PARTS I AND II
DIALOG 29:3 Summer 1990

THEOLOGY UPDATE

JOHN COBB, THEOLOGIAN IN PROCESS PART I

By Ted Peters *

1990 marks a significant watershed for the School of Theology at Claremont, and for schools of theology everywhere. This year John B. Cobb, Jr. retires, flagging the most recent boundary crossed by one of the most adventuresome explorers of new theological terrain in our generation. Almost encyclopedic in scope, Cobb's scholarly map ranges from Whiteheadian metaphysics to pastoral care, from Christology to inter-religious dialogue, from German *Wissenschaft* to feminist method, from ecology to economics. His erudition is matched only by his humility. His sophistication is matched only by his gentleness of spirit. Appreciated the world over for his insightful lecturing and irenic sensitivity to delicate intellectual problems, Cobb is perhaps best loved by his students. He is a teacher who inspires. His students grow in independence and wholeness. In John Cobb we find a marvelous marriage of faith and wonder, integrity and openness, commitment and concern.

Perhaps it is meet, right, and salutary in this retirement year for "Theology Update" to remind us of the significant contribution this distinctive person has offered to theological discussion during the second half of our century. We will do so in two parts. Here, in the first part, we will begin by reviewing briefly his nearly four decades of published writing. Then we will turn to his theological methodology and his commitment to Whiteheadian metaphysics. Our subsequent outline will follow roughly the *loci* or topics taken up by systematic theology. We will spend numerous paragraphs looking at the doctrine of God as process theologians enunciate it, because fundamental commitments here ramify throughout the theological system. I will suggest that the dipolar deity of Whiteheadian metaphysics is difficult to reconcile with certain trinitarian commitments regarding the divine life as it engages the world.

We will continue the discussion in a follow-up installment of "Theology Update" in the next issue of *dialog*. There, in part two, we will make a brief tour through Cobb's anthropology, Christology, ecological and political thought, contribution to inter-religious dialogue, and finally eschatology. The doctrine of eschatology—especially the issues of consummation of history and subjective immortality—will occupy our primary attention. All along we will interpret Cobb in the context of the wider discussion among process theologians and their critics. I will offer some critical assessments of my own, the kind of criticisms that Cobb does not like, namely, the suggestion that loyalty to the Whiteheadian metaphysical scheme forces the sacrifice of essential scripture-based commitments.

Who Is John Cobb?

A Methodist clergyperson who took degrees from the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, John B. Cobb, Jr., has been Ingraham Professor of Theology at the School of Theology and Avery Professor in the Claremont Graduate School at Claremont in California. Marjorie Suchocki will become his successor as he retires to Pilgrim Place and continues in emeritus relation to the Claremont Graduate School.

Cobb sees his own work as a constructive continuation of the Chicago school of process theology, which has its foundation in the work of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead has had some theological following independent of the Chicago school, such as the work of Norman Pittenger. Within the Chicago school, however, we can identify three strains: the empiricist, the rationalist, and the speculative. The empiricists associate themselves with a wider American movement and usually follow Henry Nelson Wieman and Bernard Meland. The rationalists, such as Schubert Ogden, follow the

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track taken by Charles Hartshorne. Cobb sees himself as a member of the speculative crew, the group he believes sticks most closely to Whitehead's original blueprint. With regard to future construction based on this blueprint, Cobb recommends we consider building with the feminist appropriation of process thought as well as David Griffin's postmodern vision.

Cobb is a prodigious writer. He began publishing what would become in itself quite a library with an article on "Theological Data and Method" in the July 1953 issue of *The Journal of Religion.* This was followed by a few pieces on ethics and then two books on contemporary theology, *Varieties of Protestantism* in 1960 and *Living Options in Protestant Theology* in 1962. In the early 1960s he along with James Robinson edited a series of books bridging the Atlantic, *New Frontiers in Theology,* in which German language theologians Heinrich Ott, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Gerhard Ebeling were reviewed by English speaking scholars. His own theological system began to take recognizable shape with the publication of *A Christian Natural Theology*[1] in 1965 and *The Structure of Christian Existence*[2] in 1967 along with *God and the World*[3] in 1969. That he identifies unhesitatingly with the Liberal Protestant tradition is affirmed in his *Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads*[4] in 1973. That his theology should be practical and ethical can be seen in his *Theology and Pastoral Care*[5] of 1977 and *Process Theology as Political Theology*[6] in 1982. As concern for the health of the environment became a globe-wide issue, Cobb responded with *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology*[7] in 1972 and further developed his non-anthropocentric ethic of nature when co-authoring *The Liberation of Life*[8] with Charles Birch in 1981. When approached by an Italian publisher to provide an introductory book on process theology, he along with David Griffin—who along with others have shepherded the Center for Process Studies at Claremont—produced the widely used textbook, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition.*[9] Cobb regrets in part the widespread influence of this book, because it overemphasizes the philosophical rootage that gives this theology its name and underemphasizes the theological wrestling with the issues. Cobb is bothered by the tendency of critics to write off process theology as just philosophy in theological language. He would prefer that attention be given to his more straightforward theological treatise, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*[10] of 1975. In the domain of inter-religious dialogue, few books have moved the discussion more forcefully than Cobb's *Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*[11] of 1982. Most recently, with Herman E. Daly he has published *For the Common Good*[12] in 1989. All this plus countless journal articles, book reviews, lectures, and seminar papers are gifts to the theological world from an indefatigable person of limitless energy and astounding productivity.

What is most important? If you ask John Cobb himself, he will answer that *The Structure of Christian Existence* and *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* provide his most valuable contribution to Christian theology. What is distinctive in his own mind is his attempt to cross boundaries. He crosses from Christianity to Buddhism. He crosses from theology to philosophy, ethics, ecology, natural science, politics, and economics. "At the moment," he told me, "I judge the work on economics to be my most important achievement, but time will tell." Yet, we do not need time to tell us that this is a career of inestimable value to theological scholarship in America.

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[1]John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), hereinafter abbreviated CNT.

[2]John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), abbrev. SCE.

[3]John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), abbrev. GW.

[4]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), abbrev. LCC.

[5]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), abbrev. TPC.

[6]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), abbrev. PTPT.

[7]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (New York: Bruce, 1972), abbrev. TE.

[8]John B. Cobb, Jr. and Charles Birch, *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), abbrev. LL.

[9]John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), abbrev. PT.

[10]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), abbrev. CPA.

[11]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), abbrev. BD.

[12]John B. Cobb, Jr., and Herman E. Daly, *For the Common Good (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), abbrev. FCG.*

Cobb's Method: Reflecting on Faith's Vision of Reality

John Cobb's method moves from pre-cognitive faith to cognitive doctrine. He begins with experience and with *faith* understood as a pre-cognitive mode of experiencing human existence. We live daily enjoying experience. All experience, in fact, is enjoyment. What we know as *faith* is a mode of existence, a mode of enjoying the experience of the God-human relationship at the pre-reflective level. *Saving faith* is a matter of basic emotions, attitudes and commitments that bring wholeness. And all people have the relationship to God we know as faith—even atheists—at the prereflective level. Faith is as universal as human experience. Our salvation is not dependent upon true doctrines, because it is given with human existence as it is. What we know as theological doctrines, then, consist of conscious attempts to formulate beliefs about faith. They are reflections on this more basic pre-reflective mode of existing in relation to God.

The Christian faith requires a "vision of reality," and this vision emerges from its pre-cognitive understanding of existence. Similar to the British idea of a 'blik,' our vision of reality is the pre-thematized perception of the real that is taken for granted in all of our ordinary judgments. It is presupposed, assumed. But it cannot stay that way. We need to think about it. We need to reflect upon that presupposed vision and bring it to thematic articulation. In short, Christian theology needs to construct doctrines.[13]

What these doctrines say will have to do both with human existence and with the world around. Faith structures human existence, and Christian faith structures it in a particularly salvific way. And Christian doctrine should articulate this. Yet Cobb wants more. He wants our vision of reality to say something objective about the world. Here, he differs from Rudolf Bultmann. Although Cobb agrees that the biblical vision of reality needs demythologizing, he does not believe this entails de-objectifying it. He believes we need to make objective statements about God and the world, statements which support the structure of our faith existence yet which actually refer to God and the world.[14]

Now, one might ask: if faith can be *saving faith* at the prereflective level, and if all people have faith, then why bother with doctrinal beliefs? Why not just live at the prereflective level of saving existence? John Cobb along with David Griffin respond saying that beliefs are important because they "support this mode of existence."[15] What does "support" mean here? On the one hand, they contend, if our conscious beliefs conform well with our prereflective knowledge, this conformity will have a positive effect on our psychic health. Dissonance between prereflective knowledge and belief systems creates tension and conflict within us. Hence, theology as a form of description strives to hold those doctrines which conform to the universal human experience of what is self-evidently true. In doing so it performs the service of maintaining psychic wholeness. On the other hand, Cobb and Griffin contend that doctrines are more than just description. They have the power to transform human life.[16] Changing beliefs leads to changes in one's prereflective emotional-attitudinal-behavioral stance.[17]

Now, we might ask whether the descriptive and transformational tasks complement or contradict

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[13]GW.119-123. Cf., *John Cobb's Theology In Process*, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Thomas J.J. Altizer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 8-10; abbrev. JCTP. This position seems to preclude the possibility of authentic atheism. Paul Sponheim disagrees, saying that atheism in its cognitive and volitional forms does exist. "The very word, *a-theism*, helpfully reminds us that there are those who do not believe in God. It seems patently wrong to christen these by decree—as if they did not know their own mind." *Faith and Process* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979) 273; abbrev. FP.

[14]David Griffin notes that there has been controversy in the past few centuries as to which side of faith should have priority, subjective human existence or objective understanding of God and the world. At one time Cobb tended to identify faith with a vision of reality. More recently, Cobb tends to identify faith with a mode of existence and to see the vision of reality as a necessary condition. He wants both. If forced to choose, Griffin believes Cobb "would give a certain logical priority to the vision of reality." JCTP.10.

[15]PT.31.

[16]Paul Custodio Bube perceives a shift in Cobb's theological method. Before 1969, he says, Cobb's method was an empirical "Jesusology" which sought to propound a Christian vision of the world and a Christian structure of human existence by explaining how the historical Jesus decisively revealed God. After Cobb's "conversion" to ecological ethics in 1969, however, his method became characterized by the notion of "creative transformation" (*Ethics in John Cobb's Process Theology* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988] xi). Perhaps in making this shift Cobb retained the former while pursuing the latter, and this might account for the uneasy relationship between the two.

[17]PT.33. Griffin notes how Cobb rejects the strict intellectualist view that one's conscious beliefs determine one's whole psychic constitution. Cobb also rejects the anti-intellectualist view that one's conscious beliefs are totally determined by subrational factors. Cobb holds to a both-and position, yet with a nuance. Although one's conscious beliefs are largely explications of one's preconscious vision of reality, "one can hold beliefs consciously that are in some tension with one's underlying vision" (JCTP, 16; cf. GW.136).

one another. If faith in God and knowledge of God are prereflectively present, then why do we want to change that prereflectivity through doctrinal transformation? If existential faith is already confidence in God, then why transform it? What does transformation here mean? Transformation cannot mean making a move from unfaith to faith? What more, then, can reflective doctrine add? It is not clear that these two roles of doctrinal theology, the descriptive and the transformative, are consistent with one another.

A partial answer to this question, however, might be discerned from the current theological task as Cobb identifies it, namely, meeting the threat of the modern vision of reality.

The Threat Posed by the Modern Vision of Reality

For centuries Western culture and Christendom were so interwoven that the biblical vision of reality was common sense, i.e., the sense held in common by most people. It made sense to think of our world as the creation of a transcendent and righteous God who demands radical obedience and who offers radical forgiveness.

Not since the Enlightenment, however. The modern world has threatened this vision of reality. Whereas the Christian vision presupposed truth and reality, the modern vision dissolves all truth claims into relativism. Whereas Christian faith saw the world as guided by divine purpose and therefore meaningful, the modern vision tends toward nihilism. The modern vision of reality excludes the type of causal relation to the world that God, according to the biblical and classical vision, would have. Thus, modernity leads to the 'death of God.' Common sense can no longer support belief in God.

What should we do? On the one hand, we could retreat. We could continue to assume the now outdated vision of a personal God and a purposeful world. Then we would become irrelevant to our cultural context.[18] On the other hand, we could surrender. We could embrace fully the modern perspective. Then the structure of Christian existence would lose its cognitive support and the mission of the church would evaporate. Is there a third alternative? Is there something other than retreat or surrender? Yes. We could attack. We could challenge the dominant modern mentality.[19] We could do this best by constructing a post-modern vision of reality which would incorporate the unassailable truths of the modern vision while pushing beyond to a more comprehensive vision that could support cognitively the transformative power of Christian faith. This is the task Cobb has set for his theological project.

The Lure of Whitehead's God

How should we carry out this task? How can we construct a postmodern vision of reality within which theological assertions will become meaningful again? Cobb turns to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. He does so because, on the one hand, Whitehead protests against the dominant modern vision while, on the other hand, Whitehead's proposed metaphysics provides an appropriate vehicle for bringing to conceptual articulation the structure of Christian existence. The Whiteheadian vision provides a way to speak meaningfully about God in relation to the world of experience. The result is what John Cobb called early in his career, *A Christian Natural Theology*, and which most identify today as *process theology*. It is to the metaphysical notion of God in process thought that we now turn.

Despite the name 'process theology,' the root metaphor or focal analog of process metaphysics is not process. Rather, it is experience. The whole of cosmic reality is understood in analogy to human experience.

More precisely, the root model of the process scheme is the process of integration experienced by human consciousness. Alfred North Whitehead is significant because in his work he seeks to overcome the subject-object dualism bequeathed to the modern world by the Enlightenment. The notions of ontologically contrasted subjects and objects are transformed into mutually defining polar principles

[18]Perhaps it is out of fear of retreat that Cobb declares, "I say, 'Keep the Quadrilateral!'" (*Circuit Rider* 11:5 [May 1987] 4-6). What he means is that theology's four sources according to the Methodists—scripture, tradition, experience, and reason—be given independent and interrelated authority. This rather than grant priority to scripture. Scripture alone cannot tackle distinctively modern challenges such as scientific knowledge and intense individualism.

[19]GW.138; JCTP.12.

amidst a more comprehensive scheme that unites them.[20]

Whitehead's system, rooted as it is in the model of human experience, branches according to three formative concepts or principles: creativity, eternal objects, and actual entities.[21] The locus of reality is found in what is concrete, the actual process of substantial or creative movement. This movement is made up of actual entities. Such a commitment to what is concrete repudiates the Platonic notion that timeless ideals or unchanging forms are the primary reality. Such timeless forms are important to Whitehead—he calls them "eternal objects" or "ideal entities"—but in themselves they are not actual; rather, they are only found exemplified in temporal process. They function to hold open new possibilities so that actual entities are free to be creative, to produce novelty.

Whitehead's theory of actual occasions logically requires a doctrine of God to complete the system. The subjective aim of each occasion as well as the conceptual prehension of eternal objects, upon which the unity and novelty of the occasion depend, requires an explanation. God is the explanation.

And if we note Whitehead's ontological principle, which says that only what is actual has agency, then this explanation must be in terms of another actual entity. Thus God himself is an actual entity, albeit a special case.[22] What is special is that God has a dual structure that is the complementary reverse of that belonging to all other actual entities. Whereas they are primarily physical and secondarily conceptual, God is primarily conceptual and secondarily physical.[23] The dipolar structure applied to God means he has a primordial nature and a consequent nature.

In his primordial or conceptual nature God functions to envisage the eternal objects, to maintain them as timeless conceptual possibilities, constantly available for ingression by the process of actualization. God's own desire or aim is to see the eternal possibilities become actual. He has an appetite that is satisfied when the world process enjoys physical concrescence. Therefore, he encourages intense experience or enjoyment without necessarily prescribing just what should be experienced or enjoyed. Akin to the Greek god Eros, "He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire."[24]

In addition to the presentation of the eternal objects, God's initial aim functions to order them according to their degree of relevance for each new occasion. This raises a problem of interpretation in Whitehead. Is there an eternal ordering or ranking of the conceptual possibilities within God's primordial nature apart from their relevance for particular occasions? Is God in Godself an idealist with a vision of the ultimate or truly good around which all things should be oriented? Whitehead seems to say "no." There is no totality which is the harmony of all perfections. There is no ideal order which all entities should strive to attain.[25]

Why would Whitehead want to take this position? Should there be an overarching divinely appointed order or hierarchization of ideals, then this would itself be a complex eternal object. It would be an eternal object which includes all the other eternal objects. But the emphasis in Whitehead seems clearly to be on the plurality of eternal objects. God does not choose between them, even if they are incompatible with one another. The function of his primordial nature is to present and urge the realization of all possibilities.

God does not create eternal objects, according to Whitehead; "for his nature requires them in the same degree that they require him."[26] An eternal ideal inclusive of all the others would have to be a divine creation, and Whitehead's God is not a creator in this sense. Hence, the eternal objects are, at least in respect to the primordial nature, random.[27]

John Cobb's construction goes beyond Whitehead somewhat because he makes the divine primordial nature responsible for ranking the possibilities. But rather than a single order oriented around a single purpose, God produces an infinite variety of orders.[28] This primordial ordering specifies the initial aim for each new occasion.

Although Whitehead can be faulted for a lack of

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[20]In this sense, Whitehead is a post-modern theorist. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933) 245; abbrev. AI. Cf., CNT.24f; 61.

[21]Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) 90; abbrev. RM. Cf., CNT.149.

[22]Whitehead refers to God as an actual entity but not as an actual occasion. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Macmillan, 1978) 88; abbrev. PR. For Hartshorne, God is not one actual entity but rather a society of entities.

[23]PR.348.

[24]PR.344; cf., AI.226.

[25]AI.356; PR.84.

[26]PR.257.

[27]William A. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale, 1959) 273, abbrev. IWM.

[28]CNT.155.

clarity and Cobb credited for adding some, it seems to me that the weight of the evidence shows that ranking is relevance-dependent and hence requires response to the actual world. It cannot emerge from the primordial nature alone. The significant implication of this, of course, is that God is not the independent author of a *summum bonum*, a highest good.

God's envisagement of the eternal objects does not make the divine conscious. In the primordial nature alone, God is unconscious. Consciousness or subjective immediacy requires the interweaving of physical and conceptual prehensions. This is another reason for concluding that within the primordial nature the eternal objects are not deliberately ordered and that the divine appetition is analogous to the instinctual appetite of an animal.

How then do we move from the random array of eternal possibilities envisaged by God's primordial nature to their gradated relevance for a particular occasion? How do we move from an unconscious to a conscious deity? For this we need to consider God's other pole, the consequent nature.

The consequent nature is God's physical pole, his prehension and integration of all actual occasions. God experiences the world in its temporal process. Because these occasions are epochal and successive, the consequent nature similarly has a successive and temporal character. In contrast to other occasions which perish into objectivity, however, God's physical pole does not perish. It is everlasting. The consequent nature is like an open account at the bank in which one makes continuing deposits yet never closes the account.

By prehending actual occasions in his everlasting consequent nature, God not only objectifies them but he retains them forever in his memory. Although their own subjective immediacy perishes at concrescence, God grants them objective immortality. This means that every enjoyment, every achievement of value, is preserved unendingly in God's memory.

God's memory is not random, however. It is organized into a harmonious integration, a unified satisfaction. To the extent that Whitehead allows religious affections to influence his otherwise strictly metaphysical doctrine, God is understood in terms of goodness. God expunges what is bad from the remembered world while retaining what is good. He does so not by distilling out the evil, for he retains everything. The revolts of destructive evil—although prehended in his consequent nature— are dismissed as trivial and allowed to atrophy into individual facts, facts not invited to participate in the divinely sponsored unity of the completed whole. In this sense, God is a savior. What is good is "...saved by its relation to the completed whole...it is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved."[29]

But, we might ask, from where comes the conceptual criteria for distinguishing good from evil? Whitehead refers us to God's own subjective aim derived from the primordial nature and issuing into the consequent nature.[30] But, as we have seen, the primordial nature seems to consist in a random set of eternal objects with the unconscious appetition that they all be enjoyed. Value has to do strictly with greater or lesser degrees of intensity in experience, not with good or bad experiences. Whatever the divine subjective aim is, it does not seem to affect directly the ordering of eternal objects. It does, however, affect the operations of the consequent nature and God's saving activity.

Thus the consequent nature is not merely a passive receptacle of feeling, not merely an open account awaiting deposits. It writes checks for specific occasions. God can supply the appropriate initial aim and ordering of eternal objects into real possibilities for each occasion because he has just prehended all the relevant past entities and is now seeking to draw this particular occasion into creative concrescence. It is tailor-made persuasion emerging from the divine subjective aim. At this point Whitehead borrows religious vocabulary and waxes eloquent.

> It is the particular providence for particular occasions. What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.[31]

I for one, however, still find Whitehead unclear regarding the source of the good. We began with God's unconscious appetition for intensity of experience with no principle for distinguishing good from evil experiences. Within this framework the experience of robbing a church would be of equal

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[29]PR.346.
[30]PR.345.
[31]PR.351.

value to that of contributing to a church, as long as they are of equal intensity. To distinguish good from evil experiences we must await the consequent nature. When the consequent nature is brought into play, God himself becomes conscious and then tailor-makes a gradated ranking of possibilities relevant for each occasion. But there is some ambiguity even here. What is the scale of gradation? Is it the degree of relevance or the degree of goodness? It appears that he argues for the former yet concludes the latter.

One might posit that the good according to which possibilities are ranked is love. But does love come originally from God? Certainly not according to the above citation. Love is produced by the free activity of the world process. From here it passes into the divine consequent nature, and then it comes back to us in subsequent conceptual prehensions. In effect, we are loving ourselves and employing God to effect our love. This seems to be a metaphysic of heavenly humanism.

There is a sense, however, in which God loves on his own. It is the sense already mentioned, namely, his erotic desire for intense experience. "We must conceive the Divine Eros as the active entertainment of all ideals, with the urge to their finite realization, each in its due season."[32] John Cobb fastens on to this primordial desire and describes it as "the love that lures man to adventure."[33] But this certainly is not the love of the God described in the Bible, the forgiving love that leads to the cross. This is not the love which would sacrifice one's own experience for the welfare of another. It is not divine agape.

In short, according to the process scheme, if we have standards of right and wrong and reverence for self-sacrificing love, then they have emerged from the human creative process itself. God is a facilitator and enhancer but not the author of our sense of the highest good. We need to ask if this is the same God about whom St. John wrote, "we love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). From Whitehead we might understand God as initiating erotic love aimed at intense experience; whereas we humans initiate the ideal of sacrificial love, label it as the highest good, and then ask God to effect it. Like a divine FTD Florist, God delivers *our* love message.

There is one more important point to note regarding Whitehead's doctrine of God. It is not primarily religious. In fact, Whitehead almost prides himself on his avoidance of religious resources because he believes the religious intuition can too easily lead one away from rationality. In *Religion in the Making* he writes, "...reason is the safeguard of the objectivity of religion: it secures for it the general coherence denied to hysteria."[34] And elsewhere: "apart from any reference to existing religions as they are, or as they ought to be, we must investigate dispassionately what the metaphysical principles, here developed, require on these points, as to the nature of God."[35] He celebrates the skepticism of David Hume who frees us from the alleged "idolatry" of the idea of God found amongst the Roman Caesars, the Hebrew prophets, and Aristotle; although he does claim sans any biblical exegesis that Jesus' view is Whitehead's own view.[36]

In contrast to the gods of the religions (other than Jesus' religion?), Whitehead's deity is produced strictly by the logical requirements of his metaphysical system. He needs a divine being to be coherent. Although not claiming to be proving the existence of God, he follows other natural theologians in observing order in the cosmos and then arguing to a ground of order.[37] Whitehead's deity, it turns out, is not the creator of the world in the sense of Augustine's transcendent God who creates *ex nihilo*. Rather, he is one entity among others who, like all the other entities, obeys the metaphysical principles which characterize the world process. "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification."[38]

Whitehead reports with pride that the "greatest metaphysician," Aristotle, introduced the concept of God in order to complete his conceptual system. It was not for religious reasons that he did this. Belief in this kind of God does not emerge from a faith response to divine revelation. Aristotle was "entirely dispassionate."[39] On this point it seems clear that Whitehead is following the footsteps of Aristotle. Despite his disclaimer to the contrary, the only avowedly dispassionate reason Whitehead can give for believing in God is that God is required to save

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[32]AI.226.

[33]GW.84; cf. Pannenberg, JCTP.135.

[34]RM.65.

[35]PR.343.

[36]PR.343.

[37]Cf., CNT.169f.

[38]PR.343.

[39]Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925) 249; abbrev. SMW.

the metaphysical principles from collapse.

The Christianized Dipolar Deity

The alleged virtue of the Whiteheadian doctrine of God is that it is in principle intelligible to the modern if not emerging post-modern mind.[40] Process theists go on to say that it also offers a more authentic rendering of the true intent of the scriptural revelation than orthodox theology has traditionally offered. These are the two criteria by which modern theology is measured: contemporary meaningfulness and faithfulness to the scriptural witness. Here, by meeting the criterion of contemporary meaningfulness, process theologians claim simultaneously to be meeting the other, loyalty to Scripture. Is it possible that these two criteria become confused? When we press certain issues to distinguish the criteria and force process theists to choose, I believe they choose contemporary meaningfulness over loyalty to Scripture.

Process theologians maintain that modern sensibilities have made the traditional doctrine of God unintelligible. A worldview dominated by a concept of the natural has no room for a God who is supranatural. Process theists seem to agree that the problem of conceiving God is the number one theological task, and that what we need is a non-supranaturalistic theism.[41] At this point we note a discernible difference between John Cobb and another prominent process theist, Schubert Ogden. Ogden wants to dub the neoclassical deity as "secular," whereas Cobb wants much more to hold on to the religious element of Christianity.[42] The neoclassical metaphysics of Whitehead and Hartshorne satisfy Ogden's need.

Perhaps the most salient feature of this neoclassical God is that he combines in himself both absoluteness and relativity. Traditional theology which employed Greek ontology had a tendency to define God only in terms of the absolute pole, only as simple, eternal, unchanging, and transcendent to world affairs. In classical theology the perfection of God was understood in these terms. But when we press the human paradigm, we would not describe as "perfect" a person who is simple, impassive, and uninvolved in the affairs of the world. Quite the contrary, a person of great stature is one most sensitive to others, who sympathizes with those in sorrow, who rejoices with those with joy. Such a person changes with the times, grows, and increases in his or her appreciation of things. In short, such a person is related to the world and affected by it. Could we ask less of God?

In the neoclassical theology of process metaphysics God is still considered absolute in the sense that he envisages eternal objects, his subjectivity never perishes, he exists everlastingly, etc. But the relative pole is present too. He is relative in the sense of being related to the world. He sympathizes with the world. He depends on the world. Thus God has the power absolutely to guarantee his own existence through all change, but at the same time he is dependent upon the world for the particular character of his existence. God is absolutely relative, because he can not fail but be related to all that is.[43]

This is possible because of God's two natures: the primordial and consequent to use Whitehead's vocabulary, or the abstract and concrete according to Hartshorne. In his primordial or abstract nature, God is unchanging, self-identical, and absolute. In his consequent or concrete nature, God enjoys new experiences, grows in memory, increases in value, and shares in the world's novelty. He is "the fellow-sufferer who understands." John Cobb is a bit critical of Whitehead for treating the two natures as if they were separable and for not sufficiently stressing their integration (although Whitehead certainly stipulates that they are integrated). For Cobb's part, he wants to stress that there is only one God whom we may describe abstractly as dipolar.[44]

Commitment to a Whiteheadian dipolar deity has a number of implications for Christian thinking. We need to ask: (1) How should we evaluate the proposed dependence of God on the world in light of *creatio ex nihilo*? (2) Does it sacrifice divine omnipotence? (3) Does it alter if not supplant the doctrine of the Trinity? and (4) Does it undermine Christian spirituality? Let us look at these in turn.

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[40]Cf., Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 56f; abbrev. RG.

[41]Cobb, GW.19; Ogden, RG.1.

[42]Ogden, RG.44-50; Cobb, GW.106-116. Hence, we see that Cobb's theological position cannot be reduced to Whitehead's philosophy. Theology goes further. Cobb does not want "to imply that this natural theology can serve in place of Christian theology in general" ("Can Natural Theology Be Christian?" *Theology Today* 23:2 [April, 1966] 140).

[43]Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) ix, 82; abbrev. DR. Cf., Ogden, RG.61.

[44]Cobb, CNT.178; PT.62.

(1) God, with or without a World?

The first implication is that God and the world are mutually dependent. One of John Cobb's books is *God and the World*, and in the title the connector "and" is the most important word. Like Siamese twins, you can not have one without the other. God needs the world as much as the world needs God. It follows that there can be no *creatio ex nihilo*.[45] To create out of nothing would presuppose that God existed prior to and independent of the created order. The God of process theism is not transcendent to the cosmic principles, recall. He exemplifies them. Hence the world and God are equi-primordial and everlastingly interdependent.

Nevertheless, God is understood by the process theologians as creative. John Cobb especially emphasizes that God is the source of creativity, going beyond Whitehead in this respect.[46] But the notion of God as creator does not make him the original author of the cosmic script. Rather, he is continually creating in the sense of continually drawing an already existent process toward further novelty.

Perhaps we can distinguish here between transcendent and immanent creativity. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* would be a version of transcendent creativity, wherein God is responsible for the very being of all things. What we have in Whitehead and now Cobb is immanent creativity, wherein God is one factor among others in an already given reality. He is a leaven, a stimulant, a provoker. God is the one who constantly calls the present forward toward the open future. God creates by offering us "a vision of something beyond ourselves and our past that calls us forward in each moment into a yet unsettled future, luring us with new and richer possibilities for our being."[47] Lewis Ford defines God in these terms as "that dynamic source of values which lures the evolutionary process into an ever-richer complexity productive of increasing freedom and intensity of experience."[48]

Robert Neville raises a strictly philosophical objection to the Whiteheadians, because they do not ask the ontological question: why is there something and not nothing? They take it for granted that the world process already exists and then fit God into it. Neville argues that the ontological (or transcendent-ontological) question should be confronted and not avoided, and further that it can be answered only by conceiving the cosmic process as the product of a kind of ontological creativity not contained within the system of the cosmos or explained by created categories.[49] When the ontological question has been asked within the Christian tradition, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has been offered as the answer. This is abandoned by process theists as inconceivable to the modern mind.

Neville's philosophical objection finds a theological parallel in one raised by Jürgen Moltmann. The deletion of *creatio ex nihilo* by the process theists marks a significant loss. Moltmann says that in effect process theology ends up with no doctrine of creation at all, but only a doctrine of preservation or ordering of the world. God's efficacy can be conceived here only within the world; the world cannot be thought of as within the efficacy of God. And, what is important to Moltmann as a theologian of hope, if there is no creation at the beginning then there cannot be a new creation either.[50]

(2) Where Has God's Power Gone? The Problem of Evil

There is a second and related implication. The term "omnipotence" must be either eliminated or redefined when applied to "God the Father Almighty." The neoclassicists do not believe that God has all the power there is. God does not govern the cosmos by fiat as a king governs his kingdom. What power he has is found not in coercion but in persuasion. The call forward is only an invitation.[51]

The position allegedly advocated by the classical theists follows the tyrant model. According to the tyrant model, the all powerful God determines "every detail of what happens in the world." Nothing

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[45]CNT.205.

[46]CNT.206-14. Whitehead emphasizes the self-creativity of the actual occasions; they are *causa sui*. Hence for him creativity is a description of the process as a whole, not the province of the divine element within the process.

[47]GW.55.

[48]Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 63; abbrev. LG.

[49]Robert C. Neville, *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (New York: Seabury, Crossroad, 1980) 138ff; abbrev. CG.

[50]Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985) 78f.

[51]Ford, LG. Chapters 2, 3.

is left to chance. Nothing is left to free decision-making on the part of God's creatures. "Omnipotence is defined as power to absolutely determine what happens." After imputing this position to the classical theists, Charles Hartshorne gets on his high horse and proclaims that "no worse falsehood was ever perpetrated than the traditional concept of omnipotence. It is a piece of unconscious blasphemy...."[52] In place of this "unconscious blasphemy" the neoclassical theists wish to propound a doctrine of God which affirms human freedom. God's power should be conceived as influencing all that happens but not determining events in their concrete particularity.[53]

This sounds far more dramatic than it really is, because the classical doctrine of divine omnipotence is simply not the tyranny it is alleged to have been. The orthodox Christian tradition from Augustine through the scholastics and the Reformers down to the present day has never seriously suggested that God determines "every detail of what happens in the world." Rather, *God is the source of human freedom.* Freedom is a gift of grace, whether it be finite freedom in creation or moral freedom through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Even John Calvin with his doctrine of double predestination acknowledges that as finite creatures we freely make all sorts of decisions every day. What we are not free to do on our own power is to achieve eternal salvation. For that we need divine grace. But this position of *sola gratia* regarding salvation does not in the least obviate finite freedom for carrying on day to day affairs. 'Omnipotence' simply has not meant what the process theologians say it has. Langdon Gilkey among others in contemporary discussion is constantly reminding us that classical theists have always held that "God is self-limiting, making room for the finite freedom which God grounds and establishes in each present."[54]

What is important to process theists here is that this view exonerates God from the charge of sponsoring evil. One of the modern objections to the traditional Christian notion of an omnipotent deity is that if God be totally responsible for all things, then he must be responsible for the world's suffering as well. The logic of what is called the theodicy problem arises from the incompatibility of three assertions:

(1) God is all-good or omnibeneficent.

(2) God is all-powerful or omnipotent.

(3) Evil is real; it exists.

While one can affirm any two of these together and maintain logical consistency, affirmation of all three results in a contradiction. If God be both all-good and all-powerful, then evil can not be real. If God is omnipotent and if evil is in the world, then God is responsible for that evil and hence less than all-good. Or, if God is all-good and if evil is real, then his omnipotence is precluded. It is the last of these three which process theists elect in order to maintain consistency.[55]

But rather than eliminate the term 'omnipotence,' they redefine it. Instead of referring to all the power there is, it now refers to all the power one can conceive of without introducing incoherence into the conception. Granting the Whiteheadian metaphysical principles already adumbrated, to be anything actual at all is to be the outcome of a free response to the free decisions of others already actual. For God to be actual, he must be part of the process and not prior to or independent of it. As part of the process, then, what power he has is found in his recognizably limited power to persuade. This means in the last analysis that whatever evil exists is not God's responsibility. The theodicy problem is solved by recognizing evil as real and pinning the blame on actual occasions which seek satisfaction according to aims different from the divine aim.[56] We shall return to this topic when discussing eschatology.

Yet, Cobb is anything but glib when it comes to the metaphysical solution to theodicy. Evil is experienced daily, and the Christian conscience is struck with outrage. Sin and suffering do not belong in our world! Reality should be otherwise! Where is God in this? How do we find God amidst suffering? In the context of the pastor ministering to a patient

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[52]Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: SUNY, 1984) 11,18; abbrev. OTM.

[53]Ibid., 25.

[54]Langdon Gilkey, "God," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2nd ed., 1985) 110; cf., *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Seabury, 1976) 249f., 282f.

[55]If one specifies a narrow definition of *theism* as Stephen Davis does—theism is the belief that the world was created by an omnipotent and perfectly good personal being—then process theists are technically not theists. They so qualify divine omnipotence as to leave the theistic camp. (Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil—Live Options in Theodicy* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1981] 2, 172f.; abbrev. EE.) Most would use the term 'theism' to include neo-classical or process theism.

[56]Schubert M. Ogden, "Evil and Belief in God: The Distinctive Relevance of a Process Theology," *Perkins Journal* XXI:4 (Summer 1978) 29-34; cf., Cobb, PT.53; GW.25ff.; Ford, LG.29ff.

dying from cancer, Cobb offers this:

> The power of that cross has been the power to draw people to it, not the power of compulsion. It is a power that does not prevent suffering and death or hostile rejection, but it is not the power that causes those evils. Even in the midst of those evils it continues to work for the good....God is to be found in the life forces within the body that struggle against the cancer, even though they are losing. And more important, God is to be found in the sick person's own experience, sharing the agony, struggling against despair, guiding toward serenity in the face of death, and finding opportunities to express love even in these terrible circumstances. God is suffering with the sufferer, not causing the suffering.[57]

(3) Is God Di-Polar or Trinitarian?

There is a third implication, which we may formulate as the question: Is the dipolar deity compatible with the Christian trinity? Should we proceed by trying to squeeze three persons out of two? When this is attempted, process theists usually equate God the Father with the whole of the Godhead (the one essence, *mia ousia, una substantia*) and then make the Son and Spirit into aspects of the Father. The path taken by Schubert Ogden is to identify the Son with divine objectivity and the Spirit with divine subjectivity. The route Cobb takes is to identify the Son with the primordial nature and the Holy Spirit with the consequent nature. Lewis Ford follows Cobb's route by following the sign of a medieval painting in which the Christian trinity was depicted as a man with two hands, meaning that the Son and the Spirit are simply two aspects of the one Father. They are not three persons in either the classical (*treis hypostaseis, tres personae*) or in the modern sense of three distinct subjectivities.[58]

The difficulties of relating a neoclassical dipolar deity to the concept of a trinitarian theism are great. Although a modern doctrine of the trinity would not demand three distinct humanlike subjectivities, it certainly would require some distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit if it were to maintain continuity with the classic formulation. Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests that John Cobb for one holds to a form of dynamic monarchianism, a rigorous monotheism of the second and third centuries which held that Jesus was God only in the sense that a power of influence from the Father rested upon his human person. So Pannenberg remarks, "no point of departure is produced by Whitehead's doctrine of God for the distinction of the Son (as also of the Spirit) from the Father, nor for the Biblically attested relationships between the three persons."[59] On another occasion Cobb along with Griffin almost throws in the towel, embracing the dipolar alternative and saying, "hence process theology is not interested in formulating distinctions within God for the sake of conforming with traditional Trinitarian notions."[60]

The real issue, however, is not formulating distinctions. The real issue is God's relation to the world. The process criticism all along has been that the God of classical theism is allegedly absolute and uninvolved in the temporal events of this world. What is ignored in this criticism, of course, is the understanding of God as trinity. The trinitarian is God deeply involved in this world through the finite experience of the incarnate Christ and through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. What we see in the quiet discussion of trinitarian theology since Karl Barth—the line of thinking followed by Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert Jenson, and Wolfhart Pannenberg—is a renewed commitment to understanding the dynamics of the world as internal to the divine life. Rahner's Rule—the immanent trinity is the economic trinity and vice versa—postulates a God-World reciprocity that makes a borrowing from Whiteheadian metaphysics nearly superfluous.[61]

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[57]John B. Cobb, Jr., "The Problem of Evil and the Task of Ministry," EE, 171.

[58]Ford, LG.103ff.; CPA.261f.

[59]Pannenberg, JCTP.142. John Cobb defends himself by advocating that Jesus' distinction from the Father is found in his humanity (JCTP.189f.). But this only strengthens the Pannenberg criticism because it so obviously avoids the distinct persons constituting the immanent trinity. In another context, Cobb sharply distinguishes between the Jesus of history and the Christ or the Word. This distinction is Chalcedonian, he says. "The failure to make that distinction has led Christians at times to make quite arrogant claims about Christianity and it has led to views of salvation which were quite exclusive and restrictive" ("Reply to Jürgen Moltmann's 'The Unity of the Triune God,'" *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28:3 [1984] 176). The emphasis on the supra-historical Christ makes it easier for Cobb to avoid the scandal of making universal claims based on the particular historical experience of God as trinity. But it also gives the case away to Pannenberg, because the historical Jesus cannot account for the distinction between the eternal Father and the eternal Son.

[60]PT.110.

[61]For a roadmap through current discussion, see Ted Peters, "Trinity Talk," Parts I and II, for "Theology Update," *dialog*, 26:1 (Winter 1987) 44-48 and 26:2 (Spring 1987) 133-138.

(4) The Problem of Spirituality: Can God Experience What I'm Feeling?

In addition to these three implications, we might pose another question that will have considerable bearing on Christian spirituality: Can God experience human subjectivity? If, according to the Whiteheadian scheme, God does not prehend actual entities within the process of concrescence but only upon satisfaction—only objectively—then God experiences them only externally. Other than eternal objects, only actual things can be prehended. One cannot experience an occasion during concrescence because it is not yet determinate; its epoch or temporal quantum is incomplete. It is not yet actual. And according to the ontological principle only actual things can have agency. The occasion itself, in contrast, experiences the divinely envisioned eternal objects during its own subjective immediacy, but God's experience must await perishing and objectification. Perhaps Whitehead and the process Christians did not intend this, but to advocate God's sharing of an entity's subjectivity during concrescence would make God an exception to, not an exemplification of, the metaphysical principles. This would introduce incoherency into the scheme.[62]

And should we deny that God can experience creaturely subjectivity, it would spell disaster for spiritual life. Christianity along with the other higher religions draws much of its vitality from inner mystical sharing or from divine access to the human conscience. The Psalmist writes:

> Search me, O God, and know my heart!
> Try me and know my thoughts. (Ps 139:23)

And St. Paul speaks of God as "he who searches the hearts of humanity" and who, as the divine Spirit within, "himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26f). In the oft repeated Augustinian phrase, God knows us better than we know ourselves. A doctrine of God which could not account for these biblically attested realities would amount to spiritual drydock.

John Cobb is ready and willing to offer an account of these spiritual realities. He responds to the above saying, "...the way in which one moment of my experience flows into its successor is not denuded of immediacy by the fact that it has attained satisfaction. What is felt by the later occasion are the feelings of the earlier occasions....Whitehead's intuition is that in God this immediacy does not fade."[63] The value of this for Cobb is that God shares intimacy with us, yet our definiteness remains. Our identity is not absorbed. With God we share communion, not an identity-less mystical union.

To be sure, Cobb is concerned to retain spiritual intimacy. Yet, there is a temporal discreteness here that is a bit frustrating. God feels my feeling after the fact. And he retains it for his immediacy, not for mine. God feels today what I felt yesterday, so I push on with life today alone.

The War against Classical Theism

The value of the Whiteheadian concept of God, it is alleged, is not that it is rooted in the Bible or the tradition of Christian theology. Rather, it is calculated to appeal to modern sensibilities. In particular, the neoclassical doctrine of God affirms human freedom and self-actualization. The positing of an all-powerful deity is interpreted by this school of thought as a limiting force, one that destroys creaturely freedom and prevents the full development of human potential. "God functions in the modern consciousness as the enemy of man's efforts to become whole and free," writes Cobb.[64] But the new process doctrine makes God the necessary condition for human freedom, creativity, and self-determination.

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[62]Cf., Neville, CG.16f., 90f. Hartshorne believes he can account for the divine experience of human subjectivity because "the satisfaction contains its process of becoming...so that to prehend a past satisfaction is to prehend the becoming, the subjective immediacy itself, of the past actuality....Nothing is lost" (Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, Jr., and Lewis S. Ford, "Three Responses to Neville's *Creativity and God*" in *Process Studies* 10:3-4 [Fall-Winter, 1980] 93). Neville denies that this can be so on Whiteheadian grounds. Becoming cannot be a term in relation because it has no existence except in its satisfaction, which is no longer becoming. He accuses Hartshorne of reverting to a pre-Whiteheadian vitalism (Robert Neville, "Concerning *Creativity and God*: A Response" in *Process Studies* 11:1 [Spring, 1981] 2). Marjorie Hewit Suchocki follows a different track, arguing that God must prehend the subjectivity of an occasion if the world is to contribute novelty to God (*The End of Evil* [Albany: SUNY, 1988] 169, n. 17; abbrev. EE).

[63]Hartshorne, Cobb, and Ford, "Three Responses," 100. Neville is partially persuaded by Cobb here, so he moves "a short way down the path" toward agreement. Neville, "Concerning," 8.

[64]GW.29.

The primary value of the neoclassical doctrine of God then is that it is potentially intelligible and acceptable to the modern mind. And perhaps more. Cobb insists that because it overcomes the Cartesian ontological dualism of subjectivity and objectivity, it may even have the intellectual power to construct a post-modern conceptuality.[65] This is truly significant. However, in counting the merits of the new doctrine, very frequently process theists engage in violent attacks against the Christian tradition they claim to be defending through their reinterpretation.

Although the ammunition was already supplied by Whitehead, Christian process theologians have gone to war over the doctrine of God. They blast away at the supposed enemy to the Christian faith: "classical theism." Classical theism is alleged to have taught that the transcendent God of orthodox Christianity is eternal, immutable, impassible, omnipotent, and hence divorced from the world of change. Consequently God is unfeeling, unsympathetic, and tyrannical. The dipolar deity of neoclassical metaphysics, in contrast, is the source of the world's goodness and love, deeply feeling and sympathetic, sharing in the pain and suffering of the creative process. This dipolar deity is the one about whom Jesus taught, not the God of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Barth, or Tillich.

> ...*Christian faith is not essentially bound up with the God who is seen primarily as Creator-Lord of History-Lawgiver-Judge* and who has so long dominated the Christian sensibility and the imagination of the West. What the Christian knows in Jesus is something quite different, and something which speaks more of human responsibility than of total dependence, more of full humanity than of repression, more of hope than of nostalgia or fear. The One who is met in Jesus is the God who suffers with us and for us more than the God who demands and judges from on high.[66]

In pressing the radicalness of his reconceptualization of the divine, Cobb sides with the death-of-God theologians, insofar as he desires to kill off the God of Anselm and Aquinas and to enliven the God of Whitehead. "God is dead;" he writes, "long live God."[67]

Why shoot to kill? The problem with the God of classical theism, say the neoclassical theists, is that due to its inherited Greek metaphysics of being its God cannot feel or sympathize with human suffering. And without feeling or sympathy the credibility of divine love is called into question by the modern mind. Cobb and Griffin put it this way: "traditional theism said that God is completely impassive, that there was no element of sympathy in the divine love for the creatures."[68]

Let us examine briefly one card-carrying classical theist who is rejected by neoclassicists, St. Anselm. In the *Proslogium*, Anselm poses the question of the relationship between God's immutable being and his compassionate love. He affirms as one of his premises: "God is compassionate." Then he asks, "but how art thou compassionate, and, at the same time passionless?"[69] On this basis Cobb and Griffin follow Hartshorne's interpretation that Anselm is teaching a God who is "...not really compassionate!"[70] How can they say this? Anselm begins his inquiry with the assertion of divine compassion and he never relinquishes it no matter where the inquiry takes him. So is it quite fair to assert that this classical theologian does not teach a God of compassion? His very words say just the opposite.

Cobb and Griffin are similarly critical of St. Thomas, because although Thomas affirms unequivocally that "in God there is love," he also follows Aristotle in saying that God "loves without passion."[71] Now again, has Thomas denied God's love?

A closer look will reveal that the real issue is not whether or not God loves his creatures. When the smoke clears, what the process theists really want is to attribute passion to the divine life proper, something classical theists were reluctant to do. This difference is a difference, to be sure. But it is a much more modest difference than the suggestion that one camp teaches divine love for the world whereas the other camp denies it.

The neoclassicists contend perhaps rightly that if one asserts that God loves, then it follows logically that God must have feeling, sympathy, and passion. This is to charge Anselm and Thomas with inconsistency, an inconsistency of which both thinkers were

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[65]GW.138.

[66]GW.37, Cobb's italics; cf., Ogden, RG.53ff.; Hartshorne, OTM.1, 29, 43.

[67]GW.41.

[68]PT.44.

[69]Anselm, *Proslogium*, VIII,13.

[70]PT.45, original italics; cf., Hartshorne, DR.54f.

[71]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I:Q.20; A.1; cf., PT.45.

obviously aware. The charge of inconsistency is one thing, maybe even a helpful thing. But to imply that they did not teach a God of love and compassion is not only unfair; it also commits the straw theologian fallacy, the apparent dubious purpose of which is to overstate the significance of the new discoveries made by process theism.[72] It seems to me that an evenhanded reading of history would show that the formative theologians of the Christian tradition should be credited with a sincere and sophisticated concern for understanding and sharing God's love.

That process theologians seek a more adequate form of understanding divine love is laudable. It is simply not necessary, however, constantly to drop intellectual H-bombs on theologians of other times and other contexts.

We will pick up our exposition of Cobb's systematic theology in the next installment of "Theology Update."

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[72]Schubert Ogden is a bit more precise in specifying the issue (RG.18).

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THEOLOGY UPDATE

JOHN COBB, THEOLOGIAN IN PROCESS PART II

*By Ted Peters**

This is the second installment of "Theology Update" marking the retirement and achievement of John Cobb. In part one of our discussion we identified Cobb's theological method as one of bringing prereflective faith up into doctrinal articulation. We also spent considerable effort at expositing the concept of God in Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics in order to show its strengths and limitations for Cobb's appropriation. Here in part two of our discussion, we will turn to the subsequent *loci* in his theological system: anthropology, Christology, ethics, and eschatology. We will give particular attention to the doctrine of eschatology, because it is here more than anywhere else that the tensions surface between classical Christian theism and Cobb's neoclassical approach. I will argue among other things that it is a great loss to the Christian vision to sacrifice the notion of a consummation to history. I will also criticize yet compliment Cobb's position on resurrection of the dead. All of this will be pursued within the context of respect and appreciation for the creative contribution of the Claremont theologian.

Anthropology

Evolutionary development toward higher consciousness provides the backdrop for Cobb's anthropology. The long multi-million year story of evolution has resulted in a processive hierarchy that leads from apparent inert matter to primitive living organisms, to higher forms of living organisms, to animals, to humans, and eventually to...what? There is a perceivable direction to evolution, says Cobb. It moves toward increased centralization.[1]

Let us borrow Whiteheadian and Hartshornian vocabulary for a moment. What constitutes human experience daily is not the individual actual occasion. Actual occasions are too small. They are just flickering moments, minute molecules of motion. They are understood by analogy with human experience and atomic theory, but in themselves they are the constitutive elements of all phenomena right down to the temporal size of an electron in passage.

We humans experience actual occasions in large groups. These large groups are of three kinds, ranging from simple to complex, from dispersed to centralized. First, there are *aggregates*, individual occasions related to one another like quiet people on an elevator: proximate, contiguous, very little interaction, no dominant member. Each occasion goes about its business as if it were not part of the group. Chairs, tables, and such apparently non-mental things are examples of aggregates. Second, *democracies* or nexus are societies of occasions in which there is cellular interaction and interdependence, but where there is no single dominant member. Plants are examples. Third, there are *monarchical societies* such as human beings.[2] Here there is a dominant member, the brain, which exercises control over the other members such as fingers. The monarch does not have absolute control over its subjects, of course, but it does set certain limits and these provide the society's self-definition. A finger may inadvertently enter one's nose in a situation that could prove embarrassing. When the monarch brain wakes up to what is happening, the finger is discreetly disciplined by quickly placing it in a handkerchief.

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[1]John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 87; hereinafter abbrev. PT.

[2]"Persons are societies," writes Marjorie Suchocki, "...with perhaps a particular governing 'strand' of these occasions constituting what we call the 'soul'" (*The End of Evil* [Albany: SUNY, 1988] 83).

The conscious self-direction of the human person, which is a society of occasions, is not identical to that of the individual actual occasion.[3] It is composite and complex. It is responsive and malleable. Consequently, it can change with the history of the race.

What we today experience as human consciousness is the product of a long development. And we are still growing. Cobb proffers a schematic theory of this developmental history. He contends that primitive myth-oriented peoples were dominated by their unconscious. Then with the axial breakthrough during the first millennium B.C. (à la Karl Jaspers), we took a leap in consciousness toward greater rationality. What rationality permits is self-transcendence, the ability to look at oneself from outside oneself. This leads to self-objectification, self-criticism, and in the modern world to self-alienation. A tension arose. Cobb describes this as a "fall" from harmony, a breaking of the cooperative unity between the physical and mental life.[4]

The centering of human existence in consciousness during the axial period led the Hebrew prophets to structure life in terms of ethics, and later the Christians structured it in terms of love and spirit. Christian existence is characterized by openness to the responsive love of God, transcending our preoccupation with ourselves. It makes us sensitive to the feelings of others and turns us toward one another with disinterested concern for one another's welfare.[5] In short, we rise up from our fall by climbing the ladder of divinely inspired love.

Cobb's Christology

John Cobb's Christology puts this responsive love together with divine creativity and then applies the name of "Christ" to the universal phenomenon of creative transformation. According to this system, Christ is present in all things as the logos, because the logos is equivalent to the primordial nature of God.[6] The source of novelty is the logos, the divine lure, calling what-is toward the open future of what can be. This characterizes all responsive love as well, because true love seeks disinterestedly to draw the beloved toward self-creation and more intensive enjoyment. Because creation has been redefined so as to exclude *creatio ex nihilo* and to refer instead to the call to novelty, it seems that for all practical purposes creation and transformation are functionally equivalent.[7] There is no distinction between creation and redemption, only a single creative-transformative process. The word "Christ" in Cobb's system is the name given the creative-transformative process. Referring to Christ, Cobb writes,

> He is the not-yet-realized transforming the givenness of the past from a burden into a potentiality for new creation. Christ always means, regardless of what the cultural values are, that they must be relativized without being abrogated; that the believer lives toward the future rather than attempting to defend, repeat, or destroy the past; that each should be open to the neighbor, in whom also one meets the claim of Christ; and that the good in what is now happening is to be completed and fulfilled.[8]

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[3]Herein may lie the solution to the spiritual problem mentioned earlier. God could share our internal consciousness if that consciousness is constituted by already objectified actual occasions. Yet, I pause. What haunts me is the overall Whiteheadian method, namely, the speculative extrapolation from distinctively human experience onto atomic events which, in turn, are more basic than human experience yet comprise human experience. Why not accept the fact that human experience is distinctive and perhaps inadequate to explain either more primitive events or divine prehension?

[4]PT.89; John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 111; abbrev. SCE.

[5]PT.94; SCE.134ff; *John Cobb's Theology In Process*, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Thomas J.J. Altizer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 7f.; abbrev. JCTP. However, we saw earlier that Whitehead's dipolar God can account for love as the erotic press toward experience, but it can not account for the specifically Christian notion of love as self-sacrificial concern for someone else's welfare. Perhaps this is one point where Cobb finds he must go beyond Whitehead's philosophy to Christian theology to find the resources to make this commitment.

[6]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 225; cf., 25, 138, 182 (abbrev. CPA); PT.98, 108.

[7]Please recall that Whitehead's understanding of creativity as an explanatory principle describing actual entities is not identical to Cobb's understanding of creativity as the work of God. Cf. "John Cobb, Theologian in Process," Part I, *dialog* 29:3 (Summer 1990) 215, n.46.

[8]CPA.59.

This leads to what we might call an exemplification Christology, according to which the Jesus Christ in whom Christians put their faith exemplifies a more universal principle. The universal in this case is the primordial nature of God, which is roughly equated with Christ. To ferret out Cobb's intent here, we need to note two things.

First, Cobb occasionally distinguishes the terms "Christ" and "logos." Logos refers primarily to Christ in his transcendence. Christ refers to the logos as immanent, especially as incarnate in Jesus.[9] Cobb means "incarnate" in more than one way. The logos is incarnate in the general sense that eternal objects everywhere find ingression at the moment of concrescence. In a more specific sense, the term "incarnate" connotes the historical fact that Christians orient their lives around the name of Christ. The reality of the logos, of course, is in no way limited to the religious life of the Christian churches. Creative transformation is universally present, whether or not it is recognized by anybody. Cobb's only point here, it seems, is that Christians have a name for it, "Christ." We might dub this an "exemplification Christology" or "re-presentative Christology," because the stress is not on the qualitative uniqueness of the salvific work of Jesus Christ but rather on his exemplification of what is universally divine.

The second point to note is that Cobb wants to be more than just liberal. He does not want to limit himself to the teachings of Jesus about God, to a limp Jesusology. By stressing the universal logos, he can affirm a strong doctrine of the divinity of Christ.[10] And Cobb will not settle for a docetic divinity. There was an actual incarnation that took place in Jesus. Although the primordial nature is incarnate in everybody, Jesus is unique because he experienced no tension between the divinely supplied initial aim and his own subjective aim based upon his prehended past occasions. "Whereas Christ is incarnate in everyone, Jesus is Christ because the incarnation is constitutive of his very selfhood."[11] Just how this makes Cobb more than liberal is not obvious; for certainly Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Protestantism, said something most similar: "...to ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to Him an existence of God in Him, are exactly the same thing."[12]

Cobb's Christology, whether liberal or not, is problematic. In the first place, to understand Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the primordial nature of God is difficult to conceive. The primordial nature, recall, is unconscious apart from the consequent nature. Whitehead describes it as "deficiently actual."[13] The primordial nature is simply the pre-personal as yet unresponsive array of ideal possibilities. And this array of possibilities is for Whitehead necessarily random; and for Cobb it consists in a variety of orders which are not necessarily compatible with one another. Given the problems locating the divine subjective aim earlier mentioned, Jesus as the incarnated primordial nature would be schizophrenic (or multiphrenic). His life would lack a single purpose and direction.

If Cobb wishes to provide the incarnated logos with such a purpose or direction, he will have to borrow from the consequent nature. But then the immanent trinitarian distinctions toward which he retains mild loyalty dissolve. This is a price Cobb seems to be willing to pay. But then we hit a second problem. Such a notion of incarnation would be almost vacuous, because it would be qualitatively no different than any other actuality or monarchical society. Jesus, to avoid schizophrenia, would have to choose among the welter of primordial possibilities according to his own subjective aim and then actualize himself. But, then, this is what all other actual occasions do as well; they all incarnate the divinely envisioned possibilities in terms of their subjective aim. Perhaps in the case of Jesus we could say *ex post facto* that his subjective aim was identical to the divinely supplied initial aim, which would account for his

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[9]CPA.261; cf., Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 51f; abbrev. LG.

[10]CPA.13; PT.98.

[11]PT.105.

[12]Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) par. 94, p. 387. Pannenberg accepts the supra-liberal posture of Cobb here saying that liberals other than Cobb are "ordinarily concerned...with stripping away the divinization of Jesus..." (JCTP.134). Despite these innuendos, Cobb for the most part is quite satisfied with being in the liberal camp.

[13]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Macmillan, 1978) 343; abbrev. PR.

alleged sinlessness. In this case he would look much like Schleiermacher's liberal Jesus. And then we would be back where we started.

Pneumatology and Ecclesiology

As Christ is identified with the primordial nature for Cobb, so also is the Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit identified with the consequent nature.[14] God's saving activity consists in an ongoing reception and synthesis into good all that in worldly occasions would, if left to their individuality, be mutually incompatible or even destructive elements. This process of redeeming the world from destruction raises the question of eschatology, a question we will ask in more detail later.

The doctrine of the church is an extension of Christology. Although Christ as logos can be found in all things, the human realm where there is openness to the divinely led transformation is special. This is the church. Whiteheadianism permits a deep understanding of just how Christ is present to the church, namely, he is constitutively present to the church in the same way that he is present to all of nature. Hence, the historical particularity of the Christian church seems to be of little or no positive consequence, at least for Cobb.

Inter-religious Dialogue, Especially with Buddhism

Perhaps this undervaluing of historical particularity contributes to the openness and perhaps even to the profound creativity that Cobb brings to the problems posed by religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue. In our pluralistic context, he asks, should we Christians try to persuade others to accept our Jesus Christ as absolute? If we Christians claim that Jesus Christ is good news, does our Gospel come as bad news to Jews or to others who want to maintain their traditional religious identity? Can Christ be bad news to anybody and still be Christ? These are burning questions and right now sit on the theological front burner.

How does Cobb answer? With nuance. On the one hand, Cobb is sympathetic to the supra-confessional universalist position of John Hick and Paul Knitter, according to which the same nameless divine reality resides at the center of every religious tradition. The various traditions express their experiences with the divine in culturally relative ways.[15] Cobb is similarly able to reach up and above the historical traditions with universal concepts such as logos or transformation. On the other hand, Cobb is slower to preempt the dialogue process by asserting in advance the unity being sought. He wants to engage in genuine dialogue with non-Christians, listening to the truth they have to teach us. And more. He wants to pass through dialogue to something beyond, namely, to a mutual transformation of Christians and non-Christians that are informed by growth in truth.[16] To do so, Christians need both to affirm their own commitment to Christ while opening themselves to new possibilities. Cobb wants to avoid two extremes: narrow-minded bigotry and lukewarm compromising. The pursuit of truth through Christ, he believes, will take us to toward mutual transformation.

> The more deeply we trust Christ, the more openly receptive we will be to wisdom from any source, and the more responsibly critical we will be both of our own received habits of mind and of the limitations and distortions of others.[17]

One quite profound example of Cobb's recommended receptivity to wisdom from another religious tradition is his proposal to tie together the Buddhist understanding of emptiness with the Christian concept of God. At first they seem incompatible. Cobb asks: How can ultimate emptiness be reconciled with ultimate being? He is willing to stress the difficulty so as to avoid a hasty and unauthentic convergence. We must

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[14]CPA.261f; cf., LG.103ff.

[15]Cf. Ted Peters, "Confessional Universalism and Inter-Religious Dialogue" for "Theology Update," *dialog* 25:2 (Spring 1986) 145-149.

[16]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Towards a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) ix; abbrev. BD.

[17]John B. Cobb, Jr., "The Religions," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2nd ed., 1985) 373.

acknowledge that the more fully emptiness is understood, the clearer it becomes that it does not mean what the Bible means by God. "Emptiness and God name two quite different ultimates to which we are related in two quite different ways," he writes.[18] He begins with difference, yet he grants integrity to the Buddhist experience with ultimate emptiness. Then he poses for consideration: can we Christians understand God as unqualifiedly empty? Might we think of God as the everlasting actualization of *pratityasamutpada* (dependent origination) so that, like Buddha, God is perfectly empty and, thereby, perfectly full? The incorporation of this Buddhist notion might help us to see God as "totally open to all that is and constituted by its reception."[19]

What I find interesting here is the way Cobb poses the problem of incompatibility presupposing the classical metaphysics of being rather than his own metaphysics of becoming. The solution found by emphasizing God's receptivity, of course, seems to warrant the God found in his process metaphysics.

Ecological Ethics, Economics, and Political Theology

The trains of Christian ethical thought ran on at least two separate tracks during the 1970s, one dedicated to human justice and the other to sustaining the planet's ability to support life. When the two trains occasionally passed one another, hissing and snarling could be heard. Cobb belongs to that small union of workers who wants to put both on the same track.

> As long as justice and sustainability are viewed as antagonistic interests, sociological theology and ecological theology will work against each other, whereas they are both needed in a truly comprehensive political theology. They can work together only when abandoning the trade-off mentality, the adherents of both rethink the requirements of both justice and sustainability so as to see that justice entails sustainability and sustainability entails justice.[20]

For two decades now, John Cobb has been acutely disturbed over the environmental crisis. As a theologian and lover of God's creation he feels he must react to the threat that life on our planet may be losing its future. He cites the growing hole in the earth's protective shield of ozone, the greenhouse effect, the destruction of the forests, the loss of species, and the pressure on sustainability due to human population growth. He finds it hard to "suppress the cry of anguish, the scream of horror."[21]

To meet the challenge of the environmental crisis, Cobb appeals to the organicism of Whitehead's metaphysics. Everything is connected through the process of prehension. Whitehead's organicism provides philosophical support for viewing our existence on earth "ecologically" in terms of "holism" and the "web of life." Cobb along with his Australian colleague in biology, Charles Birch, criticize the management mentality of modernity because it is too anthropocentric. The current mentality fails to impute rights to animals and plants and inorganic matter. Yet all are connected. What we need, they say, is "a deep spiritual transformation that will lead human beings to experience themselves simply as a part of the whole web and not as agents of purposive change."[22] To aid in this spiritual transformation Cobb proposes an ethic that is biocentric or even theocentric.

> Process theology rejects anthropocentrism for theocentrism, but there can be for it no contrast between seeking the good of God and seeking

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[18]John Cobb, "Buddhist Emptiness and the Christian God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45:1 (1977) 12. Robert A. F. Thurman accuses Cobb of being the "ultimate relativist" and, hence, incoherent. Why? Because in using the term 'ultimate' to describe both being and emptiness, he fails to recognize that emptiness transcends both being and nonbeing. The phrase 'ultimate reality' applies solely to a single, absolute, unsurpassed, final being. It does not apply to its virtual opposite. The result is the metaphysical position of ultimate relativism ("Beyond Buddhism and Christianity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 3:1 [1983] 22). Yet, it seems to me, Cobb more than others is careful to avoid the pitfalls of an easy relativism, emphasizing initially the incompatability of emptiness and divinity and, thereby, pressing for a transformation in both conceptualities.

[19]BD.113.

[20]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 128; abbrev. PTPT.

[21]John B. Cobb, Jr., and Herman E. Daly, *For the Common Good* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 21; abbrev. FCG.

[22]John B. Cobb, Jr. and Charles Birch, *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 65; abbrev. LL. Why, I ask, must we choose between experiencing ourselves as part of the whole web and being agents of purposive change? Can we not have wholism without fatalism?

> the good of creation. The good for God is the good for creation and the good for creation is the good for God. For practical purposes there is a coincidence of the implications of theocentrism and biocentrism.[23]

Cobb believes he can shift away from an anthropocentric ethic because the locus of value in Whiteheadian philosophy is not found in persons as such, but in experience. It is experience, not persons, that has intrinsic value. Our pet dogs have experience. So do ants and mosquitoes. And if we invoke Whitehead's panpsychism, even plants and inorganic matter have experience.[24] Of course, we might want to recall methodologically what is going on here. The entire metaphysical scheme is constructed from an argument by extrapolation based upon human experience and applied to all actual occasions. The model for nonhuman experience is human experience. Therefore, one simply cannot use Whitehead's metaphysics as a justification for a non-anthropocentric ethic without inadvertently reconfirming an anthropocentric ethic.

From ecology Cobb moves to economics. His newest book, *For the Common Good*, coauthored with economist Herman E. Daly, is quite a *tour de force*. It analyzes and criticizes the dominant science of economics we have inherited from the Enlightenment and proposes a new vision of breathtaking scope and subtlety. The team of two scholars want to supplement the dominant philosophy of individualism with a more ecologically sound paradigm of the "person-in-community." This position is not a total repudiation of individualism, because it recognizes that individuals make up communities. Yet, communities are more than mere aggregates of individuals, just as the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The world consists of a community of communities—an inclusive whole—and this fact should become an economic principle.

This shift to a more communitarian economic theory will require a change in anthropology, a change in our understanding of *homo economicus*. Modern economic theory assumes that individuals optimize their own interests and, further, that economic self-interest is what defines rational human behavior. This assumption makes such things as other-regard (altruism, sacrificial love, etc.) appear irrational. Yet, argue Cobb and colleague, regard for the welfare of the other is more rational and, hence, more human. Why? Because the welfare of the environment is inextricably tied to the welfare of the individual. If the community is healthy, the individual can be healthy. If the biosphere is healthy, the individual can be healthy. Individuals are internally related to their communities. Our relations determine who we are. An economic theory or practice that fails to recognize the principle of relationality is unrealistic and, worse, dooming the fragile web of life that currently exists on planet earth. We need to operate out of a vision of "the Great Economy—the economy that sustains the total web of life and everything that depends on the land. It is the Great Economy that is of ultimate importance."[25]

The use of "ultimate" here might remind us of God, the ultimate reality. It should. The Great Economy has to do with the welfare of the whole, and Cobb identifies a special relation between God and the whole. "Whatever else God is, God is also inclusive of the whole."[26] With this premise in mind, Cobb can proceed to use the term 'idolatry' to describe economic activity that is individualistic and short sighted. Idolatry is defined as treating as ultimate or whole that which is not ultimate or whole, namely, the parts.[27]

If we focus on the theology underlying this economic vision, it appears that Cobb is working with three steps of comprehensiveness: God inclusive of the whole, the whole inclusive of the parts, and individuals or microeconomic units

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[23]John B. Cobb, Jr., "Process Theology and Environmental Issues," *The Journal of Religion* 60:4 (October 1980) 350.

[24]In his review of *The Liberation of Life*, Ian G. Barbour questions whether Cobb and Birch provide adequate grounds for the protection of human rights. Does it protect persons of less intense experience—those with Down's syndrome, for example—from abuse? (*CTNS Bulletin* 5:4 [Autumn 1985] 14). Later, Cobb clarifies his position a bit, saying he believes "there is more intrinsic value in a human being than in a mosquito or a virus" (FCG.378). Nevertheless, the thrust of his wholism leads toward an appreciation of non-human life forms that sees them as more than mere means, also as ends.

[25]FCG.18.

[26]FCG.387.

[27]FCG.383.

which are the parts. It is curious that treating the whole as ultimate does not get dubbed as idolatrous; only treating something less than the whole does. Evidently, whatever divinity there is that distinguishes God from the whole—God is "inclusive" of the whole, not equated with it—does not count for much. This God is not holy. This God is not wholly other.

From ecology Cobb also moves to politics. Cobb believes "process theology must become a political theology."[28] What sends him in this direction is the challenge posed by continental theologians of hope, the theologians of liberation, and feminist thought. The particular track he follows is an extension of his process metaphysics and previously developed ecological ethic.

What is the challenge? After reviewing the work of Dorothee Sölle, J.B. Metz, Jürgen Moltmann and others, Cobb concludes that what we need is a "new concept of God" which will treat all persons as "free subjects" so that the future will be in our hands and not obviated by the power of divine omnipotence.[29] Whitehead offers just this kind of a God, because in his cosmology there is an element of self-determination in every unitary event. By presenting us with possibilities and "lures for feeling," the primordial nature of God contributes to our freedom, a freedom which differs from both determinism and chance. The presentation of possibilities in each occasion of experience opens up space for the decision of that occasion about itself.

The future is open, for better or for worse. Cobb believes that this is good news for human freedom, because Whitehead's thought "cannot assure us of the meaningfulness of our actions by pointing toward a future Kingdom of God on this planet."[30]

I have trouble, in general, with such celebrations of an open future that have no eschatological consummation. One of the things from which we need to be liberated is ourselves. To say the future is solely in our hands is to condemn us to ourselves. The idea of freedom becomes vacuous when it does not specify the source of oppression. The Augustinian or realist understanding of human sin is specific: we are the source. Salvation consists, in part, of deliverance from ourselves.[31] Freedom comes from transformation. What Cobb offers as political hope looks to me like political condemnation. Perhaps this indicates we should turn to the topic of eschatology proper.

Will God's Kingdom Ever Come?

Process theists applaud Whitehead for providing grounds for hope in history. The philosopher does this by asserting the radical openness of the future. Anything can happen. This means we are free to make happen what we want to happen. We are free to introduce wholly new and innovative chapters into the story of the world. This means also that progress is possible. Institutions and ideals can be changed for the better. The present is always ripe for visions of a radical new future, of a new self-understanding, of transformations in our way of life. And, as a special bonus, the products of these transformative acts impact upon God; they are retained in the everlasting divine memory. They have enduring importance. All of this openness to what is new bolsters hope, according to Cobb along with colleagues such as Griffin, Ford, and Beardslee.[32]

The only catch, of course, is that such openness also means we can choose the opposite of progress. There is no assurance that the human species will move forward. We may choose self-annihilation, or worse. Progress is not guaranteed. Only process is.

Depending on how this is interpreted, it just may conflict with the Christian doctrines of the consummation of history, the resurrection of the dead, and the promise of an end in which evil is overcome.

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[28]PTPT.1.

[29]PTPT.73.

[30]PTPT.80.

[31]Elsewhere I have labeled this the 'eschatological problem': if we are the problem, how can we also be the solution? The solution must be found in a redemptive act of divine grace, not in a simple open future where we continue the present cycle of oppression-liberation-oppression. Ted Peters, *Futures—Human and Divine* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978).

[32]PT.112; Ford, LG.116ff; and William A. Beardslee, *A House for Hope* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 113, 143f.; abbrev. HH.

> ...all will be made alive in Christ....Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. (I Cor 15: 22, 24 NRSV)

Process philosophers and theologians contend, however, that the power of the future can not reside in some such future actuality. If such a future actuality were promised, then this would contradict the notions of human freedom and openness to the future. The future kingdom of God may affect the present as an ideal, as an image, as a spiritual leading; but it is not a forthcoming actual state of affairs. There will be no divinely appointed end to the process. The process as presently constituted, evil and all, is everlasting.

Process thinkers have a great investment in the continuing interplay between the ideal future and the concrete present. Hence, when coordinating the Christian doctrine of the kingdom of God with the divine lure, the quality of futurity becomes more important than the actual content of the kingdom itself. Lewis Ford, for example, contends that the kingdom of God must be forever future and never present. Should it ever be realized in the present then it would lose its drawing power; and this drawing power is necessary to make the process work. "Thus the reigning of God is forever future, never capable of surrendering its futurity to present realization."[33] The result, says John Cobb, is that he cannot anticipate a coming of a new order or a new age in which the ambiguities of our world will be superseded.[34]

The problem with this is that traditionally the prophetic and apocalyptic hope has been directed at the kingdom of God, not the future per se. From the orthodox point of view, the process theologians are committing a version of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The concept of the future is an abstract category; it is not the concrete content of the Christian hope. The kingdom of God is. That the kingdom of God for Jesus and for us now has a future quality to it is true; but that toward which we look forward is the unambiguous presence of God's reign, not a future will o' the wisp.

We find a variant in Schubert Ogden, for whom the kingdom is not forever future. He can speak much more positively about the kingdom of God becoming present, but when he does so he means it existentially. He holds that the eschatological symbols are all mythological and require à la Bultmann demythologizing and application to the life of the individual. They can not be applied literally to the cosmos. There will never be an actual consummation of linear history. Eschatology for us has only a reference to human authenticity in the present.[35]

But Ogden does not stop with the existentialist interpretation. He also makes a metaphysical application of eschatology. What is new and startling about the Ogden position here is that he applies to God what previously orthodoxy had applied to the salvation of the creation. He states that resurrection does not apply fundamentally to the quantity or quality of human life, "but to the quality of God's life...it is God himself who is the only final end, even as he is also the only primal beginning, both of man and the world."[36] A religion that tries to apply the eschatological symbols to the human future is a self-serving one. It uses God for our own purposes rather than fostering our genuine service to God. Resurrection for Ogden means that we humans perish in our subjective immediacy. In doing so we are objectively remembered by God and this enriches the divine life. Instead of the one Jesus on the cross "giving his life as a ransom for many," we have here the many giving their lives for the enrichment of the one. "*Soli deo gloria*—to God alone be the glory."[37]

As we draw out the implications of this position, we move closer and closer to a showdown between process thought and orthodox Christian belief. In the doctrine of eschatology, what were earlier just tensions now begin to flare up into outright skirmishes. The two points in particular where traditional theology will be reluctant to adopt the process reformulations are the denial of divine sovereignty and the denial of subjective immortality.

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[33]LG.38; cf., PR.169; HH.96, 110, 129ff.

[34]CPA.225.

[35]Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 210, 227; abbrev. RG.

[36]RG.220f.

[37]RG.230.

Eschatology: God's Freedom and Our Freedom

As we saw earlier, process theists hold that God is not omnipotent. Their motives are perhaps threefold. First, Whitehead's system requires a finite and limited deity who exemplifies the principles, not one who dominates them. Second, when both Whitehead and the theologians confront the theodicy problem, they choose divine goodness at the expense of divine power. And third, given the criteria of modern understandability, they grant an assumed incontestable priority in all things to human freedom.

What motivated biblical and post-biblical Christians to teach an eschatological consummation was their faith that God would finally overcome evil, their assurance that the devil would be thrown into the lake of fire and that there would no longer be anything accursed (Rev 20:10; 22:3). Lewis Ford is crystal clear in his opposition here: there is no such assurance! God does not have the power to triumph ultimately over evil.

> Process theism, by relinquishing the claim that God could completely control the world in order to overcome the problem of present evil, cannot have this traditional assurance about the future. We are faced with an ineluctable dilemma: Either God has the power to overcome evil unilaterally, and he should have already, or he does not, and we have no guarantee that he will ever be able to. Process theism has chosen to embrace the second horn of this dilemma. God cannot guarantee that evil will be overcome simply because he is not the sole agent determining the outcome of the world.[38]

The "God the Father Almighty" confessed by the creeds is either replaced or reinterpreted by a deity who is strong on persuasion but weak on potency. The motive here is to avoid the God who exercises a monopoly of power and who achieves his will regardless of evil's resistance. Cobb suggests that the term "omnipotence" may still be used as long as it is redefined to refer to the "optimum persuasive power in relation to whatever is."[39] This optimum is a balance between urging the world toward what is good and maximizing the freedom of the world which God seeks to persuade.

What we see operating here is total commitment by process thinkers to human freedom. Freedom is not only the ultimate modern value, it is the ultimate metaphysical reality as well. And freedom is understood here as subjective arbitrariness, i.e., that the decisions of creaturely subjectivity are the final forces which determine the outcome of world history. Lewis Ford says that our freedom is irreducible and that it is we who "finally determine, through our own present power, how effective God's future power will be."[40] Cobb and Griffin put it this way:

> Process theism...cannot provide the assurance that God's will is always done....At this point process theology does side with the atheist against the traditional theist. It does insist that the future is truly open and that what will happen depends upon what human beings will do.[41]

Metaphysically speaking, the subjective freedom of which the process theists speak is not human freedom but rather the freedom of the individual occasions which make up the world process. Human freedom is just the model. But what is important is the irreducible priority of freedom granted to the individual actual entities and the subordination of God's freedom. God too, recall, is an actual entity, but a special case. How is God a special case? All actual entities, including God, have a subjective aim. The difference is that the aim of the individual entities attains to satisfaction in concrescence, whereas God's does not. Why the discrimination against God? Why are the rules of the game set up so that when there is competition between God and the individuals, the individuals must be granted the victory and God the loss? Why cannot God have what everybody else has? The problem of coordinating divine freedom and human freedom, divine power and human power, has plagued Christian theology throughout its history. There is no easy solution, including this one. The solution suggested by the process theists may tickle the modern fancy for human freedom, but it can not help but sacrifice divine

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[38]LG. 119.

[39]John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 90; abbrev. GW.

[40]LG.40; cf., Beardslee, HH.111f.

[41]PT.118; cf. PTPT.77.

freedom to do so.

Thus, in effect, if the world so chooses, it may roll on and on throughout aeons of unending time frustrating God. God's subjective aim could be everlastingly denied satisfaction. His will would never be completely done. It would make a lie out of the closing lines of the Nicene Creed: "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

A process thinker might counter that God is not frustrated because his consequent nature is constantly transforming temporal evil into everlasting good, that even though the world never experiences unambiguous goodness, God does. This legitimate neoclassical interpretation, however, would make God more cruel and ruthless than the alleged God of classical theism who authors evil. At least that God plans someday to rid the creation of evil so that we creatures can also enjoy blessedness. A process theism which designates salvation for divine enjoyment while consigning the creation to everlasting suffering would not solve the theodicy problem. It would make it worse.

Eschatology: Is There Subjective Immortality?

This brings us to the second eschatological issue which may cause tension and resistance to reformulation in neoclassical terms, namely, resurrection and personal immortality. Process theists take some pride in reporting that Whitehead was entirely neutral on an issue which is absolutely crucial for Christian belief. In *Religion in the Making* Whitehead describes his doctrine as "entirely neutral on the question of immortality." He goes on to say that "there is no reason why such a question should not be decided on more special evidence, religious or otherwise, provided that it is trustworthy."[42] It seems to me clear that the Christian church has claimed consistently for nearly two millennia that it has the special evidence: the Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ. This means that the issue to be discussed is just how trustworthy this evidence is. One would expect the next task to be a historical one, namely, to investigate the reliability of the biblical claims that Jesus rose from the dead. The process theists, however, do not take up this task. They do not make a historical examination of biblical witness. Instead, they return to metaphysics, the same metaphysics that dubbed itself incapable of rendering a judgment on the issue.

Thus, process theologians reformulate the question so that we end up with a different issue: evidently assuming that Whiteheadianism prohibits subjective immortality, how can we handle the claim of resurrection within his already prescribed metaphysical categories? Does this imply that process theologians are less neutral than Whitehead? Evidently so. The resulting theological position of non-neutrality is based upon the denial of the possibility of a consciousness which is not completely dependent on the physical organism.[43] I do not wish to imply by mentioning this that the orthodox view requires a totally independent consciousness. That is another discussion.[44] The only point here is that the process theists seem to be making a commitment which Whitehead himself did not make.

Two camps emerge. In the first and more dominant camp belong theorists such as Hartshorne, Ogden, Ford, and Lee Snook. These maintain that human subjective immortality is to be denied on both metaphysical and theological grounds. In the second camp we find Cobb, Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki. These take Whitehead's position on neutrality more seriously and open themselves to subjective immortality in one form or another. What they all have in common, however, is rejection of a naive image of the human soul or a resurrected person persisting beyond the funeral service.

The neoclassical metaphysical system, as already depicted, does not deny the persistence of actual entities. The question is: *how* do they endure, subjectively or objectively? What perishes at concrescence is subjective immediacy. What endures is their objective prehension by other entities and ultimately by

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[42]Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) 110f.; abbrev. RM. Cf., PT.123; LG.114.

[43]Cf., LG.114; HH.145.

[44]CPA.252ff.

the consequent nature of God. Perishing does not mean a move from reality to unreality; it means moving from one's own subjectivity to somebody else's objectivity. Consequently, a human personality cannot everlastingly retain its subjectivity. Its immortality is found in being objectively remembered by God.[45]

To this apparent metaphysical restriction against subjective immortality for the human personality, Schubert Ogden adds what appears to be a powerful theological argument. He contends that the desire for such immortality is idolatry. The wish to extend one's existence beyond death issues from the sinful denial of "the essential difference between God and man—the Creator and the creature, and Redeemer and redeemed." God alone has immortality, an enduring subjective immediacy. As finite entities who are unwilling to accept our finitude, we are engaging in "the desire to be like God," and hence are giving expression to the primal sin.[46] Authentic Christian faith, which includes self-sacrifice in behalf of the future of the other, should make us pleased to know that in our perishing as humans we are enriching the divine life.[47] Dr. McCoy in the movie "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn," seems to be comforted by such an eschatology. While he and Admiral Kirk aboard the Enterprise stand looking out the window, watching the casket carrying the corpse of beloved Dr. Spock, he remarks: "He's not dead as long as we remember him." However, scholar Robert Neville is not satisfied with a strictly memorial immortality. He writes, "the merely objective presence of the world's events in the everlasting memory of God is not what Scripture means by resurrection. If there is any analogue for eternal life in process philosophy, it is the subjective moment of creative process."[48]

Lee Snook, writing in *dialog* a few years ago, made the same point by invoking the theology of the cross. Those who live under the cross make no claims on what God will or must do for them. We die daily, indeed in every moment, and the cross gives us no reason to expect anything else. Therefore, Snook contended, "under the cross the Christian also abandons all confidence that God somehow will reconstitute our subjective existence."[49]

This position caused a veritable explosion among *dialog* readers. George Forell countered in the next issue of *dialog* saying that Snook and other process thinkers have lost their faith in the resurrection, that they are going through "theological menopause." James Burtness accused Snook of arbitrarily changing biblical meanings to suit process metaphysics.[50] Philip Hefner countered the counterers to defend Snook saying that "process theology has not drawn me away from the Christian faith; instead it has been able to instill in me a deeper faith in God."[51] I myself do not necessarily take the position of any one of the critics. My point here is that the doctrine of eschatology brings out the tensions created by pursuing theology in the process mode.

In the other camp, Cobb and Griffin stress Whitehead's neutrality on the issue and at least entertain the possibility of "renewed personal existence after death."[52] Cobb in particular is motivated to do so by strong religious impulses, the trust in a God who is not limited by the sensuously accessible world, and who just "may

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[45]I find a peculiar twist in method at this point. Recall that we began with the model of human experience and subjectivity and applied it analogically to sub-human phenomena. Then we dubbed these sub-human phenomena or actual entities the primary reality, with the human now understood as an epiphenomenal society of these more basic entities. The human *qua* human is not an actual entity. Yet it seems that in the discussion of subjective immortality this is almost forgotten. Only Marjorie Suchocki sees this as important. Might there be qualities indicative of a monarchical society of entities which are not identical to the qualities of the entities alone? Certainly our experience already tells us that human subjectivity lasts longer than the subjective immediacy of any single entity. Could this be carried further? Suchocki does by adding a factor between concrescence and transition: satisfaction or enjoyment. God's prehension of an occasion includes the occasion's satisfaction. Cf., *End of Evil*, 111.

[46]Schubert M. Ogden, "The Meaning of Christian Hope," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 30 (1975) 161; cf., Hartshorne, "Time, Death, and Everlasting Life" in *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1962) 259ff.

[47]Cf., HH.108f, 119, 136f; CPA.222.

[48]Robert C. Neville, *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (New York: Seabury, Crossroad, 1980) 95; abbrev. CG.

[49]Lee Snook, "Death and Hope—An Essay in Process Theology," *dialog* 15:2 (Spring 1976) 123.

[50]*dialog* 15:3 (Summer 1976) 214-17.

[51]*dialog* 15:4 (Autumn 1976) 306.

[52]PT.123f; cf., GW.101; John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 63-70; hereinafter abbreviated CNT.

also have the power to sustain or recreate man in quite a new form."[53] Whatever proposal Cobb might come up with to understand this renewed personal existence, of course, would be within the categories set by the metaphysical scheme. Hence, "resurrection of the body" as found in the Apostles' Creed would be eliminated from candidacy at the outset. Instead, Cobb tentatively, cautiously, and suggestively explores the possibility of disembodied souls. Regardless of the material content of his suggestions, what is important to note is that Cobb makes no doctrinal commitment. To do so would be to go beyond the limits set by a Whiteheadian natural theology.[54]

What this means is that despite Whitehead's openness to further evidence on the matter, Cobb will not systematically consider the biblical revelation as constitutive of his doctrinal system. Such a revelation would be an extra, something tacked on to an already sufficient and complete philosophical system. The truth or falsity of the biblical claim that Jesus rose from the dead and that we will rise also is simply excluded from consideration as irrelevant. Its possible incorporation might lead to incoherence in the system, and this pre-theological coherence has methodological priority.

Marjorie Suchocki follows Cobb's lead and even goes further by acknowledging the indispensability of personal resurrection to the Christian faith. She also recognizes that the concept of objective immortality is unsatisfactory from the point of view of Christian consciousness. Her examination of New Testament writings such as Mark, John, and James, plus her review of Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, dispel Ogden's charge of idolatry. It is clear in both the Bible and the early church fathers that the Christian hope centers on God's final victory over evil—a posthistorical and eschatological victory. What motivates the Christian doctrine of resurrection is not the idolatrous desire for individual immortality. Rather, resurrection is a necessary component of redemption from evil and the unambiguous establishment of justice. The individual is part of the whole, the divine whole. The real issue is "sheerly God's victory over evil," she says; and "the overcoming of evil requires subjective immortality."[55]

Now the question becomes: how can we understand subjective immortality in terms of the Whiteheadian scheme? Like other process theists, Suchocki does not argue for the persistence of a distinctively human subjectivity beyond death. Subjectivity persists, but it is not human subjectivity. She picks as her text a phrase from Whitehead's *Process and Reality* where the door is open just a crack: "...immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality."[56] Although subjective immediacy in the actual occasion is supposed to perish at concrescence, this reconciliation process in the divine consequent nature is exploited here by Suchocki. Evidently God can somehow retain the living experience of the entity in his everlasting memory. The key, Suchocki proposes, is creativity, especially transformative creativity.

> Transitional creativity, then, becomes the mode whereby the occasion can become itself and more than itself in God....Thus the peculiarity obtains that the occasion is *both* itself *and* God: it is apotheosized. As a participant in the divine concrescence, it will feel its own immediacy, and God's feeling of its immediacy as well.[57]

The catch is that the subjective immediacy which Suchocki sees retained is that of the individual occasions or entities.[58] It is not that of democracies or monarchical societies. It is

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[53]GW.102.

[54]CNT.70.

[55]Marjorie Suchocki, "The Question of Immortality," *The Journal of Religion* 57:3 (July 1977) 294; 292.

[56]PR.351. Robert Neville's interpretation would not allow for the Suchocki move. "By definition, God cannot prehend their [the actual entities'] subjective realities in process of concrescence....Therefore, in themselves all the things in the world are external to God, unknowable to God" (CG.90). Suchocki defends her position against Neville, saying that "the satisfaction retains the immediacy since the satisfaction is an integral portion of the occasion itself, and the occasion is genetically indivisible" (*End of Evil* 168, n.12; cf.88).

[57]Suchocki, *End of Evil* 102. In his review of this book, David Griffin complains that this fails to answer the question, because Suchocki affirms an *addition* to the satisfaction: the future seems to change the past. *Process Studies*, 18:1 (Spring 1989) 60.

[58]"...occasions of experience, not substantial persons, are resurrected into the life of God....the person is composed of discrete occasions, and each occasion is prehended by God upon its completion. There can be no holding off of this divine prehension until the person herself or himself perishes" (*End of Evil*, 107). It is God's prehension of all of our constituting occasions that unifies us, not our own experienced personhood.

transpersonal. Human consciousness as we know it still perishes. She has analyzed the problem well, but her suggested solution still represents a loyalty to the metaphysical system that excludes the biblical vision of person. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the seriousness with which Suchocki tackles the issue of subjective immortality combined with her reintroduction of a posthistorical and redemptive eschatology makes her a protean bridge builder between process theology and classical theism.

An Evaluation of Process Theology

Any criticisms of John Cobb and other process theists I here offer are set within a context of admiration and indebtedness to their leadership in formulating and executing the theological task. Cobb's invoking of Whiteheadian categories has broken the theological community open so as to renew our appreciation for the dynamism and creativity and compassion of God. He has carried through his method of both presupposing yet projecting visions of reality, especially wholistic visions that are aimed at transforming and improving life on earth. More of a theologian we could not ask! Nevertheless, in offering this exposition I have sought to point out a few of the problems with the process program. Now perhaps a brief summary is in order.

The central problem with process theists in the Whiteheadian tradition is that they have lost the tension between the two constructive theological criteria, loyalty to Scripture and contemporary meaningfulness. This is so because whenever such a tension arises, their immediate inclination is to relieve it by capitulating to contemporary meaningfulness—that is, to the modern sense of order, and that order is largely defined by neoclassical metaphysics. Past revelation as a definitive disclosure by God in the events of Jesus' life is systematically excluded. The epistemological foundation is common human experience and self-evidence, not special revelation. Revelation can hardly play a constitutive role let alone a normative one. The parameters of the metaphysical scheme have been drawn by Whitehead or Hartshorne, and these are seldom if ever violated in the work of neoclassical theism.[59]

John Cobb admits this and offers an apt though, to me, unconvincing justification. For him faithfulness to the witness of Scripture recognizes a decisive impetus in Jesus; but we today are not normed by what happened back then. We live now in responsiveness to the living Christ. This calls us to creativity in theology as well as elsewhere in life. Cobb claims he is "not bound to preserve any specifiable doctrine, even of Jesus."[60]

Like the process theists, I encourage philosophical speculation. But I do not believe the sole starting point and norm is common human experience. It is rather the gospel revealed in Jesus Christ and testified to by Scripture. That Christ lives today, as Cobb says, is true; but in order to know its truth we must measure common human experience by the Christ norm found in the scriptural witness to the ancient revelation.

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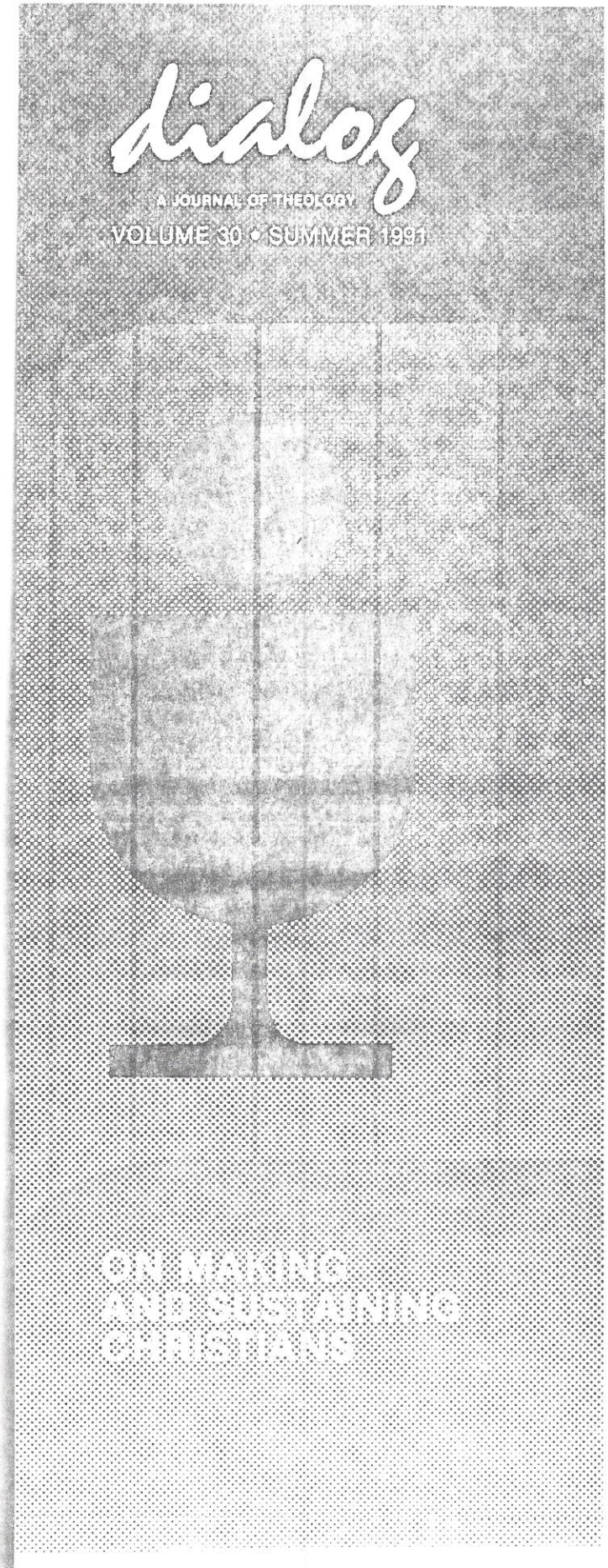
[59]One need not be too upset by this. Lyman Lundeen offers utilitarian comfort. "Ultimately, it is not what Whitehead says that matters most. Nor is it crucial that he should be credited with the resolution of certain problems. What is decisive is that our ability to cope with life is enhanced. Whitehead may help us in this respect..." (*Risk and Rhetoric in Religion* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972] 254). John Cobb believes that what Whitehead says does matter, and he has shown us how it may help us.

[60]JCTP. 187.



RESPONSE TO TED PETERS

*By John B. Cobb, Jr.**

Ted Peters has a truly remarkable ability to encompass a large body of theological material and report on it in a readable and informative way. He has demonstrated this in his periodic contributions to *dialog*, through which he keeps its readers abreast of what is happening. I am deeply grateful to him for including my work in these essays.[1]

Actually, much of his essay is about Whitehead, his disciples, and his critics. Peters' reasoning, I think, is that since Whitehead's philosophy has been so important to me as a theologian, the best basis for evaluating my work is to come to an independent interpretation and appraisal of Whitehead. Peters' analyses and criticisms are often quite astute. Nevertheless, they are different from mine, and this leads to a problem. Obviously, my theology is influenced by Whitehead as I interpret him and not by the Whitehead presented to us by Peters. Where Peters fails to note this difference, it is understandable that he finds inconsistencies in my work. However, I do not want to devote this response to scholastic debate about Whitehead.

More useful for understanding me, and a good many other process theologians as well, will be a comment on the role of Whitehead in our theological development. As I read Peters' account, I sense that he views us as having chosen rather arbitrarily to adopt Whitehead's philosophy and then to remain rigidly restricted to the doctrines that it allows, despite our being thereby precluded from affirming otherwise reliable and unproblematic features of traditional Christianity. Whatever Peters' intentions, this makes us appear a bit perverse.

My personal story is somewhat different from this. My inability to believe in a literal resurrection on the last day is not caused by my commitment to Whitehead's philosophy. Neither is my lack of belief in God as "Wholly Other," nor my

[1]Ted Peters, "John Cobb, Theologian in Process," for "Theology Update," *dialog* 29:3 (Summer 1990) 207-220 and 29:4 (Autumn 1990) 290-302.

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failure to adopt supernaturalism in general, nor my heterodox treatment of the Trinity. Instead, it was my immersion in academia as a university student that imposed the modern mind upon me. This was profoundly antagonistc to the world of thought and feeling that had been my Christian faith, and the latter collapsed. For someone to tell me, or for me to tell myself, that I *should* have faith or *should* accept biblical revelation, was at that point quite useless. That is not a matter under the control of the will, and I find any attempt to command belief, or even to generate it by social pressures, highly offensive.

In this respect the situation today has changed in one respect. At that time I might have *wanted* to believe the things that Peters believes, even though I *could* not. Today the Wholly Other God, *creatio ex nihilo*, deterministic divine power, and an assured intervention of God at the end of history do not attract me. My reasons are partly Whiteheadian, but they have been greatly strengthened by the sensitivities generated by the radical theologies of the sixties, by my encounters with Buddhism, and especially by the impact of feminism.

What *was* then the attraction of Whitehead, and why do I so rarely depart from his basic conceptuality? Whitehead offered me the only convincing alternative to the nihilism that was for me the implication of the modern, scientistic mind into which I was being drawn. This alternative allowed me, encouraged me, to reaffirm much of what had been precious to me as a Christian believer. Indeed, in some respects the Bible spoke to me with a directness and convincing power after my encounter with Whitehead that it had lacked before. I discovered that what mattered most to me in my Christian faith did not entail supernaturalism, with all the problems and threats to credulity involved. Hence Peters is quite correct to note the lack of these elements in my theology. What does not come through in his account is what I would claim to be my own contribution to theology proper—the fleshing out of a full-bodied theology in non-supernaturalist terms.

To those who are comfortable in the frame of reference of traditional Christian supernaturalism, process theology in general, and mine in particular, can still contribute a little. Peters appreciates the emphasis on divine passion as an element in God's love. Some may see value in stressing that God's power is an empowering power rather than a disempowering one. They may like the emphasis on the interconnectedness of things and the effort of process theologies to reengage the world. But like Peters they will be chiefly impressed by the omission, sometimes even the polemical rejection, of cherished doctrines and ways of thought.

The *primary* audience for process theology is that segment of the Christian movement that is not comfortable with supernaturalism. Some cling to supernaturalist ideas, believing them to be essential to faith, even though they find these ideas nearly incredible. Others have found they cannot really believe what they understand they are supposed to believe and, accordingly, leave the church, or hang on uncomfortably at the periphery. For some of these, process theology is the bearer of good news.

My own judgment is that part of the decadence of the oldline churches is caused by their retaining officially a supernaturalistic theology that does not carry real conviction for many of their most thoughtful and sensitive members. A still largely unfulfilled mission of process theology is to provide a convincing alternative. Of course, process theology shares that mission with a good many others.

I would add a few detailed comments where I found myself surprised by Peters' attribution of particular ideas to me.

First, I was startled to read that I held that salvation "is given with human existence as it is" (209). I cannot remember ever having thought that, but I know that I am not an authority on what I have said over a period of thirty years. Hence Peters may be justified in attributing this view to me. Since he provides no references for the paragraph in which he describes my position in this way, I have not tried to check it out. However, I can say with some confidence that this is not my view now, or a view that is consistent with at least 99% of what I have written. I believe the term "salvation" has a variety of uses in the Bible and a variety of legitimate uses today, but none of them that I can now think of applies to a condition "given with human existence as it is." I *hope* I never said that. If I did, I recant. It makes no sense to me.

Second, although I decided not to argue

Whitehead interpretation, I do need to comment where my views are presented directly in terms of Peters' interpretation of Whitehead. Peters concludes a couple of paragraphs on my thought with the sentence, "God feels today what I felt yesterday, so I push on with life today alone" (218). This is, as Peters knows, to derive from his interpretation of Whitehead a conclusion that is markedly different from what I have said, and then to present this as if it were the implication of my theology. This appears to me to be a bit like the H-bomb form of polemics for which he so sharply, and perhaps justly, criticizes us process theologians. Perhaps it is because we have been treated this way so often that we sometimes respond in kind. But I know this is not a justification for our overstatements.

Peters' criticism on this point hurt, since I have believed that it is an area in which Whitehead is particularly helpful. I have been convinced that there is an element of Christian truth to the position of the existentialists, who emphasize the solitariness of the moment of decision. But I have also felt that there is profound Christian truth in the affirmation of the intimate relation between us and God that is Peters' theme here. To me it has seemed that Whitehead's conceptuality has enabled process theologians to do justice to both themes.

Whitehead notes that the Alexandrian theologians, in their speculations on the Trinity and the incarnation, made the only fundamental metaphysical advance since Plato. This is the understanding of how one actual entity can be truly present in another. Whitehead views his own metaphysics as a generalization of this insight. We are genuinely members of one another. Also, God is genuinely present in us, and we are genuinely present in God.

But there is another point made by the Alexandrians that Whitehead also preserves. Although the relationship among the persons of the Trinity are co-constitutive ones, each person remains distinct. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. Similarly, God is not the occasion of human experience, and the occasion is not God. God's decision is God's. The occasion's decision is its own. That the occasion can and must decide is because of God's immanence within it, but the decision itself is made by the occasion alone. Indeed, it is only through this act of decision that the occasion attains its actuality. Just what that decision will be cannot be known even by God until it has occurred. There is thus an element of truth to the existentialist vision. It is this moment of aloneness to which Peters objects so strongly.

Exactly how this moment of separation of the creature from other creatures and from God is to be understood is a matter of ongoing discussion and debate among those influenced by Whitehead. He himself speaks of God's everlasting retention of the immediacy of the decision or of the occasion as constituted by that decision. The occasion's intrinsic value consists in that immediacy. Since that immediacy fades rapidly even in ongoing personal experience, it is quite literally true that God knows us far better than we know ourselves. I think that in general Whitehead's analysis fits well with most biblical texts, including those quoted by Peters. In other words, whereas Peters' exegesis of the texts and Peters' exegesis of Whitehead are in sharp conflict, the texts and Whitehead, as I exegete them, are remarkably congruent.

Finally, I would like to say something about the Trinity. Peters is quite bothered by what happens to this doctrine at the hands of process theologians. He thinks that commitment to Whitehead's philosophy is the problem. I see this differently. There are, in fact, some fairly traditional formulations of trinitarian dogma by process theologians. Norman Pittenger's doctrine stands well within the Western tradition. Joseph Bracken has written extensively on the subject, developing a view more in line with the Greek Fathers. Marjorie Suchocki has recently become preoccupied with the doctrine, although I cannot say whether her results will please Peters. Whitehead himself explicitly offers a Trinity, and although he did so in terms of three "natures" of God instead of "persons," what he means by "natures" and traditional meanings of "persons" overlap. Also I have already noted his great admiration for Alexandrian trinitarian reflection.

So the question is, Why are some of us so resistant to falling into line and using conventional rhetoric? I speak here only for myself. My resistance is a form of protest. Despite all the positive values that have been associated with the doctrine, it has been used, in my opinion,

more as a test of orthodoxy than as a way of clarifying and advancing the good news of Jesus Christ. Many Christians know that they *must* affirm the Trinity even though they don't understand it or see any existential or religious value in doing so. Even theologians often take the doctrine as a given and then try to puzzle out some interpretation that has positive values for the church. To me, this is all authoritarian and inauthentic, and I don't want to take part in that game.

There remain, however, important truths safeguarded by the doctrine. It makes clear that the divine reality incarnated in Jesus was truly God and that the Spirit we now experience is also, equally, truly God. It reminds us that the divine life is not simple, that it is relational through and through, and yet that God is one. Of all this I am firmly convinced. But I am also convinced that the number three has no sacred significance in the understanding of God, that, for example, the Wisdom of God has essentially the same status as the Word and the Spirit of God, and that we should be free to change our rhetoric in changing contexts. Today, I think it would be a gain to shift from a Johannine Logos Christology to a Pauline Sophia Christology. To be told that this is forbidden by the doctrine of the Trinity does not endear the doctrine to me.

I fear that this response has been more defensive than appreciative, and I regret that. I am truly pleased that Peters has taken the time to read widely in the process literature, and I am impressed by the accuracy of his insight into the problematic of process thought. Some of his exposition is impressively clear, and some of his criticisms are acute. I appreciate also that my work has been the occasion for this broader study as well as the specific attention he has given to it. I especially appreciate the kind and generous comments with which the essay begins and ends. In between he has concentrated on what he has found weak or objectionable, and I assume that one reason for doing that is to elicit a response. My response may not lessen his dislike of process theology, but I hope it will help him and others to see how process theology looks from the inside.

RESPONSE TO JOHN COBB

*By Ted Peters**

Yes, I did intend to wrestle with the broader Whiteheadian process school while explicating the systematic theology of John Cobb in the Summer and Fall 1990 installments of "Theology Update." And, yes, I fully grant that Cobb's articulation of Christian commitments are his own critical and creative contributions that go well beyond Whitehead; Cobb's theology cannot be reduced to Whitehead's philosophy. Yet the delicate point is whether Cobb's philosophical loyalty diverts or sidetracks his explication of the Christian faith. I have suggested that it does. Cobb denies this, saying that we should not blame Whitehead for what Cobb himself does.

What I find fascinating in his response to me is the turn to his personal story. The story does not begin with a prior commitment to Whitheadianism. It begins with Cobb's own faith struggle in an academic setting where he felt deeply the challenges raised by the modern mind. In the face of the profound antagonism posed by modernity, what had been his Christian faith collapsed. Whether or not he *wanted* to accept biblical revelation regarding a God who is "wholly other" or a literal resurrection on the last day, Cobb found he *could* not. Orthodoxy cannot command belief and have authentic belief. Cobb could not simply will to follow a path unless he was convinced that truth was leading him. Hence, it is not Whitehead's philosophy in itself that has led to Cobb's rejection of such things as *creatio ex nihilo*, a deterministic divine power, and an assured intervention of God at the end of history. Rather, Cobb chose to follow Whitehead because in Whitehead he found an alternative, an alternative that makes more sense to him in light of the modern and now emerging postmodern mind.

Those of us who have undergone similar struggles of faith will share in understanding how serious this is. The journal *dialog* was born amidst just such a struggle during the early 1960s, and for nearly three decades it too has sought to face the challenges modern culture poses to Christian commitment. Yet, we must

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remind ourselves that process philosophy is but one among many trails to follow through the thicket of modernity. I prefer another, while I recognize that each has its share of theological thorns. No one can be both Christian and modern without getting scratched or bruised and feeling the pain of spilled blood.

The Cobb response seems to assume that I am a supernaturalist. Perhaps this is due to my appeal to classic formulations. I do not ordinarily think of myself as a supernaturalist, however. Instead, I seek to understand nature in terms of divine creation and redemption. To think of nature as self-contained and self-explanatory is to so secularize nature as to lose sight of one of its essential characteristics, namely, its relation to God as creature-to-creator. I view nature in terms of temporality and history. This means nature changes. New things happen, because God is creative. So, when it comes to affirming such things as Jesus' Easter resurrection and the promised eschatological end to history, I believe I can avoid simple appeals to supernaturalism. Rather, I see the resurrection of Jesus as the first instantiation of a new law of nature, namely, dead people do rise. When eschatologically God's promise has been fulfilled and we find ourselves risen from the dead, it will seem quite natural. It will be.

This issue is not supernaturalism versus naturalism. The issue is whether God can and will keep the resurrection promise.

Turning to another issue in the Cobb response, I am puzzled at his objection to my interpretation of pre-reflective faith. He says he is "startled" at my reporting how he affirms that "saving faith" is given with human existence. He says he cannot remember having said that and, if he had, he certainly does not hold that position today. This sends me back to the drawing board. Why did I interpret Cobb that way? Because of my reading of passages such as the following, which appears in the book he coauthored with David Griffin, *Process Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) pages 31-32.

> ..."saving faith," the kind of faith that brings wholeness, is primarily a matter of the basic emotions, attitudes, and commitments from which one's behavior follows. That is, faith is fundamentally a mode of existence. Beliefs are important only to the extent that they support this mode of existence....Hence, there is much truth in the widespread denial that our "salvation" depends upon the affirmation of true doctrines.

Now, on second look, I sympathize with Cobb because we as readers can go two ways with what is said. On the one hand, we can emphasize the distinction between the pre-reflective mode of existence and conscious beliefs. This would apply to all types of faith, saving faith and (shall we ask?) non-saving faith. On the other hand, we could emphasize (as I did) the prior presence of specifically *saving* faith before its rise to the level of conscious belief. What would have helped to clarify the passage originally would have been a distinction between a saving faith and a non-saving faith at the pre-reflective level, if Cobb and Griffin would have wanted to. My concern in "Theology Update," recall, was with the apparent contradiction implied in moving from a faith that is already pre-reflectively salvific to Cobb's call for transformation. Why, I asked, does an already existing "saving faith" need transformation? I believe I still need to ask this question, even if it applies to only some—not all—of those who have pre-reflective faith.

Let me close with an observation regarding the dialogical dimension of the theological process. It has to do with the pursuit of truth and the important role debate plays in it. Augustine remarked that "the disposition to seek the truth is more safe than that which presumes things unknown to be known" (*On the Trinity*, IX:9). Even if faith is the starting point, said Augustine, our knowledge grows and will not flower in perfection until after this life, when we see face to face. This calls to mind Jesus' statement in John 14:6, where he says he is the "way and the truth and the life." This means, among other things I think, the theologian is to take truth seriously. I believe the implication this has for us in our modern setting with its pluralistic avalanche of scientific and religious views is this: *if the God of Jesus Christ be the source and end of truth, then we should have no fear following where the truth leads.* I engage in the dialogical process of presenting views and counter-views under the assumption that in its partial but essential way it helps us to open the gate to the path of truth. So does John Cobb. He has said repeatedly that to be a true Christian is to be open to truth, even if truth leads to the transformation of what we as Christians have believed. This constitutes a laudable faith in truth.