

A Resource for the Worldwide Church

GLOBAL DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY

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ed. I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino (San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA, 1991); **J. Sobrino**, *El principio de misericordia: Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1992).

M. Higueros

PREMILLENNIALISM. See **ESCHIATOLOGY**; **PENTECOSTALISM**.

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS. See **ATONEMENT**; **POWER**; **SALVATION**; **SPIRITUAL WARFARE**.

PROCESS THEOLOGY

Process theology is a twentieth-century movement in theology that derives from the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. In process theology, everything that happens—what's possible and what we do with our experience, is a product of the past. Whether you are a quark, an amoeba or a person, you undergo this continual process of sorting through these three inputs: what you inherit from the world, what's possible in your context and what you do about it. God is the one who offers the possibilities to the world, urging us to choose the paths that lead to a vision of the common good. While the principles of God's vision do not change, the way it gets played out on earth depends on what is happening in the world. God takes in, or incorporates, the events of the world into who God is. God then relates those events into God's vision for the common good, searching for the best of what has happened in order to offer those aspects back to us in our next instance of becoming. In short, our experiences in the world influence who we are and what we do. We then go on to influence those around us. But process thinkers go further and insist that what we do also affects God and how God relates to the world.

1. History
2. Speculative Metaphysics
3. Major Tenets
4. Scholarship

1. History.

Process theology usually refers to the religious application of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2001). Having spent much of his life as a mathematician and physicist, British-born Whitehead came to Harvard at the end of his

career, where in the 1920s he developed a philosophical cosmology into an organic understanding of the world. Herein he describes God variously as the principle of limitation in the world, as the poet of the world and as the Eros that undergirds the progression of civilization.

Whitehead's assistant from 1925 to 1928, Hartshorne, describes a philosophical theology that, while maintaining some differences from Whitehead, also discusses the symbiotic relationship between God and the world.

2. Speculative Metaphysics.

As a philosophical system, process thought is a speculative metaphysics. It tries to describe how all of reality works—including God—as a system that is coherent, logical and accurate. The endeavor to maintain accuracy makes process a flexible system with its base in empiricism. Process metaphysics starts in one field of observation, generalizes in theory and lands again for observation in another field where the generalization will be tested, adapted and tried again in yet another field. When the model does not fit what we know about reality, we revise the model to better describe what we know about the world. Thus experience is not only the ground of process metaphysics; it is also the critic of the metaphysics.

3. Major Tenets.

3.1. World. The process of becoming happens on every level. Atoms, plants, animals or human beings are composed of units of energy that are influenced by the world around and by available possibilities. Everything undergoes this process of becoming. There are, of course, levels of complexity. Some organisms have a central system that grants them more unity, complexity and harmony—and hence, more value. But all aspects of reality have an experience of becoming. Not all entities are conscious of this, but we all experience the world and God's call with some degree of freedom and with the potential to change. In this way, process theology is compatible with the lessons of science. Process thought is also consonant with the environmental movement that grants intrinsic value to the natural world—caring for it beyond its usefulness to humanity.

This process of becoming makes the world radically relational. Because we consider our past and our future possibilities when we de-

cide what to do in the world, relations are internal. We are not discrete selves that can choose whether or not we want to relate to one another. We do not have relationships, we *are* relationships. We are constituted by our relationships to other people, to our environment, our past, our hopes, our potentials and our God. There is nothing outside of these relations.

In a process world the only constant is change. Who we are today is not who we were yesterday, and who we will be tomorrow will be different from who we are today. We are changed by the new experiences we have, and who we were—that person—is gone. We can't get that person back. The ability to become something new is the cause of our freedom. We are not bound by the past. This is not a deterministic system. Since our freedom is real, we are self-creating, but because we are influenced by so many other factors, we are also created by others.

3.2. God. Process affirms the omnipresence of God in the traditional sense. Indeed God is everywhere at all times, embracing the world, feeling the world and responding to all aspects of the world. But God's power and knowledge are conceived of differently than orthodox conceptions of God. Process theologians believe that God embraces the highest form of power. Unlike classical models of God where the highest form of power is an authoritative or coercive power, in process thought, God's power is a persuasive power. God cannot make us do one thing or another. Rather, God influences, persuades, lures or "calls" us to embrace the principles of God's vision in every context.

God has more knowledge than we do because we only have access to our immediate world. God has access to the entire world and the activities and feelings of the entire world. In that sense, God is always working with more information than we are. However, God does not know what we are going to do before we do it. Process theology takes creaturely freedom seriously. When we decide what we are going to do, we freely make that decision. Once we act, God then works with what we have offered to God and to the world in order to influence us in the next moment. God never creates out of nothing. God is always working with what the world has to offer. Thus the end is not guaranteed or foreordained. In this sense, process is an open system.

Process describes two aspects of God—a primordial nature and a consequent nature, or as having creative love and responsive love. In the primordial nature or creative dimension of God, God offers the world possibilities that are relevant for our current context. These possibilities are ordered according to a primordial vision that calls us toward principles of beauty, truth, art, adventure, zest and justice. This is God's benevolence. As God influences the world, God literally becomes a part of every aspect of *creation. In other words, incarnation is universal. Therefore, process Christologies discuss how God's presence in Jesus is different from God's presence in everyone (*see* Christology). On the other hand, God also responds to us, or takes the world into God's self. God feels, or gathers into Godself, the events of the world, and they live on in God. God knows us and knows what happens to us. This is how God rejoices with us and suffers with us. We are a part of who God is. God is not identical to the world, but God is not set apart from the world in opposition to what the world is. God is in us and we are in God.

3.3. Theodicy. To the extent that we use our freedom to diverge from God's call, there is *evil in the world. Evil is not an isolated event because of the interdependence of the world. When one of us chooses to operate in a way that is divergent from God's call, it influences all of us. We often do this repeatedly within systems of power and influence, and thus create greater problems—systemic evils.

But evil is to be combated, and God is involved in this combat. This happens in two ways—within God's nature and through God's activity in the world. When God gathers together the experiences of the world within Godself, God finds the value in everything that happens. Sometimes, there is very little good to work with, but God can find it and preserve it. Since God is eternal, we have a kind of eternal life after death within God.

We also assist God in what process theologians call "creative transformation." We must strive to enact God's ideal vision on earth even if we know we cannot see it in its fullness here. When we use our freedom in accordance with God's vision, we can negate some aspects of the past that have created evil in the world. God's call offers us the opportunity to overcome evil.

4. Scholarship
From the 1930s to the 1970s, process theologians defended traditional problems with the given attention to theology (John Cobb and Ch. Creation and E. chocki) (*see* Fen

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PROPHECY
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4. Scholarship.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, process theologians defended the process concept of God and described traditional Christian doctrines and problems within philosophy of religion. Since the 1970s, process theological scholarship has given attention to topics such as *political theology (John B. Cobb), *liberation theology (Schubert Ogden.), environmental issues (Cobb and Charles Birch, Jay McDaniel) (*see* Creation and Ecology), feminism (Marjorie Suchocki) (*see* Feminist Theology) among others.

Process thought constitutes a major contributor to an active dialogue with religion and science (Ian Barbour, Philip Clayton, Ann Pederson), though contemporary scholarship in process theology places increasing emphasis on non-Christian religions, especially *Buddhism (John B. Cobb) *Judaism (Clark Williamson, Sandra Lubarsky), *Islam (Mustafa Ruzgar), *African traditional religions (Coleman) and goddess religions (Carol Christ). With process centers and translation projects throughout Europe, Korea, Japan and China, process theology is expanding beyond its American philosophical roots. Within the United States, process theology is entering new conversations with biblical studies (William Beardslee) and popular Christian theologies, particularly Methodism (Cobb) and *open theism (Clark Pinnock) and *evangelical theologies (Ronald Nash).

See also GOD, DOCTRINE OF; OPEN THEISM; THEISM.

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M. A. Coleman

PROPHECY

Prophecy is a form of religious discourse often associated with the historic monotheist faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Here, we look briefly at the conception of prophecy in the biblical literature and world Christianity.

1. Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible
2. Jesus and Mary as Prophets
3. Prophecy in World Christian History
4. Theological Implications

1. Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible.

Prophecy is the very word of God that is shared with God's people through a messenger often called a prophet (*nābi'*). God is the source, the sustenance and the future of the prophetic word. While biblical prophets often predicted the future, their words are vital primarily because they provide a discursive medium to reconnect people with their Creator.

In *Judaism, Christianity and *Islam, Moses is considered "the father of the prophets." Moses is unique because he spoke to God face to face, as one speaks to a friend (Ex 33:11). Through this communion with God, Moses was able to lead the people of Israel as their mediator, sharing God's law as an ethical norm for the people of Israel to live by.

Prophets throughout the Hebrew Bible call the people of Israel back to the justice and righteousness of God that is codified in the law. The prophet Isaiah argued that God's character is based in righteousness and justice (Is 5). Human social ethics in the prophetic tradition should be built on the righteousness of God. The people of God grow in their righteousness through being in "right relations" with God's creation.

Throughout the book of Isaiah we see that God is particularly concerned with those on the economic margins of society. In order to hear and respond to the prophetic word of Isaiah, God's people need to reflect the divine love for all people, prioritizing the poor who have the greatest material needs within local communities (*see* Preferential Option for the Poor).

In Isaiah 22:12-14, we see Isaiah confirm that a prophet is one who bears God's word of justice—that God's mercy is present in God's judgment. The wrath and anger of God are presented in the multiple images of judgment that are presented as the outcome of those who are unfaithful to God and the covenant (e.g., Is 5:24). Amid the images of judgment, the prophetic imagination also presents redemptive and eschatological images, including a time without war, a time when the lion will lie down with the lamb, and a new creation (Is 65:17-25). Isaiah gives many direct prophesies that predict