

“...adventure of the spirit...”

My Vision for the Center for Process Studies

by Roland Faber

When Whitehead thought of the “Mind of Leibniz,” considered as one of the last universal minds in European history regarding knowledge, interests, and creativity, he characterized his uniqueness by saying that his scope ranged and reached “from mathematics to divinity, and from divinity to political philosophy” (MT 3). This is also, I would suggest, a defining characteristic of the “Mind of Whitehead.” It seems to me that the Center for Process Studies, with all of her activities and affiliated programs, may be seen best as a creative embodiment of this universally oriented and connected mind. This is the basis, the “initial aim” or the “constitution” of my vision of her future.

Let me begin with the most integrative shape for such a vision that appears in one of Whitehead’s works: everything, our little lives as well as the planet Earth or the cosmos as a whole, is “nothing but” or “besides everything else” (that could be said in qualification of this), “an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable” (SMW 192). It is an adventure of which we are, as are all things in, around, and beyond us, instances of a constantly re-forming “whole,” an infinitely shape-shifting openness of creative flux, unending and ever-renewing itself. But it is an erotic process; that is, it is not just not an aimless juggle, but—beyond any other meaning we might artificially attach to it—it is a process of transformation that ultimately (although unfortunately, not always) seeks the realization of “unique intensity in universal harmony.” It is this process of universal interconnection and creative flux that we might envision as a process of the spirit and the spirit of the process. The universal spirit embodies herself; it is erotic incarnation; the evocation of ever renewed intensity. When spirit becomes matter, everything “matters” for both itself and that which is beyond the “attainable.”

With this as “incarnational” background, let me lay out my vision for the Center for Process Studies in the movement “from spirit to matter”:

1. **Spiritual Vision:** Spirituality is about experience. A process spirituality is about “organic” life and (to live within) its experience. Whitehead’s ecological understanding of the universe allows for a spirituality of interconnection through empathy, through which we are enabled to “feel” everything, and to feel everything differently. We begin to “experience” flux, relatedness, transformation, and “permanence,” or should we better say: the “persistence” of the creative Eros in all. We know of the tragic complexities of such feelings, but we might become able to search for their meaning differently: we seek ecological, social, and religious peace.

These are the consequences: We must develop this “deep spirit” in order to learn how to experience, think and act differently. We must seek discourses in cosmology and religion to integrate these experiences “experimentally”—by relating the “deep traditions” of the East and the West, the “experimental” threads of the sciences, human histories, cosmologies, and religions—be they Christian or non-Christian, be they esoteric or exoteric, be they religious or secular, be they intellectual or emotional. In striving for intercultural and interreligious discourses, practices, and spiritualities, CPS embodies and elicits the spirit of connectivity that in her deepest desire is the worship of the mystery of the “web of life.”

2. **Intellectual Vision:** In the typical Whiteheadian dialectic of spirit and matter, “intellectual feelings” exhibit a consciousness of understanding, critique, construction, and decision that directs our feeling of interconnectedness towards a vision of creative advance. In my vision, the intellectual gifts of CPS are best developed by her creation of a space of worldwide interconnection for all kinds of different endeavors to communicate, analyze, con-

struct upon, and act on the basis of the work of Alfred N. Whitehead.

In order to fulfill her destiny to be on the cutting edge of this mission, CPS must creatively enhance its longstanding tradition of this communication through, first, commencement: being the space of ever new understandings through conferences, conversations, and consultations within and outside process oriented scholars, circles, and activists; second, through commitment: by addressing rigorous research and by laying the ground for its future through scholarships (for students), frequent international lectures and guest professorships at CPS; and third, through communication: advancing the multiplicity of (scholarly and educational) transition

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of her basic texts, especially through including increasingly new media to produce a comprehensive Whitehead and Process Lexicon, new editions of all of Whitehead’s works, and an electronic representation of the research.

3. **Conceptual Vision:** With “conceptual feelings,” every event, and so the event of CPS, integrates concepts, patterns, structures, forms, and characters, seeking their embodiment as visions. In laying out such possibilities and their related strategies of realization, I dare to look into a possible or even a multiple future for CPS. Such an “imaginative projection” into the future is based on Whitehead’s contention that “integral experience” is not based on introspection and solitary reflection, but on

“social institution and action” (AI). Spiritual embodiment must be “experienced/experimented” in the (social) action and in the (social) structure of CPS.

I envision CPS as best embodying this adventurous spirit by exhibiting two structural elements. First, a duality of resources: Whitehead’s philosophy, on the one hand, and those historical traits of different traditions of interpretation and appropriation, collectively known as “process thought,” on the other. They are not the same. They, like all “polarities” in Whitehead’s thought, inhere in mutual immanence and enhance their development by mutual transcendence. Therefore, I envision the future of CPS to be best served when the indispensable sources of creativity of both “areas” are used like the left and the right half of the brain (as their unity). I envision CPS to remain a “World Center” for process thought, but besides that, to become a “Whitehead Institute” that is committed to all emergent traditions and new thought on Whitehead, even if they are not related to or originated in the American tradition of process thought—e.g., as can be seen currently in a fresh reception of Whitehead in the context of poststructuralist thought (France, Great Britain, Canada, Germany), or in the long felt relation to Chinese thought.

Second, in Whitehead’s philosophy we find, in addition to its relation to science, a triad of levels of values: evocation in its relation to aesthetics, ethics, and religion. Besides the commitment to the dialogue between science, philosophy, and theology, the “World Center” could, therefore, exhibit three “Chapters”: First, obviously, process theology in its own right, but especially in relation to religious pluralism, interreligious discourse, ecumenical studies, and Church-relations. Second process ethics may be seen

as “Chapter” committed to political theory (social and ecological justice and democracy), peace research, and process practices (e.g., liberation, resistance, contrast-building or peace-furthering actions). Finally, a strong and basic integration with aesthetics, thereby following Whitehead’s contention of beauty as the only justification of the universe and its process (AI 295), especially in creating discussions on aesthetic theories, in the commissioning of works of art, and in creating workshops for concrete, Whiteheadian experiences.

4. Material Vision: If the “adventurous spirit” is going to embody itself in the work of CPS, she must become a material expression of its visions. So I dare to envision CPS as physically recognizable institution that can fulfill her mission through two material components: First, she needs to materialize in a “physical space,” a building, a Process Center, housing its programs (her “Chapters,” her “Whitehead-Institute”), a museum, a library, meeting rooms, work places, guest rooms—and it might in its appearance embody the ecological vision of Whitehead. Second, she needs an endowment, resources for her operations, guest professorships, lectures series, scholarships, and a “Process Prize” reflecting Whitehead’s values of civilization: Truth, Adventure, Beauty, Art, and Peace (AI 274).

My wish is that we, who care about Whitehead, process thought, ecological living, social justice, democracy, and religious peace, could not just dream about, but actually realize such a vision, so that, fifty years from now, CPS will be known not only for what she stands (and always stood), but also for the resources she provides for the “adventures of the spirit” that might be alive like the fire Prometheus left so that humanity could prosper. ☘

Roland Faber: Process Theology as Theopoetics

by Richard Livingston

On February 7, 2006 Roland Faber delivered his first public lecture as Professor of Process Theology, jointly appointed at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, and as a co-director of the Center for Process Studies. “Process Theology as Theopoetics” was Faber’s summary response to the question, “What is process theology?” Realizing that it has been rooted in heterogeneous modes of thought from its inception, that no singular definition or description can adequately capture this “field” or “region,” and that there is thus no common consensus regarding an answer to that question, Faber said, “it is of the essence of process theology to be an uncontrollable undertaking in the infinite adventure of God-talk, and consciously so, in modes that I came to name ‘theopoetics.’”

The notion of theopoetics in relation to process theology finds its most concise summary in Whitehead’s famous statement, “[God] does not create the world, [God] saves it: or, more accu-

rately, [God] is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by [God’s] vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.” (PR 346) On this view, God is not a creator *ex nihilo* with absolute and coercive power, but a Divine Poet that “aims at the harmonization of possibilities that offer self-creation and ever-new re-creation.” Thus,

“...dualisms tend toward a desire for the extinction of that which is viewed as other, thereby becoming sources of supreme strife, be it political, civil, theological, economic, or humanitarian.”

the activity of divine poetry is not “creation” as such, whereby the multiplicity and infinity of interrelatedness that is the world is dominated or controlled; instead, the world is saved by God, symbolizing “an all-receptive, all-relational, all-sympathetic, and all-healing reconciliation.”

According to Faber, one of the most critical aspects of the theopoetical character of process theology is its adversarial relation to the establishment of mutually exclusive existential categories and oppressive dualistic abstractions, which have so often been (mis)used as instruments of power and domination. Such polar oppositions include “Mind and Matter, Soul and Body, the Good and the Evil, Light