

A Comparison of The Conceptions of God In Process and Black Theologies

North American Theological thought has frequently been considered to be the intellectual patrimony of Europe. With few exceptions, American theology has reflected the ethos and intellectual nuances of European countries. Process religious thought and Black Theology however, represent two of those "few exceptions" which attempt to theologize out of the American experience. Process philosophy and theology has primarily addressed the realities of North American modernity. Parenthetically, we are using the term "modernity" to describe a vague and often misunderstood concept employed primarily by social scientists to describe the scientific and technological advances, socio-economic realities, and ensuing consciousness of modern societies. Black Theology, on the other hand, has essentially responded to the crises of racial oppression and social injustice in America. By accenting the socio-ethical dimensions of the Christian faith, Black Theology typifies the best of the prophetic Christian tradition.

Process and Black Theologies not only represent indigenous forms of American religious thought, but they also represent two types of "revisionist" theism.¹ For process religious thought, God is not the impassible, immutable, Aristotelian unmoved Mover so uncritically adopted by classical Christian theism. Rather, God signifies the *elan vital*, the life force which undergrids the evolution of all organisms as well as the totality of the universe. The God of process theism is not conceived as an

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¹ Revisionist theology, according to David Tracy, is the, "dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and correctness, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, the existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity." It is a critical correlation between the "morality of scientific knowledge" and the core philosophical assumptions of the Christian view of reality. See Tracy's *Blessed Rage For Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 32.

entity set apart from the world. Rather, God and the world are inextricably bound together in a creative process.

God, in Black Theology, is first and foremost the liberative One. God is not the originator and sanctifier of the status quo. Rather, God is the One who continually calls into question the status quo and subsequently transforms it. Fundamentally, the liberation and humanization of the oppressed attest to the presence of God in human history. One recognizes the divine presence in the world by witnessing the liberation of the oppressed, the elimination of injustice and dehumanization, and by the social transformation of the world.

The purposes of this essay are to explicate, compare and critically evaluate the concept of God as it is developed within Process and Black Theologies.

By placing these two theologies in juxtaposition, we will be able effectively to analyse the strengths and limitations of each perspective.

I. Social and Cultural Context

Liberation theologians have provided an excellent critique of theological thought. Appropriating the insights of Karl Marx and the proponents of the sociology of knowledge, liberation theologians contend that all human thought, including religious thought, is socially conditioned. James H. Cone accents this point when he writes:

Theology is not universal language; it is *interested* language and thus is always a reflection of the goals and aspirations of a particular people in a definite social setting.²

In essence, theology always arises out of a particular *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life, or life setting). The concepts of God differ substantially in Process and Black Theologies primarily because of their different social settings.

Western modernity is the context out of which Process thought arises. Modern science and the process of secularization are the two most salient features of western modernity. Process thought is essentially a response to these two fundamental aspects of the modern age.

Alfred North Whitehead, the father of contemporary process philosophy, was greatly influenced by early 20th century science. He was conversant with the scientific revolutions taking place in his generation, particularly with Max Plank's quantum theory and Einstein's theory of relativity.³ Furthermore, in 1919, Whitehead was present at the meeting of the Royal Society in London when British Astronomers verified Ein-

² James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). p. 39.

³ See, Alfred North Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1925; Free Press Paperback, 1967).

stein's prediction that light rays are bent as they pass through a solar environment.⁴ This discovery flatly refuted Newton's wave theory of light which was paradigmatic for nearly two hundred years.

Whitehead fully understood the cosmological implications inherent in the scientific revolutions of his generation.⁵ Thomas S. Kuhn has suggested that scientific revolutions spawn changes in worldview.⁶ Put differently, whenever one scientific paradigm replaces another, a concomitant view of reality is installed. The Copernican and Newtonian scientific revolutions are responsible for new cosmological perspectives. Likewise the new physics of Plank and Einstein initiated a new-world picture. Whitehead wrote concerning the paradigm shift in physics:

The progress of science has now reached a turning point. The stable foundations of physics have broken up . . . The old foundations of scientific thought are becoming unintelligible. Time, space, matter, material, ether, electricity, mechanism, organism . . . all require reinterpretations. What is the sense of talking about a mechanical explanation when you do not know what you mean by mechanics?⁷

For Whitehead, the universe was no longer perceived as a mechanical, finely tuned machine. Rather, the universe was an organic, pulsating, and evolving phenomena. Furthermore, Whitehead's God was not the radically transcendent deity of Newtonian cosmology. Rather, God and the universe were inextricably tied together. Between God and the world, there is genuine reciprocity, mutual interdependence, and mutual immanence. The world is affected by God and God is affected by the world.

Henry Nelson Wieman, a contemporary of Whitehead and of Whitehead's most celebrated student, Charles Hartshorne, was another process thinker who took modern science seriously. Wieman was a philosophical empiricist and a religious naturalist. He rejected such traditional approaches to religious knowledge as divine revelation, faith, and religious authority. Wieman believed that only through employing the scientific method could theologians develop an appropriate epistemic ground for religious knowledge.⁸ To be sure, religious truth claims were not exempt from rational, scientific inquiries. In order for theology to be taken seriously by the modern world, it must be subjected to the same critical

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10

⁵ Whitehead attempted to construct a metaphysics and a cosmology that would reflect the changes brought about by modern science. For a look into this endeavor see his *Process and Reality* corrected ed., edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: *The Free Press*, 1978).

⁶ See, Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁷ Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 16.

⁸ For a critical discussion on Wieman's scientific methodology see, Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God In The Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman" (Ph.D dissertation, Boston University, 1955).

analysis as any other discipline. Wieman contended that:

All knowledge must depend ultimately upon science, for science is nothing else than the refined process of knowing. Scientific method is simply the method of knowing . . . The knowledge of God must be ultimately subjected to scientific method.⁹

While the challenges of modern science preoccupied the minds of first generation process philosophers, second generation process theologians were interested in reformulating the concept of God within a post-Christian secularized culture. During the early 1960's such theologians of secularization as Gabriel Vahanian, John A.T. Robinson, Paul N. Van Buren, William Hamilton, Thomas J.J. Altizer, and Harvey Cox, radically called into question the meaningfulness of God-talk. Schubert M. Ogden, a second generation process theologian, summed up the religious crisis thus:

. . . the issue is no longer whether the theologian can make assertions that conflict with science, but whether he can make any meaningful assertions at all. They reason that, if the kind of knowledge represented by science is the only knowledge there is, then the putative assertions of theology, so far as empirically unverifiable, can hardly make good their claim to cognitive meaning.¹⁰

To be sure, the process of secularization, through the hand-maidens of modern science and autonomous reason, had virtually rendered theological assertions and concepts meaningless and superfluous. Essentially, the term "secularization" denotes an intellectual, social, and existential view of reality free from all ecclesiastical controls and supernatural worldviews. It is a perspective whereby, "appeals to other-worldly powers, metaphysical postulates, and miraculous interventions have become logically unnecessary as people have learned to explore and explain the natural world and human life without them."¹¹

The crisis of theology in the modern world therefore, is how to speak meaningfully of God within a secular milieu that no longer takes for granted religious interpretations of reality. Religious thinkers during the secular sixties attempted to confront this challenge by reconstructing the concept of God in such manner as to correspond to the contemporary human experience of reality.

Second generation process theologians, (most notably John Cobb, Jr., and Schubert Ogden) began to appropriate the insights of Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne in developing a process theism which speaks to modern persons.¹² Process theologians generally agree that the major in-

⁹ Henry Nelson Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method* (New York: Macmillan Company; 1925; Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 23.

¹⁰ Schubert M. Ogden, *The Reality of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966; Paperback ed. 1977), p. 9.

¹¹ Lonnie B. Kliever, *The Shattered Spectrum* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 23.

¹² For a discussion on how the concept of God can be reconstructed from a process

adequacy of classical Christian theism is its supernaturalistic understanding of God and the universe.¹³ For process thinkers, supernaturalistic interpretations of reality are fundamentally antiquated cosmologies which are antithetical to the contemporary *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age). If the concept of God is to be meaningful for modern persons, then it must be constructed along the lines of the modern vision of reality. This modern vision does not necessarily negate the reality of God. However, it does demand that theologians radically redefine the nature and activity of that divine reality.

The social and cultural context of Black Theology is quite different from process thought. While Process Theology is shaped by the concerns and issues of western modernity, Black Theology is shaped by social oppression. As early as 1938, Benjamin E. Mays perceptively realized that the Afro-American experience of racial injustice was primarily responsible for shaping black people's conception of God.¹⁴ According to Mays, Afro-American religious thought has been somewhat indifferent to modern reconceptions of God. Afro-Americans have generally adopted traditional notions of God. Accordingly, even those conceptions of God which can be considered as socially emancipatory, still fall within the framework of classical theism. Mays further contends that Afro-Americans will continue to pose moral and ethical questions about God rather than metaphysical and ontological ones, so long as blacks continue to experience the pangs of injustice and oppression. In this respect, it is little wonder that black religious thinkers have been reluctant to engage in speculative metaphysics and abstract theologizing. These issues and problems are not those which arise out of black social reality.¹⁵

perspective, see Ogden's *Reality of God* and, John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

¹³ It is interesting to note that as early as 1893, the theologically orthodox theologian, James Orr, recognized that the major difference between historic Christian faith and Protestant liberalism/modernism was their stance relative to a supernaturalistic understanding of reality. The issue was not simply whether Protestant liberals were denying *certain* Christian doctrines. Rather, the real issue at stake was whether or not reality was a closed continuum of natural cause and effect. Historic Christian faith, according to Orr, has always affirmed a supernatural *Weltanschauung* (Worldview). Protestant liberalism/modernism, on the other hand, has adopted a secular-naturalistic view of reality. By denying the reality of the supernatural, Orr believed that religious liberals and modernists could no longer with integrity claim *Christian* identity. See, James Orr, *The Christian View of God and The World* (New York: Andon D. P. Randolph & Co., 1893). J. Gresham Machen reiterated the same theme in 1923 in his book, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977).

¹⁴ See, Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God* (New York: Chapman & Grimes, Inc., 1938; reprinted; New York: Atheneum, 1973).

¹⁵ Some varieties of Afro-American religious thought—while not given to speculative metaphysics—have radically reconstructed the concept of God. In the religious philosophy of Howard Thurman, for example, the concept of God is quite similar to the one found in

II. Comparison and Evaluation

How do the conceptions of God in Process and Black Theologies compare with each other? We have just examined how the *Sitz im Leben* (situation in life) of the respective theologies mold their conceptions of God. Process theistic perspectives tend to be more abstract and speculative precisely because of their engagement with modern scientific thought. Conversely, Black Theology's God-concepts tend to be more pragmatic and practical due to the existential situation of social oppression.

Process and Black theologies raise different sets of questions relative to divine reality and activity in the world. These questions are also shaped by their respective social realities. Process theologians, on the one hand, desire to understand the *nature* of divine reality. This is done first of all, by clarifying precisely what is meant by the term "God." Does the term point to any objective referent? What is meant by an *objective* referent? Does it suggest that the term "God" refers to a supreme being alongside other beings? Does the term convey the idea that "God" is personal? If so, then in what *sense* is God personal? If the term "God" does not mean a personal Creator, Sustainer, Governor, Judge or Redeemer, then precisely what does the term imply? If such impersonal terms as, "Ground of Being" (Tillich), "Principle of concretion" (Whitehead), "creative event" (Wieman), or, "creative advance" (Cobb), are descriptive of the term "God", then in what sense can we apply the category of existence or non-existence to such concepts?

Fundamentally, process theologians are concerned with metaphysical issues relative to divine reality. The kinds of questions they raise are ontological. That is, they are concerned with the nature of Being. Process theologians contend that metaphysical and ontological questions are logically prior to all other sets of questions. Before one can even raise the question concerning God's existence, one must have some idea about the nature of the reality in question. Schubert Ogden's critique of liberation theologies reflects this methodological bias. He contends that the major limitation of liberation theologies is that they "Typically focus on the existential meaning of God for us without dealing at all adequately with the metaphysical being of God in himself."¹⁶ Ogden contends that by not doing the requisite metaphysical thinking about God, liberation theologies simply end up in uncritically accepting the antiquated framework of

process theology. Luther Smith, Jr., contends that Thurman affirms a form of *panentheism*. This concept is not the same as *pantheism* which teaches that the divine essence is embedded within nature. God is *in* the world and the world is *in* God. For an analysis of Thurman's religious philosophy, see Luther Smith's, *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1981).

¹⁶ Schubert M. Ogden, *Faith and Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 1979). p. 34.

classical theism. The only change that is made in the old theism is that it becomes politicized. Notwithstanding this politicization, however, the metaphysical structure of traditional theism remains intact.

Black theologians would agree that they do not generally begin their theological program by raising speculative and metaphysical questions. As indicated earlier, black social reality dictates other sets of questions. In this respect, Ogden is quite right. That is, Black Theology *is* preoccupied with the *existential* meaning of God for black existence. The kinds of questions that Black Theology raises are axiological in character. Put differently Black Theology is primarily concerned about the *value* and significance of God for black people today.

Ironically, by raising axiological questions about divine reality, Black Theology appears more genuinely American than its White counterpart. Disillusioned with European speculative metaphysics, the American pragmatist, William James, raised the question about philosophy's "cash value." Although European philosophers considered James' term a bit crass, the point was made. James wanted to probe into the distinct character of a nascent, indigenous, American philosophy.¹⁷ According to philosopher William Barrett, James spoke of the "cash value" of an idea, to express ". . . the measure of its meaning: the requirement that somewhere along the line this idea must make a difference within our actual experience."¹⁸

Black Theology, in this respect, is fundamentally concerned about the "cash value" of the concept and reality of God. If the concept of God does not make a difference within the "actual experience" of black people, then that concept must be jettisoned.

Black Theology contends that the true nature of God is revealed through divine activity in human history. James H. Cone, for an example, asserts that "to ask, 'Who Is God?' is to focus on what he is doing; and to look at what he is doing is to center on human events as they pertain to the liberation of suffering humanity".¹⁹ In essence, Black Theology shares the same biblical understanding of God as the ancient Israelites. When the anonymous Hebrew deity finally revealed the divine self through the Tetragrammaton (the divine name YHWH, later translated Yahweh), the people of Israel realized that they were in the presence of the holy. The name "Yahweh" does not so much convey the

¹⁷ For an exploration into the contours of American philosophy see John J. McDermott, *The Culture of Experience: Philosophical Essays in the American Grain* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

¹⁸ William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979) p. 175

¹⁹ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 142.

metaphysical essence of God as it does the action and presence of God in historical affairs. The German theologian, Hans Kung, in exploring the dimensions of the divine name, believes that the term "Yahweh" means, 'I will be present' I will be present, guiding, helping, strengthening, liberating."²⁰ This interpretation of the divine name is consistent with the divine activity described in Exodus 6:5-8. In this biblical passage, Yahweh promises to liberate, adopt, and sustain the people of Israel. To be sure, the people of Israel did not attempt to bifurcate the nature and activity of God.

Black Theology contends that the metaphysical essence of God cannot be divorced from divine activity in the world. There is no way to understand the nature or being of God apart from understanding God's actions in history. In this respect, the being of God is revealed through the activity of God.

Both Process and Black theologies agree that God acts in history. However, they differ as to how and in what *sense* God acts in the world. Guided by the naturalistic modern view of reality, process thought denies that God acts supernaturally in history. Indeed, to suggest that God acts in such a fashion is to negate the common life experiences of modern persons. Divine activity is essentially expressed through natural phenomena and historical events.²¹

For Black Theology, God is not simply active in human history in general. Rather, God is active in the particular and concrete struggles of oppressed people.²² To witness the destruction of racism, sexism, class exploitation, imperialism, and militarism, is in fact to witness divine activity. Like process thought, some types of contemporary Black Theology reject supernaturalistic interpretations of God's actions in the world. Accordingly, God does *not* act independently of human endeavor. God always acts *through* the struggles of the oppressed in order to transform their social reality.

²⁰ Hans Kung, *Does God Exist?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), pp 621-22.

²¹ For an excellent discussion on the nature of divine activity within the modern world, see Owen C. Thomas, ed. *God's Activity In The World: The Contemporary Problem* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983).

²² Black Theology is not the only religious perspective that affirms the contextualization of divine revelation. Jewish religious thought has traditionally affirmed similar notions. Emil L. Fackenheim has suggested that Jewish religious thought has always situated the divine presence within the particularity of the Jewish experience. He states; "If God is ever present in history, this is not a presence-in-general but rather a presence to particular men in particular situations. To be sure, unless it were that of a mere tribal deity, such a presence must have universal implications. These implications, however, are manifest only in the particular; and they make of the men to whom they are manifest, not universalistic philosophers who rise above their situation, but rather witnesses, in, through, and because of their particularity to the nations." See Fackenheim's, *God's Presence In History* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972) p. 8.

In evaluating Process and Black theologies, we want to center our attention primarily upon their methodological approaches, and their concepts of divine activity in the world. As we have seen, process thought is a response to the challenges of western modernity. While process theology attempts to maintain some semblance of a Christian identity, it essentially has a greater affinity with the *geist* of modern secular culture. To be sure, process thought shares the same cognitive assumptions and view of reality as modern secular culture. It is guided by the "morality of scientific knowledge", and is fundamentally shaped by the *Weltanschauung* of modernity. Essentially, process thought is a variant of Protestant liberalism/modernism. Sociologist, Peter L. Berger, writes concerning the engagement between religious liberalism and secular culture the following:

Secularity . . . asserts the closed character of the universe—there are no miracles, no demons, no supernatural realms of any sort. Insofar as the model still wants to hold on to an alleged core of the religious tradition (which, in a Christian case, minimally means some notion of God as well as of the redemptive significance of Christ), that core must then be articulable in terms that exclude the "no longer possible" definitions of reality. In other words, the tradition must be demythologized, stripped of its supernaturalistic trappings—indeed, it must be cognitively secularized.²³

In the opinion of this writer, it seems that process thought has: 1) uncritically accepted the supposed cognitive superiority of the modern view of reality and, 2) uncritically accepted the supposed pervasiveness of secularized modern consciousness. In terms of the former issue, there is nothing in human experience to suggest that the so-called modern view of reality is anymore valid than the Christian view of God and the world. The bias that holds to the uniformity of natural causes within a closed system is precisely that—a bias. An affirmation of the Christian view of reality, should not suggest a return to a Ptolemaic cosmology or a pre-critical theology. Such an affirmation simply suggests that reality is open ended. The rarity and oddity of supernatural occurrences does not *necessarily* preclude their reality. By "supernatural" we mean, "the assertion or belief that there is an other reality, and one of ultimate significance for man, which transcends the reality within our everyday experience."²⁴

Furthermore, impersonal theistic reformulations are *not the only* possible conceptions of God for today. Admittedly, anthropomorphic concepts of God are grossly inadequate for the modern mind. They tend to picture God as a magnified human being. Conceiving God as "personal" should not suggest this type of anthropomorphism. This idea merely sug-

²³ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), p. 112.

²⁴ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumer of Angels* (Garden City, New York: anchor Books/Doubleday, 1970), p. 2.

gests that whatever else God may be beyond human conceptions, God is not *less* than personal. Some theologians attempt to solve the problem of divine identity by referring to God as either "transpersonal" or "suprapersonal." To be sure, this linguistic "slight of hand" doesn't really solve anything since by definition whatever is suprapersonal is at *least* personal.

Process theologians, in the opinion of this writer, tend to overestimate the pervasiveness and cognitive sovereignty of secularized modern consciousness. Religious liberals in general, and process theologians in particular, speak as if the "modern scientific world-view," "the modern view of reality", and "secularized modern consciousness," were philosophical perspectives and cognitive commitments shared by everyone within the western world. Sociologist Andrew Greeley, however, suggests that only a very small percentage of the American populace actually could be considered truly "secular".²⁵ Accordingly, the only persons who represent so-called "modern wo/man," are those within the intellectual community. Moreover, not everyone within the "knowledge class" share in the Weltanschauung of modernity. Greeley contends that empirical data simply does not support the notion that most people within American society have adopted a secular world-view. Sociological studies in fact indicate that American religious consciousness has not been appreciably affected by scientific and technological advances. Most Americans still basically affirm a traditional theism.²⁶

Process theologians appear to have accepted the Bultmannian myth that it is "impossible" (or at best improbable) for persons to benefit from scientific and technological advances and simultaneously affirm a supernaturalistic view of reality.²⁷ The assumption is that those who have been exposed to the benefits of modern science and technology also accept the philosophical framework of modern science. Needless to say, this is a bogus assumption. In reality, most Americans enjoy the benefits of advanced technology without giving a second thought as to its philosophical foundations. To be sure, a consumer oriented society is not prepared to critically think through the philosophical implications of advanced technology.

Most Americans suffer from a mild form of religious schizophrenia.

²⁵ For a critique of most sociological theories of secularization see, Andre M. Greeley, *Unsecular Man* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Schocken Books, 1972).

²⁶ Sociologists are beginning to reappraise the relationship between modernity and traditional religious belief. For a look at some of these theories see, Mary Douglass and Steven M. Tipton, ed., *Religion and America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); also, James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion And The Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

²⁷ See Bultmann's "New Testament and Mythology" *Kerygma and Myth* ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald Fuller. (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

That is, they think and live in two entirely different realms of reality: the "profane" reality of the ordinary workaday world and the "sacred" reality of Sunday morning religious experience. The most amazing aspect, however, is that most people are totally unaware of this "double-consciousness". Many people do not realize the seeming contradiction in driving a highly technologically advanced motorized vehicle to a faith healing revival. The point being made, however, is that process theologians have grossly misunderstood the impact of modern science upon human consciousness.

Lastly, the process and black theological notions of how God acts in the world, are epistemologically problematic. The religious naturalism implicit within process thought, makes any discussion of how *God* acts in the world virtually meaningless. In essence, how does one know that it is *God* acting within natural phenomena and historical occurrences? The eminent sociobiologist, Edward Wilson, indicates the superfluity of this kind of theologizing when he writes:

This apparent exclusion has spurred still other philosophers and scientists to create "process theology", in which God's presence is inferred from the inherent properties of atomic structure. As conceived originally by Alfred North Whitehead, God is not to be viewed as an extraneous force, who creates miracles, and presides over metaphysical verities. He is present continuously and ubiquitously. . . . Process is reality, reality process, and the hand of God is manifest in the laws of science. Hence religious and scientific pursuits are intrinsically compatible, so that well-meaning scientists can return to their calling in a state of mental peace.²⁸

The superfluity of process theology's concept of divine activity, lies in the fact that there is little difference in saying that the universe is governed by natural laws, and saying that, "God is manifest in the laws of science". Since there is no way to determine precisely *how* God is manifested in the laws of science, the statement itself becomes unnecessary, thus meaningless.

Black Theology suffers from a similar epistemic problem. If the activity of God is primarily manifested in the struggles of the oppressed, how does one know where human ideology begins and God's activity ends? Put differently, are we to identify all of the political actions of the oppressed with the activity of God? If not, then how do we clearly distinguish between the two? These are questions which black theologians must critically analyze if their theistic conceptions are to be credible.²⁹

²⁸ Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: University Press, 1978) pp. 171-72 Harvard.

²⁹ James H. Cone honestly confronts this epistemic problem in his discussion on "Black Theology and Ideology" in, *God of The Oppressed*. Unfortunately, from the perspective of this writer, Cone does not provide a satisfactory answer for this dilemma. Accordingly, there is no way that one can be certain about the veracity of one's religious truth-claims or moral choices. As historical beings, we all "know in part." Cone contends, however, that

To be sure, Process Theology and Black Theology are two religious perspectives that take the American experience seriously. Their theologies, in some respects, are quite novel. In their attempts, however, to reconstruct the concept of God (particularly process thought), they might have bargained away more than what is necessary. Fundamentally, God must not only be the *ground* of creative process and liberating action, but God must somehow transcend them in order to give them meaning and direction.

divine revelation can never be equated with human actions, strictly speaking. This assertion by Cone needs to be guided by certain criteria by which human and divine activity can be *reasonably* distinguished. Such an endeavor is *not* a quest for certainty. Rather, it is an attempt to establish some necessary and sufficient conditions by which human activity can be discerned as revelatory.