

Pauline and Whiteheadian Perspectives - Basic Points of Agreement¹

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“Points of agreement between the first century apostle and the twentieth century philosopher? How can this be?” This question could be raised from both a biblical perspective and a philosophical point of view. Anybody familiar with Paul knows that in 1 Cor he writes a polemic against the σοφία τοῦ κόσμου (1:20; 3:19), resp. the σοφία τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (1:19) and the σοφός, resp. the συζητητής (1:20) – a polemic which many scholars relate to philosophy in one way or another.² And a philosophical trained person might know that Whitehead in his book “Religion in the Making” turns the apostle down. Assuming that his gospel is one of fear, Whitehead recommended Christianity to rely on John instead of Paul in the task of assisting the world in finding a loving God.³

Despite these “mutual” objections, the two perspectives should be related somehow! Since “process theology”⁴ introduced Whitehead’s philosophy to Christian thought, which is deeply shaped by Paul from the very beginning, both are present within Christianity of today. And this actual co-presence calls for a careful reflection on whether and how the two could be related. – But almost no work has been done in this direction so far. While some of the more traditional theology neglects, disputes, or ignores Whitehead and process theology,⁵ the later widely neglects Paul: having rare biblical references anyhow,⁶ Paul is of an even minor importance in writings on process theology, and detailed studies in Paul are

¹ This article is a revised version of a lecture that I gave in November 2000 at the Center for Process Studies in Claremont (CA), and at the Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington (KY).

² *H. Lietzmann*, *An die Korinther I / II*, vierte von *W. G. Kümmel* ergänzte Auflage, HNT 9, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949⁴, 9, hears Paul talking about the “Nichtigkeit der Philosophie” in general. Others assume, that Paul’s opponents in Corinth are influenced by hellenistic-jewish philosophy (for literature see *H. Merklein*, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*. Kapitel 1-4, ÖTK 7/1, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992, 120 f.). And most scholars understand one of the last two terms as a reference to the Greek philosophers (for a discussion see e.g. *W. Schrage*, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* [1Kor 1,1-6,11], EKK VII/1, Zürich/Neukirchen: Benziger/Neukirchner, 1991, 176; cf. also *Merklein*, *ibid.*, 181).

³ *A. N. Whitehead*, *Religion in the Making*, Lowell Lectures 1926, New York: Fordham University Press, 1996, 75 f. (dt. *Wie entsteht Religion?*, übersetzt von *H. G. Holl*, stw 847, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996², 59).

⁴ For introductions in “process theology” cf. e.g. *J. B. Cobb*, *D. R. Griffin*, *Process Theology. An Introductory Exposition*, Belfast: Christian Journal Limited, 1977 (dt.: *Prozess-Theologie. Eine einführende Darstellung*, ThÖ 17, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979); *M. H. Suchocki*, *God-Christ-Church. A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, new revised edition, New York: Crossroad, 1992; *R. Mesle*, *Process Theology. A Basic Introduction*, with a concluding chapter by *John B. Cobb, Jr.*, St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1993. – For a detailed study on “process theology” in German cf. *R. Faber*, *Prozeßtheologie. Zu ihrer Würdigung und kritischen Erneuerung*, Mainz: Grünewald, 2000.

⁵ Cf. e.g. *W. Grudem*, *Systematic Theology. An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester/Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity/Zondervan, 1994, 166-167.

⁶ Most writings on process theology do not even have a biblical index (although they have other indices) – cf. e.g. the two introductions mentioned above n.4 – and the result of a manual indexing of biblical references is poor.

few.⁷ This *status quo* is neither satisfying nor necessary because there are some illuminating coherences!

In order to prove this claim, it's tempting to collect those verses within Paul's writings which lend themselves to a process understanding (and, therefore, are mentioned already in process writings) and weave them together to something like a "process interpretation of St. Paul." But such a procedure would be inadequate. Single parallels might be accidental contacts of otherwise incoherent paradigms, sounding similar, but having a different meaning within the particular framework, resp. symbolic universe they belong to – a fact which Whitehead reflects more detailed in his book *Modes of Thought*.⁸ Consequently, an adequate inquiry has to focus not on particular contacts, but on coherences between the *paradigms*, the basic ideas, or the bottom line of the two concepts. Only if we can find agreements between the core of each concept, we are allowed to speak of a real coherence between them. Otherwise it would be an arbitrary subjection of the one concept by the other.

I

The term "Whiteheadian perspectives", which I used in the title, is rather vague because there is a wide range of process understandings among those theologians who draw from Whitehead⁹. Therefore, I will present some ideas of process theology that I perceive as basic ones. I will try to do this in a more ordinary language because process terminology is a quite elaborated and technical one.

In process perspective to be actual means to be in process, an assumption that includes everything even the entire universe and God. The process consists of minor "elements" which are not material, but experiential, called "actual occasions," meaning "drops of experience." These drops are short moments only. Embedded in the temporal stream, they begin with a "prehension"¹⁰ of the (immediate and wider) past, as well as a possible future ("initial aim"), proceed with a selective integration ("concrescence") and come to a completion by a repetition or transformation of the "given" past. With their particular outcomes they add to the basis from which the following "actual occasions" draw. Reality "consists" of a series of becomings, which most of the time happen unconsciously.

⁷ For example: in JAAR 47 (March 1979), Thematic Issue: New Testament Interpretation from a Process Perspective, are two articles on Paul: *R. Pregeant*, Grace and Recompense. Reflections on a Pauline Paradox, *ibid.*, 73-96, *D. J. Lull*, The Spirit and the Creative Transformation of Human Existence, *ibid.*, 39-56 (the article is based on *D. J. Lull*, *The Spirit in Galatia. Paul's Interpretation of Pneuma as Divine Power*, SBLDS 49, Chico: Scholars Press, 1980). Furthermore, in the book *Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus*, co-edited by *D. J. Lull*, *W. A. Beardslee* et. al., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990², 136-199, the authors deal with Paul.

⁸ *A. N. Whitehead*, *Modes of Thought*, New York: Free Press, 1938 (dt.: will be published 2001 by Suhrkamp). For an instructive summary cf. *M. Hauskeller*, Alfred North Whitehead. Zur Einführung, Hamburg: Junius, 1994, 26-30.

⁹ Cf. *J. Cobb*, *D. R. Griffin* (above n.4), 163-189 (dt. 162-188), give a survey on the different positions until the 1970th; *M. Welker*, *Universalität Gottes und Relativität der Welt. Theologische Kosmologie im Dialog mit dem amerikanischen Prozeßdenken nach Whitehead*, NBST 1, Neukirchen: Neukirchner, 1988², 138-140, classifies process thinkers into three groups (also in his article "Prozeßtheologie", TRE 27, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1997, 600-602) and gives *ibid.*, 141-202, a detailed discussion of the three groups; *I. Claus*, *Intensität und Kontrast. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Gottesvorstellung ausgewählter Entwürfe der Prozeßtheologie*, Münster: LIT, 1994, 61-192, presents six positions; *R. Faber* (above n.4), 25-97, presents another classification with a detailed discussion.

¹⁰ The term "prehension" is a Whiteheadian neologism built in contrast to "apprehension"; while the later one denotes a conscious perception, the new term means any kind of perception even the unconscious ones; for an instructive summary cf. *M. Hauskeller* (above n.8), 34 f.

This understanding implies the idea of interrelatedness or interdependence. Every entity occurs within the temporal stream, receiving from the preceding and contributing to the subsequent “actual occasions”. And while the prehension in any given moment seems to be limited to the immediate context, the prehended previous actual occasions mediate a wider context to which they themselves had been related and thereby binding the arising actual occasion into a universal web of interdependence. The multitude of occasions influence every single occasion and every single occasion contributes to the multitude (whereas this concept is not monistic, because only the relationship to the preceding entities is “internal” while the relationship to the future is “external”). Consequently, to be is to have an effect in any case, positively or negatively, mutually enriching or impoverishing.

God is not an exception from interdependence, but participates in it. In fact, God is the supremely related one! On the one hand, God enables every actual occasion to come into existence by giving an initial aim which lures away from a simple repetition of the past towards the best possibility in the present moment. On the other hand, God receives the outcome of every actual occasion and keeps it everlastingly. God feels the world entirely and constantly. As a result, God is neither unchangeable nor complete, and the traditional understanding of God’s immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience becomes obsolete. From a process point of view, God does not act coercively, but persuasively. God is not complete, but in process with the world. God is not untouched by the world, but feels it constantly. God knows the best possibilities in every particular moment but not the future. Therefore, we can speak of a “mutual faith”: the world depends on God who provides it constantly with initial aims, and God depends on the world for actualizing the initial aims towards God’s primordial vision.

II

Of course, we can’t expect Paul to have the same detailed semantics. But there is a pattern in Paul’s theological thinking, which is coherent to the process view. This pattern is quite obvious in 2 Cor.¹¹ An outline of this letter might be useful in order to facilitate the orientation. In my perspective 2 Cor has the following rhetorical structure:¹² the letter opening (1:1-2), an exordium (1:3-7), a narration (1:8-2:17) including the proposition in (2:14-17), three blocks of argumentation (3:1-6:10; 6:11-9:15; 10:1-12:18), a central appeal at the end

¹¹ In my discussion of 2 Cor I will make use of the following commentaries (to which I will refer in the notes only with author name and the particular page[s]): *Ph. Bachmann*, *Der zweite Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, KNT 8, Leipzig: Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909^{1/2}; *R. Bultmann*, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, hg. von *E. Dinkler*, KEK Sonderband, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967; *H. Lietzmann*, *An die Korinther I / II*, vierte von *W. G. Kümmel* ergänzte Auflage, HNT 9, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949⁴; *V. P. Furnish*, *II Corinthians. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AncB 32A, Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1984; *H. J. Klauck*, *2. Korintherbrief*, Neue EB 8, Würzburg: Echter, 1986; *J. Lambrecht*, *Second Corinthians*, SP 8, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999; *R. P. Martin*, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40, Waco: Word, 1986; *A. Plummer*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915, repr. 1985; *A. Schlatter*, *Paulus der Bote Jesu. Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther*, Stuttgart: Calwer, 1969; *M. E. Thrall*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994; *H. Windisch*, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief*, Neudruck der Auflage 1924, hg. von *G. Strecker*, KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970. *Ben Witherington III*, *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1995.

¹² Cf. my forthcoming Th.D. dissertation “Nicht vergebens empfangen! Erwägungen zum Zweiten Korintherbrief als Beitrag zur Frage nach der paulinischen Einschätzung des Handelns“, University of Basel, 2000.

of the first block (esp. 5:20; 6:1-2) which becomes unfolded in the next two blocks, a summary or peroration (12:19-13:10), and the letter closing (13:11-13). It's useful to focus on the *exordium* first, because – according to the rhetorical text view – authors tend to prelude their theme(s) at the beginning of a text already. Understanding how a text begins, gives you an idea of what the whole text is about.¹³

In 2 Cor, Paul's thoughts begin with(in) God, praising "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all παράκλησις" (1:3 [NRSV]¹⁴). Commentators usually translate the last word with "consolation" or "comfort." But there is a much wider range of possible meanings of παρακαλεῖν ("to comfort, to beseech, to exhort"¹⁵ etc.) held together by a more basic meaning, which could be paraphrased like "to turn towards somebody for this person's best resp. well-being."¹⁶ Since Paul uses the word group here in its different nuances, I assume that he is interested in them as expressions of the one basic meaning (and therefore I'll put the usual translations 'consolation,' 'to console,' '(to) comfort' in quotation marks). Combined with the word "mercies," Paul presents God as active and solicitous, as the one who works for the world's best. And in spite of the specific Christian accent set by the phrase "father of our Lord Jesus," Paul is talking about God's *general* attitude towards the world¹⁷ simply indicated by the word "all": the God of *all* παράκλησις, of everything which works for the world's well-being.

In the following verses Paul continues using the word group παράκλησις: ten times altogether! While already this high frequency indicates that acting for the well-being of others is of a high significance for Paul in 2 Cor,¹⁸ his use of the word group expresses also a dynamic notion¹⁹. Having spoken of God's being the source of all παράκλησις in general (1:3), he mentions his own experiencing of it: "who 'consoles' us in all our affliction" (1:4a). This experiencing is not for personal benefit only, but aims at the ability to παρακαλεῖν others for their well-being: "that (εἰς τό) we may be able to 'console' those who are in any affliction" (1:4b). In fact, this εἰς-τό-construction most likely signifies not only a result (resp. resulting ability), but rather a purpose (resp. necessary result):²⁰ the παράκλησις "intends" to go beyond the particular recipient for more than an individual well-being. Obviously, Paul has a process in mind, a dynamic παράκλησις, beginning with(in) God, received by Paul in particular, and the "we" in general, pushing the recipients to pass on what they have received.²¹

¹³ Cf. E. Coseriu, *Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung*, hg. und bearb. von J. Albrecht, UTB 1808, Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 1994³, 188, and K. Berger, *Exegese des Neuen Testaments*, UTB 658, Heidelberg/Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer, 1991³, 19.

¹⁴ Usually I will quote from the NRSV; if not, I will mention the particular translation or translator (referring to the commentaries above n.3) in brackets.

¹⁵ V. P. Furnish, 109.

¹⁶ Cf. W. Popkes, *Paränese und Neues Testament*, SBS 168, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996. He defines paränese as follows: "P(aränese) soll den Empfänger aufbauen, fördern, schützen. P. ist ermunternd, konstruktiv auch dort, wo sie warnt; sie will Wege zeigen, aber nicht Zwang ausüben; sie zielt auf Verständnis und Einverständnis."

¹⁷ Cf. H. Windisch, 37 f.: God's "Wesen ist Erbarmen, das sich uns kundgibt – nicht in der Sendung des Sohnes zu unserer Erlösung, sondern – in allerlei Trost, den er uns in trüben Lebenslagen spendet"; cf. R. P. Martin, 8, H. J. Klauck, 19.

¹⁸ While most commentators agree that παράκλησις / παρακαλεῖν are "key terms" (B. Witherington, 357; cf. e.g. H. J. Klauck, 18), they focus on the meaning "(to) comfort" etc. and conclude therefore that consolation in affliction instead of acting for the best of others is a major theme in 2 Cor.

¹⁹ Cf. H. J. Klauck, 19, who talks about a "von Gott ausgehende(n) Bewegung".

²⁰ According to BDF § 402.2 (dt. BDR § 402.2), the εἰς-τό-construction indicates either purpose or result. A. Plummer, 10, V. P. Furnish, 110, prefer the second meaning also.

²¹ J. Lambrecht, 19, gives a similar summary of 1:3 f.

Interestingly, receiving and acting out παράκλησις are not two different occasions, but they are “internally”²² related: Paul ‘consoles’ others “with the ‘consolation’ with which we ourselves are ‘consoled’ by God” (1:4c). Paul passes on what he himself receives from God. The headline phrase “God of *all* παράκλησις” (1:3) already made this point: God is the source of all παράκλησις;²³ even the παράκλησις among humans originates from God. God *constantly* initiates παράκλησις by providing humans constantly with everything that is currently in need for a general well-being – a fact which Paul also emphasizes by his choice of the present tense (ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς [1:4], παρακαλούμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ [1:4]), indicating God’s constant, persistent, or continual activity.²⁴ And, moreover, he expresses himself in 1:3f. with a cyclic pattern: he begins his argument with(in) God, proceeds with reflections on his own person, mentions the beneficiaries of his work, and goes then the same way back to the starting point: God. – God is embracing the whole process of παράκλησις.

Like Paul, so do the Corinthians experience παράκλησις namely through the apostle: “if we are being ‘consoled’, it is for your ‘consolation’” (1:6b). But unlike Paul, they violate the process by refusing to act for the well-being of others. They are hostile towards Paul (e.g. 6:12 f.; 7:2; 12:15). They treat him like an unknown person although he should be well known to them (e.g. 6:8 f.; 10:2b, 9 f.). And, moreover, they also dissociate from the worldwide church by refusing to participate in the collection (chapters 8 and 9) and from one another by splitting the community into minor parties (1 Cor 1:10 ff.). This behavior is an absolutely inadequate response to the received παράκλησις. Therefore, Paul appeals in the exordium already for a positive response with the phrases “... it is for your ‘consolation’ which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering” (1:6) and “... as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our ‘consolation’” (1:7). Since the entire Corinthian correspondence has nothing else to say about a suffering in Corinth,²⁵ these phrases seem to express what Paul *wants* them to do²⁶: Paul asks them to share in *his* sufferings (like the Philippians do [Phil 4:14]), to participate in *his* fate by empathy and sympathy²⁷ – and most of all by praying for him, as he will mention later in: “... you join in helping us by your prayers” (1:11). Given the fact that Paul usually asks for the addressees prayer at the end of his writings while he does it in 2 Cor already at the beginning, V. P. Furnish concludes that this request “seeks to engage the readers immediately with Paul’s own situation and to accentuate their need to be active participants in the partnership of suffering and comfort of which he has just written.”²⁸ Having reinforced the idea of mutuality by this remark on the Corinthian’s prayer, Paul finally gives reciprocity a severe tone with the words “on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast” (1:14). – Mutuality is what finally counts.

The absurdity of the Corinthian’s attitude is one reason for Paul’s request. But he also knows about mutual consequences of people’s behavior. On the one side, he asks for the

²² For reflections on “internal” and “external” relations see A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. Lowell Lectures 1925, New York: Free Press, 1967, 122 f. (dt.: *Wissenschaft und moderne Welt*, übersetzt von H. G. Holl, stw 753, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988, 148), M. Hauskeller (above n.8), 39–42, M. Suchocki (above n.4), 12 f.

²³ Cf. e.g. H. Windisch, 38 (God is the “Schöpfer und Urquell der Barmherzigkeit”, the “Gott ..., der allen Trost aus sich herausläßt”).

²⁴ Cf. Ph. Bachmann, 27 f., J. Lambrecht, 19, Chr. Wolff, 22.

²⁵ Most commentators neglect this fact, “except” Ph. Bachmann, 33–34, M. E. Thrall, 111–113, Chr. Wolff, 25. Although all of them assume some sort of suffering in Corinth, they also admit “starke Gradunterschiede” (Ph. Bachmann, 34) between Paul’s suffering and that of the Corinthians.

²⁶ Cf. V. P. Furnish, 121: “Such Pauline affirmations of confidence ... are often implicitly hortatory”.

²⁷ Chr. Wolff, 25, mentions that *Johannes Chrysostomus* held a similar view.

²⁸ V. P. Furnish, 125.

Corinthian's empathy in his own interest: with their participation (mentioned in 1:6 f., 11) they would ease his current situation contributing to the παράκλησις he needs right now. On the other side, in sharing his fate they would become κοινωνοὶ παρακλήσεως (1:7), i.e., mates in experiencing well-being. In sharing his fate they not only help Paul, but also contribute to their own well-being, an idea that Paul underscores by his use of the word σωτηρία in 1:6, which means a well-being in the general sense in this context²⁹. In other words: to live out mutuality and to participate in the fate of others will contribute to a *mutual* enrichment.³⁰ Consequently, Paul has a sense of interdependence: our being, living, acting is never neutral, but always has an effect on others and myself, whether positive or negative.

After the exordium Paul launches the narration section (1:8-2:17 [with the proposition in 2:14-17]). Paul gives a sketch of previous events interwoven with theological reflections that serve for his justification against the Corinthian's suspicions. In the midst of this difficult and delicate defense, Paul continues to use the already presented ideas, and thereby he is working especially on the theme of interdependence.

Having focused on the relationship between the Corinthians and him so far, Paul now expands this horizon. Already in the first narration section (1:8-14), he not only deals with the Corinthians (asking for their prayer [1,11], arguing against their suspicions [1:12 f.], and pointing at the significance of mutuality at the "day of the Lord" [1:14]), but also alludes to a much wider interdependence: the worldwide church! He mentions the "many" who are the beneficiaries of his further missionary activities,³¹ and connects them, the Corinthians, and himself with the idea of a common shared prayer (1:11).³² And with the second travelogue – "I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia ... and have you send me on to Judea" (1:16) – Paul puts his addressees in relation to Asia (where Paul is coming from), Macedonia, and Judea. Since we know of the Corinthian's danger to dissociate from others and one another, these remarks in 1:11, 16 might serve Paul's intention to nurture their sense of interrelatedness with the worldwide church. However, more than awareness is Paul's concern: he wants the Corinthian's commitment, a positive and constructive participation! He asks them to support his mission by prayer and thereby to contribute to the well-being of the "many." He also expects them to "have you send me on (προπέμπειν) to Judea" which first of all means a support with everything in need for this particular journey,³³ resp. a support of the apostle's activities for the "many." Additionally, a contribution to this particular journey, the "collection-journey," which expresses the apostle's conviction that Jews and Gentiles are unified in Christ,³⁴ the Corinthians would join in the apostle's concern for the worldwide church. And in order to expand even this horizon, Paul speaks in 1:12 about the κόσμος, the entire world or even the universe. – Interdependence is an ultimate reality in Paul's perspective!

²⁹ Cf. *R. P. Martin*, 10, referring to *R. Bultmann*, 29.

³⁰ *R. Bultmann*, 31, alludes to this fact: "das Leiden eines jeden (wird) für den anderen fruchtbar"; cf. *H. J. Klauck*, 20, who refers to *R. Bultmann*.

³¹ While according to *R. P. Martin*, 16, "'(t)he many' ... suggests the majority of the Corinthian church", *Chr. Wolff*, 27, refers to those "die ihr Christsein Paulus verdanken".

³² Cf. *Chr. Wolff*, 27, *H. J. Klauck*, 21.

³³ Cf. *Chr. Wolff*, 34.

³⁴ For a survey on the topic cf. e.g. *R. P. Martin*, 256-258. For a recent study which pays attention to the social background of the collection cf. *S. Joubert*, *Paul as Benefactor. Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul's collection*, WUNT II, 124, Tübingen: Mohr, 2000.

Given the idea of a universal interdependence, the Corinthian's refusal to reciprocate positively will have negative or even destructive effects on themselves and others! In chapter 2 Paul illustrates this fact in three different ways. First of all, Paul reflects on a "mutual caused grief"³⁵ and the desirable alternative: "So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you" (2:1-4).

Paul then moves on to a person who was sentenced by the Corinthian community. It seems, as if Paul had supported this sentence in the past, but now he admonishes the Corinthians to reaffirm their love that this particular person might not be "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2:7). Most interestingly, Paul not only sees this single person in the danger of destruction, but also the community as a whole! He reinforces his appeal for love with the words "in order that Satan might not outwit us" (2:11 [NIV]). "Us"! The state of this particular individual has an effect on the community!³⁶ The meaning of this Pauline phrase is somewhat obscure; but within the semantics of Early Christianity the word "Satan" certainly indicates danger, danger of destruction, and in this case danger of destruction of the *community*. – The well-being of the single person – the one – and that of the community – the many – is interrelated!

Then, at the end of chapter 2, Paul creates an impressive formula for the two opposite sides of interdependence either to be an "avenue of enrichment" or an "avenue of destruction". Considering his mission and the reactions of people, he writes about himself: "... to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (2:16). Paul uses twice the same grammatical construction: "from – to", or in Greek "ἐκ – εἰς". This construction binds together condition (from, ἐκ) and result (to, εἰς). In the context of this letter, the ἐκ-part most likely refers to the way in which the Corinthians perceive Paul: as a person without glory, with weak appearance and speech, even as a person sentenced to death.³⁷ Now Paul responds: if you see this in me and treat me that way it will cause this effect in you: death! This not necessarily means physical or eternal death but a deficient way of life³⁸ that necessarily has a negative effect. And Paul also says the opposite: If you see me as a living, vivid being, send from God to you, then it will bring you life, meaning enrichment. – In short: the way I perceive and treat others will not only effect those "others," but also myself.

One more expansion of the interdependence theme needs to be mentioned: Paul even reflects on the way in which God is involved. First of all, he describes God as the "Father of mercies (οἰκτιρμοί) and the God of all 'consolation' (παράκλησις)" (1:3). Although most scholars emphasize that this "phrase is not a description of God's nature but of what God bestows"³⁹ the terms οἰκτιρμοί and παράκλησις definitely presuppose a God who is affected by, and concerned about what's going on in the world – a fact which Paul exemplifies in

³⁵ The notion of mutuality in this paragraph is recognized in the literature, cf. *Klauck*, 28 ("gegenseitige Freude und Liebe"), *Wolff*, 41 ("Wechselwirkung").

³⁶ Cf. *A. Schlatter*, 491 f., *R. P. Martin*, 39.

³⁷ While *Chr. Wolff*, 56, also understands the ἐκ-part as a reference to the way in which people perceive the apostle ("Die einen sehen an uns [ἐκ] nur den Tod wirksam") and refers to 2 Cor 4:10 f.; 6:9; 11:23; 13:4, he does not mention explicitly the relation to the Corinthians.

³⁸ However most commentators interpret in the sense of an eternal consequence.

³⁹ *V. P. Furnish*, 117, with references e.g. to *R. Bultmann*, article "οἰκτίρω", TDNT V, 161 (dt.: ThWNT V, 162).

1:8-10 with his rescue from a deadly peril. Being touched, God gives παράκλησις which aims at well-being in any particular situation.

However, the “success” of the given παράκλησις also relies on humans. Although God is the “God of *all* παράκλησις”, it is Paul who “mediates” παράκλησις to others (1:3) while his own παράκλησις – at least partially – depends on the Corinthian’s participation in his situation (1:6 f.). Several times Paul expresses the human part in God’s activity with the prefix σύν (“with”): the Corinthians contribute (συν-υπουργεῖν [1:11]) with their prayers to Paul’s rescue, Paul is a co-worker (συν-εργός [1:24]) of the Corinthian’s joy, and as a co-worker (συνεργεῖν [6:1]) he appeals to the Corinthians.⁴⁰ He also points at the connection between God’s and his own activity with the three remarks that his conduct in the world is directed by God (1:12), that he doesn’t make his plans according to the flesh (1:17), and that the proclamation of the gospel by himself, Silvanus and Timotheus was only their saying “Amen” to what God has already done (1:19 f.). All of these statements imply that God initiates what Paul does while God relies on Paul for really doing it. Paul presents this idea several times in 2 Cor, but most impressively in 5:18-20: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.”

Basically, this concept of “mutual faith” (that God relies on humans, as well as humans rely on God) is true for the Corinthians too; but their positive participation is more a matter of hope, as we have already seen. Paul comes back to this issue at the end of the first argumentation section (3:1-6:10). Having spoken of his being a commissioner of God’s reconciliation with the world (5:18-20), he appeals to the Corinthians “We beseech you on behalf of Christ: ‘Reconcile yourselves to God.’ ... We also entreat you not to receive the grace of God (χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ) in vain. ... Behold, now (it is) a favorable time; behold, now (is) the day of salvation (σωτηρία)!”⁴¹ (5:20b; 6:1 f. [*Lambrecht*])⁴² A second time Paul uses the word σωτηρία and his appeal sounds as if the Corinthian’s σωτηρία was at stake because they are in danger of receiving “the grace of God in vain”.

What Paul has in mind here becomes obvious from his use of χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ. This term occurs in 2 Cor, besides this current appeal, again in 8:1 and 9:14, i.e. in this appeal, and at the beginning and the end of Paul’s comments on the collection for Jerusalem.⁴³ By framing the whole collection issue with this particular term, Paul signals that both have to do with each other. And with the appeal in 6:1, he points already at this connection, expressing that the Corinthians σωτηρία resp. well-being has to do with God’s grace and their participation in the collection.

The nature of this connection comes to the fore when we focus on the way Paul uses the entire word group χάρις within these two chapters. His considerations are framed by remarks on the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ that is given to the Macedonians and the Corinthians (8:1; 9:14). Within this framework Paul uses the single word χάρις several times and in different meanings: for God’s provisioning of the Corinthians (9:8), for the collection itself (8:4, 6, 7,

⁴⁰ While most commentators assume that only the third σύν (in 6,1) refers to God, A. Schlatter, 468, 485, 569, interprets all three instances in this sense.

⁴¹ Translation according to J. Lambrecht, 91, 107.

⁴² The opinion that not only 6:1 f. appeals to the Corinthians but already 5:20b, is held by R. P. Martin, 155 f., H. J. Klauck, 56, V. P. Furnish, 350.

⁴³ While many commentators mention the χάρις-τοῦ-θεοῦ-frame in 8:1 and 9:14 (e.g. Chr. Wolff, 164, 166, 168, R. P. Martin, 295, V. P. Furnish, 452), the connection with the appeal in 6:1 seems to be widely neglected in the literature so far.

19), for “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8:9 [NIV]), and finally for praising God (8:16; 9:15). With this “conscious play on the word χάρις,”⁴⁴ Paul links the different nuances to one χάρις-complex, resp. -process⁴⁵ which displays the same dynamic character as the one of παράκλησις in the exordium: beginning with(in) God, revealed in a special way through Christ, opening people towards other people, causing the receivers to reciprocate and finally to praise God. – God’s grace is the moving Power within the world!

This abstract observation can be proved by other arguments which Paul uses in these chapters. Paul presents the Macedonians as an example: they received the grace of God and this caused them, although they had been poor, to contribute to the χάρις in the sense of “collection” (8:4)⁴⁶. Paul comments this attitude with the words “they gave themselves first to the Lord, and by the will of God, to us!” (8:5) They receive χάρις from God and pass it on. They become moved towards other people: they reciprocate to Paul, to whom they owe their existence, and they contribute to the collection and the well-being of others.

At the end of chapter 9 Paul demonstrates the same dynamics: God not only gave χάρις once, but is constantly providing humans with everything they need, the Corinthians in particular – “Now, God has the power to cause every gift to abound in you” (9:8 [Lambrecht]) – and humanity in general – “The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread to eat will supply and multiply ...” (9:10 [Lambrecht]).⁴⁷ Like in the exordium, Paul emphasizes God’s constant activity by using the present tense (δυνατεῖ ὁ θεός [9:8], ὁ ἐπιχορηγῶν [9:10]). This provisioning aims at the recipient’s behavior: “that ... you my share abundantly in every good work” (9:8), which means nothing else than being active for the best of other people. Those who are the beneficiaries of these good works, in turn, long for community with the givers: “while they long for you and pray for you” (9:14). They are living in a state of mutuality within the web of interdependence.

A closer look at the χάρις-framed chapters reveals that the apostle constantly uses and re-arranges the different “process fragments” in his argumentation for the collection. Consider Jesus Christ, Paul says. He was rich and became poor in order to make us rich (8:9) – whereby Paul assumes, that the “richness” we gained necessarily leads to a conduct that serves others.⁴⁸ Consider the example of Titus ([7:5-7, 13b-16] 8:6, 16 f., 23)! God gave him the eagerness for the Corinthians and therefore he lives out mutuality with them (in spite of their suspicions) and with the apostle. And, additionally, Paul underscores the idea of mutuality with a sentence of wisdom: “It is not that others should have relief and you a hard time; but rather, it is a matter of equality. Your surplus at the present time is for their need, that their surplus may be for your need, that there may be equality” (8:13 f. [Furnish]) – or mutual enrichment! Paul appeals for a “reciprocal material help,”⁴⁹ an expression of interdependence as ultimate reality in financial terms!

⁴⁴ R. P. Martin, 295.

⁴⁵ Most of the commentators link at least some of the different χάρις-expressions; e.g. Chr. Wolff, 168, and V. P. Furnish, 413, combine the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ given to the Macedonians (8:1) with their participation in the collection called χάρις (8:4).

⁴⁶ Literally, the Macedonians want to share in “τὴν χάριν καὶ κοινωνίαν”. This is a hendiadys (cf. V. P. Furnish, 401) which combines or identifies the meaning of the nouns: in the κοινωνία the χάρις is present, resp. active.

⁴⁷ For the continual aspect cf. e.g. J. Lambrecht, 151, Chr. Wolff, 186.

⁴⁸ This understanding seems to be common sense, cf. e.g. J. Lambrecht, 143, R. P. Martin, 263 f., H. J. Klauck, 68.

⁴⁹ J. Lambrecht, 138. Thereby he rightly disputes the spiritual interpretation of these verses (held e.g. by Chr. Wolff, 173, H. J. Klauck, 69 f.). Cf. also A. Plummer, 245 (“Here the help on both sides is material”), H. Lietzmann, 135 (“gleichartig materielle” Gabe).

And it's almost needless to say that Paul's argument here displays the same idea of God's being involved as in the first two chapters. First of all, God is the affected one: touched by the situation in Macedonia, God gave the χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ which changed their situation completely. And similarly, the course of Christ was motivated by his concern "for us" and resulted in the change of our "poverty" into "wealth" (8:9).⁵⁰ God's affection becomes activity. It is God who gave χάρις to the Macedonians, who gave eagerness in the heart of Titus and also the one who provides the Corinthians constantly with everything they need. At the same time God relies on humans. Paul sees himself – as already mentioned – as "working together" with God (συνεργοῦντες [6:1])⁵¹ and reminds the Corinthians that God provides them that they "may share abundantly in every good work" (9:8). What Paul has to remind the Corinthians of, is already reality with the Macedonians (8:1 ff.), some other communities (8:19; 9:2, 4), Paul himself and Titus. They pass on what they receive and live according to the aim of the dynamics initiated by God.

With this background, the fact that the Corinthians dissociate is not a minor issue for Paul. Since Paul understands the collection as an affair initiated by God, commissioned by humans, aiming at the well-being of the poor in Jerusalem, the Corinthian's refusal to participate and to respond positively to God's initiating endangers their own σωτηρία, resp. Well-being, as well as that of others. They deprive and impoverish themselves, as well as others – an inescapable fact in a relational world of interdependence. It is this issue that Paul has in mind when he appeals to the Corinthians in 5:20b and 6:1.

IV

Having focused on 2 Cor so far, a detailed analysis of further Pauline writings would be in place. But this would be a too ambitious project for an article. Only a glance at other letters is possible and only some supportive data can be mentioned.

A world in process is not at all a strange perspective for Paul. He himself expresses the idea in several contexts. Regarding the Christian life, he wishes the Galatians that Christ may take shape within them (Gal 4:19); and he reveals to the Corinthians that being a Christian means to be transformed from one glory to another (2 Cor 3:17). For Paul the Christian life is not a once for all alteration, but a "creative transformation" which takes time – an idea that he expresses in both letters with the term "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15)⁵². A few times he puts this concept even in a broader context. 2 Cor 5 for example: God reconciled the κόσμος, the world, or even the universe, with "godself" through Christ; but this reconciliation still has to be worked out and exactly to this task Paul feels himself committed. And in Rom 8: Paul reflects on the groaning of the entire creation and its hope for transformation towards freedom.

Paul also repeats the idea of God's being deeply involved in the world and its process reality. A few quotes may illustrate this: "We know that in everything God works for good" (Rom 8:28 [RSV]); "From him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom 11:36); "There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one

⁵⁰ While commentators discuss the parallels with Phil 2 and the ethical purpose of this *exemplum* etc. at length, they disregard the affection of God resp. Christ.

⁵¹ The notion "together" in the participle *συνεργοῦντες* should be related to God because of the preceding context (and not to other teachers, the Corinthians etc.); cf. *J. Lambrecht*, 108, *R. P. Martin*, 164 f. (with a detailed discussion of the issue).

⁵² For the process understanding of the term "new creation" as "creative transformation" cf. *J. B. Cobb*, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975, 31-94. For a summary in German cf. *I. Claus* (above n.9), 252-255.

Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6); and finally “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28 [RSV]). Even the idea of an affected God, or a God in process, is not impossible for Paul. Already the tradition he grew up with, the biblical as well as the (pre-)rabbinic, held this view.⁵³ The Hebrew Bible bears witness of a God who *learns* from the flood that the “inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (Gen 9:21), of a God who is moved to sorrow by Israel’s groaning (Judges 2:18), or a God who *repents* at the Mount of Sinai because of Moses intercession (Ex 34). Paul experienced this himself: As a Jew he believed in God’s election of Israel and that the νόμος was given for good; however, the encounter with Jesus Christ forced him to realize that God opened the covenant for Gentiles too. In the light of this experience Paul concludes that the νόμος was a previous intervention of God: the law came in beside (παρεισηλθεν [Rom 5:20]) resp. was added (προστέθη [Gal 3:19]), he says, thereby contradicting some of his contemporaries who developed at the same time the idea of a preexisting Tora⁵⁴. Both interventions, God’s giving the νόμος and sending Jesus Christ, suggest that Paul does not assume a divine plan which unfolds in a predefined way. Therefore, the assumption that Paul, like any first century Jew, couldn’t have thought other of God than in terms of consistency,⁵⁵ is inadequate.

Also the idea of the initial aim, that is always designed for the particular situation, is present in Paul’s writings – although in an indirect way. Paul only gives rare ethical advices that are definite and concrete. He prefers the more abstract type that leaves room for interpretation and adjustment to a particular situation. And in certain issues he himself argues for different options in different situations.⁵⁶ This not only shows his awareness that the actual best is due to the situation, but also his expectation that God lures his people to the current best in any given situation and thereby into an ever new future. *E. Käsemann*’s understanding of God’s righteousness supports this perspective: he suggests that it not only means “Gabe” but also “Macht” which “employs” the recipients and calls them “zu stets neuem Dienst und in immer neue Zukunft.”⁵⁷

Of course, in Whitehead’s concept the initial aim is not necessarily given on a conscious level but also – or even more often – on the pre-conscious or pre-language level. Paul covers even this area with his concept of ἐν Χριστῷ, or: being in Christ. *A. Schweitzer* called this Paul’s “mysticism”: Being in Christ is something like a sphere of power in which Christians live and participate. Within this sphere, Christians are given particular initial aims. Paul touches this topic also when he writes on prayer: the spirit of God teaches Christians to pray, sometimes giving them words which they themselves do not understand (Rom 8:26).

⁵³ Cf. *A. Heschel*, *Die Prophetie*, Krakau 1936, on God’s affection (or pathos) in the prophetic literature; *J. Jeremias*, *Die Reue Gottes. Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung*, 2., erweiterte Auflage, Neukirchen: Neukirchner, 1997, on God’s repentance in the Hebrew Bible; *P. Kuhn*, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der rabbinischen Überlieferung (Talmud und Midrasch)*, AGAJU 13, Leiden: Brill, 1978, on God’s grief in rabbinic texts.

⁵⁴ Cf. *L. I. Rabinowitz*, *W. Harvey*, article “Tora”, *EJ* 15, Jerusalem 1974, 1235-1245, *ibid.* esp. 1236 ff.

⁵⁵ *E. P. Sanders*, *Paul*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 118 (dt.: *Paulus. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995, 154); he’s dealing with this issue already in chapter 5 “Theological presuppositions: monotheism and providence” (dt.: “Theologische Voraussetzungen: Monotheismus und Vorsehung”).

⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. *E. P. Sanders* (above n.55), 87 f. (dt.: 114 f.).

⁵⁷ *E. Käsemann*, *Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus*, in: *E. Käsemann*, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, erster und zweiter Band, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965, II 181-193, *ibid.* II 188.

Obviously, there are essential points of agreement between the Pauline and the Whiteheadian perspectives. Is it possible then to define the relationship between Paul and the modern process view?

To me the two concepts appear like a woodcut on the one side, and a detailed realistic painting on the other side, or like an ordinary view on the silhouette of a mountain range and the more detailed perspective through a telescope. In other words: Paul, in his life-sphere, became aware of structures of reality which are coherent to the modern process view, but which the apostle didn't try to probe more deeply.

Expressed in more detail:

Paul's life-sphere was the ancient world, his Jewish tradition, the encounter with Christ and the spreading of Christianity. Here he realized a world in process because of God's action in Christ, because of an increasing and developing Christianity and so forth. In this sphere he also realized the matter of interdependence with the diverging possibilities of mutual enrichment or impoverishment.

But – and this is the first limitation – Paul did not try to illuminate the details of this process. God is involved in the process, yes. God works toward the good, yes. And God relies on humans, yes. But to discuss how, was of no interest for Paul. He did not break down the process in its basic pieces, as Whitehead did, in order to understand the last bits and bites. He only wanted to participate in this process, to participate in God's activity towards the good, to work for a mutual enrichment.

And a second limitation: Paul did not try to generalize his observations and convictions. The realm of his theological, intellectual and practical efforts was mainly his missionary activity and the arising and developing church. Paul spelled out the process-model within this context and did not ask for a universal paradigm, at least not systematically. Only a few times in his letters, he extended his considerations and even then he displays a view that is coherent to the modern process view.

In short: by centering his theological and intellectual work on the Christ event and the realm of the church, Paul – by the way – developed a process-model which is coherent with the modern process view although it is restricted to a certain sphere.

Given this result, the above-mentioned “mutual objections” turn out to be inadequate. If Whitehead had the chance to encounter such an understanding of Paul he most likely had rewritten his comments on Paul that I cited earlier. If process theologians would pay more attention to Paul they could develop process theology even as biblical theology. And if the more traditional theology would take the presented material more seriously there would be no need to reject the process perspective.