



Chalmers Summer School 2007

March 13, 2007

Process Theology

John B. Cobb, Jr.

July 16-20, 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Course Description

This apologetic introduction will illustrate to you how process theology responds to the needs of the church. The church needs an intellectually convincing biblical and theological basis for a progressive stance, including support for insights derived from the various liberation theologies, critical engagement with the natural and social sciences, and an appreciative relationship to other religious traditions without abandoning a strong Christocentrism.

Course Format

Monday. Introduction to the process model of reality; its difference from the model inherited from the Enlightenment. This difference has consequences for our thinking in many areas, including theology. One difference is that it implies that the boundaries we have erected among disciplines mislead us, and that theology should not be developed separately from the natural and social sciences. In this week we will focus on narrowly theological topics, but we will show how they interrelate with other topics as well and will turn to some of them on Friday. Since on the whole both “liberal” and “conservative” theologies are still heavily influenced by the Enlightenment view of reality, process thought is not well understood in those terms.

Tuesday. Process theology is unusual in our time in that it offers a quite specific conceptually developed way of thinking about God. The process doctrine of God and of how God relates to creatures is developed not only in relation to the Bible but also in relation to scientific thinking. Much of the focus is on how God is present in the world and how the world is present in God. Process theology views the exclusion of God from the intellectual world, as expressed, for example, in the university, as a loss not only for faith but also for reason.

Wednesday. Our understanding of God and how God is present in the world provides a context for the distinctive implications of process thought for Christology. This, of course, requires also reflection on the nature of creatures and especially human beings and is inseparable in Christian thinking from soteriology. Process conceptuality can be used to articulate a variety of Christologies, but I will develop the one that seems to me most helpful to the church today.

Thursday. One area in which process thinkers have been involved for a long time is religious diversity. In some ways process thought is more congenial to the thinking of East Asia and, in India, of Buddhism, than to Greek and modern thought. We think it is also

closer to traditional Hebrew thinking. A Christian faith articulated in this conceptuality can clarify differences and similarities in the more specifically religious dimensions of the several traditions. I will discuss especially the relation of Buddhism and Christianity

Friday. As indicated in general terms on Monday, process thought is also relevant to many questions. Indeed, from the process perspective there is reason to question the dominant theories in many fields. They have been formulated on the basis of the mechanistic and reductionistic vision of nature that triumphed in the Enlightenment. One example is the dominant economic theory that has no place for human community or for the natural world. I will juxtapose economic and ecological thinking and show how process thought can bring them together. Another example is evolutionary theory that excludes the subjectivity of animals. From the process perspective, the dominant neo-Darwinian formulation ignores a great deal of relevant evidence including evidence that intelligent and purposive activity affects the course of evolution.

I will assign *Handbook of Process Theology*, edited by Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, as the major text. Students should read this book in advance to get a sense of the scope of process theology and the variety of approaches to it. I hope this will enable them to think about a topic for their papers before the course. I can then help them further with this decision while I am there. I will assign limited re-readings of particular chapters during the week.

Tuesday, *Chapter 1*

Wednesday, *Chapters 2 and 3*

Thursday, *Chapter 4, 20 and 21*

Friday, *Chapters 15 and 18*

Required Reading:

Handbook of Process Theology, edited by Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman

Supplementary Readings:

I would like students to read in advance two other books selected according to their interest. At least one of these should be one I have written so that students will be introduced to my approach. I will ask the bookstore to stock some of them, but others are acceptable. Also students with special interest in other process theologians should take this opportunity to read a book by one of them. In this connection, I have asked the bookstore to stock Carol Christ's *She Who Changes*. Christ is not a Christian theologian, but her feminist appropriation of Charles Hartshorne's doctrine of God should be of special interest to feminists and is a good introduction to process thinking about God for any reader.

Course Requirements

1. All participants are expected to attend class daily and engage the learning process for classroom lectures and seminars. Attendance is mandatory for credit students.
2. All students (credit and audit) are expected to do pre-reading of primary texts for the course, and do limited reading of handouts between classes (approximately one hour per day).
3. In order to receive credit for the course, all students taking the course for any type of credit must read three of the assigned texts.
4. For those taking the course for degree credit, (Diploma, M.Div., M.A.T.S., M.A.R.E., Th.M.), see "**Summer School Degree Credit Evaluation Information**" handout for paper requirements.

5. For those taking the course for Chalmers Institute Summer School Continuing Education credit, see handout, “**Summer School Continuing Education Credit Information,**” for requirements. For all credit students there will be an extra one-hour meeting with the course grading tutor, additional to class time, for each course, to review credit requirements and decide on an appropriate research topic.

John B. Cobb, Jr. was born in Japan in a Methodist missionary home. After serving in the U.S. Army in World War II, he attended the University of Chicago where he received the PhD in 1952. He taught for three years at Young Harris College, five years at Emory University, and thirty-two years at Claremont School of Theology, from which he retired to Pilgrim Place in 1990. He has been visiting professor at Vancouver, Iliff, Chicago, Harvard, Vanderbilt, Mainz, and Rikkyo. He founded the Center for Process Studies at Claremont and co-founded Progressive Christians Uniting, with headquarters in Los Angeles. Among his books are *A Christian Natural Theology*, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, *Beyond Dialogue*, and *Postmodernism and Public Policy*. With Charles Birch he wrote *The Liberation of Life*, with Herman Daly, *For the Common Good*, and with David Lull, *Romans*. His most recent book is *The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God*, co-authored with David Ray Griffin, Richard Falk, and Catherine Keller.

**All books will be available from the UBC Bookstore after May 14th.
604-822-2665; Toll-free Canada 1-800-661-3889**