



# **God – God as Personal, God as Father and, God as love**

## **The concept of God in Process Theology**

- The challenge of understanding anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God
- God as Father and King
- Feminist perspectives
  
- God in Process Theology
- God as neither omnipotent nor Creator

## The Anthropomorphic Tradition

In the last booklet, we looked at two sets of ideas about God: that his nature is on the one hand transcendent, unknowable and wholly other; on the other that God is immanent and can relate to persons. To some extent these different ideas can be reconciled by holding that God is both transcendent and immanent, and we have seen that the language of the Trinity gives us one way of doing this. In particular, to describe Jesus as the Son of God means that as the second member of the Trinity, Jesus was fully God; yet at the same time as God incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth was fully human. Most Christians accept this language as a coherent way of talking about God, but one problem with it is that it requires us to talk about God anthropomorphically. **Anthropomorphism** is the practice of attributing human characteristics to non-human entities. With regard to God it is anthropomorphic describe God in human terms The Bible frequently describes God in human terms.



The Bible frequently describes God in human terms. For example, in Genesis 2:2, God 'rested' from the work of creation; in Genesis 3:8-9 Adam and Eve hear the sound of God 'walking' in the garden in the of the day, and God 'asks them where they are'; in Genesis 6:6, God is 'sorry' and 'grieved' that he made humanity; in Exodus 32:14, God 'change his mind' about bringing evil on his people; in Romans 5:5, God's love is poured into human hearts; in Psalm 35:15 God's 'eyes' look toward the righteous, and his 'ears' listen to their cry. In other words, God is portrayed as having human actions, human emotions and a human body. Perhaps the ultimate anthropomorphism in the Bible is that God himself assumes human form as the Son.

There are clear problems in understanding anthropomorphic language about God. For example:

- To describe God as having human actions, human emotions and a human body reduces God to the human level. If God has human physical characteristics, then he presumably shares some of the physical limitations of humans. How can a supposedly all-powerful God be described in limiting terms?
- Equally, to say that God judges, forgives and laments, for example suggests that God has a conscious brain, since these are brain states that with humans can be seen using magnetic resonance imaging to scan the brain. How are we to understand the concept of a God whose brain state are potentially analysable like our own? How can such a God be the Creator of the universe?
- Presumably the universe cannot have been created from inside itself so the creator must have been separate from the universe, and must have been transcendent (above and beyond space-time). Anthropomorphic descriptions of God seem to suggest that God is a part of the universe rather than its creator.
- Sigmund Freud for example understands the concept of God in terms of wish-fulfillment. We desire a God who forgives /saves/ heals/is just/creates peace, and so we invent God in our own image. Perhaps this explains the state of the human race, because such a being simply cannot do what is required.
- How can such a limited God save humans from sin, or be the object of worship?
- In summary, human language has developed over thousands of years and reflects human concerns, thoughts and values. It is therefore challenge for us to understand how human language can be used about God and by God

**Task: Look up the following bible verses and note the anthropic features they give to God.**

Exodus 20:5;  
1 Samuel 15:35;  
Jeremiah 30:23-24;  
Romans 1:18

Exodus 7:5;  
Numbers 6:24;  
Revelation 19:15

John 14:6-7

Genesis 1:25;  
Hosea 11:4 and 13:8;  
Isiah 42:14  
Psalm 123:2

To illustrate the depth of anthropomorphic language about God, consider now, what the Christian tradition says about God as Personal Father/ Love King.

## God as Personal

- To say that God is personal does not mean that God literally 'is' a person; rather this kind of language is analogical and is used to argue can be 'related to' as a person. For example, a God who answers prayer or gives people religious experiences, is the kind of God who is experienced in a personal sense. As some people put it, they feel that they have a relationship with God.
- A personal God would therefore be immanent within the world, and in the previous section we saw that whereas the Christian 'Godhead' is thought of as transcendent and unknowable, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are thought of as immanent and personal
- In Moltmann's 'social' account of the Trinity which puts the emphasis on the three persons of the Trinity existing in a community of mutual self-giving and receiving love. This offers a model for human personal relationships
- We also see that most Christians (for example, those who follow Catholic Natural Moral Law or Protestant Divine Command Theory) believe that moral standards are not just a matter of opinion: they are objective and given by a personal God.

**Task: Highlight passages & explain briefly the various ways here in which God is portrayed as personal.**

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."''

Then Jesus said to them, 'Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him." And suppose the one inside answers, "Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

'So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

**Luke 11:1-13**

## God as Father

The image of the human father stands as a metaphor for a number of qualities, such as strength, power, authority, wisdom and love, but as far as the Bible is concerned, to call God 'Father' is not just a familial metaphor. In the Ancient Near East, society was organised along patriarchal line patriarch being the oldest male in a family, having complete control of the other members of the family. Although some women did achieve positions of power and influence (see the story of Deborah in Judges 4), the adult males held political, economic, domestic and moral power.

Deuteronomy 32:6 describes God as the Father who creates the human race, and in Exodus 4:22 God describes Israel as his first-born son: the son who is rescued from Egypt (Hosea 11:1). In Jeremiah 3:19, God laments the faithlessness of Judah, who he thought would call him Father. In Malachi 1:6, God is the Father who should be honoured. In 2 Samuel 7:14, God announces that he will be the Father of the Davidic dynasty.

To talk of God as Father is, of course, male anthropomorphism. As the God of Israel, Yahweh's role is in effect described as that of the patriarchal Father. After the disobedience of Adam and Eve he exercises punitive justice by ordaining different roles for men and women in which agriculture becomes a matter of toil and sweat for men, and women continue being fruitful and multiplying, but childbirth becomes painful for them (Genesis 3:16-19). In return for protection and security, God lays down absolute religious and moral laws, and does not hesitate to punish breaches of the rules, going so far as to bring about the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians (2 Kings 17) and that of Judah by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:18-25:21).

Perhaps the most anthropomorphic aspect of God's role as the Father is seen in the New Testament, where God becomes incarnate through his Son, Jesus. In the Apostles' Creed, the statement of belief in God 'the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth' is followed by that of belief in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. God is Father in both senses here: the Father Creator all things, and the Father of Jesus.

Jesus himself frequently uses the title Father to refer to God, for example, in teaching the disciples the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father* in Matthew 6:8-9, where that form of address reflects the whole range of reverence, respect and love that all Christians have for God as the heavenly Father. In the wording of the Lord's Prayer, there is a sense in which Christians who use it share the Father-Son relationship of Jesus with God as they pray. The Aramaic word that Jesus would have used of God as Father would have been *Abba*, which can also have the intimate meaning, 'My Father'.

Avoid the popular mythology that *Abba* means 'daddy' in first-century Aramaic; however *Abba* does signify God's approachability as the Father for all people, so in Romans 8:15 (see also Galatians 4:6), Paul suggests that when Christians cry, 'Abba-the Father!' they become 'adopted' sons of God; thus the emphasis on God's fatherly nature is both intimate, powerful and all-inclusive.

**Task:** The only other reference to 'Abba - The Father' in the New Testament is where Jesus makes a passionate appeal to God before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36):

**'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee: remove this cup from me; yet not what will, but what thou wilt.'**

In your view, what qualities of God as Father is Jesus appealing to here?

**Qualities:**

## God as Love

Alongside God's main characteristics of complete power and knowledge the Christian tradition puts an equal emphasis on God's love, holding that God is omnibenevolent - 'all-loving' / 'perfectly good'. This can be a very difficult attribute to comprehend, not least because of the problem of evil. You will remember that in the section on the problem of evil, the logical problem of evil can be stated in terms of the 'inconsistent triad':

1. God is omnipotent (all-powerful).
2. God is omnibenevolent (all-loving all-good)
3. Evil exists An all-powerful God must be able to abolish evil; an loving all good God must wish to abolish evil. Why then does evil exist? The problem is made worse by adding a fourth proposition
4. God is omniscient (all-knowing).

At the point of creation, God must have been aware of the sheer extent of evil that would befall the world, so why, then, did he bother to create it?

We looked at three attempts to solve this problem: the Free Will Defence the Irenaeus-Hick theodicy and the views of Process Theology, and doubtless you will have formed your own opinions as to whether or not any such views offer a satisfactory solution to the problem It is probably fair to say that although the philosophical solutions may not work too well, most Christians put their trust in the loving nature of God Their main evidence for this comes from the Bible:

### **God's love is the basis of the covenant between God and Israel.**

In fact, this is a special kind of love, known as *hesed*, for example Deuteronomy 7:9, where it is translated as 'steadfast love':

**'Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments...'**



**The greatest gift of the Spirit is love,** because it is God's love poured into human hearts. (Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-18, which is Paul's great 'hymn to love'.)

### **God is love, and this is the basis for loving others:**

**Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love ... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.' (1 John 4:7-8, 11-12)**

### **God's love is encapsulated by the suffering and death of Jesus:**

**'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world ... that the world might be saved through him.' (John 3:16-17)**



**The fact that God is love requires love to be the basis of human also.** Matthew 22:34-40, a lawyer asks Jesus which is relationships In the greatest commandment, to which Jesus replies: 'You shall love the with all your soul, and with Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.' (verses 37-40). By 'the law and the prophets', Jesus means the whole content of law and prophecy in the Bible, so literally the whole sphere of human activity is encapsulated within the commands to love God and other people. Again, this is not just a metaphor: Jesus sets it as the basis for right conduct.



**If God is love, then love describes the relationship between the persons of the Trinity,** since they are 'mutually indwelling'. Where, for example, John 3:35 says that 'the Father loves the Son', this is not simply a metaphor: it is part of the nature of the Trinity. In John 17:20-26, Jesus suggests that God's love for him is pre-existent: given before the foundation of the world'. (verse 24)

**The kind of love that Jesus is talking about is *agape*.** Agape is Jesus' 'other person-regarding' love, which comes from the nature of God as love. You will remember that this is why Joseph Fletcher placed agape at the centre of Christian Situation Ethics, with direct reference to Jesus' answer to the lawyer.

**Do unto others as you would have them do to you...**



**Finally, the belief that humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27) means that God's love must be reflected in the human capacity for *agape*.** Perhaps the most poignant representation of this is in Michelangelo's fresco painting of *The Creation of Adam*, which in the mirroring of the pose between God and Adam is generally believed to reflect the creation of Adam in God's image. God is portrayed as being accessible and persona and not as remote and unknowable.



## God as King

The Bible is full of God's kingly titles, such as: Majesty, Lord, Sovereign, God of gods, King of the whole earth. To call God 'King' is an obvious metaphor, since the power of the king in the ancient world was usually absolute. We can see this kind of royal imagery in the prophet Isaiah vision of Yahweh as an enthroned deity in the Jerusalem Temple:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'

(Isaiah 6:1-5)

The throne in this vision is the Ark of the Covenant, which was built during the Israelite wanderings in the wilderness, after the Exodus from Egypt. It was seen as the throne seat above which God was enthroned as 'the King, the Lord of hosts' (verse 5). Yahweh was envisaged as presiding over a heavenly council in much the same way as the earthly king presided over his court, with the difference that Yahweh's council was composed of the gods of the nations who were all subservient to Yahweh. There are reminders of this concept throughout the Old Testament, not least in Genesis 1:26-27, where God says: "Let us make man in our image, where the us presumably refers to God's attendant court. Not only that, the image is not just male: verse 27 shows quite clearly that humans were created 'male and female', so Yahweh's court included female deities.



Psalms 24, 27, 93, 95-99 are known as Enthronement Psalms, because they are celebrating Yahweh's kingship. For example:

**'The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice...' (97:1)**

**'For thou, o Lord, art most high over all the earth ... exalted far above all gods.' (97:9)**

**'He sits enthroned upon the cherubim ... Mighty King, lover of justice...' (99:1,4)**

In Psalm 24, Yahweh is the 'King of glory ... strong and mighty in battle' (verse 8). One of God's main kingly titles appears in verse 10 – *Yahweh Sebaoth* – 'The Lord of hosts', which refers to his leadership of the hosts / gods of heaven, picturing Yahweh as a warrior king of ultimate power.

For Christianity, the most important feature of all this royal imagery is how it is used in the New Testament to portray Jesus as the Messiah, a title which means 'king' / 'anointed one'. In Luke 9:20 Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, to which Peter replies: 'The Christ of God'. 'Christ' is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for 'Messiah'. The Jews were expecting a warrior king who would get rid of the Romans, but in the New Testament Jesus' role as the Messiah is to bring about the Kingdom of God. The kingly reign of God is announced by John the Baptist: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 3:2), and Jesus is the one who brings it about.

There are many different interpretations of what the Kingdom of God is, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some interpret the Kingdom as the new relationship brought about between God and humanity by Jesus as the Messiah, who dies and then is resurrected to atone for the sins of humanity. Some see the Kingdom as an ongoing reality inseparable from Jesus and the life of the Church. Some see it as a future event heralded by the 'Second Coming' of Christ the Messiah, when the forces of evil are finally defeated and the dead are raised to eternal life:

'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.'

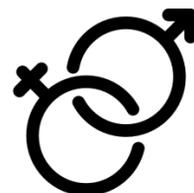
**(Revelation 11:15)**

We can perhaps summarise these different understandings by saying that Christ's Kingdom is both a present and a future reality for all who believe in him. This forms part of the discussion in the next chapter, on Self, Death and Afterlife.

**Task: Summarise why Christians might define God as Love.**

**Task: Summarise why Christians might define God as King.**

## Anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God



**The challenge of understanding anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God (God as Father and King), including feminist perspectives.**

We have referred already to the challenges of using anthropomorphic language about God: it seems to limit God. God becomes a being with human emotions, human actions and human physical characteristics. How could such a God be the Creator, or save humans from sin, or be worthy of worship? Does all such language merely reflect the human desire for a God, who protects, forgives and heals?

Not only that, anthropomorphic language about God is distinctly gender specific, so God is male, and is described as both King and Father – a figure of authority and power who commands and rules the lives of his subjects, having the power of life and death over all. How are we to understand language which makes so much of male characteristics? Why should we not refer to God as Queen and Mother?

### **The use of gender-neutral language:**

In response to this, in the past two decades new translations of the Bible have appeared that are gender neutral (using terms that are neither masculine nor feminine). For example:

- 'man' (meaning) the human race becomes 'mortals' / 'humankind'
- 'man' (meaning a male) becomes 'person' / 'anyone'
- 'son' becomes 'child'
- 'father' becomes 'parent'

Whether this helps with understanding the Bible is a matter for debate. As we have seen, terms such as 'Father' and 'King' are part of the patriarchal culture of the Ancient Near East, and to remove them from the text is to remove them from their proper context. The royal line in Israel was male, with the single exception of Athaliah, who became queen at the death of her son by murdering all the male contenders, ruling for six years until she suffered the same fate at the hands of a surviving male heir (1 Chronicles 22:10-23:15). Athaliah is the exception that proves the rule: to refer to God as Father and King is a cultural norm in the context of the Old Testament.

For a good overview of the controversy about the use of gender neutral language in translating the Bible, you should look briefly at Michael Marlowe's account at:  
<http://www.bible-researcher.com/inclusive.html>.

## The feminist critique of anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God:



The feminist critique of anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God offer perhaps the most serious attack on the biblical view of God particularly with the objection that it is irrelevant to half of the human population.

To give an outline of one of the most coherent and consistent feminist critiques, here is an overview from Daphne Hampson.

Whereas feminist theology can be a gender-inclusive theology (using language which does not privilege men over women / avoids bias towards particular sex or a non-gendered theology for example replacing 'Father' with 'Creator'), the language of the Bible is clearly masculine. God is defined as an omni-everything, and so represents what every male would like to be in his wildest dreams: all-powerful, all-knowing: perfect in every way, and clearly and unequivocally male. God is the male patriarch carried to extremes. He is the all-powerful warrior, leader of the heavenly armies, supreme judge, king, ruler and - in fact - unchallengeable male despot. Much of the problem with Christianity, in Hampson's view, is that its 'truths' are fundamentally flawed. Christians insist that there has been, and can be, only one Christ and one resurrection, for example, so the whole Christian story that was 'true' in the first century CE must necessarily be true in the twenty-first century CE, which means that all its patriarchal 'baggage' has to be accepted in the twenty-first century into a society which is becoming increasingly less patriarchal. We no longer (for the most part) live in the kind of tribal, male-dominated society that was characteristic of Jewish life during Old and New Testament times. Hampson puts it as strongly as this:

**'...I have concluded that fundamental to the Abrahamic religions is the will to subvert women and establish man as norm. That is to say that, in so far as this is the case, these religions are a form of fascism.'**

Monotheism in effect means male monotheism, and why should women be subject to that which is represented as unreservedly male? Why should women pray to a male God? The archetypal prayer Jesus taught his disciples is to 'Our Father'. What happened to 'Our Mother'? To what extent can Trinitarian thought be inclusive of women, when we have a male God the Father, and a male God the Son? There are a few Christian groups who see the Holy Spirit as feminine, on the grounds that the Hebrew for 'spirit' (*ruah*) is feminine, but this is very much a minority viewpoint. Hampson comments that:

**'What is to be understood as female is something vague; indeed the Spirit is often designated as neuter. The two "male" persons of the trinity by contrast are anthropomorphically conceived entities, "persons" to whom people direct their prayers. Moreover the Spirit has ever played second fiddle to the male Christ within trinitarian theology.'**

Feminist theologians also point to Jesus' apparent lack of commitment to any kind of female equality, not least in that he consistently refers to God as the Father. Jesus was unquestionably kind to women, but the idea that had any kind of feminist perspective on society is something for which he there is no evidence.

Some of these issues are addressed in the A-Level section on 'Christianity, gender and sexuality' but as a final comment here on the anthropomorphic aspects of Christianity, Hampson suggests that just because we can picture God as a person - as a Father and King, for example - it does not follow that God is in fact such an anthropomorphic agent. Feminist analysis of the language of Christian prayer convinces some that belief in a personal God who enters into relationships with people 'requires' anthropomorphism, because God is required to be a being of this kind in order to take part in the dialogue of prayer. In Hampson's view:

**'As one's intellectual understanding of what the word God connotes changes, so too may one's practice.'**

so that instead of the dialogue of prayer we might think of ourselves as:

**'...being open and present to what one conceives to be a greater reality than one's self, knowing oneself as loved and upheld.'**

As a critique of anthropomorphic, patriarchal, male-dominated Christian ideas, this is very challenging material, and it is not difficult to see why Hampson thinks that such ideas can no longer serve as credible approach to religion in the modern era. There are, of course, feminists who disagree. Some in particular to Jesus' general approach to women, not least his defence of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11), together with the fact that he clearly accepted women as disciples. Had Jesus gone so far as to advocate modern feminist principles in the context of first-century Judaism, he would perhaps have achieved very little.

**Task: Summarise Hampson's critiques of anthropomorphic and gender-specific language about God.**

# The concept of God in Process Theology

## The Process God as neither omnipotent nor Creator

We'll narrow the focus on Process view to that of God as neither omnipotent nor creator. Process thought arose primarily from the work of the English philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Whitehead was fascinated by quantum mechanics, which in simple terms is the science of the very small. Whereas models of the universe from the time of Isaac Newton (1643-1727) tended to see the universe as a gigantic kind of mechanism working by precise mathematical laws, quantum mechanics began to reveal a universe in a constant dynamic of flux and change, and according to Whitehead, God is also growing and changing. This is the background from which Griffin's Process Theology evolved.

## Griffin's rejection of creation from nothing', and his rejection of God as the Creator

The main point from which Griffin starts his theodicy concerns the Christian view of *creatio ex nihilo* – 'creation out of nothing', which most Christians assume is the way that God created the world in Genesis 1:1-3. Griffin insists that this is based on a mistranslation of the text. To recap, this is the Revised Standard Version:

'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.  
And God said, "Let there be light": and there was light.'

This translation of the Hebrew text shows that God's first creative act is to create the universe ('the heavens and the earth'), and it implies that God called the universe into existence from nothing simply by using words of creative power:

However, a more likely translation of the Hebrew would be:

'In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth, the earth being without form and void, and darkness being upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters, God said. "Let there be light"; and there was light.'

If you compare the two translations, you will see that the second gives a completely different sense of the passage, because the phrase, the earth being without form and void assumes that the universe already exists. What God is creating, therefore, is not the universe: rather he is creating order out of the formless and void chaos.

According to Griffin then:

- The universe is uncreated, and eternal it was always there.
- What was there was primitive, unformed matter, that is, chaos.
- God was also always there, and just as human minds and bodies exist together, God and the universe exist together. The technical word is that they exist 'panentheistically', meaning everything is in God. Equally God is 'in' the universe, so both are eternal and uncreated.
- God's role was therefore creative in the sense that he persuaded matter way from chaos into a state of greater order and complexity. The development of the galaxies we now see is one aspect of this persuasion. The evolution of life on earth is another.

## The concept of God in Process Theology

You'll remember from Sources of Wisdom and Authority that we looked at the stories of creation and flood in Genesis and pointed out that they are in large part copies of earlier Babylonian stories the *Enuma Elis* (the creation narrative) and the Epic of Gilgamesh (the Flood story). The Babylonian accounts presuppose that the gods created the world out of chaotic pre-existing matter, so it seems probable that Genesis makes the same assumption.

Put simply, then, most Christian scholars and most Christians assume that God created the universe out of nothing, because they believe that this is what Genesis is teaching. Process theologians such as Griffin beg to differ: they make a very strong case that what Genesis really teaches is that God is a 'persuader': he does not create out of nothing - he persuades what is already there into some kind of order. He persuades order to come out of chaos.

### Griffin's rejection of God's omnipotence

1. Perhaps the main source of the Christian belief that God is omnipotent (all-powerful) is the doctrine of creation out of nothing, because a God who can literally bring the universe into existence from nothing would truly have unlimited power. But, if God did not create the universe from nothing, then he cannot have unlimited power, because there is something he cannot do: he cannot now create the universe, since it has always existed.

2. Not only that, chaotic matter has some power of its own to resist God. Think again of the analogy between human minds and bodies. We only ever see minds that are connected with bodies, so it makes sense to think of God and the universe in the same kind of way: God is 'in' the universe and the universe is 'in' God in the same way that our minds and bodies are both part of one thing – a human being. We are mental and physical unities, and we can understand the idea of God /the universe being a similar unity. Equally, your mind can control some of the workings of its body, but as Jesus says in Matthew 7:27, try adding to your height (or your lifespan) just by being anxious about it. If the mind of God seeks to persuade the vastness of the universe (or the multiverse), it has presumably taken him 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang to organise the universe into the form in which we now see it. God's power on this kind of thinking is immense, but it is not unlimited, so God is not omnipotent.

### Assessing the Process view of God

The discovery through quantum mechanics that, at the sub-atomic scale reality is a chaotic process of flux and change, gives some support to Griffin's argument that God's creation of the universe was not creation from nothing but instead was the gradual ordering of pre-existing chaotic material.

Whether or not the doctrine of creation from nothing is implied in some biblical texts is a contested point, but Griffin is almost certainly right that the Hebrew of the main creation account in Genesis 1:1-3 is talking about creation from chaotic materials, and this understanding is strongly supported by the fact that the biblical account reflects the Babylonian stories of Creation and Flood.

God's lack of omnipotence in Process Theology can be seen, in some ways, as a strength, for example, it explains why God does not control evil – he cannot. Some consider it to be a major weakness, however, holding that a non-omnipotent God would not be worth worshipping.

Note that Process Theologians do not on the whole claim that it 'is' the case that God is not the Creator and is not omnipotent; rather they claim that what we observe of the universe suggests that this is 'probably' the case. Questions such as this can be considered afresh after looking at the other sections where we consider Process thinking.

**Task: Summarise the concept of God in Process Theology. Be sure to include:**  
**Griffin's rejection of creation from nothing**  
**Griffin's rejection of God's omnipotence**  
**Summary of Process view of God**

