

HISTORY OF PROCESS THEOLOGY

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Many schools of philosophy and of theology keep the two quite separate. Process thought, however, opposes these kinds of disciplinary separations. For it, not only do philosophy and theology overlap but both overlap with science. Accordingly, the title of this essay should be A History of Process Thought with Special Emphasis on its Theological Aspects. The theological aspects for Christians are those that are most directly important to appreciating, appropriating, and revising what is taught most distinctively in Christian Churches. I will also discuss some about how Christian theologians have made use of it, and the role it has, less often thus far, played in other spiritual traditions.

One could trace the history of process thinking back to Heraclitus in the West and Gautama Buddha in the East. One might note that Hebrew thought and Chinese thought are both very processive. All this has its place. But the movement usually meant by “process theology and philosophy” today had its origin in the cultural shock administered by Darwin. Since the seventeenth century the dualistic separation of humanity from the rest of nature, implicit in most Western thought, had been emphatically affirmed and established as metaphysically fundamental.

The nature thus defined as excluding human beings was viewed as a complex mechanism. The most complex machines at that time were clocks; so the behavior of living things as well as the inanimate world was thought to be understandable as clockwork. Although from the beginning this was not convincing to everyone, the science built on this understanding was so successful, that doubt was marginalized. Philosophy and theology dealt with human beings especially as they operated cognitively and freely. God was understood to have created both nature and humanity, and given each its law, natural law to determine how natural things operated and moral law to direct free human behavior. Natural law enforced itself. Moral law was not compulsory, and it was often thought that rewards and punishments were needed to enforce it.

Darwin showed convincingly that human beings are part of the natural world. This undermined the thought that had dominated for two centuries.

Science, philosophy, and theology all required radical change. It seemed that there were just two possibilities. One possibility was that humans were mistaken in supposing that they are free and responsible beings who operate purposefully. In fact, their actions can be explained fully by the mechanistic model of the science that had been so successful in its dealings with the nonhuman world.

On the other hand, there were those who would not so easily surrender their conviction of their personal purposive existence. They thought that scientists were engaged in kinds of thought and action that could not be attributed to the clockwork that explained so much of nature. But they also thought that our animal cousins showed signs of being like us in transcending the mechanisms posited by science. They concluded that if we are part of nature, nature is not purely mechanistic. Some of them argued that organisms, that is, living things, had never been fully understood as only clockwork.

In short, since we are part of nature, we need to re-think what nature is. The advocates of this view sometimes called themselves “neo-naturalists.” The faculty of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago under whom I studied sometimes called itself by this name. However, philosophically, many of those who called for a new naturalism thought that the root of the problem was that science had understood everything in terms of material substances, and that this must be criticized. They thought that in fact science was much more about events or processes. Accordingly, they answered the call for a new naturalism by identifying events rather than material substances as fundamental. They called themselves process thinkers. They called for science, philosophy, theology, and social studies, as well, to rethink themselves on the basis of this different metaphysics.

In the early part of this century, both of these options had their respected supporters in the universities. However, by midcentury the mechanistic approach to nature including humans had won out. For some time, the University of Chicago was a holdout, but the process folk gave up in the fifties.

Immanuel Kant provided the mechanists with their justification. He introduced a somewhat different dualism. There are, he said, two kinds of “reason”. One is “pure” reason. Science employs that and must do so. It arrives at facts, and facts alone. However, we cannot live by pure reason. We must hold ourselves and others responsible for our actions. This requires an entirely

different kind of reason. Kant called it “practical.” Practical reason can tell us nothing about what is true and false. Pure reason can tell us nothing about what is valuable. The universities oriented themselves to pure reason and were successfully gaining facts about nature, now including humanity. Practical reason was none of their business.

Kant considered practical reason of equal importance. Many Christian thinkers were happy to give up the struggle to establish a factual basis for Christianity. Now they had a major role to play in practical reason. So, Kant gave us value-free universities and fact-free churches.

Process thought lost the struggle both in philosophy and in theology, both in the university and the church. Nevertheless, it survived at the fringes of both and in the wider culture. It probably had a larger role in a few theological schools, than elsewhere in the universities. Its teachings about God and how God works in the world commended themselves to some church folk.

II

This small movement was far from homogeneous. In Europe its most influential representative was Henri Bergson who influenced Teilhard de Chardin. In the United States, Dewey, James, Peirce, Wieman, and Hartshorne may have been the most influential writers who persisted in seeking a new naturalism, but the deepest, most rigorous, and most inclusive thinker was Alfred North Whitehead. Among theologians, Norman Pittenger was an outstanding early follower of Whitehead, followed by Daniel Day Williams.

These theologians dealt with many topics, but the one that became best known and most controversial was “God.” Process theologians pointed out that “God” had been taken over by Greek thought and presented as a supreme substance. The Greeks thought that invulnerability was much to be admired and had attributed to God the virtues of impassibility and immutability. Process theologians pointed out that this was quite contrary to the loving God they found in the Bible. How can God love us if what happens to us has no effect on him? The Bible presents us with a compassionate God. The Greeks transformed this God into a passionless being.

Another emphasis was on the understanding of God’s power. For Whiteheadian theology, God plays a role in every event, but so do past events and

current decisions. God is not the exhaustive explanation of any event. The Greeks thought that one honored God by attributing to "him" omnipotence. Now it is possible to give that word a meaning that process theology can affirm. But overwhelmingly, over many centuries, it has meant that God can do anything at any time. When calamity comes, God must be responsible. At the very least, God could have prevented it and chose not to. The victims add to their losses the idea the God has turned "his" back on them, probably because of their sin. Critics of Christianity have delighted in showing that history and personal life show that the One people worship cannot be loving or just. Process theologians showed that this idea of God's power is present in only one book of the Bible, and even that does not teach literal omnipotence. Omnipotence taken strictly would entail that human sin is the work of God, and human beings could not be responsible.

It is the claim of process theologians that the ideas about God they derive from process thought, and especially Charles Hartshorne and Alfred North Whitehead, are closer to Jesus' teaching, to the New Testament, and, indeed, to the Bible as a whole than is so-called orthodoxy.

This argument has often been carried on without direct discussion of process metaphysics. Most Protestants, from Martin Luther on, have detached themselves to a considerable degree from metaphysics. When we are dealing with believers who are open to discussing their beliefs, it works well to point out that our "process" beliefs are much closer to the New Testament than the ideas developed out of the substance thinking the church adopted from Greek philosophy.

However, process theology has a more fundamental task as well. The university has excluded God from any role in the world. Despite Kant's radical separation of practical reason from pure reason, a great number of people think that if God factually has no role in the world then encouragement by practical reason to pray to God carries no conviction. A God who in truth does not exist is of little practical help. Atheism spreads from pure to practical reason, from university to church.

Most theologians have followed Kant and do not try to dispute with scientists and modern philosophers about God's role, or lack of role, in the world. Process theologians agree that if we accept the mechanistic view of nature and consider the world to be constituted of matter, God has no role. Neither do

human values, or personal responsibility, or purposes. The list goes on. If science can claim omniscience for clockwork only by excluding much that we know to be important, the neoneaturalists are right. There is more to the world than what the university typically allows.

For this reason, process theologians study Whitehead's philosophy as a whole to see whether it provides an alternative mode of thinking that encompasses both facts and values and includes God in the scheme of things. We believe it does, and we are glad to see a new interest in Whitehead even in universities. Surprisingly, this change has emerged in Europe, but since European philosophy is respected in the United States, we can expect a spillover.

However, this will not be of as much help to theology as we might hope. Theology has very low standing in universities on both sides of the Atlantic. And the debate about evolution has left deep animosity toward theism in the university. Conservative Christians were not satisfied that human beings were to be considered part of a mechanistic nature, that the processes by which human beings came into being were purposeless. Hence, they persisted in arguing against the dominant neo-Darwinian view. They argued, for example, that the eye is so complex that it would have taken a very long time to evolve, and that the early stages of development would have given the organism no survival advantage. Overall, the neo-Darwinians had the best of these arguments and developed a contempt for those who were trying to bring God into the explanation of evolution. Whitehead can be understood as siding with the conservative Christians in giving God an explanatory role. Those European thinkers who have been impressed by Whitehead's thought did not include Whitehead's doctrine of God in what they regarded as worthy of consideration.

Years earlier some Whiteheadian philosophers in the United States also proposed "Whitehead without God", hoping to overcome the total rejection in the American academy. It did not help here. But since it succeeded on the European continent, we can expect also in the United States a renewal of this movement. This leads, of course, to a split in the Whitehead movement, since it is Whitehead's doctrine of God that is the main reason for adoption of his thought for a good many people. I am one of those who thinks that much is gained from Whitehead's thought even when God is excised, but I hope that as his inclusive vision is internalized, the reason for fearing to bring God back into the university

will decline, and scholars will be guided by evidence on this as other matters rather than by commitment to a rather poorly examined metaphysics.

III

I went to the University of Chicago soon after leaving the Army in January 1947. God was the center of my life as a child and even in my years in the Army. But I had become aware of the intellectual history that presented belief in God as a relic of an earlier unenlightened epoch. I enrolled in the MA program called "the analysis of ideas and the study of method." I proposed to study the reasons for rejecting this belief. I had the interesting experience of studying with Charles Hartshorne who found traditional arguments convincing once one shifted to process thought. At the same time, my other courses and the world of thought with which I was surrounded had no place for God. Although I found Hartshorne intellectually convincing, I went through my own "death of God" experience. I had entered a world in which there was no place for God. All space was physically occupied, and no two entities can occupy the same space at the same time. Where can God be?

And if everything that happens is ultimately explained by physical motions, and these are part of the clockwork of nature, then what does God explain. What can God do? And if God is not anywhere and does nothing, what difference does the possible divine existence make? In other words, the modern worldview is inherently and unavoidably atheist. The question then is not so much about God but about this world view. My questions changed. Fortunately, I had already some sense of the answer, and it has become clearer and clearer to me. The modern worldview has proved fruitful in a certain stage of scientific development. But now it does not work well even in science. Everywhere else it has been damaging. Whitehead offers a worldview based on deeper reflection about science and deeper penetration into experience. He would be the first to say it is not the last word. But so far as I have been able to discover, it really has no competition at present. I am committed to working with it to liberate whomever I can from the prison of modern thought, which I identify especially with Descartes and Kant.

I decided I did not need to complete an MA degree on reasons for not believing in God. I thought it better to transfer to the Divinity School where I

could learn how others who thought that ideas about nature should be changed were dealing with the situation.

The Divinity School faculty respected Hartshorne and gave him status as a member. However, they did not follow him. He was a rationalist, and they were empiricists. Both sought certainty. I thought Whitehead was wise to reject the quest for certainty. My dissertation was on "The Independence of Faith from Speculative Belief." I studied theologians who sought such certainty and criticized them, arguing that speculation is inescapable, that is, the effort to find reasonable and empirically supported beliefs rather than certain ones. This was, of course, in support for Whiteheadian speculative cosmology instead of pure reason or strict phenomenology.

This faculty survived for another decade and became more Whiteheadian. However, Chicago was changing. Robert Maynard Hutchins, who thought that universities should be places of intellectual life, gave up the struggle and allowed the value-free academic disciplines to take over. The Divinity School joined the mainstream. Today it prides itself on excellence in religious studies, that is, the objective, value-free approach to knowledge about religion. Whitehead disappeared from the University of Chicago. There remained a process theology group at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and a philosophical organization for the study of process philosophies. The American Metaphysical society remained open to process contributions. Elsewhere there was little openness.

In the late sixties, it was clear that we could no longer look to Chicago for leadership in process thought and that this was excluded from philosophy as well. Indeed, the victory of fragmentation, objectification, and reductionism in universities overall left no foothold for neo-naturalism in any form, and certainly no place for any kind of cosmology. Obviously, Whitehead was out. As this became clear, I talked with a friend, Lewis Ford, about what we might do to keep his ideas alive in academia, however marginally. We were convinced that he offered the only adequate alternative to Kant. We decided to publish a scholarly journal, open to the wider process movement, but focusing on Whitehead. The first issue of *Process Studies* appeared in 1970. Ford agreed to be the editor. His interest was primarily in philosophical and theological discussion, mine, in

relevance to what was happening in the world. He tried to be balanced, but he was not successful.

My conviction was that as long as the Cartesian/Kantian worldview prevailed, there could be no coherent doctrine of God. Indeed, directly arguing for belief in God in the academy seemed to me quite futile. First, we would need to show that a Whiteheadian world view could help in many fields of study accepted in the university. Therefore, showing that many topics could be discussed better in the context of Whitehead's organic philosophy was a theological task.

To make this claim requires that we not think of theology as one academic discipline among many, but to think of it more as the classical world did. Christian theology in the Roman Empire and the Medieval world was Christian thinking about important matters. This became even more important to me when I learned in the late sixties that human activities on this planet are not sustainable, that we were heading for catastrophe. To me it seemed that shifting to a coherent view of God, humanity, and the world would help people understand what we were doing to the world and challenge them to work for change. The university assigns any thinking about this global crisis to a few disciplines such as ecology and climatology. Nowhere could it be discussed holistically. And, of course, to challenge students to seek changes that might reduce the foreseeable catastrophes would bring values inappropriately into academic life.

From the beginning there has been a close relation between process thought and ecological concerns. Although the universities could not ignore the questions about how humans were damaging their environment, the Kantian reinstatement of Cartesian thinking inhibited the changes that were badly needed if human behavior was to become sustainable. Whitehead's philosophy of organism clearly met the need. It was ecologically oriented at a time when few philosophies were, and ecological philosophy was badly needed. My hopes that the journal would work well to push the conversation in this direction were not fulfilled, but it kept the discussion alive.

IV

Before we established the journal, we were already wishing we could have a center that would focus more on the changes that adopting Whitehead would make. The problem was that we had no money and the School of Theology barely

scraped by. Emory University invited me to return (I had taught there from 1953-58). I had mentioned there my interest in a faculty center, and the invitation included this element. I was ready to go.

To my surprise, Claremont matched this offer. I became an Avery Professor at the Claremont Graduate University, and a position in philosophy of religion would be filled with someone who would be free to work with me on the new center. I was amazed, but I declined the Emory invitation with deep gratitude, and the Center for Process Studies was established in Claremont. David Griffin joined me and took primary responsibility for organizing conferences, etc. We would decide on a topic maybe a year and a half in advance, David would study the literature, select the people whose writing showed some promise, and send them a brief indication of the Whiteheadian perspective on that topic.

I cannot forbear telling about one incident. We planned a conference about the role of mentality in nature. David made the mistake of writing a paper that was much too long. No one read, and the conference suffered from that. But the University of California Press published it as a book. This indicates something of the quality of David's work.

Our first conference was never surpassed. Charles Birch, an Australian biologist, arranged with the Rockefeller Foundation for us to have it at Bellagio. He invited the leading biologists who had not accepted modern reductionism as the last word, and most of them came. The conference was called "Mind in Nature." Regrettably, it was the swan song of the scholarly biological resistance to what became neo-Darwinism. They could not survive because they did not know how to fight the worldview that underlay the thinking whose consequences they could not accept.

The one exception was a young man named David Bohm. When he talked to us, we knew his was a new level of discourse. He understood that quantum theory requires a fundamental metaphysical change, and he was prepared to lead in its formation. I am certainly not a specialist. But it is my impression that Bohm's proposals for quantum theory are the best we have. He spent time with us in Claremont in later years, and it became clear that in different language what he affirmed was much the same as the relevant aspects of Whitehead's work. To me this has been quite reassuring that physics is on Whitehead's side.

Over the years we have held other conferences on biology. The biologist with whom I was most impressed was Lynn Margolis. She believed that her fellow biologist had constantly emphasized that competition is the key element in evolution. She believed cooperation was at least equally important. She found that her fellow biologists were so biased against cooperation, which she often called symbiosis, that they were very reluctant to fund her research. This was in spite of the fact that they had been forced to admit, very reluctantly, that the eukaryotic cell, of which our bodies are composed, came into being by symbiosis. Once again, it is good to know that cutting edge evolutionary theory is so congruent with Whitehead.

Whitehead was himself a mathematical physicist. He was as impressed as anyone by the Genius of Einstein. He fully adopted special relativity. But, despite its brilliance, he could not accept Einstein's theory of relativity. It introduced contortions of space in a way that attributed to space attributes he denied it on metaphysical grounds. He was not alone in this concern. Once Einstein had provided a formula that fit the facts, but it was and remains very difficult to understand. Others tried mathematical formulations that made more sense to them. Whitehead was one of these. Over time, all but Whitehead's failed some crucial test.

Of course, the predictions of his formula were extremely similar to Einstein's. The one difference in prediction was that Einstein expected no gravitational pull from distant galaxies. Whitehead thought there would be some, however tiny the amount. More and more refined tests found none. Finally, Cal Tech declared that Whitehead was not supported by the evidence.

Since this difference between the two formulae were based on philosophical ideas, this announcement was troubling to Whiteheadians. If we can account for the scientific facts only by adopting Einstein's formula, must we give up Whitehead's cosmology? We want, in all cases, to take the empirical data seriously. Indeed, we were highly critical of scientists who ignored evidence against their assumptions.

Obviously, we could have pointed out that our failure to find any gravitational influence from distant bodies did not prove that there was none. But this was not a comfortable way to deal with the matter. Fortunately, we discovered that Whitehead had solved the problem for us. He had noted that if

the empirical evidence did not support him, there was another formula, one he could accept philosophically, whose predictions are identical with Einstein's. We unpacked it and found that it works. Clearly, we are not forced to give up his philosophy.

These comments on the history are intended to express the importance we attribute to the sciences and to checking to make sure that we do not affirm what new information gained by the sciences denies. Thus far we judge that developments in the sciences are generally supportive. This is a task that most theologians eschew on the basis of Kant's dualism.

This concern that what we say about God and Christ and creation and salvation in church fit with what is known about the world through science would have been readily understood by Thomas Aquinas and indeed by most theologians prior to the Reformation. It is still more appreciated by Catholics than Protestants. The Reformers opened Protestants to the victorious Kantian dualism.

The Reformers called for theology to be based only on scripture. Since we think that the transformation of Christian thinking by Greek philosophy was a serious mistake, we have sympathy with the Reformers' desire to return to scripture. In fact, we claim to have done so better than they did. They retained creedal formulations that are not at all scriptural, whereas we think believers should be free to judge them by scriptural standards. But process theologians cannot agree that Christian theology should use only scripture. Clearly the scriptures assume a cosmology that is now thoroughly outdated. To try to bind Christians to that would be a serious mistake. To pretend that our understanding of the world and of human thought is irrelevant to the beliefs of contemporary Christians has contributed greatly to the decline of our churches and the confusion of our members.

Sola scriptura is justified in contemporary theology by a dualism that is often Kantian. Our judgment is that this has proven a misstep and has led to the loss to the church of a vast number of thoughtful people. Taking on the task of separating scientific findings from the substantialist and materialist way they are often presented is necessary if thoughtful people are to be able to consider Christian truth claims on their merits. Whitehead gives us the confidence that this can be done.

The second conference was about Whitehead's philosophy and Buddhism. These constitute two forms of process thought. Buddhism arose two and a half millennia ago in India in reaction to the substantialist thinking of most Hindus. Their thought centered around a substantial self, Atman, and a substantial all-inclusive ultimate reality, Brahman. Sages and mystics had realized that Atman and Brahman are one and the same. They have found spiritual power and freedom in that realization and continue to do so to this day.

Gotama's profound meditation, however, led to the understanding that there is no substantial self of substance underlying all things. Neither Atman nor Brahman exists. There are no substantial entities of any kind. There is nothing that remains itself through time. There is nothing to cling to.

Gautama's language focuses on deconstruction. But his followers did not understand him to be a nihilist. Freedom from clinging, and from any idea that there is something one might cling to opens us to what is. Emptiness is at the same time compassion. "What is" is the coming together of all things in a momentary unity that passes at the moment it occurs. Nagarjuna is the single most influential figure in the exposition of this idea.

Whiteheadians are astonished to find ideas so similar to Whitehead's in ancient writings that have shaped one of the great spiritual traditions of the world. Whitehead came to a similar rejection of substantial existence in reflection on the tension between what scientists were learning about the world and the metaphysics through which they interpreted it. His interest was more constructive than deconstructive. Substantialist thinking had led to the breakdown of cosmology because there were no causes could be discovered in a world of substances.

While there are not substantial entities, and certainly no substantial selves, Whitehead spent a lot of time describing what there are, namely, monetary syntheses of elements of the past. Once again, what is astounding is the similarity of Nagarjuna and Whitehead in this account. Of course, there are differences. For Buddhists, the fact that becoming is also perishing is emphasized to prevent the clinging from which Buddhist thought and practice release us. Whitehead calls

this process of synthesizing and perishing “creativity”. This gives it a more positive spin.

Further, Whitehead shows that in this process novelty can arise. He finds the source of this novelty in God. Buddhists hear in the word “God” something substantial and deconstruct all beliefs in God. But Whitehead does not think that desubstantializing God does away with a divine reality any more than desubstantializing us does away with us. It is interesting that the most popular forms of Buddhism find in their desubstantialized world entities that they experience as compassionate and healing.

I hope to have said enough to indicate that conversation between these traditions is not a matter of mutual rejection. Through it both can learn ideas compatible with their existing beliefs but quite different from what they have entertained in the past. The Center for Process Studies encourages dialog not only with Buddhists but with all the great wisdom traditions. It opposes the idea that they are all teaching the same thing with different words. It also opposes the idea that if one is true then others are false. The totality of reality and the multiplicity of human opportunities are far beyond our imagination. We think that what Buddhists teach and what Whiteheadians believe are quite different. No doubt both make mistakes. But also, both have profound truths. We can learn for one another, integrating what we learn into the way of thinking and the way of life to which we have previously adhered. All traditions have much to learn from others. To learn from others is not to abandon or weaken allegiance to one’s own tradition.

We think that in diverse ways Whitehead can be helpful to all the great traditions and even to indigenous ones. We know there may be instances when we are proved wrong, but thus far our experience has supported our expectation. Those of us who are Christian are pleased when Buddhists affirm the helpfulness of Whitehead. We are glad that Jews and Muslims have been able to develop Whitehead theologies. Beyond that, we have been delighted that Chinese are so appreciative of Whitehead’s help.

Our experience of ready acceptance in China has led us to a better understanding of the obstacles to adopting Whitehead in Europe. We note that Buddhism has never had great success in India; but that it swept readily through China, Korea, and Japan. Why? We think that Indo-European languages support,

almost demand, substance thinking. We have a subject of a sentence, almost necessarily a noun or a pronoun that identifies what the sentence is about. Without thinking about it, if we speak an Indo-European language, we assume the world is made up of the sort of things to which nouns and pronouns refer. East Asian languages and Hebrew are not like that. The Bible is composed of stories, not discourses about objects. The most influential ancient text in China is the Book of Changes. There is no difficulty here in understanding that reality consists in happenings rather than static objects.

We think that in our pluralistic and secular age, we Christians are called to deepen our rootage in the Bible and especially in Jesus. But we believe strongly that this makes us freer from clinging to particular past forms of Christianity and more appreciative of other traditions in their multifaceted differences from us. We have much to repent about our past behavior, and we are glad that many of our colleagues give priority to avoiding a continuation of those crimes of thought and action. However, we fear that some of our colleagues suppose that we must reduce our commitment to our distinctive sources in order to avoid prejudice against others. We are grateful that Whitehead helps us to avoid that kind of thinking. We think he may help people in other traditions as well.

VI

We knew that many academics would write us off immediately because we were part of a School of Theology. To reduce that response, we made clear that the Center for Process Studies was not focusing on church doctrine. In our own minds, we were engaged in theology, but not in such a way as to exclude the contributions of secular people. Of course, in our teaching in the seminary, the church played a large role, and graduates protested that the Center was not helping them in their work as pastors.

Of course, we were interested in helping them also, but we still wanted secular people to work with us on rethinking science and cultural diversity. We wanted to be sure they knew that their membership fees were not going to the church. Accordingly, we set up an autonomous program that we called "Process and Faith." It held its own lectures and conferences and produced its own

literature for the churches. Under the leadership of Will Beardslee and Marjorie Suchocki it rapidly gained more members than the Center itself.

Although it was explicitly directed to the needs of pastors and lay people, that did not exclude concerns about synagogues and mosques. The need to improve and strengthen relations among the Abrahamic traditions is an important factor in the lives of churches. Actually, we hope that much of the literature produced for lay people in Christian churches would not require much change to be helpful to lay people in other Abrahamic traditions. But that is for them to judge.

Christian theology was far from static. Black theology was quite well established by the time the center was founded, and I have indicated that ecological theology was a motive for creating the Center. But feminist theology broke through after we had been working for a few years, and Claremont was one of the main centers. Process theology found much congeniality with feminist theology, and especially with eco-feminism, and a good number of the feminist students found process thought congenial.

During this period, process theology was marginalized by church leadership both institutional and theological. But many pastors and lay people found it useful. I am sorry to say that although it still exists, and much of the literature it produced is still available, it is not currently very active.

Many of the best process theologians are women, and almost all those women are strongly committed to ecofeminism. Although feminist theology was strongly counter cultural, it was not marginalized in the countercultural community, and seminaries wanted it represented in their faculties. This gave us an opportunity to place some process theologians in seminaries that were not previously open to us. This was a major step toward acceptance by the church leadership.

Loosely related to the Center was the work of Tripp Fuller. He developed a podcast called "Home-Brewed Christianity." It reached tens of even hundreds of thousands of people. This is by far the largest audience reached by any program of process theology. The audience has been largely youth growing up in conservative churches and open to an expression of Christian faith more relevant to their culture.

Another major development for process theology was in relation to conservative evangelicals. Del Brown, a process theologian, was in conversation with a leading conservative theologian, Clark Pinnock. The outcome was that Pinnock discovered that we were closer to the New Testament than he had thought. Subsequently his followers and process theologians have met together at the American Academy of Religion under the rubric of “open and relational theology.” This movement has given rise to a new center organized by Tom Oord, who is one of our graduates. He is teaming up with a new school to offer a doctoral degree in open and relational theology. It shows that Whitehead’s thought can be deeply meaningful to conservative Christians.

After the second Vatican Council opened the doors of the Roman Catholic Church, Catholic students began going to non-Catholic schools. For a decade, half of my graduate students were Catholic monks. Some of my Protestant PhDs got jobs teaching in Catholic colleges. Teilhard de Chardin was profoundly influential in Catholic circles and represented there the neo-naturalist movement. Through him it seemed that process thought was gaining a strong foothold in the Roman Catholic church. That epoch ended abruptly. But it indicates to me that when the door is open, Whitehead’s thought may well flourish again in Catholic circles.

Among denominations the ones in which the leadership is most open to process are the Disciples and the Unitarians. However, the time when there was great suspicion of us has largely passed. Interest in theology in general is low, but process theology has survived in the church better than most others.

I am not aware of any organizations of Jewish or Muslim process thinkers. However, one Jewish process theologian, Rabbi Artson, has a considerable following. An autonomous Islamic school for training Muslim leaders has been located within the Claremont School of Theology, and process thought has had some influence there. There are individual Muslims in Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Norway who have serious interest. It happens that my driver to my Methodist church on Sunday mornings is an Egyptian Muslim who loves Jesus.

The Center organized at least one conference for process thinkers in which at least half a dozen traditions were represented. Obviously, not tradition will find its theology ready made in Whitehead’s writings, but it is important to me that

people in many traditions can find illumination and deepening through those writings.

VII

During the years I was teaching, the Center developed various projects especially in relation to other countries. From time to time, our Korea project was quite active. Sporadically, the Latin America project was also. We related to process activities in Japan, where Whitehead played a role in Christian/Buddhist dialogue. I worked with Masao Abe to develop an international Buddhist/Christian dialogue, and for several years I was part of a Jewish/Christian/Muslim conversation. But none of this led to a specifically Whiteheadian organization other than the Center.

This changed because of developments in China. In the nineties, Chinese intellectuals were troubled that as China became less ideological, the main effort of the government was modernization. Intellectuals in Europe were becoming very critical of “the modern,” and Chinese intellectuals wanted to join them in being postmodern. But the Chinese were interested in developing policies, and their greatest problem with modernization was its effects on the environment. French postmodernism was not a good fit.

Meanwhile at CPS we were concerned about our relation to what people were understanding by postmodernism. We were very critical of modernity, and sometimes called ourselves postmodern. Whitehead did not use the term, but his book on “Science and the Modern World” depicted the need for something to come after the death of the modern. We were glad the French were joining us in critique of the modern, but our critique was not exactly the same, being far more influenced by the ecological crisis. And our focus was on the beliefs and practices we advocated for the postmodern world. David Griffin started calling our views, “constructive postmodernism,” and he edited a series of books under that title.

These books like most of those we produced were little noticed in the United States. But in this case, they attracted attention in China. The first book in his series was entitled, “The Re-enchantment of Science.” The Chinese found this kind of postmodernism attractive. One of the leading postmodernists, Zhihe Wang, a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, came to Claremont

to get a PhD with David. He stayed after completing the degree and was joined by his wife who chaired a philosophy department in a university in Beijing.

We established a China Project under their leadership. It prospered. Chinese universities created center for process thought. It was increasingly awkward that their project was legally part of a Christian theological school. So, we all agreed that they should have a completely independent organization. They created "The Institute for the Postmodern Development of China." More than thirty Chinese universities now have centers for process thought. Many process books have been translated into Chinese. Hundreds of process folks have lectured there. A large literature has emerged. Philip Clayton has written a book on "Organic Marxism" which reinterprets Marx in the context of Whitehead's organic philosophy. This has been an important event for professors of Marxism. In China we work with high-level officials.

Of special importance has been the Chinese government's commitment to work for an "ecological civilization." Zhihe Wang learned that this was coming and held the first conference about it here in Claremont. The fourteenth conference was scheduled for April of this year, but it was postponed because of the virus. Since so much of the development of the idea has been by the process community, in China the two are closely associated. And there are many in the process community in the United States for whom, also, they are closely associated.

This connection has led to a breakthrough in South Korea. An economist by the name of Gunna Jung has spent some time in Claremont and been particularly interested in how process thought expresses itself in a vision of a new order emphasizing community. It happens that he is a close friend of the mayor of Seoul, and the mayor is now seeking to apply what he is learning about ecological civilization to his city. He is very welcoming of the international Whitehead community. His prestige has put ecological civilization on the map and other organizations in Korea are joining in.

VIII

Not all the activity has been headed up in Claremont. Among universities the California Institute for Integral Studies has been teaching process thought for decades. Some of its faculty are leaders in process philosophy.

One of the most committed members of our community, Herman Greene, came to Whitehead through Thomas Berry, and remains deeply committed to Berry. He has an organization in North Carolina that focuses on the “ecozoic” rather than the ecological, but not in any antagonistic sense. We consider it part of our family, and that other programs stimulated by Teilhard, are important partners.

Very impressive work is being done by Jay McDaniel at Hendrix College in Arkansas. By far the best website is located there. He has things for people with highly varied interests. He includes serious philosophical work, but he is especially interested in the arts. For a long time, the website was called “Jesus, Jazz, and Buddhism.” But he has become especially interested in including Jews and Muslims. He has been personally active in China and of course that shows up in the website as well

In 1997, we held what we called the Third International Whitehead Conference, building on earlier events in Nagoya, Japan and Bonn, Germany. We wanted to make this a more regular event; so, we organized the International Whitehead Organization not only to offer a place for individuals in many countries to connect but also an organization that would take responsibility for these conferences.

On the occasion of the tenth of these conferences, we organized a much larger than usual affair in Claremont. We thought of it as also the ninth in the series of ecological civilization conferences for Chinese. About fifteen hundred people signed up. Several hundred others were marginally involved. The conference was organized into eighty tracks. One purpose was to show that Whitehead’s cosmology is relevant to a vast number of topics and problems. Another was to create a sense of commonality among people working in many fields. Another was to increase the sense of urgency of making our voice heard and uniting to create an ecological civilization. The planning group continued meeting to keep up with what was happening in the process community. Now that CPS is no longer in Claremont, it has expanded to become another 501c process group to continue work in Claremont.

We also announced at the conference that a new organization, Pando Populus, would be involved in follow up. Led by Eugene Shirley, it works chiefly in Los Angeles County and has become a player in both city and county affairs. It is

in position to help the county to implement its excellent, announced goals. It is also working with many groups of elderly Catholic sisters who would like for that properties to serve humanity as Pope Francis has defined in *Laudato Si*.

A little later Philip Clayton organized Ecological Civilization Institute to work globally. It is working with public organizations to solve their problems. For example leaders of many cities met in Capetown to discuss how to respond to serious shortage of fresh water.

All along, we published some books. Key to most of that was Jeanyne Slettom. She agreed to set up the Whitehead Century Press to ensure that those tracks that developed their work into books would be able to find a publisher. Of course, she has published many other books as well. It is a significant contribution to the whole process movement.

I hope I have communicated that the process movement including process theology is no longer led by any one institution. I have mentioned perhaps a dozen institutions that are part of one family. There are others. A tiny Whiteheadian senior college is opening up in Flagstaff. There are process conversations in several cities. Deleuze's interest in Whitehead e has led to his inclusion in several universities in Germany.

Nevertheless, the Center to which I have given so much emphasis in this paper has survived a series of crises, and it continues to be a center for process studies. It includes the Whitehead Research Center, which has kept the postmodern discussion in Europe in contact with process studies in the United States. It has also initiated the publication of the critical edition of Whitehead's entire corpus, turning up new manuscripts in the process.

The financial problems of the Claremont School of Theology have forced it to close its doors in Claremont. It has found its host in Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. The current head of the Center for Process Studies, Andrew Schwartz, has been at that university this school year. He finds a level of support and appreciation for the Center's work that it never had in Claremont. The Center is likely to be able to play a significant role in educational experiments.

The departure of CPS from Claremont led us to organize the process community that remains in Claremont in a new 501c3. This is more of a membership organization than most process groups. It has sponsored lectures

and classes. It hopes also to take actions that promote ecological civilization. The nearby city of Pomona has become a “compassionate city” and we are trying to be of help. We have developed close relations with the University of LaVerne and hope to help move its educational program away from the lure of value-free disciplines toward relevance to the personal needs of students and the urgent needs of the world.

All branches of the process movement have had to adjust to the social responses to the corona virus. This institute meets regularly by zoom. This has made it a less local organization, and this may continue even after we are free to meet in person. Far more important is the effect of the pandemic on people’s beliefs, attitudes, and convictions. Recognition that we are heading into a time of catastrophes is much more existential. They listen more seriously to what we have to say and to our ideas about ecological civilization. That more than a thousand people signed up to study Whitehead’s most difficult book showed a major growth of interest in an alternative way of thinking.

We live in a crisis. The corporate world seeks to tighten its control of our lives for the sake of short-term profits. This will accelerate the march to human suicide. Far more people are ready for far more needed change, but there is little consensus or organized leadership. So much to do. So little time to do it! It would be wonderful if the Abrahamic traditions would unite in a serious struggle to prevent the devastation of what God has given us.