

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide"  
Hymn #99, New Century Hymnal; Process and Reality, Corrected Edition, pp. 209 &  
338

INTRODUCING PROCESS THEOLOGY—Developed by John Sweeney

*Alfred North Whitehead* (Harvard, 1924-1947):

The Chicago School (1920's-1960's):

Henry Nelson Wieman:

Bernard Meland:

Bernie Loomer:

*Daniel Day Williams* (Congregational/UCC):

*Charles Hartshorne*:

Schubert Ogden:

*William Beardslee*:

*John B. Cobb, Jr.*:

The Claremont School (1958-present); Center for Process Studies (1973-present):

*John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin*:

*Marjorie Suchocki*:

*Mary Elizabeth Moore*:

Catherine Keller:

Jay McDaniel:

Traditional Notions about God:

What is Process Theology?

Radical Interdependence

Freedom & the Creative Powers

Creative Transformation

Relational God

Readings:

June 8 – Mesle, pp. 1-40

June 15 – Mesle, pp. 41-64

June 22 – Mesle, pp. 65-97

June 29 – Mesle, pp. 98-122

SESSION TWO: June 8, 2003

“Being tackled at Rugby, there is the Real.  
Nobody who hasn’t been knocked down has the slightest notion of what the Real  
is.” Whitehead, quoted in William Ernest Hocking, “Whitehead As I Knew Him,”  
Journal of Philosophy (14 September 1961): 512.

Varieties of Process Thought: Heraclitus, G.F.W.Hegel, William James, T. de  
Chardin

The Whitehead/Hartshorne variety of process thought is interdisciplinary.

Whitehead: Mathematics, Logic, Sciences (esp. Physics), Education, Philosophy

Hartshorne: Ornithology—Born to Sing

Beardslee: Biblical Studies, Literature (even Postmodernism in his 70’s)

Cobb: Ecology, Economics

Griffin: International Relations

Suchocki: Film (“Whitehead Film Festival”), Methodism

Moore: Religious Education, Women in Ministry

Mesle: Literature

Mesle, pages 1-40:

God is Love:

God is Supremely Related:

Philosophy (metaphysics, worldview)--Greek has reigned in Christian  
Tradition, esp. Unmoved mover/impassibility:

Persuasion, patience, and presence:

The Problem of Evil (Kushner’s *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*):

If God exists and is an omni-being, then evil should not exist.

Evil does exist.

Therefore, either God does not exist or God is not an omni-being.

Theodicy = attempting to explain how the existence of God is consistent with the  
existence of evil/suffering in the universe.

"You cannot shelter theology from science, or science from theology; nor can you shelter either of them from metaphysics, or metaphysics from either of them.

There is no short cut to truth.

Religion, therefore, while in the framing of dogma it must admit modifications from the complete circle of knowledge, still brings its own contribution of immediate experience."

Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making, 1926/1954, pp. 76-77.

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### SESSION THREE: June 15, 2003

On the necessity of God (a loaded word):

A fundamental notion, assumed in theology; what kind of God is an issue. Usually the discussion of whether or not God exists is philosophy/philosophy of religion (Griffin, Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, pp. 162-

203.)

Guiding evolution, containing possibilities, and presenting the initial aims. There are process thinkers and some religions that are agnostic or atheistic.

God's "unchanging" love is a repeating pattern. ("abide with me, . . .")

Divine Power:

Traditional: unilateral & coercive = Aristotle's Unmoved Mover (impassible) + the Divine Right of Kings/Despotism.

Process Theology: infinitely patient and persuasive

Philosophy/worldview (implicit or explicit):

Augustine used Platonic philosophy.

St. Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle's philosophy.

Whitehead appreciated Plato's philosophy.

Mesle, pp. 41-64:

Process theologians take science seriously, no escape into the supernatural:

"The past largely determines the future (p.47)." Repetition yields stability:

Freedom increases with complexity of organization:

Time = the passage of events; there is no "space-time container":

Individuals are constituted by events, experiences, relationships.

Do animals have souls? Aristotle thought so; Descartes did not.

"Every creature in every moment experiences God (p. 58)."

process theology v-a-v the "freewill defense" (the problem of evil):

God works for healing, yet the power of the past remains.

"In the organic philosophy the notion of repetition is fundamental"  
Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, Corrected Edition, p. 137.

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#### SESSION FOUR: June 22, 2003

Southern California Nevada Conference

United Church of Christ

Annual Gathering 2003 (please see attached sheet)

Process Philosophy as descriptive, more than prescriptive

Process Theology is more prescriptive than process philosophy.

Time:

Traditional: Creatio ex nihilo and/or Newtonian views of a Space-Time container

Process: a Relativity Theory = space-time continuum grows out of experience

Do animals have souls?

Aristotle said yes—all living creatures have some degree of soul.

Descartes said no—any physical body is a machine.

And process theology suggests = ?

Despotism v-a-v Love

"The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly. . .

The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Casesar."

Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, Corrected Edition, p. 342.

Mesle, pp. 65-97:

Our beliefs about God influence our beliefs & actions in other areas of our lives.

". . . those in power control the pulpits, the books, the schools, the churches (p. 72)."

God as the "great companion, the fellow sufferer who understands (p. 76)"

Both revelation and liberation are ongoing, involving divine call and human response.

### Committed Relativism

Somewhere between dogmatism and complete relativism  
Beauty involves a balance between harmony and contrast.  
Too much harmony yields tedium/boredom.  
Too much contrast yields chaos.

"The aim of science is to seek the simplest explanation of complex facts. We are apt to fall into the error of thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher

should be,

Seek [sic] simplicity and distrust it."

Alfred North Whitehead, The Concept of Nature, 1920/1982, p. 163.

Or as Satchell Paige, baseball philosopher, is reputed to have said, "Ain't nuthin' simple."

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### Love and the Divine Right of Kings (Despotism v-a-v Love)

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Mesle, pp. 65-122:

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### Scripture

Revelation and liberation are ongoing, involving divine call and human response.

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### Religious Pluralism

God works in and through all cultures, throughout all "time".

Religious beauty and religious diversity

Jesus

One who responded most fully to God's call (divine lures/initial aims)  
Each creature, including each human being, responds to some degree.

Prayer

Can help there be more favorable conditions in the world

Miracles

"Healthy faith cannot depend on ignorance (p. 120)."

Beware a God of the gaps.

God works with patience and persuasion.

"The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane.

It starts from the ground of particular observation;

it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization;

and it lands again for renewed observation rendered acute by rational  
interpretation."

Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, Corrected Edition, p. 5

Quotes from the Redlands UCC website

All quotations from Alfred North Whitehead

June 1

"The essence of education is that it be religious. Pray, what is religious education? A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events...And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity."

--From The Aims of Education, 1929, p. 14.

June 8

"Philosophy can exclude nothing. Thus it should never start from systematization. Its primary stage can be termed *assemblage*. Such a process is, of course, unending."

--From Modes of Thought, 1938, p. 2.

June 15

"Connectedness is of the essence of all things of all types. It is of the essence of types, that they be connected...No fact is merely itself."

--From Modes of Thought, 1938, p. 9.

June 22

"Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe."

--From Modes of Thought, 1938, p. 111.

June 29

"So, finally, you have got to provide your own enjoyment by interesting yourselves in things which are worth doing and worth thinking about."

--From Science and Philosophy, 1948, p. 181.