-rooted self-seeking has prevented their being: sons of God, heirs of eternal life, true men.'(11)

(9) *ibid.*, p. 116.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 116.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 116f.

Pittenger's understanding of atonement is thus thoroughly 'exemplarist' and he refuses to countenance any deviation from that norm. Within that context, however, two major areas of his atonement thought may be detected, which must be examined more closely. Firstly there is his understanding of how God is involved in the redeeming work of Christ, how he is connected with the cross, how he overcomes evil. This discussion which will constitute the remainder of this chapter, will draw heavily upon process insights. Indeed this is the area of Pittenger's atonement theology where process influence is most marked. The next chapter will take up the idea, suggested in the opening sentences of this section, that the essence of atonement is the restoration of relationship. It will consider Pittenger's description of salvation as wholeness, known within the loving relationship which is exemplified by the Christian Church. A further chapter will indicate that all Pittenger's talk of atonement and salvation is to be understood solely within a 'this-worldly' context. This will be followed by a final chapter offering a broad appraisal and criticism of Pittenger's total scheme.

Before moving on, however, the criticisms made of Pittenger at the beginning of this section, that the impact of process thought upon his theology was greatest in respect of conventional atonement doctrines was a piece of special pleading, must now be substantiated. It has already been indicated that for Pittenger 'exemplarism' is the essence of atonement, but the further suggestion that this pre-dates his conversion to Whitehead's conceptuality and may best be accounted for by his Modernist upbringing, has not been proved. However, in a book published in 1939, which on his own admission was before his first reading of process material, he offers a summary statement of his understanding of atonement, which is wholly reliant upon 'exemplarism'

and which is indistinguishable from his most recent discussion of atonement doctrine. Here is part of that summary.

'By Atonement is meant the union of God and man, at-one-ment. Life adjusted to Reality on the deepest level, rich and overflowing in love - that is the goal. Through Christ that goal is made possible. ... In the larger sense the Incarnation is the Atonement. ... It is incorrect to think that any change is made in the nature of God by Christ's activity. The whole point is that all that Christ has done is in the most real sense the work of God. That is the kind of God with whom men have to deal. A real change is made in man, however. Through the loving influence which Christ and his relentless Spirit exert upon men, they are brought back from wilfulness and erring ways to love and obedience towards God. ... There is an objective side to the Atonement. That ... is the intensified and intimate action of God in man on our behalf. It is the whole life of Christ, culminating in the death which crowned and gave meaning to his self-sacrifice and service. In that life and death a victory was won which the risen power of Christ has demonstrated. A new energy was released into the world. But there is also a subjective side to the Atonement. For that energy (which theologians call the grace of God) must be accepted by men. It redeems from narrowness, meanness, selfishness, and sin, and brings men the clean, fresh, winsome life of communion with God in perfect liberty and mutual understanding. But its acceptance is not easy. We must open ourselves to its influence. The weakened will of man must make an act of glad obedience, and of willing acceptance of the love of God. We must centre our thought, will and affections on the 'Calvary-God'; and by so doing we shall be filled with the Spirit of Christ, receive his power, and be made part of the incarnating life of the eternal Word.'(12)

Here in 1939 is the characteristic Pittenger approach to atonement, of an exemplarism mixed with a heavy incarnational or immanentist stress. The conclusion is inescapable that process thought played no seminal part in the development of Pittenger's atonement theology, rather it merely provided ammunition for positions already reached. Indeed it is in Pittenger's rigid adherence to the exemplarist theme that the weakness of his atonement theology will be seen to lie.

(12) W. N. Pittenger: The Approach to Christianity, London, The Centenary Press, 1939, p. 46.

(2) How God overcomes Evil(a) Introduction

Whitehead's teaching that God includes both a 'primordial' and a 'consequent' aspect, which he developed to show that God is both infinite, unchanging and 'abstract from the world' (13) and at the same time related to and affected by all that goes on in his creation, is the theory upon which Pittenger bases his understanding of how God overcomes evil. The consequent aspect emphasises that God is, in Pittenger's phrase, 'richly concrete'. (14) By this is meant that he is intimately related to the processive nature of the world and its creative endeavour as it advances. He is 'in on things' not only affecting but being affected by what goes on. This 'relationship between God and the world, in which there are influences and affects in both directions' (15) is basic to process thought and derives from the concept of the consequent aspect of God. Pittenger expresses this characteristically.

'For the process theologian, the simple believer's conviction that God is the tender Lover, "the fellow-sufferer who understands" (in Whitehead's words), the participant in all human experiences both joyful and painful, is taken with the most complete seriousness.' (16)

The purpose of God's involvement in the world is to secure by lure, persuasion and solicitation 'the free consent of the creation to his purpose of good', (17) so that the creative process might advance. Yet this advance is thwarted by negative, contrary decisions which

(13) G.D., p. 36.

(14) P.T.C.F., p. 28.

(15) G.D., p. 36.

(16) Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited' . . . Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 213.(17) *ibid.*, p. 213.

constitute evil; and God is thereby affected. As Pittenger says;

'A conception of God which sees him in mutual relationship with the creation will inevitably go on to say that the evil in the world has its affect upon God, while God is continually at work to reduce or to transform this evil so that it may become an instrument for the accomplishment of the good which he purposes.' (18)

Two points which emerge from this must be stressed in preparation for considering how God overcomes evil. Firstly, it is clear that on this view God is affected by evil. Pittenger criticizes traditional theologies for teaching God's aseity, his being the 'unmoved mover' removed from the world, suggesting as replacement the process view that rather than being unaffected by evil God shares in it and knows its effects and consequences. Secondly, in order to overcome it he must remain consistent to his nature which means he will operate by loving solicitation, respecting the freedom of creaturely decision which is of the essence of the creative process. We can thus expect that if he is to remain true to himself he cannot simply override evil or destroy those responsible for it but rather transform it through the operation of his loving nature. Indeed what is characteristic about this notion of the 'consequent' aspect of God's nature is that God 'takes into himself all that has in fact occurred. Whether this be good or evil, whether it be directed to further prospective fulfilment or a denial of that end, whether it be adjustment or maladjustment: all is accepted by God and in one way or another can be used by him'. (19)

This picture of God ceaselessly at work in the world striving by solicitation for the world's 'good' which is the fulfilment of its God-given aim and thereby being deeply affected by the world must be

(18) G.D., p. 38.

(19) P.T.C.F., p. 32.

looked at more closely. Pittenger lists four important elements of this for consideration.

'First, in all the "perishing of occasions" by which the creative process is marked, God uses everything available to him for his purpose; he knows it and keeps it. Second, whatever is in fact useable is positively prehended by God and made to serve love's ends. But, third, God can use that which has evil ingredients in a manner that will secure good ends. He "turns even the wrath of men to his praise", as we might say; and for process thought God's praise signifies not some self-glorification of deity, but the outgoing action of love in ever wider circles of expression. Anything that is thus available may become an occasion for further advance. But in the fourth place if there is some surd evil which is not assimilable, God will negatively prehend it; it has occurred and it cannot be annihilated, but it remains as a moment from which all possible good has been extracted by the alchemy of the divine loving persuasion.' (20)

Pittenger seems fond of the word alchemy to describe this process whereby the dross of evil by some mysterious process is turned into the gold of goodness. He indicates that it is the divine love which effects this process and he identifies the Cross as the 'sign and symbol' of this suffering love 'which by a mysterious alchemy can transmute (evil and human wickedness) into good'. (21) The process thought background will have to be examined for this to be understood better.

(b) The process background

In the foregoing quotations the word 'prehension' has been used to indicate how God takes both good and evil into himself. It will be recalled that an actual entity or occasion, that instant of experience which is the basic unit in process thought is in fact a concrescence, a coming together of previous entities to make the new one. The new entity prehends those that make it up. Thus prehensions are the

(20) Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited', p. 218.

(21) G.P., p. 16.

vehicles by which one actual entity becomes objectified in another.

In fact prehensions are what an actual entity is composed of. As

Whitehead says;

'The first analysis of an actual entity, into its most concrete elements, discloses it to be a concrescence of prehensions which have originated in the process of becoming.' (22)

The critical point about Whitehead's system, however, is that he said that God 'is an actual entity' as 'is the most trivial puff of existence in far off empty space'. (23) Amongst process thinkers there is a debate as to whether Whitehead was correct or consistent with the remainder of his system in saying this. Those who are unhappy about this notion point out that Whitehead did not mean by this that God is an 'actual occasion', which would be nonsense. Peter Hamilton explains this distinction by saying that 'occasions perish, and only live on objectively' whereas 'God exists throughout time without loss of immediacy'. (24) He goes on to say that 'Whitehead elsewhere seems to have accepted the idea that God is not an entity, but rather a whole sequence of entities'. (25) He quotes Charles Hartshorne in support.

'God is, as Whitehead agreed in a carefully noted conversation with A. H. Johnson, a linear sequence (which Whitehead terms "a personally ordered society") of occasions - with the difference, as contrasted to ordinary personal sequences, that in God there is no lapse of memory, no loss of immediacy, as to occasions already achieved.' (26)

Now it would clearly run counter not only to common sense but also to the process view of God which has been developed thus far to suggest

(22) Whitehead: Process, p. 28.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 23.

(24) Peter Hamilton: The Living God and the Modern World, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, p. 168.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 168.

(26) Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese: Philosophers Speak of God, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 174.

that God is but a single 'actual entity' like any other. What has been quoted from Hartshorne and Hamilton would seem to offer the most satisfactory interpretation of this idea. Hamilton summarizes this as follows.

'On this view, it remains true that at any given moment God is an actual entity; but when viewed over the entire span of time, God is seen to comprise a whole sequence of divine occasions of experience.' (27)

Although Pittenger does not enter into this technical debate of Whiteheadian interpretation his whole approach would identify him as following the line of Hartshorne and Hamilton here quoted. This is apparent in one of his references to Whitehead's aphorism that 'God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification'. (28) Pittenger suggests that this quotation does not preclude the possibility that in certain respects God is different and he proceeds to suggest what the nature of this difference might be; in so doing he shows that he thinks of God as being involved in the creative process moment by moment or better, occasion by occasion.

'He is different in that he abides in and through all process, he abides in and through it in his identity as creative love, and he is both the principle initiator of all that happens and also the chief recipient of the affects of what happens.' (29)

Thus while Pittenger following Whitehead, would deny that God should be placed in a category different from the world; he is not to be 'treated as an exception to all metaphysical categories' yet he insists that this does not mean that there are 'no distinctions or differences between

(27) Hamilton: op.cit., p. 169.

(28) Whitehead: Process, p. 405.

(29) G.D., p. 36.

God and other actual entities' 'since (for one thing) God endures and does not "perish".' (30) In explaining further the nature of this difference Pittenger quotes some words of Professor Donald Sherburne which have a special reference to the subject under discussion. Sherburne had written that 'the principles governing all actual entities are in some instances exemplified in a reverse way in God'. (31) Pittenger draws two conclusions from this. First he points out that 'while entities in the world of time-space originate with physical prehensions of occasions of data ... God in his 'primordial nature' works with his conceptual valuation of 'eternal objects'. (32) By this Pittenger means that God is not limited to the physical world. Indeed that would be to reduce God to mere physical existence which would be to make a nonsense of the idea of God. Rather the 'primordial' aspect of God ensures that God brings to the creative process, to each actual occasion the value enshrined in 'eternal objects'. Secondly Pittenger says that 'while temporal entities move from physical to conceptual prehensions, God in his 'consequent nature' (as affected by the world) is constituted by his physical prehensions of those entities and their accomplishments'. (33) What Pittenger is stressing here is that God in his consequent aspect can be said to be made, to be 'constituted' by his prehension of other entities and what they effect. The notion of God as actual entity is crucial here. The principle of how actual entities are constituted is here taken to mean that God as 'actual

(30) W. N. Pittenger: art. 'A Thing is what it does: A discussion of God', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 15, No. 4, New Series, July 1972, p. 241.

(31) Donald W. Sherburne: A Key to Whitehead's 'Process and Reality', Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1966, p. 226.

(32) W. N. Pittenger: art. 'A Thing is what it does', p. 241.

(33) *ibid.*, p. 241.

entity' is made up by a physical prehension of other entities whether their effect is good or evil. Both are taken into God. Good is immediately used for the advance of the creative process; evil is prehended negatively in that whatever of good can be found there is drained from it and the residue kept back by God.

This process view of God as 'actual entity' or better as 'a linear sequence of occasions' means that God is present throughout the creative process as a factor in, a 'prehension' in the concrescence of each actual entity. God is at the heart of every moment of experience. His operation there is two-fold. First he brings to each actual occasion 'in the cosmos its 'initial aim', in accordance with his over-all purpose of the achievement of highest intensity of experience'. 'From the eternal realm of possibility, this or that special aim is selected. It is then supplied to the concrescent entity, but not as an addendum; the entity emerges as and with this aim'. (34) This aim is not simply the application of 'eternal values' or 'an abstraction from the realm of possibility' (35) but takes account of the situation of the new entity and also builds upon the achievements of the creative process so far. In that God also receives the affects of previous entities in the process the movement of the process is thus deposited in God and so in offering initial aim to each new entity there is 'a utilization of earlier achievements in creation which have been received by God in his 'consequent nature' and now pass back into the temporal world'. (36) Secondly God's involvement in each actual occasion means that he prehends the decision involved in that occasion for good

(34) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(35) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 243.

or evil. God is thus affected by the free creaturely decision enshrined in every instant of experience throughout the creative process.

It is on this basis that it is possible to say, within the process conceptuality that God is able to transmute the evil that is in the world. It is because God is intimately involved in the decision of every moment of life and is affected by it, that it can be said that 'God can use that which has evil ingredients in a manner that will secure good ends'.(37) It is only because process thought is able to see God at work at the microscopic level of life that it is able to make judgements about the macroscopic aspect. It is because God as 'actual entity' prehends other actual entities that it is possible for process theologians to say that God is affected by what goes on in the creative process.

It is on the broader scale, however, that the motive for God's operation throughout the cosmos can be seen. Pittenger says that God's work is 'to produce a stream of influence which has its consequence in the creation'(38) and he goes on to say that there are consequences also for God in that he is affected by what goes on in the world but through his consequent nature he is able to employ everything he has received whether good or evil 'for further activity in the world of temporal actual entities'.(39) This view of God's activity entirely accords with Whitehead's dictum that 'the divine element in the world is to be conceived as persuasive agency and not as coercive agency',(40)

(37) W. N. Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited' in Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 218.

(38) W. N. Pittenger: art. 'A Thing is what it does: A discussion of God', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 15, No. 4, New Series, July 1972, p. 242.

(39) *ibid.*, p. 242.

(40) Whitehead: Adventures, p. 170.

and is the basis for Pittenger's repeated insistence, noted throughout this thesis, that God can only properly be known as Love. To understand, though, how God can both overcome evil and also operate only by love and solicitation, it is necessary to see how Pittenger interprets evil.

(c) The fact of evil

Pittenger vigorously defends himself and others who employ the process conceptuality against the accusation that they do not treat the fact of evil with sufficient seriousness.⁽⁴¹⁾ Indeed his argument is that far from minimizing it, evil is recognised as an important element in the Whiteheadian view of the creative process and of God's involvement in it.

'For every Process thinker known to me, notably for Whitehead evil is very real indeed. It is a horrible but inescapable fact. In Whitehead it is one of the elements which enters into his vision of the world-process and of God as marked by high tragedy. This is no light-hearted dismissal of evil; on the contrary, it is the taking of the consequences of evil with such profound seriousness that they enter into God's own life in what he styled God's 'consequent nature' - God as affected by the world in his eminent temporality. Thus one might claim that here evil is given a much more profound recognition than in conventional theistic schemes in which its effects have no place whatever in the divine life.'⁽⁴²⁾

This apologia can only be sustained, however, by interpreting evil in a special and restricted sense, as will be shown.

Pittenger begins from a recognition of what he calls the 'fact of evil' by which he means that evil 'is so plainly part of the world in which we live and of our own human experience'.⁽⁴³⁾ How he accounts

(41) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology - A Short Comment', The Expository Times, Vol. 85, No. 2, November 1973, p. 56.

(42) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited', Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), pp. 216-217.

(43) G.D., p. 14.

for this 'fact of evil' is best introduced by three negatives.

Firstly he rejects any suggestion that evil is intrinsic within creation or endemic to mankind.(44) This is an aspect of that major element in his theology, which Pittenger would describe as his 'incarnationalist' stress and which has been accorded a fuller discussion in an earlier chapter. Secondly he rejects the concept of a devil or any power of evil at large in the world which might be held responsible for evil.(45) Thirdly he insists that 'we must once and for all get rid of the barbarously unchristian notion that God is in some sense responsible for the horrible evils, the ghastly suffering, and everything else that is wrong with creation ... above all we must jettison the dreadful and subchristian idea that God punishes men by sending evil upon them'.(46) Thus he would never ascribe evil to the agency of God for whatever hidden purpose, since such would be a denial of the loving nature of God.(47)

In offering his own explanation of the 'horrible evils' and 'ghastly suffering' in the world Pittenger acknowledges that much of it is attributable either directly or indirectly to human sin and wrongdoing. Much animal suffering, for example, can be laid at the door of human cruelty,(48) and amongst human beings themselves thoughtless or wanton behaviour or careless living habits, which on Pittenger's definition amount to sin, can cause much suffering.(49) He also

(44) L.T.P.P., p. 59. 'evil is not radical, if by that is intended 'at the root of things' - for it cannot be, if God is love and is Himself 'at the root of things' through his creativity at work in them'.

(45) W. N. Pittenger: 'Is God responsible for Evil?', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 19, (N.S.), No. 3, Spring 1976, p. 86.

(46) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(47) Pittenger: God's Way With Men, pp. 21f.

(48) G.D., p. 23.

(49) *ibid.*, p. 26.

suggests that some of the suffering associated with natural disasters can be attributed to human sin. His argument here is that natural events such as earthquakes and tidal waves can be regarded as necessary for the preservation of 'the natural or physical status quo' (50) of the earth so that human life might continue to be possible on it. Thus Pittenger comments that a tidal wave that swept over an uninhabited atoll would not be regarded as evil, simply a 'fact of nature'. (51) Such natural phenomena only come to be regarded as evil when human life and habitation are affected or endangered by them. He implies, though, that such evils might be accounted to human sin, since it is 'irresponsible' and 'preposterous to build houses known to be subject to earthquakes or where they are likely to suffer from floods'. (52)

There remains, however, much evil which cannot be accounted for by human sin. These non-moral evils are various. There might be human suffering caused by natural disasters such as famines, epidemics or catastrophes, there is the wide range of suffering in the animal world, (53) and there is also that human suffering arising from ailments such as painful cancer, many sorts of emotional and mental disorders or various forms of congenital abnormality. Pittenger says of such evil that it has 'something to do' with 'some intractability in the created order', (54) or, as he more closely defines it 'such evil is a surd in the creative advance ... it is a refusal to move with the process'. (55)

(50) *ibid.*, p. 18.

(51) *ibid.*, p. 19.

(52) *ibid.*, p. 26.

(53) *ibid.*, pp. 21f.

(54) Pittenger: 'Is God responsible for Evil?', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 19, No. 3, Spring 1976, p. 87.

(55) Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited', Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 217.

The word surd, which comes from the Latin surdus meaning deaf, is a term used in mathematics and there means a 'quantity inexpressible by rational numbers or which has no root', so the word comes to mean something that is irrational or inexpressible. In the context of the phrase quoted above this would seem to suggest that evil is a factor within the creative process which prevents that process from reaching its fulfilment; it is a denying factor present within the process which need not be there. Pittenger's definition of evil then is very similar to his definition of sin, as this quotation confirms.

'Evil means ... that there is in the created world disorderliness, maladjustment of vehicle to purpose, disproportion in the arrangements of the relatively good realities which makes them unworthy or misleading; while sin means that there is a dis-ease in man which can, and observably does, lead to a state of alienation from his true end and hence to actual sinning, because it involves an inordinate or disproportionate employment of his desire towards ends that are not finally good.' (56)

Evil then is to be recognised as that disorder or maladjustment within the creative process which arises from refusal to fulfil the God-given aim. Hence it is analogous to Pittenger's definition of sin. Just as sin is the refusal of individual human beings to fulfil their God-given aim; so evil can be recognised as just such a refusal at other levels of the creative process. Pittenger makes it clear that 'the whole of the created order' including both humanity and the realm of nature is being 'appraised' as to whether they have 'played or failed to play, their part in the good which is being achieved by God'. (57) Sin and evil both constitute failure, a refusal to pursue the God-given aim.

(56) Human Nature, pp. 62-63.

(57) L.T.P.P., pp. 58-59.

'Evil ... is a freely chosen refusal, coming from creaturely decisions in their varying ways and at their different levels. God's purpose for the world is to secure a field for the expression of love - his own and that of the creatures; he is "in the world" for precisely that end. He secures that expression, but not by arbitrary imposition or interference, but by eliciting the amen of the creatures to the enormous good that is offered them. That good is nothing less than the actualizing of their potentiality, the making-real of their freely chosen "subjective aim". This occurs in ways that vary according to the creatures and with differing intensity of conscious apprehension. In the creative advance a radical freedom obtains, so that the given entity may decide not to realize its potentiality for good. This is evil, for it is a violation of the purpose of the whole process; it is always a possibility and it may become, it has become, an actual fact.' (58)

As that quotation shows in its penultimate sentence such evil is possible because 'radical freedom obtains throughout the creative process'.

'The world ... has its own freedom of decision, its own capacity to make choices, its own capacity for the choices made. At the human level this works by consciousness of the creatures; elsewhere it lacks that awareness but none the less the creation is free to decide within the limits of such order or pattern as are present in its movement towards actualizing of potentialities.' (59)

Evil then like sin can only be seen, in Pittenger's scheme, as the almost inevitable by-product of the freedom implicit within the creative process. Although sin and evil remain as 'surds' in the sense that they are not intrinsic to the process; yet if freedom in the self-creation of the world through evolutionary process, which is marked by movement towards novelty and creativity, is the mark of reality, as process thought teaches, then evil should be expected. It is almost an inevitable consequence, however unpleasant or painful

(58) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited', Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 217.

(59) W. N. Pittenger: 'Is God responsible for Evil?', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 19, No. 3, Spring 1976, p. 88.

the effects of this may be. (60) Pittenger comments:

'Why there is such evil and sin we are not able to say. It may be that these things are a necessity in the continual creative activity of God, in the sense that a world which is in some sense the realm of freedom must inevitably possess a certain ability to go off on its own and show recalcitrance to the divine goodness. It may be that God permits evil and sin in order to secure a greater good - namely a free response of the created order to his goodness.' (61)

What is more significant, though, is that in process thought God operates in a way which respects that freedom.

'God cannot prevent evil, which is brought about by the genuine freedom and integrity of the very creation itself; he can and he does work in and with his creation against evil of every kind and sort, so that out of it some good may come. Good Friday and Easter Day, taken together, are the Christian paradigm here.' (62)

The significance of the final sentence will be shown later in this chapter, but first it must be emphasised that God, in process thought, works within the context of the self-creating freedom which is characteristic of the creative process. God operates by love and solicitation and it is in such a way that he works against evil. Pittenger believes that with its particular view of the world and God's involvement in it process thought is particularly suggestive in its understanding of how God overcomes evil. The process view, he suggests, is more helpful in understanding how God faces evil than ever 'classical theism' could be, which is so 'hopeless in the face of evil'. (63) His discussion of how God is able to transmute the evil thrown up in the freedom of the creative process, through the operation of his Consequent Nature, will now be considered.

(60) G.D., p. 5.

(61) G.P., p. 16.

(62) article, 'Is God responsible for Evil?', p. 88.

(63) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(d) God's Consequent Nature and the overcoming of evil

Pittenger's major claim for process thought is that it dispenses with any conception of a 'remote deity' emphasising rather that 'God is operative in the whole creation, at every level of existence; he moves through it, works upon it, accomplishes his good will in it. He is closer to us than breathing, nearer than hands or feet'.(64) God's involvement in the prehension of each actual entity is the substance of this claim. Process thought goes on from this to propose two principles about God's mode of operation in the creative process. First, 'he is the chief causative agency in the world, working through the provision of initial aim and through lure'.(65) Secondly, he is the Principle of Limitation. He works according to his purpose or aim; he sets limits within which the creative advance into novelty may proceed'.(66)

Both of these principles, however, are only operable in terms of God's 'consequent nature' effective at the level of actual entities. While offering creative lure to each occasion God has the capacity to receive into himself the creation's achievement and thus the creative process is enhanced. This concept of God as the 'supreme affect' also relates to the negative decisions of evil in creation. As Pittenger says;

'He is also the 'supreme affect', influenced by what goes on in the creation and in what Whitehead styled his 'consequent nature' participant in the world's suffering as in its joy, receiving into Himself the good achieved in that world, making the evil which has occurred into an

(64) G.P., p. 17.

(65) W. N. Pittenger: 'A Thing is what it does: A discussion of 'God'', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 15, (N.S.), No. 4, July 1972, p. 243.

(66) *ibid.*, p. 243.

occasion for new good, rejecting such evil as cannot thus be 'used' - and acting always for the establishment of greater good in more ways, despite the setbacks, the recalcitrance, the selfish decisions, and the sin which must be taken seriously into account.' (67)

Thus by this 'negative prehension' of wrong in the world God is not only able to limit the movement of the process from false directions, he is also within his 'consequent nature' 'able to extract from such evil or wrong whatever elements of good may be hidden there; and he can make 'even the wrath of men' serve as an occasion for the realization of a good which otherwise might not be possible'. (68)

Pittenger in this regard likens God to 'the sculptor who can turn an artisan's mistaken and distorting chiselling into a lovely figure. His purpose is to make history meaningful even when man has done his utmost to destroy its meaning'. (69)

From this we pass to the next step that Pittenger takes which is to describe the nature of God's purpose and then relate this to Jesus. Pittenger finds the clue to God's loving purpose within and throughout the creative advance in the world of men and supremely in Jesus. He suggests that whatever may be the 'remoter intention of God in the awe-inspiring stretch of space and time, it is all of a piece with what he is doing in the historical experience of man' and he goes on to add, significantly, 'in a way, that is what the homo-ousion' of the Nicene Creed affirms'. (70) This is clear evidence of his immanent view of the world, namely that the divine activity effective in every aspect of life was supremely exemplified in the event of Jesus

(67) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Attributes of God in the Light of Process Thought' in The Expository Times, Vol. 81, 1969, p. 22.

(68) W. N. Pittenger: 'A Thing is what it does: A discussion of 'God'', The Modern Churchman, Vol. 15, (N.S.), No. 4, July 1972, p. 243.

(69) L.T.P.P., p. 67.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 67.

Christ.

Pittenger finds Teilhard de Chardin's word 'amorization' helpful to describe the nature of God's activity in the world, which he interprets to mean 'the development in creation of a relationship in which all creaturely constituents are caught up into and share a love which is fulfilling for each and fulfilling for all'. On the human level the goal of such a process of 'amorization' will be 'a society of men in and under God, whose love is 'sole, sovereign lord' and where everything thought, said or done will be in love, by love and for love'. He comments that such 'mutuality at its highest possible level is the Kingdom or realm of God'.(71)

Although such is the good that God seeks to achieve for the world it is thwarted by decisions negative to God's design, and these are the substance of evil. Yet his complete participation in and identification with the world at every level means that not only can positive decisions be used to the fulfilment of God's loving purpose but evil ones also can be overcome and turned to his glory. 'In every way and in every place, God makes the best of everything, including human lovelessness and the failure which it entails'.(72) God's overcoming of evil must then be seen as the most significant aspect of his loving activity in the world. The symbol of this is the cross of Christ. The following quotation indicates how Pittenger relates these themes.

'The Christian Church has claimed ... that it does have the practical answer to evil and human wickedness; that answer is the suffering love which by a mysterious alchemy can transmute them into good. Of this the Cross of Jesus is the sign and symbol ... Christianity is basically a

(71) W. N. Pittenger: art. 'A Thing is what it does', p. 245.

(72) *ibid.*, p. 245.

faith which finds in God himself, in his love and tender mercy as manifested in Christ, the only real answer to this question.' (73)

(3) The cross in God's overcoming of evil

(a) Introduction

Two significant points arise from the quotation with which the preceding section closed. Firstly the cross is seen only as 'the sign and symbol' of God's continuing loving activity in overcoming evil. Secondly the use of the word 'suffering' implies that the cross characterized this activity of God as necessitating suffering. In these lie the key to Pittenger's understanding of the cross.

God's transmuting of evil within his 'consequent nature' might be regarded as some hidden impersonal operation within the deity. Pittenger would reject this criticism, seeing God rather as the 'supreme affect', whose nature the Cross disclosed as suffering love. 'The doctrine of the Atonement', says Pittenger, 'is a way of asserting that God has both lived in the human situation and also has faced it as it is', (74) and thus has known 'genuine participation in the pain of the world'. (75) He is 'the tender Lover, "the fellow-sufferer who understands"' (in Whitehead's words). (76) God has overcome evil by taking it into his own life (77) and the cross is evidence that such an operation is costly and marked by suffering. The following is Pittenger's description of this suffering yet victorious love known on the cross.

(73) G.P., p. 16.

(74) G.D., p. 81.

(75) *ibid.*, p. 46.

(76) Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited' in Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 213.

(77) *ibid.*, p. 217.

'God's consequent nature - that is, God as he concretely 'is' with all the affects and influences that the world has offered and he has accepted - is so superabundant in love that we may speak of the divine 'victory' which brings the divine 'joy'. God is utterly vulnerable; but he is also invulnerable - by this I intend that his love is so infeasible and so indefatigable, so rich and inexhaustible, that nothing can finally defeat or overcome it or turn it into anything else ... it is the most profound insight of the Christian faith that it is so ... the origin of that insight ... is in the life of Jesus Christ and above all in his willingness to give himself up to death. Calvary is the heart of the matter ... The Cross is the sign of divine victory over evil by absorbing it and assimilating it and using it.' (78)

Pittenger looks at Calvary in two distinct yet related ways. While he sees it as a symbol of eternal truth about the nature of God's love, he is only able to do so because he recognises that in that event something was accomplished and displayed, namely that God's love is at once 'utterly vulnerable' yet victorious. How this is possible is summarized by Pittenger when he says that 'Calvary is itself an evil thing; yet as that inescapable evil, God has used it for a greater good than any man could have conceived'. (79) To understand this aspect of Pittenger's thought it is necessary to place God's overcoming of evil within the context of the work of Christ.

(b) The cross as the work of Christ

Pittenger's first point is that 'in the totality of Jesus' human life, obedient to the will of the Father to the point of death, there is the enactment on the stage of history and in the circumstances of human existence, of the right human relationship to God'. (80) This has been established in previous chapters; now secondly the significance

(78) G.D., pp. 41-42.

(79) Pittenger: art. 'Process Theology Revisited', p. 218.

(80) G.P., p. 35.

of the phrase 'to the point of death' must be taken further. Pittenger submits that Jesus 'firmly believed' his death to be 'the fulfilment of the divine purpose for the world';(81) that he 'quite literally gave himself "unto death, even the death of the Cross"',(82) so that God's will might be fulfilled.

'In obedience to what he believed to be God's unmistakable will, Jesus went to the Cross and died there in order that God's sovereign rule might be established (in New Testament terms, that the Kingdom of God might come).'

(83)

Thirdly, Pittenger implies that Jesus had this strong sense that death would be the culmination of his mission because he knew that a life that consciously sought the fulfilment of its God-given aim and worked for the realization of God's Rule of Love would come into conflict with the sin and evil in the world caused by man's denial of God's aim. It is in this sense that his death was 'occasioned by wicked men' and was 'the result of human sin and moral evil'; 'the consequence of human rejection and condemnation'.(84) But, fourthly, Pittenger suggests that Jesus faced and accepted the very worst in the cause of the fulfilment of God's will of love in order that others might enjoy that freedom which would be won by the victory of love.(85) Fifthly, this acceptance of the focal position in the conflict between love and evil, as the fulfilment of his life's mission,(86) meant that on the cross he knew 'a sense of dereliction', even a 'loss of awareness of, perhaps confidence in, the divine presence'.(87) On the cross Jesus knew in

(81) G.D., p. 44.

(82) *ibid.*, p. 45.

(83) G.P., p. 35.

(84) G.D., p. 46.

(85) *ibid.*, p. 45.

(86) *ibid.*, p. 44.

(87) *ibid.*, p. 46.

the depths of his agony how evil 'can call in question the love of God, his care for the world, and his unfailing availability to his human children', (88) and yet in that he faced that and was not overcome by this sense of dereliction, love had the victory. For this to be so, however, another dimension has to be added to our understanding of Calvary. As Pittenger says;

'If Jesus were nothing more than 'another man', called upon to suffer pain and endure death, there would be no specifically Christian insight. In that case we would have one more instance of the horror of evil. The problem would be aggravated, it would not be illuminated.' (89)

This extra dimension is that 'the cross brings to us the assurance that in their afflictions' God was and is afflicted'. (90)

(c) God is reigning from the Tree

For Pittenger this phrase offers a profound insight into the meaning of the cross; because it emphasizes that in the man Jesus God demonstrated 'in act his victory of love over all sin ... all evil and over death itself'. (91) This recalls earlier discussions of Christology where Pittenger's preference for what he called 'act-Christology' against schemes which spoke of substances and essences was noted. Thus the event of Christ is seen as the 'classical instance' of God's working in creation. In the present context this means that;

'In the life of the Man of Nazareth, all of it under the shadow of the Cross', and supremely in the events of the last few days culminating in the passion and death on Calvary, God is involved.' (92)

(88) *ibid.*, p. 46.

(89) *ibid.*, p. 48.

(90) *ibid.*, p. 48.

(91) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(92) *ibid.*, p. 52.

The significance of this in Pittenger's thought, is that it is not only of Jesus but also of God himself that it can be said that 'he bears the suffering which men must know in the world, and in knowing this suffering he shares also in that kind of dereliction which the cry on the Cross so poignantly symbolises'.(93) Then expanding the idea that it is God who is reigning from a Tree Pittenger writes;

'The only crown he wears is a crown of thorns; the only throne he occupies is a Cross; the only rule he exercises is the reign of suffering and participant love.'(94)

It is in this identification of God's love with the suffering of the world, facing evil to the point of dereliction that is the essence of the divine victory. It is because God in Christ chose to face the horror of evil and lovelessness that his loving nature could be shown to be victoriously at work in the world. Here the subject of the Resurrection is raised.

(d) The Resurrection victory of God's love

Pittenger's historical scepticism towards the Easter narratives was noted in an earlier chapter as was his interpretation of the Resurrection as being the affirmation that in Christ in virtue of his relationship with God there is seen life which not even death can conquer. The Resurrection, says Pittenger, is 'God's vindication and validation of Jesus';(95) it is the vindication of what was done in Christ's life and in his suffering and death. He continues;

'It is as if God had written over Calvary, 'That is how I myself really am. That is how I am related to the world's pain in the face of evil. That is what I do about it.'(96)

(93) *ibid.*, p. 53.

(94) *ibid.*, p. 53.

(95) *W.I.*, p. 69.

(96) *G.D.*, pp. 53-54.

Although Pittenger adds that God would never act with such blatant self-advertisement yet as a poetic summary of how he understands God's victory through the cross it is helpful. Easter Day, he insists, does not cancel out or reverse Good Friday but its message works 'to suffuse the hill of Calvary with the light of God's victory over sin and death'.(97) Calvary remains an evil thing but it is also the assurance of the divine victory over evil because there God in Christ faced ultimate evil and lovelessness. As a result of Calvary, Pittenger can say, 'there is a Cross planted in God's heart; he suffers in and because of the horror of that historical event, while at the same time he triumphs over it through his employment of it precisely to declare his love for his children'.(98) It is because the divine love was willing to go to the extremity of the cross that men have the assurance of the victory of love and goodness. It is this that is crucial in Pittenger's thought about the cross and resurrection; namely that the Easter victory is 'the validation ... of God's indefatigable love in using that murder for bringing good to his children';(99) that 'the Cross is the sign of the divine victory over evil by absorbing it and assimilating it and using it'.(100)

(e) The divine victory in Christ

The divine victory known on the cross is the 'sign and symbol' of God's eternal loving activity. This is what is vital to Pittenger about Calvary. God in his 'consequent nature' is ceaselessly at work

(97) Pittenger: 'Process Theology Revisited' in Theology Today, Vol. 27, (1970), p. 218.

(98) *ibid.*, p. 218.

(99) *ibid.*, p. 218.

(100) G.D., p. 42.

at every instant of life seeking by lure and solicitation to move forward his purpose of good for creation. When he is faced with evil which arises from decisions taken in contradiction of his will of love, then although his purpose is thwarted he is able to transmute that evil using some aspects of it for further good, taking the remainder into himself. This divine transmuting of evil, however, is no passionless process, rather the facing of evil causes suffering to God. The very suffering as seen on the Cross is the nature of the suffering that God knows in his loving work of overcoming evil. Calvary is 'the deepest possible insight into what God is like and what he is accomplishing'.(101)

In thus relating Calvary to the process insight that God is able to overcome evil within his 'consequent nature' Pittenger claims a 'practical answer' to the problem of evil.(102) Evil on this view is not ignored nor is it accorded the status of being an independent force within the cosmos. Evil is the unhappy yet unnecessary result of free human choice, which in the process view is integral to God's ordering of the creative process. 'But once evil has happened, it can be used. In thus using it and conquering over it, God manifests himself as the indefeasible and indefatigable love that he is'.(103) The following summarizes Pittenger's views that have been outlined in the preceding sections.

Calvary, seen in the light of Easter, is a window into the heart of God himself. In him the pain and suffering, the evil in the world, whatever and wherever it may be, has been received so far as it possesses any redeemable possibilities ... In the paradigm case of Calvary (the 'classic instance of what God is and is "up to" in his world') we ... have been granted the deepest possible

(101) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(102) *ibid.*, p. 4.

(103) *ibid.*, p. 57.

insight into what God is like and what he is accomplishing, we have also the assurance of faith that evil can be made into an occasion of good, so that nothing worthy of saving is lost.' (104)

(4) The Cross in Pittenger's Christology

The proposal for this section is to draw out the implications of the preceding discussion with respect to Pittenger's Christology because these have direct relevance to his understanding of salvation.

(a) His reliance upon other Process thinkers

In his brief discussion as to the possibility of a distinctive process presentation of Christology in 'Process Thought and Christian Faith', Pittenger's argument consists in the main of quotations from the writings of Hartshorne and Whitehead. These are significant because they provide the background for understanding Pittenger's approach both to Christology and salvation.

Pittenger comments that it might seem surprising that process thinkers who possibly did not regard themselves as 'believing Christians' and whose prime concern was a 'philosophically oriented study of nature and history' still make frequent references to Jesus. The reason for this, he suggests, is that in Jesus they see 'a "revelation in act" of that which a sound philosophical understanding of the world can discern "in theory"', which Pittenger quotes Hartshorne as meaning that in Jesus there is the embodiment of the truth that 'God is Love'. (105)

Pittenger summarizes the process position by saying that 'the Nisus working through the whole course of events has in Jesus revealed

(104) *ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

(105) P.T.C.F., pp. 65-66.

himself in a specially vivid manner', (106) and thus he indicates that it is the incarnation which has importance for process thinkers, even though they are not concerned with detailed definitions of the two-natures theory. For them the test of the incarnation lies in its revelation of the divine nature and that as suffering. In this regard Pittenger quotes Hartshorne in which he relates the incarnation and the cross to the dipolar nature of God.

'... the dipolar view must hold not only that God contains suffering but that he suffers and that it is in his character to suffer, in accordance with the suffering in the world. Here the Christian idea of a suffering deity - symbolized by the Cross, together with the doctrine of the Incarnation - achieves technical metaphysical expression.' (107)

In his writings Charles Hartshorne is at pains to eradicate the notion of God as being above and immune to suffering. One of the main thrusts of his argument is that the insight of faith in Jesus as the Christ would point to the truth about 'there must be suffering in God'. (108) It is to this he points when in the following quotation he speaks of Jesus not suffering alone upon the Cross.

'Jesus was a man who suffered, mentally and physically, in an intense degree, and not alone upon the cross. Thus his acceptance of suffering symbolizes the supreme value of humility. The first of men dies the death of a slave. But should we not go further? Jesus was termed the Christ, the self-manifestation of God.' (109)

(106) *ibid.*, p. 67.

(107) Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese: Philosophers Speak of God, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 15.

(108) Charles Hartshorne: 'A Philosopher's Assessment of Christianity' in ed. Walter Leibrecht: Religion and Culture: Essays in Honour of Paul Tillich, London, S.C.M. Press, 1959, p. 175.

(109) *ibid.*, p. 175. (This quotation is taken directly from the original article. Pittenger's quotation in Process Thought and Christian Faith contains an error. Instead of 'depths of humility' Pittenger reads 'depths of humanity'. This might be a typographical error but one can suspect that Pittenger's misreading of this word supports his view that Christ's acceptance of the Cross in fulfilment of his God-given aim can be seen as the epitome of humanity at its best.)

A further quotation completes the argument. Here Hartshorne offers;

'the simple suggestion that Jesus appears to be the supreme symbol furnished to us by history of the notion of a God genuinely and literally sympathetic (incomparably more literally than any man ever is), receiving into his own experience the suffering as well as the joys of the world.' (110)

The use of the word 'symbol' in each of these quotations is significant.

Again employing Hartshorne's words Pittenger summarizes the process position as recognising that 'Jesus was, and can still be, a living and unique symbol' of God's loving and suffering mode of operation in the world. (111) We have noted elsewhere Pittenger's own reference to the cross as 'the sign and symbol of the divine victory over evil' and there would seem to be little doubt that he has borrowed that phrase and the idea behind it from Hartshorne.

He goes on to quote the following famous passage from Whitehead's 'Adventures of Ideas':

'The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world. The record is fragmentary, inconsistent and uncertain ... but there can be no doubt as to what elements in the record have evoked a response from all that is best in human nature. The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger: the lowly man, homeless and self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.' (112)

Pittenger comments that these 'beautiful words' 'sum up most of what a Christian would wish to say about Jesus'. They indicate that Whitehead 'believed that the tenderness, sympathy and love which were shown in Jesus' life and death are the disclosure of the nature of the divine

(110) Charles Hartshorne: Reality as Social Process, Collier-Macmillan, New York, 1963, p. 24.

(111) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(112) Whitehead: Adventures, p. 167.

reality, who is the chief ... principle of explanation for all that has been, is and will be'. The person and work of Jesus are thus the 'revelation in act' of the divine working in the world which Whitehead described as 'persuasive, creative, dynamic energizing love'.(113)

Pittenger's own placing of the cross within a total incarnational world-view is thus shown to be in a large measure inspired by the writings of Whitehead and Hartshorne.

(b) The Cross within Pittenger's immanentist world-view

That for Pittenger 'in the larger sense the Incarnation is the Atonement'(114) is consistent with the emphasis on incarnation which characterizes his theology. In this thesis it has been noted that he regards the world as incarnational;(115) that the Logos present in every man guarantees that no man is wholly sinful or depraved;(116) and that the supreme manifestation of the Divine Logos or 'Deity Self-Expressive' is the incarnation in Jesus.(117) The cross fits into this approach by being regarded as the high-point of the divine activity known in the incarnate Word. Thus Pittenger regards it as 'quite mistaken to separate the cross from the total life of Jesus Christ' because 'that which happened on the Cross is a placarding before the world of what Jesus was during the whole course of his life among us'.(118) Clearly then Pittenger's atonement thought is but an extension of his emphasis on 'act-Christology'. The event of Jesus

(113) P.T.C.F., p. 71.

(114) W. N. Pittenger: The Approach to Christianity, London, The Centenary Press, 1939, p. 50.

(115) W.I., p. 6.

(116) *ibid.*, p. 5.

(117) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(118) G.D., p. 44.

Christ is thus seen as the focus of the action of God in the world. His dictum that 'Jesus cannot be viewed as the supreme anomaly but as the classical instance of God's working in creation' (119) summarizes his perception that while God is active throughout human experience and history yet 'the stance of the Christian faith is that in this Jesus ... God is at work ... and that in a manner unprecedented in degree of fulness ... and in a decisive manner revelatory of what God is and of what God is "up to" in the world'. (120) The cross is then the supreme manifestation of the character of God's involvement in the world. (121) Yet in all this discussion Pittenger does not offer explanations as to why such an extremity of the cross was necessary to display the divine love. He does not ask whether this was the only satisfactory means available to God to display his loving nature and intention. He remains simply content to repeat that it was on the cross that God's love was displayed.

'But why the Cross? We do not know; but we do see that it is by life poured out in death that the secret self-giving of God is received. The Christian centuries have seized on the Cross as their central symbol, not by some freakish accident, but because Christian insight has understood that it is in the One who 'loved me and gave himself for me' that the truth about God and man is spoken and that this loving and giving were consummated on Calvary, 'on a green hill far away'. The heart of God as compassionate fellow-sufferer is there disclosed as nowhere else.' (122)

This offers no advance upon Pittenger's immanentist position that the cross is the consummation of that focus of the divine loving activity which was the event of Jesus Christ.

(119) *ibid.*, p. 51.

(120) *ibid.*, p. 51.

(121) *ibid.*, p. 52.

(122) G.P., p. 37.

Perhaps the nearest Pittenger gets to asking 'Why the Cross?', is when he relates it to human sin, which in one sense he regards as its cause. Thus he can write that 'the death of Jesus was the result of human sin or moral evil', that it was 'the consequence of human rejection and condemnation', that his suffering was 'occasioned by 'wicked men''.(123) Recalling his definition of sin as being the failure to realise the God-given aim of one's life the following quotation relates this to the Cross.

'On the Cross, where love went to the limit of death, we men are shown for what we are in our sin - unloving, self-willed, in contrast to that perfect love. Our defects, our weaknesses, our failures to follow and reach our ideals are now recognised for what they really are: not harmless peccadilloes, but thoughts and words and deeds that tend to kill the God who is active within us.'(124)

This quotation, however, does not take the argument any further. All it says is that the Cross underlines the gravity of sin primarily by confirming the contrast in respect of sin between Jesus and other men and thereby showing that sin kills 'the God who is active within us'. This final phrase emphasises the contrast between sinful men and Jesus. The sinlessness of Jesus was earlier interpreted as his fulfilment of God's aim and thus his life was seen as that 'love-in-action, by which a man relates himself to his brethren and becomes the adequately expressive, highly personalized, fully-deciding instrument for the Cosmic Lover who is God'.(125) In relating this to the cross, he says;

'In the totality of Jesus' human life, obedient to the will of the Father to the point of death, there is the enactment on the stage of history and in the circumstances of human existence, of the right human relationship to God.'(126)

(123) G.D., p. 46.

(124) G.P., p. 36.

(125) C.R., p. 53.

(126) G.P., p. 35.

Yet this avoids the question as to whether the cross was necessary. All that Pittenger is doing is to repeat that Jesus in the furtherance of God's kingdom was prepared to face death; whereas we by contrast stifle if not kill God and his aim within us. This is our sin, the 'reductio ad horrendum' of which is the cross.

The cross, then, remains firmly within the framework of Pittenger's immanentist world-view. In this discussion two parallel yet related themes have emerged which hold together both a view of the Cross and an incarnational stress. Firstly on the view that God's aim within each man is rejected and thereby God's loving activity in the world is thwarted, the cross Pittenger implies, shows that this is tantamount to killing God, for it is the 'killing of the God within' one. Secondly in Jesus we see the fulfilment of God's aim of love which was accomplished through rejection to the point of death. The cross thus stands as the highest manifestation of the divine love. It will presently be seen that these two strands come together in Pittenger's theology when the cross is presented as the source of inspiration leading to the transformation of men's lives.

(5) A divine initiative?

Some consequences that arise from Pittenger's description of how God overcomes evil must now be drawn out, for I believe they indicate a weakness in his theological scheme and highlight a problem in the process view of God. Quotations early in this chapter show that Pittenger regards his stress upon the divine activity in salvation and atonement as consistent with what is called the 'divine initiative'.(127)

(127) footnote 11.

It is my view, however, that his description of God's involvement in the world as outlined in this chapter displays a marked difference from the way the concept of the 'divine initiative' would normally be understood. His process view of God and of the manner of his transmuting of evil, means that God is dependent upon what occurs; whether good which he readily employs for his purposes or evil which he negatively prehends after all possible benefit has been extracted from it;(128) and this is very different from the usual definition of initiative, which would be understood in terms of first step, origination or taking the lead. When initiative is understood in a military context, as being the ability to make the enemy conform to one's own movements, then Pittenger's picture of the divine initiative is very different, for he sees God responding to and being affected by what is originated by other agencies whether human or other entities within the creative process. This betrays a prime weakness in the process concept of God.

D. W. D. Shaw indicates that a major problem in any process theological system is that the 'principle of creativity' is central to it, with God dependent upon it and subject to it.(129) Such a conclusion has, I believe, been illustrated in this chapter. Although God offers his lure and presents his aim, thereby seeking to mould the way the world shall develop and the creative process shall advance yet he remains subject to creativity and to the freedom implied in it. Once, though, it has been conceded that there exists a principle greater than God to which God is subject then not only can God not

(128) footnote 20.

(129) D. W. D. Shaw: 'Process Thought and Creation', Theology, Vol. 78, No. 661, July 1975, pp. 346-347.

really be spoken of as creator, as 'Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth', (130) but also a very different understanding of the 'divine initiative', with consequences for salvation, is implied.

The problems posed for the concept of the 'divine initiative' by the process concept of God have occasioned much debate amongst process thinkers. Shaw comments that while most process theologians have, in seeking to interpret Christian doctrine in the light of a Whiteheadian view of God, remained 'true to Whitehead and process proper', John Cobb is one who has departed 'from strict "process" theory at this point so as to give God the ultimate role in creation, and make him the supplier of creativity'. (131) Consistent with this approach, Cobb is able to speak of 'divine initiative', saying:

'It would be arbitrary to deny to God (the) freedom to differentiate his relations to particular occasions. Hence, we may suppose that God may well take the initiative in presenting himself to human occasions with peculiar force and specific efficacy prior to and quite independently of their self-preparation or desire for this occurrence.' (132)

Schubert Ogden, in a review article of Cobb's book quotes this phrase and comments:

'Given the unique relation by which Whitehead conceives God to be related to other actual entities, such "initiative" would seem to be neither necessary nor possible, and Whitehead himself, so far as I am aware, nowhere suggests anything different.' (133)

Here is a clear admission that in a strict process theology the concept of a 'divine initiative' is not sustainable.

Colin Gunton in an article discussing the process concept of God

(130) *ibid.*, p. 347.

(131) *ibid.*, p. 347.

(132) John B. Cobb Jr.: A Christian Natural Theology, London, Lutterworth Press, 1966, p. 237.

(133) Schubert Ogden: 'A Christian Natural Theology', Process Philosophy and Christian Faith, edd. D. Brown, R. E. James, and G. Reeves, Indianapolis and New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971, pp. 113-114.

uses that quotation, describing its conclusion as 'both honest and radical'.(134) He comments:

'To gloss Ogden's conclusion, we can say that initiative is not necessary because all that the Bible attributes to divine initiative - creation, covenant, incarnation, justification, consummation - are replaced by the necessary progress that Process thought attributes to the cosmic process.'(135)

He goes on to say that the 'Process concept of God' can be criticized firstly as 'procrustean', in the sense that it tends to produce uniformity in the way God is recognised as operating, thus 'making it impossible to say many of the things that Christian theology has wanted to say about God', and, secondly, as 'necessitarian', thus depriving 'the Christian Gospel of its quality as free grace'.

'Grace of creation and redemption are replaced by metaphysical optimism, which would hold sway quite independently of anything done through Jesus Christ.'(136)

These criticisms are I believe substantiated in the case of Pittenger by the discussion of this chapter. The mode of divine operation can be categorized as 'uniform' because God has been seen as acting in a broadly similar manner over every instant of experience, presenting his aim, utilizing positive decisions, transmuting negative ones, thereby seeking to enable his will of love for creation to move towards its fulfilment. This leads to 'metaphysical optimism' because by this uniform operation of God there is built in to the process a mechanism whereby the good must ultimately succeed, since what is evil can be transmuted. Further in that Jesus Christ and particularly his cross is only the 'sign and symbol' of the divine activity, by which its

(134) Colin Gunton: 'Process Theology's Concept of God, An Outline and Assessment', The Expository Times, Vol. 84, No. 10, July 1973, p. 295.

(135) *ibid.*, p. 295.

(136) *ibid.*, p. 295.

character is recognised, then it must be conceded that the divine operation 'could hold sway independently of anything done through Jesus Christ'. On Pittenger's definition the cross is not essential to the divine operation. I have already remarked that Pittenger offers no coherent explanation of why the cross was necessary. To say, as he does, that it manifested the character of the divine activity must mean that the divine operation could have continued without that revelation. God's loving work in luring the creation and overcoming evil, it must be assumed, could and would continue, whether its true nature were revealed or not. These criticisms taken together mean that Pittenger's description of God's involvement in the world and of the manner of his overcoming of evil does not add up to what Christian theology has called the 'divine initiative'.

Pittenger himself replied on behalf of process theology to the criticisms of Gunton. Two points made by him are germane to this discussion. Firstly he rejected Gunton's phrase 'metaphysical optimism' commenting that 'he (Gunton) fails to recognise that the only optimism is in respect to God's capacity to receive and use evil for greater good'.(137) Secondly he repudiates the accusation of 'necessary progress' by saying that no 'Process theologian known to me, would for a moment accept such an identification of 'process' and 'progress'. Indeed there is process or change; but it is not inevitably progress. To put it vulgarly, one can "process to hell" quite as much as "process to heaven".'(138) These comments, though, indicate that Pittenger has missed the point of the criticisms; as Gunton acknowledges in a

(137) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology (Short Comment)', The Expository Times, Vol. 85, No. 2, 1973, p. 56.

(138) *ibid.*, p. 57.

subsequent reply;(139) by failing to recognise that they relate primarily to the process view of God which makes him essentially passive and receptive. If God's involvement with the world, no matter how intimate, is to be responsive to what occurs in the creative process and if in that sense he is subject to the onward movement of creativity, then he becomes in the final analysis a mechanism built into the creative process to assist its advance towards novelty. Once God is fixed into the system in such a capacity then the creative process must have a 'metaphysical optimism' built into it, because everything that happens can either be used for the advancement of the process or in the case of evil be negatively prehended and where possible turned to a good purpose. Progress must be the inevitable by product of such a system. Indeed despite Pittenger's comment nothing in such a system could be said to be processing to hell, in a later chapter he himself will be seen to reject the concept of hell and also to assert that through the operation of God's consequent nature evil will be transmuted and whatever is good will find 'objective immortality' in being used towards the furtherance of God's loving purposes.

Pittenger believes that the process view of God is an active one.(140) His repeated use of the word 'activity' confirms this. Thus he either fails to recognise the force of or does not accept the criticisms that the process view of God is essentially passive, with creativity central to the process metaphysical system. Thus while other process writers, such as Ogden, recognise that the notion of 'divine initiative' is inappropriate in a strict process scheme,

(139) Colin Gunton: 'Process Theology: A Reply (Short Comments)', The Expository Times, Vol. 85, No. 7, 1974, p. 215.

(140) W. N. Pittenger: 'Process Theology (Short Comment)', The Expository Times, Vol. 85, No. 2, 1973, p. 57.

Pittenger both wants to speak of 'divine initiative' and also use process insights to the full. Yet, in my view, the process view of how God faces and overcomes evil is determinative of his theology to the point of making his concept of the 'divine initiative' very different from what Christian theology means by that phrase. This is demonstrated by his description of how Jesus relates to God's overcoming of evil. In that in his life and death God's character was revealed and his suffering concern for the world demonstrated, there is no need for a special divine initiative in Jesus. Indeed Pittenger rejects any idea that in Jesus there is a special action of God for the world's salvation. His insistence that Jesus's difference from other men must only be a matter of degree is further evidence that the idea of a special divine initiative in Jesus is inappropriate in his theology. But these considerations arise from his use of the process view of God. Jesus' passion is thus the 'sign and symbol' of God's suffering, indeed passive nature. Yet this is far removed from what Christian experience has sought to say about the divine saving activity in Christ. This inability to cope with the idea of divine initiative also betrays the weakness for Christian theology of the process view of God. As Colin Gunton says in his article on process theology's concept of God:

'My own view is that the Gospel cannot bear the changes that appear to be required and remain the Christian Gospel, if by that is meant the good news of God's gift to men in Jesus of Nazareth. However successful Process theology may be as a theologia crucis - and its suggestiveness in this sphere should not be denied - there are other factors, of overwhelming importance for the New Testament understanding of the events of and accompanying the life of Jesus, that cannot be conceptualized satisfactorily by this doctrine of God: for example, the conceptions of the kingdom that breaks into the world; of the love that actively seeks out the lost and judges those who reject it; and the power that raises the dead. All require a more 'activist' understanding of God than is possible on the Process account.' (141)

CHAPTER 5 - APPENDIXPITTENGER'S THESIS COMPARED WITH JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S'THE CRUCIFIED GOD'

Pittenger's scattered and unsustained references to God's involvement in the cross hardly bear comparison with Moltmann's magisterial thesis which has been acknowledged as a major contribution to current atonement thought. Further Pittenger's discussion seems somewhat idealized when compared with the astringency with which Moltmann writes of the 'crucified God' in a theology born from the horrors of Auschwitz where God was truly to be seen 'hanging from the gallows'.(1) Yet because the theme of the 'crucified God' is common to both and because Moltmann refers to the contribution of process thought to this discussion some attempt at comparison must be effected.

Several areas of marked similarity between Moltmann and the process writers, including Pittenger, are readily detected.

Firstly, as Pittenger rejects any notion of God's 'aseity' 'his self-existence and self-containedness'(2) so Moltmann rejects the idea of his 'apatheia' in the sense of his being 'incapable of being affected by outside influences, incapable of feeling', (3) rather he speaks of 'the pathos of God' which is descriptive of 'the way in which God is affected by events and human actions and suffering in history'.(4)

- (1) Jürgen Moltmann: The Crucified God, London, S.C.M. Press, 1974, p. 274.
- (2) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Attributes of God in the Light of Process Thought', The Expository Times, Vol. 81, 1969, p. 22.
- (3) Moltmann: op.cit., p. 267 also p. 228.
- (4) *ibid.*, p. 270.

He comments that 'incapability of suffering in this sense would contradict the fundamental Christian assertion that God is love.'(5)

Secondly, Moltmann wishes to free theology from a metaphysics which sees God in terms of 'unity, indivisibility, immovability and immutability'.(6) Against this 'philosophical concept of God' he ranges a specifically Christian theology and he quotes as an accurate estimate of and antidote to this 'philosophical theism' Whitehead's suggestion that 'the Galilean origin of Christianity' 'which dwells upon the tender elements of the world' is the only valid alternative to those three strains of thought which fashion God in the image of 'the ruling Caesar or the ruthless moralist or the unmoved mover'.(7) Pittenger's frequent use of this quotation has been noted.

Thirdly, like Pittenger, Moltmann believes that the cross reveals the nature of God; that it is mistaken to confine the cross 'within the horizon of soteriology', rather theological thought should 'concentrate the question and knowledge of God on the death of Christ on the cross and attempt to understand God's being from the death of Jesus'.(8)

'With the Christian message of the cross of Christ, something new and strange has entered the metaphysical world. For this faith must understand the death of God from the event of the suffering and death of the Son of God and thus bring about a fundamental change in the orders of being of metaphysical thought and the value table of religious feeling. It must think of the suffering of Christ as the power of God and the death of Christ as God's potentiality.'(9)

Such sentiments accord closely with Pittenger's theological position.

(5) *ibid.*, p. 230.

(6) *ibid.*, p. 214.

(7) *ibid.*, p. 250 also p. 281, note 36, quoting Whitehead: Process, p. 404.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 201.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 215.

Moltmann develops these insights into an understanding of the 'crucified God' which for him is the central theological truth; that God suffered in the suffering of Jesus; that 'God himself really enters into the suffering of the Son and in so doing is and remains completely God'.(10) He recognises how this runs counter to the axioms of the philosophers that 'by definition God cannot suffer and die',(11) but he affirms that the Christian faith says that 'God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ'.(12) Within a discussion of the cry of dereliction Moltmann speaks of Jesus as 'the godforsaken',(13) dying 'as one rejected by his God and Father',(14) and comments that 'to comprehend God in the crucified Jesus, abandoned by God, requires a 'revolution in the concept of God''.(15) God deliberately 'delivers up his son on the cross',(16) but because of the intimate relationship between Father and Son this 'not sparing and abandoning also involves the Father himself'. 'In the forsakenness of the Son the Father also forsakes himself. In the surrender of the Son the Father also surrenders himself'.(17) Hence he is the crucified God.

While, however, Moltmann and the process writers share a common approach in understanding God, believing that the Christ event should be normative for such understanding, conspicuous differences remain between them which will provide a fertile area of discussion for this study.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 205.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 214.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 216.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 145.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 243.

Moltmann quotes Whitehead's dictum that 'God is the great companion - the fellow-sufferer, who understands', (18) in the sense that 'God is, God is in us, God suffers in us, where love suffers' and he suggests that when 'understood in trinitarian terms' this means that 'God both transcends the world and is immanent in history'. (19) Now while recognising that this is what 'process theology says in the bipolar concept of God' he implies that it is deficient in fully trinitarian terms. In a precursor article to the publication of the English translation of his book he states this more clearly saying that he 'does not believe that the cosmological conception of God (God's primordial and consequent nature) sufficiently grasps the problem of suffering'. He goes on; 'on the other hand, the starting point for a trinitarian theology of the cross can take up process theology ideas of the suffering God and use them for a Christian cosmology. Even the cosmos itself groans in travail (Romans 8), and even its suffering has become through Christ a part of the suffering of God.' (20) It is these criticisms of the process position, namely, its insufficient grasp of the problem of suffering, its lack of a trinitarian dimension in its understanding of God and its failure to relate them together that seems to me to apply most clearly to Pittenger's understanding of the 'crucified God'.

In its simple form the question of suffering can be readily dealt with, though its further ramifications belong to a discussion of the Trinity. The criticism has already been made that Pittenger does

(18) *ibid.*, p. 255, Whitehead: Process, p. 413.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 255.

(20) Jürgen Moltmann: 'The Crucified God', Theology Today, 1974-5, Vol. 31, pt. 1, p. 15n.

not face the tragic dimension of sin, that despite his protestations of taking evil seriously he does not see sin and evil in the light of the desperate suffering they so often bring in their wake. His, it has been suggested, is essentially an idealistic picture. This is not true of Moltmann. His theology of the crucified God arises from Auschwitz, it takes oppression and suffering very seriously. For example in a symposium, 'Hope and the Future of Man' in which Moltmann and others debated that subject with process theologians, Moltmann criticized them for their 'purely speculative expression of hope' which is concerned with the future of 'this world' viewed as a 'global village' and which ignores 'separation, oppression, ghettos, apartheid, etc.'. (21) He caricatures them as 'liberal theologians of the white bourgeoisie' whose talk of hope is in terms of the future 'of the affluent technologically developed nations' exemplified by their 'making theology scientific and their dialogue with other sciences equally scientific, while overlooking the social and political context of science and of their own theologies'. (22) He relates an assertion that 'the central question in any Christian theology is evil' to an evolutionist view such as process thought by asking if it is possible to 'integrate evil into creation as part of a world in evolution or process'. (23) Despite once again acknowledging his attraction for Whitehead's description of God as the 'fellow sufferer who understands' he is forced to recognise great dangers within an evolutionist theory which concentrates upon God

(21) Jürgen Moltmann: 'Response to the opening presentations' in ed. Ewart H. Cousins Hope and the Future of Man, pub. The Teilhard Centre for the Future of Man, (Vol. 6 of The Teilhard Study Library), London, 1973, p. 55.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 56.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 58.

the mover of evolution because in such a system evil can be minimized in that the suffering of millions in the process of history is in danger of being forgotten. (24) Now although this reference is aimed at Teilhard it can also be applied to the process writers and particularly to Pittenger.

The difficulty I find with the concept of God subsuming evil within his consequent nature, in addition, that is, to hesitation about being able to speak so definitively about the inner workings of God, is that it seems such an abstract remote transaction which does nothing really to answer the immediate horror of suffering. To offer a facetious example, it is rather like a vacuum mopping up the debris from the night before, without itself having shared at all in the revelry. To know that one's own evil deeds and their consequences or one's own suffering resulting from evil are prehended by God and subsumed within his ongoing purposes does nothing to alleviate the present trauma. Such a theology is small consolation to a starving child, a victim of Auschwitz or to someone who senses his evil deeds to be irrevocable. The further suggestion that the divine operation is fraught with suffering, the 'sign and symbol' of which is the cross does not lessen its remoteness. Despite Pittenger's contention that such a view 'placards' and offers new, profound insights into the divine suffering, it seems to me to do the opposite. Moltmann's book confirms this impression, for he, by contrast, indicates that the recognition of an intimate relationship between God the fellow sufferer and the cross speaks directly to the problem of evil and suffering.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 58.

'For in listening to the oppressed, the oppressors and the theologians among them might become sensitive to the "oppression of God", the oppression God suffers in Jesus Christ and by which he liberates mankind.' (25)

He sees this expressed most clearly in the Trinity. In 'The Crucified God' Moltmann relates this notion of the suffering God very closely to an understanding of the Trinity, the conjunction of which he suggests as the distinctive concept of the divine in Christianity. In large measure this is Moltmann's protest against 'the religious conception of many Christians' which proves 'to be no more than a weakly Christianized monotheism'. (26) This is a criticism I would suggest as being applicable to Pittenger. To understand this an indication of the closeness in which he holds the cross and the doctrine of the Trinity should be given. As he says:

'The theological concept for the perception of the crucified Christ is the doctrine of the Trinity. The material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ.' (27)

Moltmann outlines the significance of holding the Trinity and the cross closely together when he says:

'When one considers the significance of the death of Jesus for God himself, one must enter into the inter-trinitarian tensions and relationships of God and speak of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. But if that is the case, it is inappropriate to talk simply of 'God' in connection with the Christ event.' (28)

Thus after looking at Moltmann's positive contribution to this question, those areas that he regards as 'inappropriate' because they 'talk simply of "God" in connection with the Christ event' will be considered, particularly with relation to Pittenger.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(26) Moltmann: *op.cit.*, p. 236.

(27) *ibid.*, pp. 240-241.

(28) *ibid.*, p. 204.

Moltmann begins from the recognition of Jesus as the 'godforsaken', (29) as the 'one rejected by his God and Father', (30) but he comments, 'to comprehend God in the crucified Jesus, abandoned by God requires a "revolution in the concept of God"'. (31) Such, though, he suggests has not been forthcoming in Christian history, for most Christian theology has begun with the attempt to explicate a general doctrine of God, offering philosophical proofs for his existence and has only offered trinitarian understanding at best as secondary thoughts, at worst as 'theological speculation with no relevance for life', (32) hence his conclusion that the religion of many Christians is no more than a 'weakly Christianized monotheism'. It is Moltmann's belief, however, that it is only when cross and Trinity are held together that true value can be given to either, indeed it is God's presence in the cross that is the scriptural basis for Christian belief in the triune God. (33)

Moltmann works out this insight in terms of God 'delivering up' his son to death, based on Romans ch. 1 vs. 18 ff. He points out that Paul initially uses the idea of 'delivering up' for judgement, in the sense that because of their godlessness and corruption God abandons them to their own lusts. Thus the Godless become the Godforsaken. But Paul proclaims, it is in this situation that the saving righteousness of God is manifested, made possible by God abandoning his own son and delivering him up to an accursed death.

(29) *ibid.*, p. 145.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 152.

(32) *ibid.*, p. 237.

(33) *ibid.*, p. 241.

'Thus in the total, inextricable abandonment of Jesus by his God and Father, Paul sees the delivering up of the Son by the Father for godless and godforsaken man. Because God 'does not spare' his Son, all the godless are spared.' (34)

Yet this 'not-sparing and abandoning also involves the Father himself', (35) but this, Moltmann asserts, can only be understood in Trinitarian terms.

'The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son. Unless this were so, the doctrine of the Trinity would still have a monotheistic background.' (36)

Thus the Trinitarian emphasis expresses the 'deep community of will between Jesus and his God and Father' seen most clearly 'at the point of their deepest separation, in the godforsaken and accursed death of Jesus on the cross'. (37) 'In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender'. (38) This Moltmann interprets as the manifestation of the divine love in the cross. But this, he insists, is no mere divine-human event but a trinitarian event between the Son and the Father, for it is reliant upon the personal response of the Sonship of Jesus.

This is very different from Pittenger's understanding of the crucified God. On Moltmann's definition Pittenger is wholly 'monotheist' in his approach. His prime concern is with the loving activity of God, subsuming evil within his consequent nature, the 'sign and symbol' of

(34) *ibid.*, p. 242.

(35) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(37) *ibid.*, pp. 243-244.

(38) *ibid.*, p. 244.

which is the cross. This is consonant with his Christology. A Christology which because of its immanentist presuppositions accounts for the speciality of Jesus in terms of a difference of degree from other men must have a restricted view of the cross. It could not speak of inter-trinitarian involvement as Moltmann has been seen to do. At best it can speak of the Christ-cross event as the supreme manifestation of the divine character; the key event for his activity. From Moltmann's stance such is not only an inadequate view of the cross but also weak theology. On Pittenger's view Jesus on his cross seems to be reduced to a tool, albeit a willing one, within the ongoing activity of God, in order to display its true character. This does not even approximate to trinitarian understanding.

Moltmann was noted earlier as saying that 'it is inappropriate to talk simply of "God" in connection with the Christ event', yet this is precisely what Pittenger does. In this regard several critical points that Moltmann makes will be applied to Pittenger.

Firstly there is Moltmann's contention that 'even the doctrine of grace is monotheistic, and not trinitarian, in practice'.(39) This clearly has relevance for Pittenger who emphasizes grace both in Christology and salvation experience. Grace for him is synonymous with the divine activity, it is 'God's favour and his help',(40) yet for it to operate (in Moltmann's words) 'no trinitarian differentiation in God seems to be necessary'.(41) That Jesus by his full-hearted response to the divine aim is a greater recipient of grace than others confirms that Pittenger's understanding of Jesus, and by extension of the cross,

(39) *ibid.*, p. 236.

(40) *W.I.*, p. 43.

(41) Moltmann, *op.cit.*, p. 236.

is confined within what Moltmann would designate as a monotheistic scheme.

Secondly, Moltmann finds similar fault with a doctrine of creation which he claims a 'weakly Christianized monotheism' could share with Islam.(42) Such a stricture would apply whether creation were viewed as a single *primaeval* event or an ongoing process. A theological immanentism such as Pittenger's, expressed in terms of the ongoing creative activity of God, known in all men and events yet exemplified in certain crucial and 'important' ones is essentially monotheistic in its conception, in the sense in which Moltmann uses the word.

Thirdly, Moltmann believes that an interpretation of the cross in theopaschite terms is also narrowly monotheistic.(43) This would apply to Pittenger's description of God reigning from a tree when seen in the context of his act-Christology. The cross then becomes the poignant symbol of God's willingness to face dereliction and suffering in order to overcome evil. It is the divine loving activity which is paramount with Jesus but the willing instrument within the operation. Moltmann, however, would counter such by saying that a full trinitarian interpretation would not speak simply of a divine-human event but of the 'relationship of Christ to his Father'.

'In that case one will understand the deadly aspect of the event between the Father who forsakes and the Son who is forsaken, and conversely the living aspect of the event between the Father who loves and the Son who loves. The Son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father as he dies. The Father suffers in his love the grief of the death of the Son. In that case, whatever proceeds from the event between the Father and the Son must be understood as the spirit of the surrender of the Father and the Son, as the spirit which creates love for the forsaken men, as the spirit who brings the dead alive.'(44)

(42) *ibid.*, p. 236.

(43) *ibid.*, p. 203.

(44) *ibid.*, p. 245.

Any such sense of 'an event between the Father and the Son' and the interaction between them is quite foreign to Pittenger's thought. His stress upon the loving activity of God of which Jesus is the instrument would be adjudged on Moltmann's estimate to be of inadequate trinitarian emphasis. Pittenger's own teaching about the Trinity confirms this conclusion.

He explains the Trinity in terms of 'three-fold experience' of the revelation of the divine Reality; (45) God encountered as Father in Israel's history, as Son in the Christ event and as Spirit, the one who elicited response, in the Christian community. It is Christ, though, who is the definitive factor, for, 'the 'Christian God' is indeed continuous with the God of Israel; he is the same God but he is now more deeply understood, in terms of Jesus and all that he has done'. (46) It is on the basis of this experience of God that the 'distinctively Christian concept of God' arose, that while remaining monotheist this attitude was 'enriched by the belief that in the mystery of the divine Reality there are distinctions and relationships'; (47) for Pittenger insists that since God 'must reveal himself in action as he really is and of himself', (48) there must be 'in the depths of the Divine Life, in the very heart of the divine Reality ... a three-foldness which corresponded with the three-foldness of the human experience of the divine working'. (49) He finds it difficult to describe these differentiations in terms of 'persons', with the implication of individuation, preferring to speak of 'modes', though (no doubt to avoid

(45) G.P., p. 47.

(46) W.I., p. 220.

(47) *ibid.*, p. 216.

(48) G.P., p. 47.

(49) *ibid.*, p. 48.

the accusation of modalism) not in any sense as 'activities of a single divine Being'.(50) His definition thus is equivocal, falling between adjectival and substantival senses.

'If they are 'aspects', they are eternal and are relatively distinct and different; if they are 'persons', they are so interpenetrating and so make up the one life which is God that they are also one together.'(51)

It may be doubted if this can be described as full Trinitarianism according to Moltmann's criteria. Although Pittenger speaks of interpenetration between the 'persons' within the Trinity nowhere does he explicate this in terms such as Moltmann has been seen to describe the interaction between Father and Son on Calvary. Pittenger's prime stress is upon the divine involvement in history understood in terms of the Christian experience and it is only after that has been established that he would speak of this experience defining the nature of Godhead as at once self-disclosing and triune in its relationship. He makes no attempt to define this in terms of anything but the Christian experience. He prefers to employ the process dipolar concept of God to explain God's involvement with the world and he relates the cross to that as being symbolic of its character but that can be recognised as no more than a device for explicating the divine activity and has been seen to be described by Moltmann as less than trinitarian.

(50) W.I., p. 225.

(51) *ibid.*, p. 225.

CHAPTER 6THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION(1) Wholeness

Pittenger speaks of 'salvation' as 'the wholeness of life, the "integration" which comes through a radical adjustment to God made known and available to men in the emergent life of our Lord'.(1) He variously describes this wholeness as 'man becoming truly a lover' by allowing his life to be grasped by 'God the Cosmic Lover', (2) or as a renewal of strength, a freshness of purpose or the overcoming of the frustration of our loving. (3) This is 'his true nature' (4) to which man can be restored when he is no longer in sinful defection from his true self.

'Although man is in such defection, yet he has the potentiality of restoration to health and wholeness. In the language of Christian faith, he has been "saved" by being brought into a right relationship with his Creator and hence into a right relationship with himself and others. And this, which is a given fact for the Christian - a fact established in Jesus Christ - a man can be brought to accept and hence to realize, to enter into and find made actual, in his own life.' (5)

This wholeness clearly relates to Pittenger's understanding of both sin and human potential, which have been discussed earlier, and can be seen as their opposite.

Sin when viewed as the failure to fulfil the God-given aim of life, as 'that which contradicts the true - that is, the divinely intended - nature of man, as mind-body in social relationships' (6)

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- (1) W.I., p. 5.
 (2) C.R., p. 52.
 (3) Love is the Clue, p. 49.
 (4) Human Nature, p. 106.
 (5) *ibid.*, p. 106.
 (6) *ibid.*, p. 99.

will suggest as its opposite 'positive, outgoing, active, participant goodness'.(7) Salvation as wholeness would thus be 'love in action, by which a man relates himself to his brethren and becomes the adequately expressive, highly personalized, freely deciding instrument of the Cosmic Lover who is God'.(8) This is the realization of human potential; for Pittenger has been seen to stress a human potentiality which no sin can totally distort and which can be identified as the image of God in man. Despite sin we are 'still God's children, still grounded in him, still made in his image (however we have damaged it), still possessed of an unfulfilled capacity for him'.(9) Salvation thus becomes for Pittenger an 'adjustment to God', albeit a radical one.(10)

'Man, then, needs restoration. Nothing in him needs destruction; but his sinful affections and desires, with their rooting in his wilful mind and proud spirit, must be reoriented and centered in God so that they are no longer sinful.'(11)

How this restoration to wholeness is realized in Christ is the essence of Pittenger's atonement thought. For it is 'by participation in the life of that man' in whom man's divinely intended nature was displayed that 'we are integrated, made one, brought back to ourselves, to others and to God'.(12)

(2) Jesus and the Experience of Salvation

It is because Pittenger begins from such an understanding of sin, human nature and salvation that he claims 'that our Lord is not an

(7) C.R., p. 53.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 53.

(9) G.P., p. 61.

(10) W.I., p. 5.

(11) Human Nature, p. 81.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 126.

intruder into the Creation, "a divine rescue expedition", but is tied in with and expressive of the whole God world and God man relationship, even while he is also ... the Saviour from Sin'.(13) This is consistent with what have been shown to be Pittenger's christological emphases. It is crucial though to see how within this framework he interprets Jesus as Saviour. He does this by speaking of Jesus as our example and secondly as the source of grace the one in whom God's power is known.

(a) Jesus as our example

The example motif is based upon the recognition that Jesus is the one in whom the God-given aim of life is seen to be fulfilled, that he is Love in action. Pittenger speaks of Jesus being manhood truly fulfilled; as 'God's idea of what man is' and 'what God is up to in respect of manhood'. He draws this conclusion.

'But if Christ is this, he is this only because in him there is made actual, real, complete, vivid, and clear what is potential although unrealized and unaccomplished in every one of us men. He is the Truth about us, placarded on the pages of history in a genuinely human life.'(14)

Thus firstly the life of Christ is our example in that it shows by contrast what is unfulfilled in every man. The life of Christ and the cross in particular shows human sin for what it is, a loveless unfulfilment of God's aim.

Secondly the example of Christ evokes a response which Pittenger describes thus:

'the response which the placarding of Christ on his cross ... demands from us and evokes from us is the making real in our own lives the spirit of self-identification with the world's pain which was God's act in Christ.'(15)

(13) W.I., P. 156.

(14) Human Nature, pp. 31-32.

(15) G.D., p. 61.

In a short article in 'The Times' entitled 'Learning Forgiveness in Lent' Pittenger wrote this.

'It is that season of the church year when we can make a special effort to look at Jesus Christ, really to look at him, so that his mind becomes ours, his will ours, and his love ours too. If we do that long enough, attentively and with singleness of heart, we shall become like him - we shall "forgive everyone who has ever injured us" and to any question put to us we shall answer "simply 'Love' said with a countenance clothed in humility".' (16)

Further evidence of Pittenger's stress upon the 'example' of the life of Christ is afforded by his repeated quotation of Whitehead's words from 'Adventures of Ideas' that the essence of Christianity is the appeal to 'the mother, the child and the bare manger; the lowly man ... with his message of peace and love ... the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed' because they have 'evoked a response from all that is best in human nature'. (17)

This is the starting point for Pittenger's atonement thought. The life and death of Jesus are seen as a profound incentive persuading men to change their lives and move towards that state of wholeness in which they seek the fulfilment of their God-given aim, but only when the life of Christ is recognised as the arena of the divine activity. It is only because 'the life of Christ is in its deepest significance God's act for man's wholeness, health, integration, fulfilment, "salvation"', and because 'it is what God did in true human life to the end that the rest of us could have these things' that 'the Christian claim that in the full filial obedience of Christ we see the goal of human endeavour is true at all'. (18) Thus while the example of the man Jesus in itself is not the source of salvation, yet when that life is seen as the revelation of God's love then not only is it a

(16) The Times, Saturday, March 4th, 1972.

(17) Whitehead op.cit., p. 167 quoted Pittenger Human Nature, p. 32 P.T.C.F., pp. 70f.

(18) Human Nature, p. 32

salvatory example but it also becomes the source of grace and power. This is the essence of his appeal to the Abelardian exemplarist theme.

(b) Jesus the source of Grace

Pittenger's stress on love provides the best introduction to this aspect of his atonement thought. His personal apologia, quoted in the introduction to this study, suggests that when process thought began to influence him he was helped to recognise atonement as the renewal of loving relationship.(19) In this vein he describes wholeness, salvation and the deliverance from the sin situation as 'falling in love'; which he defines thus.

'By this I mean letting himself be grasped by the love which surrounds him and presses in upon him, a love which ultimately is nothing other and nothing less than the cosmic Love which is God. In more personal ... terms, God the cosmic Lover environs man and moves towards him ... In letting himself be grasped by that Lover ... a man may be delivered from the inhibitions which the past has imposed, opened to healthy relationships in the present, and given a freedom to live towards the future in the dedication of the self in its organic wholeness to the subjective aim proper to him - he may become truly a lover.'(20)

Pittenger goes on to say that it is Jesus who 'can be for those whom he called his brethren a source of that grace which empowers them to become the lovers they are meant to be - or, in theological idiom, to be saved'.(21) This will be understood better by recalling two previous discussions.

The first concerns human sin; man's failure to realize the God-given aim of his life. Pittenger insists that man can never

(19) op.cit., p. 132.

(20) C.R., pp. 52f.

(21) ibid., p. 55.

overcome this situation and fulfil his potential by his own efforts. He rejects any accusation that his work is Pelagian (22), insisting rather that man 'must be released'; he must be placed in grace; he must be empowered'. (23)

Secondly how Pittenger sees Jesus as being the source of this grace relates directly to his view of the sinlessness of Jesus, which he has been seen to interpret in terms of the motivation and aim of Jesus' life which was the wholehearted fulfilment of God's will and the bringing in of his Kingdom, characterized by a life of love in action. The two concluding points of that earlier discussion have relevance here. These were that Jesus' fulfilment of the God-given aim of his life and thus his overcoming of sin was possible only through the operation of divine grace and love. Secondly Pittenger saw Jesus' overcoming of sin in his own life as being the source of victorious living for his followers because the 'positive, creative, out-going love and goodness of Jesus is shareable and is shared'. (24) Both of these points are held together in the following quotation.

'To be caught up into and to be grasped by Christ's love is to live in Christ. To live in Christ is to participate in the creative Love, thus active in human loving, which is the very reality of God himself.' (25)

Beyond such statements, however, Pittenger does not explain how Jesus per se is a source of grace, suggesting rather that it is within the fellowship of Christ, within the Church, that such grace is known. This major element in Pittenger's thought will be granted fuller discussion in a separate section.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 64.

(23) Human Nature, p. 80.

(24) *C.R.*, p. 63.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 63.

Before that, however, it would be helpful to see how such an understanding of salvation fits into Pittenger's immanentist world view.

(c) Salvation within Pittenger's immanentist scheme

It is significant that almost every time Pittenger uses the word "salvation" he places it within inverted commas, indicating his qualified use of the word and dissociating himself from its usual connotations. In particular he is denying that Jesus came into the world on a 'rescue expedition', for this view of salvation would contravene his whole theological approach, which has been defined as immanentist, though he would prefer to call it incarnational. By this he means that 'God is ... united in some fashion with his whole creation and that he is working through it at various levels and in various ways to reveal himself and to accomplish his purpose'.(26) 'The Incarnation of Christ' is to be understood as 'of a piece' with this 'general sense' of incarnation, which is the 'manner and mode of God's working in his creatures'.(27) The grounding of man's life in the divine Logos is one aspect of this which means that 'God and man are always in relationship'.(28) It is such an approach which causes him to reject a 'rescue expedition' view of "salvation" for this, he would believe presupposes a broken God-man relationship. Several implications for Pittenger's atonement thought derive from this approach.

The first is his confession that he is a Scotist, by which he means his belief that 'even had man not sinned, the Incarnation would

(26) W.I., p. 124.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(28) *ibid.*, p. 180.

have happened'. These are his reasons.

'I am convinced that God - in that magnificent consistency of purpose and constancy of operation of which the Jewish understanding of him, reflected in the Old Testament, is witness - would have crowned his creative work by his supreme creative act, so far as we men are concerned, manifesting himself with a fulness and energizing with a uniqueness such as Christians believe they see in our Lord Jesus Christ.' (29)

Secondly, accepting the reality of sin, "salvation" is seen as the work of God himself, which is of a piece with his creative work. It can only be understood within the context of the continuing creative and living activity of God. Thus not only does he repudiate atonement theories which seem to him to minimize this emphasis upon love but he also criticizes undue concentration upon atonement when extracted from the wider picture of God's activity because such 'specific soteriology' loses 'sight of the wider implications and consequences of the coming among us of Jesus as Lord'. (30) The keynote of his theology is the loving activity of God, of which the Cross is the 'sign and symbol'. An atonement theory which does not share this stance is unsatisfactory for Pittenger.

Thirdly, on this view, for salvation and wholeness to be effected in a person's life what is required is a 'radical adjustment' towards God in a response of faith and self-surrender to the love of God seen in Christ. Thus they make real in their lives the potential which is there by the indwelling of the Logos, and which was seen perfected in Christ. Thus salvation is of a piece with what Pittenger would describe as his incarnational emphasis. It is coming to be united with Christ and thus coming into closer fellowship with God,

(29) *ibid.*, p. 4.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 4.

for 'Christ Jesus is a unity in whom God and man are brought together in singular intensity', (31) and it is in him that men are lifted up 'to a new level or stage in the God-man relationship which became an achieved fact in our Lord'. (32) In Pittenger's scheme this salvation is experienced pre-eminently in the fellowship of the Church.

(3) The Church as the Vehicle of Salvation

In Pittenger's thought the Church and Christ are intimately related but not in the sense that Jesus is the one who 'instituted it, giving it laws and ordering its life according to rules he laid down', rather 'it is related to him in quite a different way'. (33) That is, both Jesus and the Church are elements in the ongoing divine activity. Both are parts of the total Christ event. As Pittenger says:

'the supreme and crucial act of God for men is not Christ alone, nor is it Christ and his Church; rather, it is Christ-Church, Christ in his Church and his Church in him as its Lord and sole meaning.' (34)

It is working from this position which he equates with the description of the Church as the 'extension of the Incarnation' (35) that Pittenger justifies his recognition of the Church as an element in atonement.

(31) C.R., p. 99.

(32) W.I., p. 4.

(33) C.R., p. 95.

(34) W.I., p. 273.

(35) C.R., p. 95.

'But we dare not think of the Church as God's method of extending the activity which he inaugurated in Jesus, unless at the same time we see that the Church, in doing this, is continuing - or, as I should like to phrase it, making both vividly real and concretely available - the Atonement. In other words, if the Church is God's method for extending to succeeding generations that which he wrought in Jesus, and hence integral to the total event which we name Jesus Christ, it can be such only because it is essentially the method chosen by God for bringing his human children into oneness with him in terms of that quality or character or specific spirit which is the result of the life of Jesus Christ in the world.' (36)

Pittenger here is saying more than that the Church is the medium in which the Gospel message is carried and propogated, rather it is 'integral' to the total Christ event, as its continuation. The loving activity of God which found its focus in Jesus continues in the Christian community. It is within that fellowship that Christ is known; and Christ is known not in terms of his 'natures' ('since to talk in this way is to speak in terms of an outworn metaphysic'); nor indeed in terms of his 'benefits', for the way in which Melancthon used that phrase 'he meant what Christ had accomplished for us' and Pittenger finds such a perspective on salvation incomplete and thus unsatisfactory; rather Pittenger insists Christ is known in terms of his 'activities', 'or what is being done in him'. (37) Here is confirmation that in Pittenger's theology 'the Church and Jesus are so intimately related' (38) within the incarnating activity of God.

(36) *ibid.*, pp. 95f.

(37) *ibid.*, p. 96.

(38) *ibid.*, p. 96.

'His work, his activity, or rather and better God's activity in him as an occasion or occurrence, is indeed centred or focused in the historical figure, but it is continued, extended, conveyed, made available, through that historically grounded community which has come to be called the Church, and which thus makes the event of Christ and the achievement wrought in that event a present reality for men, through the operation of the Holy Spirit.' (39)

Pittenger denies that this means that 'God's saving love is confined to the Christian church'. (40) His immanentist approach enables him to see God at work in other religions as well as in men of good-will who claim no religious allegiance. (41) God's love is 'operative everywhere'. (42) The Christian church exists to point to that truth. It is able to do this because its very existence arose from the decisive manifestation of the divine love in Christ. This is why the church is called 'the Body of Christ'; 'because by its means the specific awareness of love brought near to man in Christ is known'. Thus the Church, 'his Body is integral to the continuation in the world of God's activity in that mode'. (43)

The Christian community is thus, in Pittenger's view, part of the economy of salvation because it continues the loving activity of God, known decisively in Jesus Christ, through whom all men might come to know the joy of wholeness in harmony with God. The mechanisms by which the Church fulfils this role will be considered in more detail after a major influence upon Pittenger's thought has been estimated.

(39) *ibid.*, p. 96.

(40) *ibid.*, p. 96.

(41) *W.I.*, p. 5.

(42) *C.R.*, p. 96.

(43) *ibid.*, p. 97.

(a) The Influence of John Knox

This section can be introduced by a personal reminiscence.

In a conversation with Norman Pittenger I asked him why he had not undertaken a sustained study of the atonement, particularly as so much of his theological writing impinged so closely upon that doctrine. His reply was somewhat startling, for he said:

"There was no need for me to do so; John Knox has done it all. He has said all I could ever wish to say about the atonement." Several times in this thesis Pittenger's acknowledged debt to John Knox has been noted. His comment, however, makes this indebtedness more definite.

In our conversation it became clear that he was referring particularly to Knox's book 'The Church and the Reality of Christ', confirming that Pittenger directs his atonement thought to the experience of salvation within the fellowship of believers rather than to the mechanics of atonement theories; for this is the stress in Knox's book. In an essay in honour of Knox Pittenger suggests that there is evidence from his writings that Knox has been influenced by a 'metaphysic of process' (44) and particularly by Hartshorne. He lists three emphases as evidence of this, namely that Knox holds a 'dynamic view of history and by implication a processive view of world order'; that he interprets 'events' in such a processive world 'not as fixed moments' 'but as richly complex occasions' in which the past, the present happening and future consequences are all involved;

(44) W. N. Pittenger: 'Some implications in John Knox's writings' Christian History and Interpretation Studies presented to John Knox, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, R. R. Niebuhr, Cambridge, University Press, 1967, p. 11.

and lastly that Knox is 'convinced that it is only by engagement in faith that the revelatory and salvatory character of an event can be grasped'.(45) These emphases are also dominant in Pittenger's own work and are ascribed by him to process insights.

These elements combine together in that concept which is not only distinctive of Knox's thought but also is used by Pittenger to establish that the Church is part of the economy of salvation; namely that 'the Church remembers Jesus'.(46) By this Knox seeks to describe the rich pattern of the Church's life, including liturgy, scripture and experience of the living Lord, through which the present Church is seen to be one with its primitive predecessor. This 'remembering' Knox suggests has always been a feature of the Church's life. It even predates the New Testament. The earliest Christian converts responded to the picture of Jesus that was presented to them and their response and Christian outlook became defined by the 'memory' of him they then came to share. The New Testament documents, he says, epistles and gospels are ^{more} valuable for the testimony they bear to the existence and nature of the early Church's memory of Jesus than for any statement of more "objective" fact they may make about him and his career.'(47) Since the New Testament was 'written out of the Church's experience ... alone',(48) it should be recognised as part of the memory and experience of the Early Church, though not exhaustive of that memory.

The death of Jesus and its meaning are both enshrined within that memory and thus the cross should never be viewed in isolation from the larger event of which it is part.

(45) *ibid.*, p. 4.

(46) John Knox: The Church and the Reality of Christ, Collins, London, 1963, p. 37.

(47) *ibid.*, p. 49.

(48) *ibid.*, p. 50.

'For it is the meaning of the Cross in the life of the Church and in the experience of the believer which is the really important thing ... The death of Christ actually took place only in the context of an event which began ... with the gathering of Jesus' disciples and ended ... with the creation of the Church ... in which Jesus was remembered and was still known as the living Lord. The meaning of the Cross can be seen only in this context. Indeed the Cross itself stands only there. For by the Cross ... we mean the central moment in a divinely creative and redemptive event which only the Church remembers and the continuing meaning of which only the Church can know.' (49)

Two conclusions follow from this. These are that 'when we speak of God's atoning act in Christ, we are speaking of nothing other than his act of bringing the Church into being' (50), and that 'the ascription of atoning sacrifice to the Event has its ground in the actual existence of the Atoning community'. (51)

These conclusions are logical steps in the light of the priority that Knox gives to the Church in his theology. If the basic Christian datum is the Church and if through its memory and fellowship the reconciling (the word Knox prefers to describe the divine action) (52) action of God, which was decisively expressed in Christ, is mediated, then not only is Christ unknowable apart from the Church but the Church must be of the essence of the reconciling process.

How Pittenger develops this approach will now be considered.

(b) Pittenger on the Atoning work of the Church

In placing the Church within the total Christ event Pittenger speaks of it as 'God's method of extending the activity that was

(49) John Knox, The Death of Christ, London, Collins, 1959, p. 129.

(50) *ibid.*, p. 107.

(51) *ibid.*, p. 34.

(52) *ibid.*, p. 102.

inaugurated in Jesus' and thus it is 'continuing the Atonement' in the sense of making it 'both vividly real and concretely available'.(53) He lists three major ways in which the Church does this: it remembers Jesus; it is the source of belief; it is the place of fellowship.

Firstly Pittenger claims that 'it is through the community and through it alone, that the remembrance of the event, as originally apprehended, is made a continuing reality';(54) 'that our knowledge of Jesus in any real sense depends upon the community which believed in him and worshipped him'.(55) The use of the word 'reality' in this context indicates that Pittenger is pointing to something more than is found in the New Testament. To suggest what this might be Pittenger speculates on what would have happened if the entire Christian community had been wiped out some time within the first century and the Christian documents that had been written in the intervening fifty years or so since the death of Jesus had been secreted only to be discovered centuries later. It is impossible to imagine that upon discovery belief would have grown up in a living Lord, one who after a life of goodness had been unjustly done to death yet had been raised from the dead. No, concludes Pittenger, 'does not this suggest that it is precisely the continuing life of the Christian Church which has in fact played a major role not only in preserving the records about Christianity but also in making the Christian faith a vital and vitalizing factor through succeeding generations down to the present hour?'(56)

(53) C.R., pp. 95f.

(54) W.I., p. 53.

(55) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(56) *ibid.*, p. 58.

The New Testament documents keep us in touch with the earliest Christian facts but only 'as the facts were known to those who interpreted them by faith as the working of God in human affairs'.(57) So just as the early Church by its preaching and interpretation of the life of Jesus made Christ a reality for men in their day, so the contemporary Church is more than just a repository of Christian documents. Thus Pittenger concludes, with acknowledgement to John Knox, that it is as the Church remembers Jesus that it makes him 'a present and real figure in the lives of men'. He proceeds:

'One could almost say that it is the community which makes Jesus alive today - and I am not talking here of an ecclesiological substitute for the Resurrection, but of the plain truth that it is within the community, and only there - no matter how one may be related to it - that the question of Jesus, the confrontation of men by him, the demand that men come to terms with him, becomes a living and inescapable factor in experience.'(58)

Secondly the Church is the source of sound belief in the sense that Jesus 'can never be correctly assessed or satisfactorily apprehended in his total Christian significance apart from the Church and its witness'.(59) This relates closely to earlier Christological discussion in which Pittenger was found to defend the premise that the Church 'created the Divine Christ of Faith'. By this he meant that within the New Testament the Church's high estimate of the significance of Jesus can be discerned in its ascribing Lordship and Divinity to him; a process that was continued into the following centuries as the Church defended the divine truth that it found in Christ through credal definition. What is important, however, is that the Church did not

(57) *ibid.*, p. 25.

(58) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 273.

embark upon this process as an intellectual exercise but to express its 'soteriological experience'. 'That is to say the belief in Jesus was dependent upon having an experience of Christ's saving work, not in individualistic isolation but as a member of the community of faithful people, the Church'.(60)

Thirdly this saving experience is known within the Christian fellowship. Indeed 'to be a Christian means to be a member of the fellowship, for Christianity is fellowship';(61) to be a member of 'the community of Love'.(62) Pittenger recognises that much in its history and present occupation would detract from that title, but he goes on; 'the Church is, at least in principle, the fellowship of those who are caught up into the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord, and aim to live one with another in such a relationship of love that they will contribute to the making present, in the world, of this love as man's authentic existence'.(63)

The Holy Communion is the heart of this fellowship for there the several strands that comprise the Church's life are held together. Jesus is remembered, there is an awareness of communion with the living Lord as his followers meet together in love at his table and there is also an anticipation that one day God's Kingdom of Love will become a reality throughout the world and all men will meet in love at Christ's table as Christians do now.(64)

Pittenger denies that the description of the Church simply as a human institution is at all adequate; its place and purpose within

(60) *ibid.*, p. 83.

(61) G.P., p. 64.

(62) G.D., p. 105.

(63) *ibid.*, p. 105.

(64) 'The Christian Church as Social Process', pp. 68f.

the divine activity known in the Christ event is its true description. The phrase, 'the Body of Christ' should be taken 'very seriously' in this regard. The following quotation is Pittenger's definition of this phrase.

'The 'Body of Christ' is the most adequate symbol for the truth about the church. Hence the body of Christ is the continuing organic expression of the life of him in whom God lived most richly among us; it is informed by life-in-love because it is itself life-in-union; its head is the everlasting Christ and its secret life is the Holy Spirit who is the charity of God; its purpose is the incorporation of all men into Christ; its end is the return of men with the entire creation to God, so that he may be sacramentally expressed and active throughout that entire creation by free and glad surrender to his purpose, until all shall find itself in him.' (65)

Three elements may be distinguished here which describe the place of the Church in atonement.

Firstly it is the continuing life of Christ. It is the vehicle for making the event of Christ a present reality; but by this Pittenger means more than that it proclaims Christ in its memory, preaching, creeds, worship and fellowship. Christ and the Church are intimately related within God's action. 'The historical result of the fact of Christ was the fact of the Church'. (66) The Christian society bound together in worship, love and obedience to Christ arose because they understood certain events in Palestine to have been the incarnating action of God in the person of Jesus. Pittenger here implies a priority for the Church which he believes is shown by the New Testament. (67) The act of God in Christ is unknowable apart from the

(65) Human Nature, p. 64.

(66) W.I., p. 272.

(67) *ibid.*, p. 272.

community which arose out of that divine action. Conversely, the Church cannot be understood in its true nature apart from the act of God in Christ'.(68)

'The Church is the reflex of the act of God in Christ. It is the consequence and result of what Christian faith conceives God to have done for man in Christ. It is therefore part of the Gospel of the Lord himself. For the gospel is the good news of 'God's mighty act' for man, and the Church is the community which not only bears the message of God's act, but is also itself the result of the act.'(69)

The action of God centered in Jesus Christ resulted thus in the community without which that action of God could never have been remembered, known or experienced. Pittenger's thought here is very close to that of Knox.

Secondly, the life of the Church is more than camaraderie; its fellowship 'is informed by life-in-love because it is itself life-in-union'. The Church is thus seen as an extension of the Incarnation, part of God's continuing incarnating love. Jesus Christ was the focal manifestation of God's Love in a human life, the actualization of God in manhood. So the Church in union with Christ its head is the continuing manifestation of God's love in human terms.

Thirdly, the purpose of the Church 'is the incorporation of all men into Christ'. The Church is the 'instrument for Christ's continued relatedness to the world, so far as his incarnate life and his 'benefits' are concerned'.(70) 'It is in the Church that Christ's 'benefits' are to be found. Hence in a true and important sense the

(68) *ibid.*, p. 272.

(69) *ibid.*, p. 272.

(70) *ibid.*, p. 273.

Church is the sphere of redemption'.(71) The Church is the society created by God 'which mediates the Messiah and his Salvation'; it is 'God in Christ's' instrument for bringing new life to men.(72) The Church is thus essential not only to our knowledge but also to our 'communion' with Christ.(73)

Pittenger does not mean by this that God's Love is confined to the Church and that men of other religions and philosophies are without God.(74) Yet in Christ mankind has been presented with a special awareness of God's love and it is the task of the Church of Christ to exhibit, live out and proclaim that love, which is the essence of its life, so that men might be brought into the fullest possible relationship with God and thus enjoy wholeness in their lives. It is as men are joined with Christ 'in a fellowship of surrendering love' that they would be 'enabled to do through him what they are meant to do'; fulfil the aim of their lives and live in wholeness and love,(75) which in Pittenger's view is the essence of atonement.(76)

(c) The Church as future prehension

In an earlier chapter Pittenger's placing of the Church within the whole Christ event was supported by the process concept of 'prehension'. He spoke of the Christ event as a complex of past, present and future prehensions. It was because Jesus was prehended in the future by the response to him in the Church that Pittenger

(71) *ibid.*, p. 272.

(72) *ibid.*, p. 273.

(73) *ibid.*, p. 273.

(74) C.R., p. 96.

(75) G.D., p. 35

(76) C.R., pp. 96f.

could claim, with process philosophical support, that 'the Church is part of the event of Christ'.(77) In that discussion, however, it was argued that such was a mistaken use of the process conceptuality.

In the present chapter a similar conclusion has been reached without specific process reference. This is because the argument of the previous pages has been based upon books which while employing general process presuppositions do not sustain the argument with process details.

Pittenger's belief that the Church is part of the Christ event and thus integral to atonement can be upheld without specific reference to process thought. In 'Christology Reconsidered' where his use of the prehension concept in this regard is most evident, what Pittenger appears to have done is support his conclusions arrived at on the basis of other criteria with elements drawn from Whiteheadian metaphysics. The suspicion that this is how he has used process thought has been repeated at other places in this thesis. That Pittenger's use of process terms is open to criticism in this regard does not in itself invalidate his conclusion that the Church is part of the Christ event and an element in the economy of salvation; upon which, as has been seen, he lays much stress.

As a final comment in this chapter, however, it should be said that that conclusion and stress is in itself open to criticism. Although Pittenger recognises that 'much in its history and present occupation would detract' from his description of the Church yet he continues to speak of it as being the atoning community where God's love in Christ is known. For myself what I know of the history and present disposition

(77) *ibid.*, p. 145.

of the Church would prevent me from treating it in the idealized terms that Pittenger employs. That Pittenger does so is somewhat surprising in one who himself is so critical of the Church in many aspects of its life. However much, though, he may dislike what he knows of the Church, he has to treat it in the way he does, one suspects, to sustain his theological system. Since he has evacuated salvation of any suggestion of a special divine salvatory initiative, interpreting it rather as the wholeness of human potentiality achieved in response to the divine love, he has to allow for a mechanism whereby that love expressed in Christ might be experienced. In ways that have been demonstrated the Church fulfils this role in Pittenger's system. That he has to use the Church in this patently idealized way betrays, I believe, a marked weakness in his theology.

This examination of Pittenger's understanding of salvation will be completed by a consideration of its eschatological dimension.

CHAPTER 7PITTENGER'S INTERPRETATION OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF SALVATION

Pittenger presents a sustained discussion of Heaven, Eternal Life and related themes in his book, 'The Last Things' in a Process Perspective'. In the opening chapter, because he regards it as 'impossible and incredible', (1) Pittenger admits that he would welcome the 'disappearance or muting of the traditional teaching about the last things', (2) 'which was sometimes expressed in ghastly and ridiculous fashion'. (3) He does not want, however, 'to lose altogether the insight and intention which was behind it', (4) for he recognises that these traditional doctrines 'did point to important truths about human life as well as about Christian Faith'. (5) So in his reinterpretation he seeks the preservation of the 'values' of the old scheme while stating them in a fashion 'not quite so outrageous' as that he was taught. (6)

(1) The Immortality of the Soul

The critical point of the traditional scheme for the purposes of this study was belief in the immortality of the soul. Pittenger says of traditional teaching that although it recognised that 'every man dies' yet it went on to say; 'but not all of him dies, for man himself is compounded of soul and body; and while the body dies, the soul

(1) W. N. Pittenger: 'The Last Things' in a Process Perspective, London, Epworth Press, 1970, p. 15.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 11.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 15.

(4) *ibid.*, p. 15.

(5) *ibid.*, p. 11.

(6) *ibid.*, p. 12.

cannot die. By its very nature it is immortal', so that at death, 'the soul was "released" from its bodily dwelling-place and enabled to go elsewhere'.(7) Pittenger, however, insists that death is complete and that no part of the human being escapes death's finality.(8) His catchphrase is 'we all die; and all of us dies'.(9) He further suggests that the 'notion of the "immortal soul" which "survives" the fact of our biological death' is an attempt 'to evade' both death 'as' finality and the finality 'of' death .(10) He also regrets that the Greek notion of the immortal soul 'found in the speeches that Plato put into the mouth of Socrates' and reliant upon the idea of 'the eternal realms of forms' should have been confused with the Biblical phrase 'resurrection of the body'. Pittenger is definite that the attempts of theologians through the centuries to weld these concepts together was misleading and mistaken.(11) He concludes that:

'the talk about "immortality of the soul" has served to provide for a great many Christian people what they wrongly took to be the right and proper Christian way of escaping the stark reality of total death.'(12)

Pittenger goes on to point to the contrast to this to be found in the Old Testament. The Jew, he says, was not only 'prepared to recognise the full reality of death' but also 'until the time of the Maccabees, Jewish faith was not dependent upon nor did it presuppose a kind of "immortality" or "resurrection" ... which alone made it possible to commit oneself wholly to Jahweh and to the doing of his holy will'.(13)

(7) *ibid.*, p. 5.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 33.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 35.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 33.

(11) *ibid.*, pp. 33f.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 34.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 35.

Pittenger emphasises this point for it is the key to his own re-conception. The Old Testament faith, he insists, 'stands as a judgement upon any effort in more recent times to insist that unless "immortality" or "resurrection" ... are in the picture, there can be no deep and genuine faith at all'.(14) His concluding comment on this matter lays down the basis for his own reappraisal.

'Christians may wish to say something more, but they simply must not suppose that God, faith in Him, commitment to Him, service of Him, and a denial of the reality and inescapability of death go together. Above all, they must not suppose that it is integral to faith in God, with its consequences, to believe that all of us (in the special sense I have given that phrase) does not die.'(15)

This quotation, in that it indicates that for Pittenger reference to an afterlife has no part to play in faith in God shows that for him 'the talk about the last things is essentially a matter of existential import'.(16) The next section will confirm this.

(2) Sin and Judgement

(a) Sin and its appraisal

Sin in Pittenger's scheme is the failure to realize the God-given aim of one's life in rich loving mutuality with one's fellows. This is no arbitrarily imposed aim negating human freedom; rather 'it is the law ... for our becoming'; 'it is integral to our very "routing", to ourselves as a series of occasions constituting our personality-in-the-making'.(17) The new point, however, that Pittenger makes in this discussion is that death is the terminus of this 'personality-in-the-

(14) *ibid.*, p. 35.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 35.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 39.

making' and as such 'qualifies and colours each life'.(18) Thus it is within his life alone that a man may actualize his potentiality and become the lover he is intended to become or fail to do so; and so it is only within life that any judgement as to the character of his life is possible. Judgement, traditionally one of the 'last things' is interpreted by Pittenger as contemporaneous 'appraisal'.

'Every man, day by day, is appraised.'(19) This is a fuller definition.

'Appraisal is a genuine and persisting factor in human existence. Appraisal means that each man is responsible for his life and for the decisions which he has made in the course of it; and it also means that each man must be prepared to give what traditional thinking describes as "an account of his life" - in the face of whatever ultimately determines and assesses true values in the whole scheme of things. If that "ultimate" is love, as Christians believe, the appraisal is all the more searching and it is all the more terrible to be aware that one must face it.'(20)

It is the fact of death which forces this appraisal because it reminds a man of his finality. It is love which is the yardstick of their self-appraisal. As Pittenger says:

'The question comes down to this: in what ways, to what degrees, have I or have I not opened myself to love, to give love and to receive love, to commit myself in utter faithfulness, to live in ideal mutuality ... and thus in the truest sense to have been "a man"?'(21)

Any honest answer to such a question must acknowledge failure time and again but Pittenger goes on to say that it is not the fact of individual sins and failings which is significant, rather the determinative factor is 'the direction our life has taken the aim which

(18) *ibid.*, p. 45.

(19) *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 50.

(21) *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

has been ours'.(22) This is a significant extension of his understanding of sin, for although sin is the failure to fulfil the God-given subjective aim of our life nevertheless, he implies here, it is the intention to fulfil that aim which is particularly significant. Indeed it is 'in terms of the direction he has taken in his mortal existence' that his life will be adjudged in respect of life's true possible 'destinies', namely Heaven or Hell.(23) These possible destinies, further, although once again traditionally 'last things', are not to be thought of thus for 'it is in the "now" that these destinies are made present as possibilities'.(24) Pittenger's existential interpretation of these two possibilities are, on the one hand, that 'blessedness which comes from self-fulfilment' this is of course not in isolation but in relationship with others, and, on the other hand, 'the disintegration or failure which comes from self-destruction or rejection by God because there is nothing to be received by God in His consequent nature for the furthering of His purpose of good, in the course of the process of creative advance.(25) Thus men within their lifetime are appraised as either 'blessed' or 'damned' 'by the ineluctable working out of what they have made of themselves, what they have become'.(26)

It might appear that Pittenger has just erased all the content of the traditional thinking about the 'last things' or in his own often repeated saying 'thrown the baby out with the bath-water' and replaced it by a form of existentialist, humanistic self-examination.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 51.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 62.

(26) *ibid.*, p. 62.

Yet this is not so. For although Pittenger plainly rejects futuristic and mythological interpretations of the 'last things' yet God stands at the heart of his reinterpretation. References to the divine element in Pittenger's scheme have already been quoted, as for example his insistence that 'blessedness' required the acceptance by God of human self-fulfilment; yet his understanding of God with the aid of the Process conceptuality within his interpretation of the 'last things' must be drawn out for his view of immortality to be understood.

(b) The Process Background

Several points discussed in more detail in the thesis must be listed in brief here as necessary background for this discussion. Firstly there is the process presupposition that history is a purposeful movement. This purpose 'is nothing other than God's incredibly cherishing love, shared with His creatures and moving through their free decisions towards a great end'.⁽²⁷⁾ Secondly the natural world shares in this purpose. This not only means that the world is good because God has created it but also that he is involved at every moment of the creative process. Thirdly each human life has such a subjective aim and God is present at every instant of life providing the lure of his initial aims towards the fulfilment of his 'great end'. Failure to realize this aim for Pittenger is sin. Fourthly it has been noted that the Process view of God as himself an 'actual entity' means that he is present as a prehension in every other actual entity providing lure and aim or overcoming negative response within his consequent nature. The summary of these points is that each person at each moment has a contribution to make, however slight, to

(27) *ibid.*, p. 67.

the ongoing divinely aimed creative advance of the cosmos. If that contribution is not made then that advance is held back and God's will is not fulfilled, which is sin. It is within this context that Pittenger's reinterpretation of Judgement and beyond that of Immortality is founded.

(c) The Divine Appraisal

Firstly judgement or the 'appraisal' of our lives is not only self-appraisal, there is a divine element. We are judged as to whether or not we advance God's aim not only for our own lives but ultimately for the cosmos. It has already been noted that Pittenger thinks of such appraisal not so much in terms of individual sins but more in respect of the intention to be detected through a life. The criterion for such appraisal has already been quoted as whether in a life there was anything 'to be reclaimed by God for the furthering of His purpose of good in the course of the process of creative advance'.(28) Now although Pittenger is here speaking on a broad scale yet in a system such as process thought, which is based upon microscopic entities, such a broad criterion of appraisal can only be built upon the fact of divine judgement or appraisal at each and every occasion of life.

Thus in the 'perishing of occasions', that is as each actual occasion passes into the next, God is present. Pittenger describes what God is doing there as follows:

(28) *ibid.*, p. 62.

'with the "perishing of occasions" ... there is ... the reception into God and hence both the preservation and use, of whatever good has been achieved within the process itself, to the end that the advance may continue, that further good may be actualized, and that the purpose of God (which is just that actualization of good, through love which is shared in the widest conceivable degree) may be realized in more places and times and in more ways.' (29)

Not only therefore does a man's action and character in this life have a determining quality in respect to himself, to history and to the world, as has already been established, but also to God. This however is but to repeat that God is the 'supreme affect'. It is in this way that Pittenger reinterprets the divine element in Judgement, Heaven and Hell. As he says, in using these traditional words, 'we are not talking about some state "after this life"; we are talking about the negative and positive prehensions by God of what is going on in this existence'. (30) Thus God's judgement is present every moment or better at every occasion. In that he is involved in every occasion his judgement is determined by whether he is affected by and is able to prehend that occasion 'negatively' or 'positively'. As Pittenger says:

'The appraisal that God makes is worked out in what He does - or, in words that describe the creative advance as we know it, the appraisal is worked out in terms of what is taken into, and what is refected from, the "consequent nature" of God, God as He is affected by what occurs in the world; and then, in what use is made of what has been thus taken or received in the furthering of the project or purpose of God, the implementation of good 'in the widest commonalty shared.' (31)

This appraisal of a single occasion when viewed over the expanse of a life, or at least over a sufficiently long span of life for the

(29) *ibid.*, p. 36.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 74.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 58.

direction of that life to be fairly judged, presents the possibility of appraising that life in terms of 'these two destinies, these live ultimate possibilities', traditionally called Hell and Heaven.

(d) Heaven and Hell

Thus on the one hand there is the possibility that a man 'shall so terribly and persistently fail, in his ignorance and impotence and in his own decisions, that he must suffer a continuing rejection'. 'That is Hell; by definition, it is the absence of God.' 'Hell is always a real possibility' since because of free human decision 'the possibility of wilful alienation from God, and persistence in that alienation' is there. (32) The tenor of his words, however, makes it clear that although Pittenger recognises such as a 'possibility', he does not think that it can apply to many. This would accord with his basic theological premises that no man is depraved and utterly sinful but rather contains within himself the 'image of God'. It should be remembered further that in speaking of Hell Pittenger is not thinking in terms of everlasting damnation rather what he is saying is that looking at life over all no man is wholly bad. Though most of his actions and decisions may affect God negatively such a man may still, albeit in small ways, respond positively in love and thus God will be enhanced. Indeed Pittenger would speak in this vein of 'universalism'. He asks, 'is there anything or anybody who cannot be saved?' and he proceeds to say that although God would not use coercion, for that would prevent the free response of the individual, yet 'love can solicit, invite, lure, entice, in so many different ways and through so many different channels 'secular' and 'religious' that one need not

(32) *ibid.*, p. 73.

be hopeless about the matter'. (33) It is on such terms that he would say that everyone can or will be saved, for salvation is not some future state of bliss it is a process of becoming in and towards God. This is how Pittenger would speak of Heaven. It is not 'some state after this life' but within this life it is 'enjoyment of God, in which God accepts and receives into Himself the man who, in his ignorance and impotence and by his free decisions, has yet been possessed of the kind of 'becoming' which makes him thus acceptable and able to be received by God'. (34) During the life of such a man there may well be many sins, many rejections of God's will but looked at over all it is characterized by a desire to see God's will of love realized and as such it has known the 'full satisfaction', the joy, the fulfilment, the happiness which is associated traditionally with Heaven. Heaven and Hell are thus traditional labels which Pittenger uses for two categories of people who can be said either to have accepted or rejected God's aim. It would not be very mistaken, I think, to suggest that Pittenger is probably embarrassed to be obliged to continue to use such words but a published discussion of 'last things' obliged him to do so. Since, however, any 'after-life' reference is excluded by Pittenger the desire to know whether any life could be appraised to fit roughly into either the Hell or Heaven category is of little more than academic interest. Further since Pittenger, although recognising the 'possibility', suspects that it is unlikely that anyone could throughout his life consistently refuse the lure of Love offered 'through so many channels secular and religious', such categorization becomes superfluous.

(33) *ibid.*, p. 83.

(34) *ibid.*, p. 74.

Indeed such broad generalized judgements as are implied by the continued use of such words as Heaven or Hell are not really helpful, since they only serve to obscure the real criterion of judgement. This is grounded at the level of the 'actual occasion' and this 'appraisal is worked out in terms of what is taken into and what is rejected from the 'consequent nature' of God'. (35)

(e) Appraisal within the Divine Purpose

Decisions which respond to the God-given aim of each occasion are prehended by God in his consequent nature and employed by him in the creative advance towards further and fuller good. Decisions against his aim, characterized by lovelessness and failure and even evil are negatively prehended by God. Whatever good there might be in such an occasion is positively prehended. As the discussion of evil showed 'God is able to transmute and transform what is most certainly evil into opportunity for good' (36) but then 'anything not received, anything that is negatively prehended, is utterly use-less; it is "cast as rubbish to the void", in Tennyson's words, because it can make no contribution to the abiding good and its implementation in the creative advance'. (37) What, therefore, is ultimately significant is God's purpose for history, for the whole creative process. 'God sustains its every event and is the chief (not only) causative principle behind all causation. God loves His world and everything in it; He is there, in the world, with cherishing care tending it and bringing it on towards final good, while at the same time he redeems it from triviality

(35) *ibid.*, p. 58.

(36) *ibid.*, p. 93.

(37) *ibid.*, p. 93.

and frustration'. (38) Every human life, every occasion is to be judged as to whether it has affected for good or ill that divine progress.

The criticism that Pittenger's this-worldly reinterpretation of the last things served to drain them of divine content, reducing them to a form of humanism, is thus clearly false for what matters above all else in Pittenger's scheme is God and his creative purpose. The following sections will confirm this.

(3) Immortality

(a) Subjective immortality rejected by process writers

Pittenger begins by rejecting certain popular notions about immortality. Referring to an essay, 'The Promise of Faith' by Schubert Ogden (39) Pittenger agrees that 'subjective immortality' (to use Ogden's phrase) by which he means the 'persistence beyond death of the conscious self' is not 'in and of itself, by necessity, utterly integral to Christian Faith'. (40) Indeed he thinks that it is quite possible to 'be a Christian without holding firmly to personal persistence beyond death' (41), yet Pittenger cannot deny that the idea of life after death is one of the most popular and firmly-held aspects of Christian belief to the extent that it can become 'the Christian hope'. (42) He suggests though, that this is due to 'self-centredness', that it is 'a strong individualistic stress on the self' which lies

(38) *ibid.*, p. 67.

(39) Schubert M. Ogden: The Reality of God and other essays, London, S.C.M. Press, 1967, pp. 206-230.

(40) L.T.P.P., p. 78.

(41) *ibid.*, p. 79.

(42) *ibid.*, p. 79.

behind the desire for immortality. It says in effect 'Glory for me' which Pittenger sees as a denial of the Christian demand that men should lose themselves in the 'love and service of God'.(43) This point is made very tellingly effectively by Peter Hamilton, whom Pittenger quotes in this discussion.(44)

Hamilton admits that 'there is a strong element of self-interest in much of our thinking about what happens when we die'(45) and he proceeds to tell of how he was cured of this himself. He had read some words of Charles Hartshorne in which Hartshorne had written that not only was the common notion of immortality apparently ignored by Whitehead but that most of the arguments usually adduced in its defence left a Whiteheadian unconvinced. Process thought with its emphasis on the satisfaction and enjoyment of the present occasion implies that 'this occasion has already all the reward it can ever have'. Hartshorne goes on to say whether my personal life or any other human life can expect future joys is not a primary question. What is important though is that

'there must be a thread of personal identity connecting our present act and any future good with which it can be concerned. Indeed, there must be, for truth itself depends on this thread, and so do the coherence and order of the world. But not our personality is this necessary, this primary, personal unity, but only God's. It is a hard lesson to learn - that God is more important than we are.'(46)

Hamilton confesses that he was shattered by these words. The final two sentences particularly revealed 'all too clearly not only the probable

(43) *ibid.*, p. 80.

(44) *ibid.*, p. 79.

(45) Peter Hamilton: The Living God and the Modern World, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, p. 108.

(46) Charles Hartshorne and W. L. Reese: Philosophers Speak of God, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 285.

falsity but also the basic self-centredness of the beliefs (he) then held as to what happens when we die'. (47) It is the phrase 'God is more important than we are' that Hamilton found so significant and he goes on to say:

'that is why we ought not to expect, let alone insist, that "we" will enjoy future rewards or suffer future punishments. Both the rewards and the punishments occur now: the reward of knowing ... that our actions are helping God's loving purpose for his world; or the punishment of knowing, in the depths of our being, that our actions are incompatible with this loving purpose.' (48)

Hamilton's words here resemble closely Pittenger's position already outlined. From the two preceding quotations, however, with their repudiation of 'subjective immortality' come indications of an alternative view. Hartshorne's statement that it is God, not ourselves, who is the 'thread of personal identity' which gives 'coherence and order to the world' is particularly important for it expresses the substance of the process notion of 'objective immortality'.

(b) Objective immortality

'Objective immortality' can simply be taken to mean that each of us influences those who come after him and thus acquires an existence in them beyond the termination of his own subjectivity. Schubert Ogden comments on this view that it forgets that our human posterity is just as involved in 'perpetual perishing' as we and he concludes, 'is the final meaning on my life simply the ever decreasing impact I make on other men who come after me?' (49) The process view, by contrast,

(47) Hamilton, op.cit., p. 140.

(48) *ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

(49) Ogden, op.cit., pp. 225-226.

stresses that our final destiny is to be loved by God which means that our life is given everlasting significance. Schubert Ogden summarizes what this means in these words:

'Because God's love ... is pure and unbounded, and because he, therefore, both can and does participate fully in the being of all his creatures, the present moment for him never slips into the past as it does for me. Instead, every moment retains its vividness and intensity forever within his completely perfect love and judgement. He knows all things for just what they are, and he continues to know and cherish them throughout the endless ages of the future in all the richness of their actual being. In other words, because God not only affects, but is also affected by, whatever exists, all things are in every present quite literally resurrected and restored in his own everlasting life, from which they can nevermore be cast out.' (50)

The process concept of 'objective immortality' stresses that it is as the 'good' elements of one's life are taken into the everlasting life of God and thus contribute to his aim for the greater good of the cosmos that we share in the everlasting life of God. It is God and his everlasting loving purpose alone which is important and I find my joy in the knowledge that I am called to share in that purpose. It is in this sense alone that I, in Pittenger's words, 'will be preserved beyond the "perishing of occasions"'. (51)

The process 'mechanics' behind the concept are clear because they have been repeated several times and need here only to be summarized briefly. Each and every 'occasion' as 'entity' makes its contribution negatively or positively, through being taken into God's consequent nature, towards God's loving purpose in the creative advance of the cosmos. It is by being participant in this that alone grants us 'immortality'.

(50) *ibid.*, p. 226.

(51) L.T.P.P., p. 82.

(c) Personal immortality?

The description of the Whiteheadian concept of immortality presented thus far does not appear to envisage our continuing as persons, which has always been one of the emphases in traditional views of immortality. The thought of our actions and decisions being subdued in the creative advance of God may be all very fine but it can appear as a very inferior alternative to a notion with a stronger stress on the personal aspect. In saying this there is no desire to reassert any self-centred view of immortality; but in Pittenger's words, 'may it not be that exactly in receiving all that has been done which is valuable, the doer of the valuable is able to be received?': and he goes on 'may not something like the "communion of Saints", in the divine life and usable by the divine agency, be a possibility? After all, "personality" is in relationships'. (52) Peter Hamilton offers a response to this which is essentially negative. Having emphasized that 'everything of any value in our life will be prehended into God and immortalized in his supremely personal life' (53) he quotes part of this sentence of Charles Hartshorne, 'Nothing is more personal about a man than his concrete experiences - which "perish and yet live for evermore" - in the divine, supremely personal life'. (54) In the context of that quotation Hartshorne is saying that the Whiteheadian immortality is personal in a literal sense since all that is known to be actual of any human personality is the life of that person while on earth. A system like process thought which stresses that reality is a matter of experiences rather than essences or substances must question whether

(52) *ibid.*, p. 82.

(53) Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

(54) Hartshorne and Reese, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

there can be anything of value beyond experience and go on to say that since the 'actuality of experience ... is just what ... is immortalized in the all-receptive unity of God', (55) this must be judged to be deeply personal. In the following quotation Hamilton underlines this.

'In God's prehensions of our experiences we do live on everlastingly as persons - but finite persons as seen from the outside, not eternal persons as seen from the inside. Our "within" terminates at death; our "without" or "outside" - in so far as it is compatible with God - is privileged to share, in God, in his everlastingness. What ultimately matters is not our personality ... but only God's.' (56)

It is interesting to note, however, that although this is the technical process answer it fails to satisfy Pittenger. In spite of acknowledging that the Whiteheadian view of 'objective immortality' is for him personally 'enough' (57) he clings to 'the intrinsic value of personal human existence' (58) and wishes to 'be permitted to hope' that 'if God is truly love and if love is relationship' which means 'sharing' then he would 'wish to share with others that which is good, that which is being done towards good, and that which leads to enjoyment in good'. (59) In this way Pittenger would interpret the 'Communion of Saints'; that everlasting fellowship of persons with their God in the enjoyment of his good aim. Speaking of the love from God which binds people together, which because it is of God has about it an 'enduring' quality Pittenger adds that he does not know whether this could mean the 'conscious and personal persistence beyond the dead of either partner or of both of

(55) *ibid.*, p. 285.

(56) Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

(57) L.T.P.P., p. 84.

(58) *ibid.*, p. 81.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 85.

them ... but I may be permitted to hope that it does'.(60) He also identifies with John Baillie's comment that it would be 'oddly selfish of God' to 'permit the annihilation of human personality'.(61) Elsewhere he goes further than what he here calls his hope and speaks firmly of 'the ground for the Christian assurance that there is life beyond death' which he finds 'in the nature of God and in the belief in the resurrection of Christ from among the dead'.(62) By this he means that it is 'inconceivable that a genuinely good and loving God would permit the annihilation of those persons whom he has created, whom he has so lovingly sustained, and upon whom he has showered such super-abundant grace' and it is further inconceivable 'that the communion with the "risen Lord", which the fact of resurrection has made possible, should ever be brought to an end ... for it has about it the quality of everlastingness, even of eternity'.(63) What Pittenger is saying here is of importance for this thesis since it shows him trying to add an extra Christian dimension to Whitehead's scheme. Since while admitting that for him the Whiteheadian concept is 'enough' either in the sense that it is intellectually satisfying or else that for himself the prospect of 'objective immortality' is sufficient yet he has emotional, pastoral (for his criticisms and hopes are on behalf of others and suggest pastoral situations) or religious reservations which make him want to say more.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 86.

(61) *ibid.*, p. 85.

(62) *G.P.*, p. 86.

(63) *L.T.P.P.*, pp. 84-85.

With reference to 'objective immortality' he says this.

'Obviously (so I think) Christian faith must say something more: but the more that it says is not in contradiction to this conception of human and cosmic destiny. Rather it gives that conception an even fuller significance and a wider application.' (64)

This fuller significance that will accrue to the notion of 'objective immortality' is a combination of a clearer emphasis on the value of human personality, an unambiguous stress on the love of God for individual persons and the full use of the insights that the Resurrection of Christ provide. The question that needs to be resolved, though, is whether this does or not 'contradict' the Whiteheadian conception. Pittenger's main ground for believing it does not lies in Whitehead's remark that his doctrine 'is entirely neutral on the question of immortality'. (65) Although he goes on to acknowledge that in a conversation recorded by Lucien Price, Whitehead said:

'In so far as man partakes of this creative process does he partake of the divine, of God, and that participation is his immortality, reducing the question of whether his individuality survives the death of the body to the estate of an irrelevancy.' (66)

Yet building upon Whitehead's neutrality on the question Pittenger still believes 'a more positive view is possible' (67) while agreeing with the process thinker's rejection of the self-centredness implicit in the traditional scheme and their belief that it ought to be enough that one's personal achievement is linked with the 'wonderful

(64) P.T.C.F., p. 82.

(65) Whitehead: 'Religion', p. 111.

(66) Lucien Price: 'Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead', London, Max Reinhardt, 1954, p. 366.

(67) P.T.C.F., p. 80.

enrichment of the divine experience', (68) Pittenger is still not fully satisfied, and wants to find other ways of thinking of immortality.

'In any event, keeping entirely on the level of speculative discussion, is it not possible to follow consistently the line of thought advanced by Whitehead and accepted by Hartshorne and then go on to say something like the following? Precisely because God is love and precisely because the achievement of greater good, especially through the activity of such personalized occasions as man may be said to be, is in itself a good, may not the achieved good include the agency by which it was achieved? May not the satisfaction of the subjective aim which is specifically human include as a necessary consequence some sort of persistence of the creatively agent, and cannot this persistence itself enhance the ongoing process? Will not this in fact provide more ways in which the creative good can be both expressed and enjoyed?' (69)

There seems to be evidence of a conflict here between Pittenger the process thinker and Pittenger the Anglo-Catholic. The emotional, pastoral and religious reasons already suggested for his desire to say more seems to be confirmed by the hesitancy of the vocabulary he uses in defence of the 'more' he wishes to say to add to the process line of thought with which he also agrees. He speaks of 'hope' or 'something more' or again 'may not' there be 'some sort of persistence'. The question that must be asked therefore, in the light of what must be reckoned as Whitehead's supposed 'neutrality' on the question of immortality is, will the process scheme sustain this 'more' that Pittenger hopes for? The answer seems to be no.

Firstly Pittenger's own insistence that 'all of us dies' seems to conflict strongly with the language used, particularly in the previous quotation, about persistence. Pittenger's own firmness about the finality of death would seem to be stronger evidence than his later

(68) *ibid.*, p. 81.

(69) *ibid.*, pp. 81f.

aspirations and so his whole desire for more is called in question. Secondly after disposing of most of the traditional last things fairly firmly Pittenger appears to renege on his previous thoroughness in postulating his hope. It is therefore necessary to ask whether or not there can be personal persistence after death in the light of the two main arguments he puts forward; the love of God and the Resurrection of Christ. These arguments, however, must be consistent with the process system and if they fall down on that test of consistency they will be only special pleading. This is true of Pittenger's suggestion that because God is love not only would it be selfish of him to allow our annihilation but also it would stand as a denial of his love for persons. The implication behind this is that God could grant such preservation if only he would, but that is to contradict one of the basic tenets of Whitehead's thought which Pittenger himself quotes frequently that 'God is not to be treated as the exception of all metaphysical principles'. The concept of 'objective immortality' is the logical development of process principles and is accepted as such by process thinkers. Pittenger is now introducing a new element which threatens to make God an 'exception' to the process system as outlined and he does so without offering any technical process grounds for doing so. His argument thus can only be seen as special, hopeful pleading and therefore of no validity.

His argument based on the Resurrection of Christ is more complex. The Resurrection of Christ is offered a fuller discussion elsewhere; what is important in the present context, however, is that Pittenger interprets the Resurrection as involving the continuation of Jesus' consciousness and goes on to suggest that it is inconceivable that communion with the 'risen Lord', which the fact of resurrection has made possible, should ever be brought to an end. Pittenger emphasizes

the aspect of Christian hope, by saying:

'The conviction of the earliest Christian disciples that death had not put a stop to their Lord and Master, but that he was alive and with them "to the end of the world" carried with it the confidence that because he lived, they would live also ... And since it was God who had "raised Jesus from the dead", the Christian believers were sure that life which was "in Christ" was indestructible, both for him their Lord and for themselves as those who were already united with him ... The "resurrection of the dead", then, is the Christian hope - not simply "the immortality of the same". It is the total man, in the full integrity of his humanity, who will be "raised".' (70)

Pittenger qualifies this final sentence by emphasizing that he is not referring to the re-creation of material bodies but rather to our re-creation by God 'with all things appertaining to the perfection of our nature', (71) yet even so such extravagant language is very different from the process emphasis that 'what ultimately matters is not our personality, but God's'. (72) Indeed this is Pittenger's strongest statement of belief about personal immortality. Perhaps this can in part be qualified by suggesting that the more tentative opinion found in 'The Last Things in a Process Perspective' might betray the acknowledged influence of Peter Hamilton's book and Schubert Ogden's essay 'The Promise of Faith' both of which were published after his book 'God in Process' had gone to press. But even accepting the more moderate opinions of the later book it still remains to be asked whether Pittenger has firm philosophical grounds for supporting his contentions. If he has, he does not offer them. An article which offers a critique of Pittenger's position from a technical process viewpoint makes it clear that special evidence such

(70) G.P., pp. 87f.

(71) *ibid.*, p. 88.

(72) Hamilton, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

as Christ's Resurrection cannot simply be accepted as invalidating the general process position without full philosophical support. In other words it could only be after Pittenger had argued cogently that life after death were a possibility that evidence like Christ's Resurrection could be offered as support.

'Once this real possibility (of life after death) were established, the grounds to which Pittenger appeals could have some persuasive power. But as it is, with no arguments for the possibility of Survival ... his reasons for hoping for something more than objective immortality carry little weight. This is accentuated by the fact that many of his own statements make immortality seem less of a real possibility than Whitehead's position does.' (73)

Pittenger's hopes for something more beyond 'objective immortality' have from a process perspective been declared invalid.

This judgement, however, does not mean that Pittenger's hope should be dismissed especially as it is such a tentative hope which does not affect his main thesis. All he is hoping is that a personal God whose love is known through personal relationship, in taking the effect of the decisions of individuals within his ongoing loving purpose would within that 'objective immortality' make possible the personal recognition of those whose positive decisions have enhanced the divine aim. It seems to be a desire to make 'objective immortality' less of an anonymous transaction and give it a more human, loving and thus divine face. Pittenger is simply expressing the hope that one's own response to God and the fellowship within which that loving response was engendered and made possible might be recognised within the divine creative advance. This hope whether it be adjudged sentimental or natural, proper or improper does not invalidate

(73) David Griffin: 'The Process Theology of Norman Pittenger', 'Process Studies', Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1972, p. 148.

Pittenger's prime espousal of a view of 'objective immortality' which he has learnt from process writers. His existential reinterpretation of the 'last things' is what is important for his understanding of salvation.

CHAPTER 8PITTENGER'S UNDERSTANDING OF 'SALVATION' - CONCLUSIONS(1) Summary

Pittenger's understanding of 'salvation' is consistent with his whole theological position. Thus his view of salvation as the wholeness which arises from the restoration of loving relationships between man and man and man and God is the natural concomitant of what he would describe as his incarnational emphasis, his stress that is upon the divine love who has been active throughout the creative process and human history seeking wholeness and harmony for the world and mankind. That this divine love was decisively manifested in the total Christ event and supremely on the cross, and there shown to be suffering love also fits neatly into his total theological picture. So also do the detailed implications for Christology which follow from this, namely that Jesus was fully human and different from other men only in respect of the degree to which he fulfilled the God-given aim and intention for human life. Thus since it was in Christ that that wholeness which Pittenger equates with salvation was seen, to which other men approximate in inferior degree, then the way to salvation will be following Christ and seeking to share in his fulfilment. It is only the exemplarist atonement theme which is suited to such an approach.

This exemplarist emphasis, however, means, in Pittenger's thought, much more than that Jesus is the example of a good life which ought to be emulated; it includes the response to the divine love in Jesus which was focused in his cross. It is as men face the sight of God's love as suffering love, which the cross symbolizes, that they will be led to respond in repentance for all their failings to God's loving activity.

Their lives will be changed by thus allowing themselves to be grasped by the divine love and grace which was manifested in plenitude in Christ. It is thus, in Pittenger's system, that Christ, the victorious participant in the human condition, becomes the bringer of salvation for men within the terms of their humanity, not as a rescue expedition from beyond but as the one who so effected the divine grace and love in his own life that he became the source of engracement for others. It is 'by fellowship with him, through life en Christo (that) men are restored and brought to their own fulfilment by the gracious loving action of God in him'.(1) Thus in the close interlocking of the elements of Pittenger's theology his Christology and understanding of salvation belong tightly together. It is because Christ is 'the fulfilment of man's capacity for God' and 'the fulfilment of God's purpose in man'(2) that it is 'through fellowship with him, through the participation in him which we call being 'in Christ', that these capacities and potentialities in the rest of us are quickened and brought to life'.(3) It is to come into 'union of fellowship with God, made available in the perfected humanity of Jesus' which 'is the final goal for men'. This is wholeness and salvation.

Pittenger's system is completed by the recognition that this is only really made possible within the Church. The Church is thus both the consummation of the divine activity in the Christ-event and its continuation through subsequent ages. Pittenger's salvation-system thus represents the fulfilment of human potentiality in relationship with others and, as has been seen, is restricted to the plane of this life and its experiences.

(1) W.I., p. 285.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 285.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 209.

I find Pittenger's theological scheme deeply unsatisfying but such an internally coherent system is, I think, best criticized not by an attempt at wholesale demolition but by pointing out certain areas where its answers are inadequate. Since Pittenger's is such an internally coherent system this in turn will have the effect of putting in doubt the validity of his theology as a whole. This is perhaps best approached by seeing Pittenger's system in the context of his theological approach.

(2) Pittenger's theological style

Pittenger's theological method which has been demonstrated in this thesis is to demolish or declare invalid those elements in 'classical' or 'traditional' theology that are deemed to be offensive to the susceptibilities or thought-forms of modern man. Only a tiny residuum is allowed to remain, which Pittenger suggests encapsulates what traditional theology was trying and failing to say because it was not on the wave-length of the contemporary generation, this is then reinterpreted in thought-forms that Pittenger clearly believes will make it readily acceptable and understandable to men of this age. Such a reductionist approach is the hall-mark of the English Modernist movement which Pittenger espouses and the particular influences of which have been noted in the course of this study. It has been said that the Modernists 'believed that the Christian faith, as expressed in the Creeds, was archaic and out of sympathy with modern thought, and set themselves, therefore, to produce a new statement of the Christian faith in simple terms of the love of God'(4) which had been 'considered

(4) J. R. H. Moorman: A History of the Church in England, London, A. & C. Black, 1953, Second Edition, 1967, p. 423.

afresh in the light of growing knowledge and restated in a way suitable to the intellectual conditions of the age'.(5) This is a precise description of Pittenger's work and, in my opinion, largely accounts for the neat, interlocking quality of his theology. In a theology whose premises permit the disposal of unhelpful elements the remainder can readily be fitted into a coherent and plausible system.

The mode of Pittenger's reinterpretation has been with the evolutionist insights of Whitehead's process conceptuality, but as was indicated in the opening chapter and has been confirmed in the course of the study his use of this conceptuality is idiosyncratic, dependent more on his evangelistic approach to process thought than upon his being its technical exponent. His heavy stress on the concept of aim and his employment of it as explanatory of sin, true human nature and its Christological fulfilment; his confused use of 'prehension' towards the conclusion that the Church is part of the Christ-event; his novel use of the idea of 'importance' as providing the definitive Whiteheadian clue as to how the speciality of Jesus within the ongoing creative process might be accounted for, have all been given as evidence of his imprecise use of Whitehead's thought. Certainly Pittenger works within the process atmosphere but his imprecise use of its concepts makes it difficult to regard him as one of its true exponents. It is my contention that the manner of his use of process thought provides clear indication that it is his modernist background which has determined his theology, and this has been fortified for him by process insights. His basic theological position was already established before ever, on his own words, he found process thought. I have already indicated that

(5) *ibid.*, p. 423 quoting H. D. A. Major English Modernism, 1927, p. 12.

this is true in respect of his atonement theology. Pittenger then has fortified his established Modernist theological position by placing it within an evolutionary, processive context and by employing insights taken from process thought which he has then adapted to fit what is required. This adaptation accounts further for the coherent, interlocking quality of his work.

For reasons given Pittenger's system is altogether too neat. It is tidy because difficult areas have been omitted and concepts used have been adapted to fit. The danger attendant upon such an approach is that its resulting theology is too simplistic, and this, I believe, applies particularly to Pittenger's understanding of 'salvation'. This then is the burden of my criticism of Pittenger; that his is an inadequate theological system because it leaves out of account significant areas of Christian thought and experience, in its anxiety to present a coherent system of Christian theology acceptable to modern thinking. This is demonstrable in relation to his understanding of 'salvation' and may be seen in four critical areas of his thought; namely, at the intersection of his Christology and soteriology, in the distinctive view of salvation that his evolutionary approach requires, in his unwillingness to allow more than a narrow exemplarist atonement interpretation to colour his view of salvation and in the type of salvation that his view of sin necessitates. In these areas it will be suggested that in his effort to arrange a tight, rationalistic theological system he has impoverished the traditional Christian understanding of salvation.

(3) Pittenger's Christology and Soteriology criticized

In his Christology Pittenger has sought to present a dynamic view of Christ's divinity which does not in any sense deny his humanity

but it may be doubted whether an account of Jesus, relating him to the ongoing divine activity, present to some degree in every man, is a fulfilment of this intention. Such a view, as Hick and McIntyre commented, comes close to adoptionism, for despite Pittenger's talk about Jesus fulfilling his God-given aim and being thus able to offer the full divine-human interpenetration, this adds up to little more than saying that once in history a human instrument was available who perfectly exhibited the divine love. This is thinly veiled adoptionism. Hick commented that the difficulty with adoptionism is that it vitiates redemption, which is a comment that applies to Pittenger, for his 'adoptionism' fits closely with his generalized view of 'salvation'. Indeed Pittenger's 'adoptionism' is best seen when he discusses the cross. Pittenger's references to the divine activity subsuming evil being focused in the cross seems to imply that God's loving activity needed a willing human instrument in order for its character to be manifested, and this is patent adoptionism. If all that God required was someone who would manifest the fullness of love, as characteristic of God himself, not only throughout life but even to the point of death, then it would not seem inappropriate for this revelation of God's character to await the coming of one who could bear the task, someone whose life was directed towards the fulfilment of his God-given aim. Thus in some sense the problem of adoptionism, raised by Hick, might not at all be a problem for Pittenger; hence his apparent refusal, perhaps, to answer his critics in detail. If this surmise is correct, and Pittenger would not regard the accusation of adoptionism as significant, what that means for his theology in general, and more particularly his soteriology, is brought out by the question: Why the cross? His reply that this was the extent to which the divine love in Christ was prepared to go, seems unsatisfactory. If the only purpose

of the cross was to manifest the costly and sacrificial nature of God's love it might be asked whether such suffering love could not equally well have been displayed by a life of self-less service for the good of others which led possibly to the untimely death of the servant, or by the willingly faced death of one who espoused some noble ideal whose fulfilment would ultimately benefit mankind. It might be felt that such idealistic death might have expressed the message about the character of God's love, which Pittenger clearly believes to be of greatest significance, more directly and economically than Jesus' execution. It might be wondered, then, if Pittenger's answer to the question, Why the Cross? is sufficient. An element of this insufficiency might be pointed out by Moltmann.

Moltmann presumably would categorise such 'adoptionism' as Pittenger's as 'weakly Christianized monotheism', in the sense that within Pittenger's thought it is God's activity which is of supreme importance, Christ merely being instrumental within it. There is no sense in Pittenger, as was mentioned earlier, of what Moltmann would speak of as inter-trinitarian relationships, which he saw as distinctive about Christian faith. But that is indeed inevitable. Pittenger's whole theology would preclude such a suggestion. A soteriology which includes the Church, seeing it as an integral part of the divine activity and the salvatory process, could never grant that uniqueness to Christ which a view like Moltmann's requires. If Jesus is not different from other men except in degree, and if the presence of the Logos in him is potential in all men, then such a figure could not be thought of as being party to such inter-trinitarian relationships. But it is ~~in~~ Pittenger's inability to account for such a figure which I believe betrays the weakness of his soteriology, for his soteriology lies circumscribed within his theological framework. If all that ultimately

matters is that God's character might be revealed and that men might be enabled to conform to the will of God so revealed then the Saviour will be primarily a revealer and through that revelation an enabler. Thus exemplarism will be the distinctive atonement note. Salvation will come by following the example of the Saviour and like him becoming recipient of the divine grace, in order that one's life might become conformed to the divine will of love. Further, it is such a figure, unlike Moltmann's deeply trinitarian view of Christ, who will fit more readily into a soteriology set within a processive and evolutionist framework.

(4) Pittenger's evolutionist view of salvation

It is significant, I think, that Pittenger treats the words 'atonement, redemption and salvation' as synonymous.⁽⁶⁾ To treat them thus loosely means that they are able to be fitted more easily into Pittenger's system. When what is of prime concern is the divine loving activity, the clue to which is given by the life and death of Christ, then whatever word is taken from biblical and traditional Christian theology can be seen to be serviceable. A generalized view of salvation will suffice in such a system. This can be demonstrated by reference to Whitehead. 'Creativity' is the key concept in Whitehead's philosophy. Movement towards novelty is what in Whitehead's view characterizes life. God is subject to this principle of 'creativity' and so, as has been discussed already, in process thought God is seen as leading creation onwards by loving lure and solicitation towards ever greater good and when evil occurs by prehending it negatively and thus subsuming it

(6) e.g. W. N. Pittenger: 'Some implications, philosophical and theological in John Knox's writings' in eds. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, R. R. Niebuhr, Christian History and Interpretation Studies presented to John Knox, Cambridge, University Press, 1967, p. 6.

within his own nature. His power of persuasive love at each instant of life, in each moment of human decision leads the creative process forward. On the basis of such a view of the divine operation, seeking the highest and overcoming the worst through his intimate involvement, Whitehead describes God as 'the fellow sufferer who understands'.(7) Pittenger's repeated use of this description has been noted. The problem that is raised by such an approach is that if God is involved at every moment of the creative process leading it forward and overcoming the evil that is thrown up, then there is no place for a specific atonement event, for salvation would seem to be built in to the process of creation. This conclusion is confirmed by Whitehead's own words.

'He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness.'(8)

In process thought creation is somewhat independent of God. In his series of famous antitheses in the chapter 'God and the World' in 'Process and Reality' Whitehead concludes by saying:

'It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God.'(9)

This is consistent with speaking of God as being 'not before all creation, but with all creation',(10) and then seeing God's involvement with creation as making him 'the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality'(11) or 'the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire'; 'the initial object of desire' in each creative

(7) Whitehead: Process, p. 413.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 408.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 410.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 405.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 405.

act.(12) The creative process is thus in one sense independent of God but God is necessary for its ordered and harmonious advance. In thus luring the creative process forward by his 'vision of truth, beauty and goodness' God's involvement is more akin to a saving work rather than to a creating one. A specific salvatory event would thus seem to be unnecessary. Here then, it might be suggested, is philosophical support for Pittenger's attempt to place salvation within an evolutionist context. The Christ-event defines this creating-saving activity of God but such a salvation cannot, almost by definition, be confined to Jesus.

In a recent article discussing the process view of creation, in a closing paragraph which introduces the question of 'new creation', D. W. D. Shaw asks,

'Is this decisive manifestation, this 'classic instance', enough to justify traditional language of once-for-all atonement and new creation arising out of it, which deems it appropriate to ascribe to Christ the worship that is due to God? Only, I suspect, if one is prepared to go further (as some process theologies are not) and claim that by his actualization of the possibilities of creative life, or love, he has opened up new possibilities for all which are in fact not otherwise available.'(13)

I differ, however, from Shaw's conclusion. Pittenger's is a good example of a process theology which does offer new possibilities for creative life, for the actualization of possibilities for wholeness, that is, for salvation; yet the simple offering of such does not per se fulfil the atonement-salvation requirements that Shaw himself lays down. The possibility of wholeness associated with Christ and within the creative process in no sense guarantees the 'once-for-all' character of atonement which Shaw believes to be characteristic of traditional

(12) *ibid.*, p. 406.

(13) D. W. D. Shaw: 'Process Thought and Creation', Theology, Vol. 78, No. 661, July 1975, p. 354.

Christian language. Despite holding to a Christian experience of salvation Pittenger repudiates any 'once-for-all' view of Jesus other than in the sense of the singular intensity of the Christ event as revelation of the divine activity. His confusion of salvation terminology is, I believe, evidence that for him only a generalized view of salvation is tenable. Professor MacKinnon, however, is one who finds such confusion of language unsatisfactory.

MacKinnon draws a distinction between redemption and atonement, suggesting a tragic element as being essential to the latter.

'If the idea of atonement, unlike that of redemption, is both heroic and tragic, it is so because it necessarily includes reference to the author of the act of atonement who is, it is implied, a human being.'(14)

His distinction is that while a human agency is needed for an act of atonement, redemption can 'be achieved by a deus ex machina intervening to deliver'.(15) In modern theology, he says, the atonement theme has been quietly dropped and the redemption motif has taken its place; for when demythologized of concepts, which originate from the Roman practice of slavery, of people being in bondage to alien power, this redemption theme is an 'effective means of proclaiming our conviction that our deliverance from all evil, our safety in time and eternity, are the work of God himself, and none other'.(16) In his revelation in Christ and supremely in the pain, rejection and contempt that he faced, God has disclosed that the power of his love is able to face and overcome the very worst. This truth is of 'deepest consolation to the believer' for it assures him that 'if he has faith to turn again, the very courses

(14) D. M. MacKinnon: 'Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement' in ed. F. G. Healey, 'Prospect for Theology' Essays in Honour of H. H. Farmer, Welwyn, Nisbet, 1966, p. 169.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 169.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 170.

of action whereby he estranges himself from God in the service of his own ends or perverted desires' may be shaped 'by the divine mercy' into paths of self-knowledge, faithfulness in the service of God's kingdom and new strength and power. He continues:

'If the Cross occupies a central place in this scheme, it is as an illustration without which, indeed, the lesson could hardly have been learnt; necessary indeed to its communication, in such a way that we can properly speak of it as a redemptive act, in that, by its centrality in the ministry of Jesus, the illusions which bar us from the presence of God are decisively dissipated, and his being towards us as love, established beyond questioning.' (17)

It is because Pittenger's theology can so readily be recognised to fall within such a definition of redemption that MacKinnon's following question: 'But can we call this in any sense atonement?' takes on a special relevance for this thesis.

MacKinnon's main criticism of the 'redemption' approach is that 'it ignores altogether the dimension of the irrevocable' and 'comes perilously near to taking refuge in a false optimism, which supposes all for the best in the best of all possible worlds'. (18) This criticism is in similar vein to that offered of Pittenger's understanding of sin in an earlier chapter where it was suggested that Pittenger's approach ignored the tragic and radical consequences of sin. To imply that a man who has 'sowed his wild oats and then come to himself' to live henceforth in wholeness, seeking the fulfilment of his God-given aim is freed from the consequences that his earlier behaviour caused is to diminish the reality of sin. As MacKinnon says, there are 'consequences' in such behaviour; 'the damage to his victims is not

(17) *ibid.*, p. 171.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 172.

somehow justified by his advance in self-knowledge'.(19) He goes on to suggest that 'any presentation of the work of Christ merits rejection as morally trivial, if it does not touch the deepest contradictions of human life'.(20) MacKinnon finds that it is the 'writers of tragedy' who 'have not hesitated to recognize' those contradictions 'without the distorting consolation of belief in a happy ending'(21) and it is from their insights that he takes his clue to understand the work of Christ.

The tragic and heroic dimension in the life of Jesus is indicated by the manner in which he set 'his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem', a phrase which MacKinnon believes tells as much if not more the intention of Jesus regarding the significance of his death as it reflects the theological insights of the early Church. He suggests that in the Gospel narratives 'however theologically or apologetically controlled' there is the presentation 'with substantial detail' of 'a man going to meet a horrible death', 'who clearly dreaded both the physical and spiritual ordeal it entailed'.(22)

'The language of the Fourth Gospel, both in the upper room, and in the final cry from the Cross, make it plain that for the writer the ordeal is a burden laid on Jesus by his Father, and something of the same sort is conveyed by the prayer in Gethsemane.'(23)

This serves to substantiate the distinction that MacKinnon draws between redemption and atonement. The tragic element indicates that there are two sides to atonement; namely that while the divine activity

(19) *ibid.*, p. 172.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 172.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 172.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 174.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 174.

is endorsed the human aspect must not be minimized.

'A doctrine of the atonement is the task of trying partly (for the final secret belongs to God alone) to capture the sense of the passion of Jesus for what it is: this because, although in the Cross, to quote the words of Paul, 'God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself', and we have therefore to reckon with an action of which he is the author, we have in the Crucifixion to do with something which is also unquestionably a human act.' (24)

The value of MacKinnon's thesis for this study lies in its positive critique of a view of salvation such as Pittenger takes. It doubts whether an approach which concentrates on the divine activity in general can give adequate weight to the necessary atonement dimension. There are two elements to this. Firstly there is a specific divine action in Christ for the salvation of the world and secondly there is the ordeal faced by Jesus, conscious of it as a burden laid on him by his Father. It is this that MacKinnon describes as unquestionably a human act. It is this tragic and heroic act which plumbs the depths of the deepest contradictions of human life. Such, MacKinnon clearly believes, is the essence of atonement and without this atonement dimension no understanding of salvation is complete. MacKinnon's description of the elements of atonement seem very similar to Moltmann's suggestion, already quoted, that, 'in the forsakenness of the Son the Father also forsakes himself. In the surrender of the Son the Father also surrenders himself'. Yet, in his theology Pittenger takes no account of such a special divine-human encounter in Christ, and particularly in his cross, which MacKinnon and Moltmann, from different points of view, see as essential for any full understanding of the saving work of God in Christ. Such an act of atonement is, however,

(24) *ibid.*, p. 174.

precluded in Pittenger's scheme, primarily because of his refusal to countenance any special, direct initiative from God in Christ. For him the Christ-event can only be descriptive of the continuing divine activity. Thus despite Pittenger's claim that his view of salvation is complete I consider it to be seriously lacking, particularly in this area of a once-for-all atoning work of God in Christ. If such is absent, however it be interpreted, then a vital element of the Christian Gospel is omitted. Further, Pittenger's talk of atonement in an exemplarist vein can also be seen to be deficient in this regard.

(5) The Exemplarist Atonement theme and the tragic dimension

Pittenger's espousal of the exemplarist atonement theory has been documented in this study. It has also been shown that such a view not only fits neatly into his general theological scheme, but also is more profound than mere moral enlightenment in response to the example of Jesus, for he would speak of a response to the divine, suffering love seen in Christ through which such love is enabled to become effective in them. The Abelardian position has been defined as saying that 'Christ reconciles men to God by revealing the love of God in his life and still more in his death, so bringing them to love him in return'.⁽²⁵⁾ This is the heart of Pittenger's view of atonement. His own contribution to this position has been to emphasize the supremacy of the divine love and to indicate with the help of Whiteheadian concepts how God is able to overcome the evil of each moment and transmute it within his loving nature, relating this to the cross. The problem, however, with a position like Pittenger's is its implication that an understanding of

(25) R. S. Franks: The Atonement, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 2.

salvation in an evolutionary context is dependent on an exemplarist motif. Few theologians, though, treat the exemplarist theme as uncritically as Pittenger appears to.

Vincent Taylor, for example, recognises that the central truth of the Abelardian approach is 'an essential element in any doctrine of the Atonement worthy of the name'; 'indeed it may be said that any theory has lost its base unless it is continually in touch with the statement of St. Paul: 'God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'.'(Romans Ch. 5 vs. 8)(26) Yet while acknowledging the validity of this, the inadequacies of the exemplarist position are also apparent. Considering the theory in its noblest dress, that, not only is the love of God manifested in the death of Jesus, but is also 'definitely objective, since it persists in spite of all that sin can do, and has for its end nothing less than the reconciliation of sinful men with God in the harmony of a restored mutual love';(27) Vincent Taylor is still able to list the following inadequacies of such a theory.

'The objections most commonly brought against this view are that it is vague and indeterminative, that it gives no satisfactory account of the suffering and death of Jesus, and that it is inadequate to human need, especially the need of those who are conscious of the reality and power of sin.'(28)

Taylor finds the latter criticism 'particularly pressing'. Penitence, he suggests, is essential for forgiveness and reconciliation with God and yet it is a fact that our penitence is 'fitful, incomplete and individualistic'. Even among those most conscious of individual sins

(26) Vincent Taylor: Jesus and his Sacrifice, London, Macmillan, 1939, p. 300.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 300.

(28) *ibid.*, pp. 300f.

there is a complacency towards 'social sins of neglect, national pride, social cruelty and oppression'. Penitence, he says, comes and goes 'quickened by the revelation of divine love in the Cross, but speedily lost again in the whirl of life'. The example of the cross alone is thus insufficient. 'It is undoubtedly true that, as a manifestation of divine love, the Cross will deepen penitence. When it fades the Cross will quicken it, when it is complacent it will rebuke it, when it is self-centred it will enlarge its range. It will expose our sin as sin against love and convince us that forgiveness is costly'.(29) But, Taylor suggests ^{that this} ~~such~~ does not match the depth of human need, for such a penitence is 'compassed with imperfection; it is hedged about by all the limitations of the finite, never constant, never complete, never invested with the note of universality. It is a penitence restricted by sin and constrained by creaturehood'.(30) MacKinnon was pointing to ^{this} ~~such~~, when he suggested that atonement like tragedy must explore the ambivalence of the world, that it needs to touch the deepest contradictions of life.

Taylor's criticism of the exemplarist theme is summarized by his comment, already quoted, that it 'gives no satisfactory account of the suffering and death of Jesus', rather it alters the nature of salvation making it a matter essentially of perception, albeit perception of a 'stupendous character', that 'God loves us unto suffering and death'. Thus, 'in consequence, salvation becomes response to the revelation, it is the reorientation of the soul after confession and trust' which approaches a 'God-mysticism'.(31) If Jesus' death is believed to be

(29) *ibid.*, p. 301.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 301.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 302.

simply the high point of a divine self-revealing process, as Pittenger would assert, then, on Taylor's view, a vital element of Christian thought and experience is being omitted. It is interesting that Taylor considers that it is the 'so-called 'cruder' theories of Atonement (which) have a closer affiliation with Jesus' own thought' than any others, not least because they represent that 'principle cardinal to Jesus' thinking that, as the Son of Man, He fulfils a ministry for men before God'. (32)

Further light will be shed on this discussion by relating it to the criticism made in an earlier chapter that Pittenger does not give sufficient weight to the tragedy in human life of sin and evil.

Pittenger clearly resents the accusation that he and other writers in the process vein treat evil with less than full seriousness. He even says that such accusers 'only convict themselves of failure to read the relevant material in Whitehead ... and Hartshorne'. (33) This, however, is to miss the point. There is no doubt that like other process thinkers Pittenger does speak of God's involvement with the tragic aspects of life, the question that remains is whether such references in themselves are enough. Criticisms that process thinkers do not treat tragedy seriously seem to me to be saying, not that the subject is not discussed but that the whole process metaphysical scheme, by its very presuppositions is unable to encompass the tragic dimension. This can be illustrated from Pittenger. In rejecting this accusation he outlines the process understanding of God's love in relation to evil:

(32) *ibid.*, p. 303.

(33) W. N. Pittenger: 'Christology in Process Theology', *Theology*, Vol. 80, No. 675, May 1977, p. 189.

'The cosmic Lover, revealed because enacted in the life of Jesus, is the victor over evil and sin, the patent reality of which is to be seen for what it is, with no sentimentality and with no reduction to emotional states or pleasant feelings. God is love - but he is love in and through and with the facing of the appalling facts of life.' (34)

It must be doubted, though, if this does encompass the tragic dimension of sin and evil in human experience. Is someone who believes his deeds to be irrevocable and irredeemable comforted or enabled to live anew by the advice that God in his love has subsumed the consequences of his guilt and he has but to respond to the one in whom the divine love was manifested to experience wholeness of life. Pittenger's theology outlined in that quotation and worked out in this study appears so blandly optimistic that it is incapable of answering the problem of tragedy, although it purports to answer that question. Pittenger's restriction of an answer to the question, 'Why the Cross?' to exemplarist terms is evidence of this failure to allow for so much of what Christian theology of the cross has sought to say about the tragedy of sin.

It probably must remain a subjective judgement that Pittenger's understanding of salvation fails to touch the deepest contradictions of human life, yet it might also be suggested that Christian theology has recognised that a fuller understanding of this problem is to be found in the death of Christ.

A. M. Ramsey refers to this deeper understanding of the cross which theologians have by their own admission vainly and inadequately tried to express, in contrast to the somewhat simplistic answer of the

(34) *ibid.*, p. 189.

exemplarist school, by quoting (35) from John Oman's review of Hastings Rashdall's magnum opus. There Oman refers to the admittedly inadequate attempts of Dale, Denney, Forsyth and Moberly to give renewed expression to penal and satisfaction atonement theories, and he continues;

'Nevertheless, one has a feeling that all these writers are reaching out after some spiritual need with which Dr. Rashdall is untroubled, not because he has solved the problem, but because he has ignored it. So far as he goes he is wholly right, and until his criticism is accepted a sound theology convincing by its own veracity is impossible. But when one compares him with St. Paul, or even with Luther, one realizes how little he cares to live in half lights, and how all really creative souls have to live there all the time.' (36)

This is precisely the criticism I would make of Pittenger. His water-tight theological system betrays his neglect of the critical, indeed crucial, areas of Christian thought and experience which can only adequately be approached with an attitude of reverent and creative uncertainty.

(6) Sin and salvation in Pittenger's scheme

In this section the relationship between these two aspects of his theology which epitomizes the deficiency in Pittenger's system will be considered.

It is apparent that any understanding of salvation will be determined by the definition of sin upon which it depends. Thus, in the case of Pittenger, since sin is a failure in human potential, a missing of the ideal mark, albeit with unhappy and even sometimes tragic circumstances, then restoration need only be confined to the human plane

(35) A. M. Ramsey: From Gore to Temple, London, Longmans, 1960, p. 55.

(36) in Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. 21, April 1920 (not 1921 as mentioned by Ramsey), p. 270.

and condition, which is where Pittenger places restoration in Christ. No intervention in the human condition *ab extra* will be necessary, hence his repudiation of the idea of salvation as a rescue expedition. If, however, his definition of sin is inadequate, as has been suggested, then his theological edifice would be fundamentally flawed.

It has been indicated earlier that an irrevocable, seemingly irredeemable element in human evil doing, witnessed to in literature, is left unaccounted for in Pittenger's scheme. This tragic element, however, can be accounted for in two ways. It can either be suggested that certain notorious people alone are liable to experience such a sense of the tragic, or, as I would suggest, writers who have expressed these themes intended that these infamous cases should be recognised as symptomatic of the human condition in general. This is particularly true of Dostoyevsky who was quoted earlier. Celebrated cases of murder, corruption, violence, self-deception, etc., portrayed in literature are not intended usually to be treated as aberrations but as indicative of an underlying flaw in the human condition, no matter how much men may seek to minimize or disguise it. Such has been described in traditional theology as original sin, which, as was shown in Chapter 1, Pittenger rejects not only in name but also in reality. If, however, Pittenger is wrong in this, as in that chapter references to Williams, Temple and Barry were intended to suggest, then a very different approach to salvation ^{from} ~~than~~ that taken by Pittenger would be required. The suggestion that there is a deep contradiction in human life, that there is a flaw in human nature, whereby man is incapable of sustaining the wholly good, which causes evil in its every manifestation, which cannot be put right by man's effort alone, which represents an impasse in his moral and spiritual development and which cannot be corrected by any adjustment, however radical, even if it be

an adjustment to God's love as seen in Christ, because such represents the 'fallen' nature of man whereby his fellowship with God has been severed, then this suggestion means that salvation must be seen as a putting right of what has gone wrong, a making possible a radical reordering of relationships between God and man and man and man, and this, traditional theology has asserted, requires the direct intervention into human affairs of God, in a special and decisive manner, which he did in Jesus Christ.

Such an approach to sin involves a different Christology. Unlike Pittenger who can only accept Jesus as the victorious participant in our human condition Christian theology from biblical times has struggled to express the belief that in Christ God decisively intervened in human history in order to effect man's salvation, which was accomplished through the cross. St. Paul in Romans Ch. 3 vs. 23ff expresses this in the following way:

'For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendour, and all are justified by God's free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus. For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death, effective through faith. God meant by this ... to demonstrate his justice ..., showing that he is himself just and also justifies any man who puts his faith in Jesus.' (N.E.B.)

Those words present a very different picture of salvation ^{from} ~~than~~ such as has been outlined in this study, and though commentators may debate their interpretation there can be no doubt that they can only be understood as referring to some special intervention by God in Christ in history. This contrasts markedly with Pittenger's repudiation of a rescue expedition view of salvation. Implicit also in these verses is that such intervention was necessary because of the serious consequence of sin. Sin, as there described, clearly breaks the relationship between God and man and radical action is required for matters to be

put right.

Referring to Anselm's understanding of these verses and the chapter in which they were contained, James Denney wrote:

'... sin makes a real difference to God, and ... even in forgiving God treats the difference as real, and cannot do otherwise. He cannot ignore it, or regard it as less than it is. If he did so, He would not be more gracious than He is in the atonement; He would cease to be God ... Paul in Romans iii, ... speaks of Christ's death as a demonstration of God's righteousness. Christ's death ... is an act in which ... God does justice to Himself. He who is moved with compassion for sinners does justice to his character as a gracious God.' (37)

While it is not the intention of this study to discuss the various atonement theories that have been put forward through the centuries it can be said that the different theories that have employed the coinage of ransom or satisfaction or justification or penalty have been struggling to understand, however partially, the profound mystery that Christians have always recognised the cross to be; that in the cross God in Christ has, while maintaining his justice and mercy, been enabled by the sacrifice of his son to remove the barrier between God and man caused by sin and thus restore communion between them. In whatever forms these various theories have been advanced there seems to have been the assumption first that sin has caused a radical breach in relationship between God and man, secondly that the decisive act of God was required to remedy this and thirdly that such atonement was wrought by the death of Christ. Pittenger's scheme, however, does not share these assumptions. His particular combination of exemplarism with an immanentist theological approach leads him in a different direction, and, it might be suspected, away

(37) James Denney: The Death of Christ, London, The Tyndale Press, 1951, p. 188.

from traditional Christian thought. Thus he both interprets other atonement motifs in the light of the exemplarist theme, as was indicated in an earlier chapter, and also refuses to see Jesus as the decisive act of God, only as the supreme manifestation of an ongoing divine activity. But in thus dismissing these theological formulations he also neglects the Christian experience which lies behind them. As this section has tried to indicate his view of salvation is reliant upon his understanding of sin. If, however, sin were recognized to be altogether more tragic in its consequences and more penetrating in its effect upon human nature, as traditional talk about original sin would assert, then salvation will be seen in a different light and will need to include some understanding of the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Once again A. M. Ramsey says of Rashdall what I would wish to say of Pittenger:

'In discussing theories which are unacceptable, whether because they were intellectually 'dated' or because they failed to do justice to Christian truth, Rashdall seldom probes to the religious need or the theological instinct which lay beneath a particular theory. Was it mere perversity which caused a Gregory of Nyssa, an Anselm or a Luther to say what they did?' (38)

Pittenger similarly fails to probe into the experience which lies behind so much Christian theological formulation. This is particularly true in respect of understanding sin and atonement. His system is compact and it is recognisably an attempt to make Christian thought more readily acceptable to modern man, but its result is a flat, bland theology which fails to answer deep 'religious needs and theological insights' even of contemporary man and yet which so many theologians of the atonement sought to articulate as they grappled with the mystery of the cross.

(38) A. M. Ramsey: op.cit., p. 54.

(7) Concluding Comments

This study has, I believe, indicated that the main difficulty attendant upon any attempt to interpret salvation within a theological system that seeks to understand the divine activity within an evolutionary and processive world-view is how to account for a divine salvatory initiative in Christ. Pittenger's approach, which is to deny any decisive, unique, once-for-all action of God in Christ does not remove but merely serve to underline the problem. As the closing section of Chapter 5 indicated, if God's involvement in the world is dependent upon the creativity which the Whiteheadian scheme suggests characterizes the evolutionary process, then in such a scheme there can be no place for an activist view of the divine initiative, and thus cannot be said to offer a satisfactory interpretation of the Christian Gospel. Pittenger's theological system, as outlined in this study, falls under this criticism.

In that closing section of Chapter 5 it was also suggested that one process thinker at least, namely John Cobb Jnr., has sought, within a Whiteheadian scheme, to hold firmly to a view of the divine initiative in Christ. This also was what Lionel Thornton was seeking to do. It is significant that Pittenger regards Thornton's attempt to assert the Christian belief that Jesus was in some sense both final and transcendent because in him God the Word descended into the creative process, as a contradiction of the Whiteheadian scheme that Thornton purported to use. This is the critical point of division between the two ways of interpreting God's involvement in an evolving world. Pittenger chose to proceed in such a way that made Christian doctrine wholly susceptible to the new interpretations presented by an evolutionary world-view. Such an approach, though, is incapable of sustaining any reference to a special divine initiative in Christ, because this would run counter to

process view which interprets the divine involvement only within the creative advance. Such a view is very different from traditional Christian theology but this difference is camouflaged because traditional Christian vocabulary continues to be used. The different approach means that Christian words are used in a radically different way. Pittenger virtually acknowledges this by usually placing the word 'salvation' within parenthetical commas. This is tantamount to admitting that for him the traditional associations of that word, associations directly related to a divine salvatory initiative in Christ, have lost their meaning and need to be replaced by the fresh insights that an evolutionary approach to theology bring. Similarly his lumping together of 'salvation, redemption and atonement' as synonyms also indicates that the different areas of Christian understanding and experience contained within these words have lost their relevance and can all be subsumed within the new evolutionary view of salvation. The marked, though subtle, difference of meaning that overtakes Christian words when interpreted in this evolutionary way can further be illustrated from a brief consideration of Pittenger's use of the word 'grace'. This also will conclude the thesis by emphasising again that Pittenger's theological position is unable to sustain a view of a special divine initiative in Christ.

Pittenger, as has been seen, vigorously defends himself against the criticism that he minimizes grace. His use of this word, though, as in several places this study has shown, makes it synonymous with the ongoing, divine, loving activity. Thus a man needs to be awakened and alerted to this divine gracious activity for him to know that wholeness of life which is salvation. The major persuasive for this awakening will be the life of Christ and more especially his death, where the divine love and grace were manifested. Yet such a generalized

view of grace leaves out of account the sudden, surprising, specially directed quality of grace which is so much a part of the Christian experience of it. A large and vital element in Christian hymnody, devotion, spiritual experience and theology speak of God in his grace seeking, pursuing, arresting, surprising and confronting the human soul; and this active, searching view of grace is wholly consistent with the biblical picture of the divine initiative. Yet this whole element is seriously neglected in Pittenger's theology and his view of grace. This, however, is quite consistent with a theological position which sees the divine activity as circumscribed within the evolutionary process. No such surprising view of grace is really possible in a theology which refuses to acknowledge any special, decisive action by God in Christ, insisting rather that Christ can only be the man whose life of dedication and obedience provided the revelation of God's continuing work; a revelation of how the world should be if God's aim for it were fulfilled. Such a Christology, though, is incapable, by virtue of its presuppositions, of sustaining all that the Christian Gospel has sought to say of God's special involvement in the world 'for us men and for our salvation'.

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