

Creative **Transformation**

exploring the growing edge of religious life

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Love is come again like wheat that springeth green

A Publication of Process & Faith, based on a Relational Vision of Reality

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Volume 13:1 Winter 2004

Publisher and Editor

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki
Director, Process and Faith

Contributing Editors

Robert and Adrienne Brizee
Bruce G. Epperly
Patricia Adams Farmer
Ronald L. Farmer
Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore
Freddy Moreau
Paul S. Nancarrow
Douglas Sturm

Managing Editor

Jeanyne B. Slettom

Cover Photo

Uschi Hering

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Editor: Creative Transformation
1325 North College Avenue
Claremont, CA, 91711-3199
909-447-2559
Fax: 909-621-2760
E-mail: Faith@ctr4process.org

Web site: www.processandfaith.org

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Incarnation and the Resacralization of Nature: A Christian Process-Relational Response to the Ecological Crisis

Ronald L. Farmer

Environmentalists lay much of the blame for the ecological crisis at the feet of the Abrahamic religions, especially Christianity—and not without good reason. Not only has Christianity dominated the Western world, which is largely responsible for the current calamity; it is also, in its dominant expression at least, the most anthropocentric of religions.

The dominant expression of Christianity can be labeled classical theism. According to this conception of reality, God created all things out of nothing.² Thus, there is an ontological gap between the Creator and the creation. God is Wholly Other. Moreover, classical theists assert that once created, the world operates according to natural laws established by God. God only rarely intervenes in the natural process; when God does become actively involved in worldly affairs, a miracle is said to occur.³ Thus, in addition to the categorical gap between the Creator and the creation, there is also a gap with respect to divine activity or influence that God only rarely bridges. In effect, then, classical

theism removes God from the world. Nature is desacralized.

Another foundational tenet of classical theism is that humans are unique within the natural order, in that they are the only creatures to have been fashioned in “the image of God.” Just as there is a gap between the Creator and creation, so too there is a gap separating humans from the rest of creation. This imposing gap has resulted in humans adopting an anthropocentric view of the natural order. The rest of creation exists solely for the benefit of humans (and, of course, for God). Thus, nature possesses only instrumental value; that is, nature has value only in so far as it contributes to human or divine experience. Nature has no value in and for itself. On the contrary, only God and human beings possess intrinsic value (as well as instrumental value). Attempts to attribute intrinsic value even to the higher animals, such as bonobo chimps and dolphins, are considered to be naïvely anthropomorphic or anthropopathic. Given the fact that this understanding of the relationship between humans and

RONALD L. FARMER is Dean of the Wallace All Faiths Chapel and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Chapman University in Orange, CA. He may be reached at rfarmer@chapman.edu

nature is presupposed by much of the Western world, even by agnostics and atheists, the degradation of nature follows quite logically. The natural world is regarded as a mere resource for economic exploitation and human consumption.

Now to be fair, I should note that many classical theists are incensed by the way the environment has been abused. The ecological crisis is a flagrant manifestation of human sinfulness, they assert. The world and everything in it belong to God (Ps 24:1). God charged humanity with the responsibility of exercising stewardship over God's good earth (Gen 1:26-31). Stewardship⁴—defined as the care and use of something entrusted to a steward by a master—would not lead one to treat nature as a mere resource for human consumption. Doubtless, this is true. Perceiving the natural world through the lens of stewardship would go a long way toward solving the ecological crisis we face. Thus, I could have chosen the Genesis creation stories as the focus of a biblically-based article setting forth a Christian response to the ecological crisis. However, because the two tenets of classical theism outlined above—which result in the desacralization of nature and the adoption of an anthropocentric viewpoint—unintentionally (and unwittingly?) lay the groundwork for the exploitation of nature, I feel it is imperative to move beyond a mere appeal to stew-

ardship and critique these two precepts.

In a previous *Creative Transformation* article, I observed that passages such as Job 38:25-27 dramatically challenge anthropocentrism.⁵ Rejecting classical theism's anthropocentric point of view and embracing our responsibility for the stewardship of nature would certainly transform the dominant Western relationship with the environment. Nevertheless, as long as nature is desacralized, as it is in classical theism, it will never receive the reverent respect it does in the more eco-friendly religious traditions such as Wicca and Native American spirituality. Are there biblical passages that support the resacralization of nature? Can one truly affirm both God's transcendence and immanence? I contend that a biblical teaching lying at the very heart of Christianity does just that—the doctrine of the incarnation.

Admittedly, in many respects the doctrine of the incarnation has been an intellectual embarrassment at best and a theological nightmare at worst. Jews and Muslims frequently accuse Christians of polytheism—and given the way many Christians have understood the incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, their accusations are correct! Indeed, the early church councils devoted much of their energy to stating what the incarnation does *not* mean. Among the “heresies” denounced were all formulations of the doctrine that denied the

Can one truly affirm both God's transcendence and immanence? I contend that a biblical teaching lying at the very heart of Christianity does just that—the doctrine of the incarnation.

Making a Difference

unity and oneness of God. (Likewise, they rejected all explanations that in any way denied the full humanity of Jesus. And in wrestling with the third person of the emerging doctrine of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, they also rejected any notions of the divine that smacked of pantheism.) The councils clearly declared what incarnation does not mean, but when it came to expressing what incarnation does mean, the councils were less than clear—to put it mildly. In my opinion, the principal reason for their ambiguity was that they were hampered by an inadequate metaphysical framework. The “substance-based” metaphysical system that has dominated the West for millennia has over the

last century been giving way to a new understanding of reality characterized by “event-thinking.”⁶ Viewing the building blocks of reality in terms of events rather than substances affords post-modern thinkers a new possibility for understanding the notion of incarnation.

The problem facing the early theologians could be summed up in the following questions. How can two substances occupy the same place at the same time? Wouldn't that require displacing at least a portion of one of the substances? How, then, can a Christian rationally explain the foundational affirmation that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine?

Process theologians, however, are not constrained by the limitations imposed by substance thinking. Understanding reality in terms of an interrelated web of momentary energy events, each of which is present in all subsequent events, opens up a new understanding of incarnation. Indeed, reality is perceived to be thoroughly relational, thoroughly incarnational! This new understanding of reality has an important theological corollary: God is present in each event, too, lovingly luring each creaturely entity toward its highest good in its moment-by-moment process of development. Thus, if God is present in each and every event, then the Christian doctrine of the divine incarnation in Jesus of

“AVATAROLOGY”: A Hindu Christological Perspective

Jeffery D. Long

When it is said in the Christian tradition “the Word became flesh” this statement is generally understood to refer to the Incarnation—to the physical manifestation of God in the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Hindu tradition, interestingly, does not have a problem with this claim, which is usually regarded as the most distinctive of Christian doctrines. Indeed, “The Word became flesh”—or, more to the point, “God became a human being”—is a claim that many Hindus make as well. “But,” a Christian might ask, “Do Hindus

believe that God became *Jesus*?” The possibly surprising answer to this question is yes. Many Hindus do, indeed, believe, or would accept the idea if it were proposed to them, that God did manifest in the world in the person of Jesus Christ. There is even a term within the Hindu tradition for such a divine manifestation: *avatar*, a Sanskrit word that literally means “descent.” The idea is of God “descending” to the earth (in contrast with “ascending” up to the Heavens). Furthermore, the basic metaphysic underlying this avatar concept is not so very different

from that underlying the Christian doctrine of divine incarnation.

What is the difference, then, with regard to this doctrine of incarnation, or divine descent, between the Christian and Hindu traditions? If many Hindus believe that Jesus was God incarnate, that Jesus was divine—the most distinctive of Christian doctrines—does that not make them Christian?

This, of course, depends on how one defines terms like “Hindu” and “Christian,” and whether one regards such identifications as mutually exclusive—which many Hindus do not. But the chief

Nazareth poses no problem; it is rational and coherent. In fact, the task set before process theologians is not to explain how the divine and the human could combine in Jesus of Nazareth; rather, it is to explain how and to what extent Jesus is a unique manifestation of “God with us.” From the process perspective, that uniqueness is not viewed in terms of a metaphysical uniqueness. Understanding his uniqueness in metaphysical terms is the problem imposed by the constraints of substance thinking, which has plagued Christianity since the earliest days of theological reflection on the significance of Jesus. For process theologians, the metaphysical dynamics of the incarnation in

Jesus were no different than the dynamics of the incarnation in all entities. Jesus’ uniqueness had to do with the *content* of the divine lure (a revelation of God’s nature) and the *quality* of his response to that lure.⁷

The classic text on the incarnation is the Prologue to the Gospel according to John (1:1-18). The key verses for the purpose of this article are:

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . (3) All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being that has come into being.

(4) In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . . (9) The archetypal light, which enlightens everyone, was continually coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (11) He came to his own, and his own did not accept him. (12) But to all who received him, who believed in name, he gave power to become children of God . . . (14) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full

difference between the classical Hindu doctrine of the avatar and the classical Christian doctrine of the incarnation has to do with the number of times this event of divine descent is believed to have occurred.

On a mainstream understanding of Christianity, divine incarnation is an event that happened only once and for all time—again, the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. But the Hindu tradition speaks of many avatars. In a famous verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Bhagavan Sri Krishna, one of the most beloved of the many avatars of the Hindu tradition, states: “Whenever righteousness is threatened and evil prevails, I

descend, age after age, to re-establish the good and to destroy the evil” (*Bhagavad-Gita* 4: 7-8).

Krishna, again, is one of the most beloved avatars of the Hindu tradition. Much like Christians, the devotees of Lord Krishna believe that wholehearted faith and loving devotion to God is sufficient to carry them across the ocean of rebirth to the further shore of liberation. Many also believe that, like Jesus, Krishna came into this world precisely so human beings could know God directly—a God who, as in process thought, feels with the beings making up the universe, directly aware of and sharing their joys and sorrows, their victories and de-

feats. There are even many parallels between the life of Krishna and that of Jesus. Like the baby Jesus, the baby Krishna was threatened by a wicked king—his own uncle, Kamsa—who plotted to destroy him, killing many other innocent children in the process. The image of the baby Krishna on his mother’s lap is as beloved by Hindus as that of the Madonna and child is by Christians.

For Hindus, there is no conflict between believing in the divinity of Jesus and the divinity of Krishna. Hindus hold both to be manifestations of the infinite love of God, a love that cannot be contained in any single form or incarnation.

¹ The present article is abstracted from a paper I presented at the second annual William A. Beardslee Consultation sponsored by Process & Faith, May 5, 2003, held at Temple Beth Tikva, Fullerton, California. That paper will be part of a volume of collected papers—by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars—to be published following the fourth Beardslee consultation.

² Creation out of nothing is an idea more Greek in origin than Hebrew. The creation stories in the Hebrew Bible portray God bringing forth order out of preexisting chaos (e.g., Gen 1:1-2). Not until the rise of Hellenistic Judaism during the late Second Temple period does one find the idea of creation out of nothing (e.g., 2 Macc 7:28). Unfortunately this notion quickly became part of “orthodox” Christianity.

³ Deism takes classical theism a step further in denying that miracles occur. According to deism, God created the world, but the world now operates according to natural law without any divine influence.

⁴ Although most English translations of Gen 1:26 use the words “have dominion” rather than “have stewardship,” the idea is that humans, who are created in the image of God, are “to manifest God’s rule on earth, on the analogy of a child who represents a parent (5:3)” (Bernhard W. Anderson, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* [New York: Oxford UP, 1991] 3). Thus, human “dominion” should be benevolent, not exploitative.

of grace and truth.

In choosing to describe Jesus of Nazareth as the Word become flesh, the evangelist drew upon his rich, dual heritage—Greek and Hebrew.

The Greek word *logos*, translated “Word” above, has two basic meanings: “thought or reason” and “word, an outward expression of an inward thought.” Stoic thought of late antiquity identified the *logos* of Socrates (the rational principle in humans, the mind or soul) with the *logos* of Heraclitus (the creative Reason or Mind that pervades the universe, producing rational order and stability). Because the individual human soul was conceived of as a spark of the universal *logos*, the highest good was evident: humans should live in harmony with the *logos* pervading the universe, that is, they should live a life completely integrated with and in harmony with the larger world surrounding them.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *logos* regularly translates *dabar*. This Hebrew word, meaning “to speak, to communicate,” is a common expression for God’s communication with humankind, God’s self-revelation, especially through the prophets. Yet the Word of God is more than speech. The Word of God is *God in action*, creating (Gen 1; Ps 33:6), revealing (Amos 3:7-8), and redeeming (Ps 107:19-20). The Targums⁸ of the late Second Temple period continue this tradition, frequently substituting

the expression “the Word” for the personal name of God. Another Jewish tradition with parallels to the Johannine Prologue is the personification of Wisdom who, as God’s agent of creation, dwells among God’s people reflecting God’s glory and bringing light and life to people (Prov 1:20-33; Prov 8-9; Sir 24; Wis of Sol 7:22-11:1). And in the first century, Philo of Alexandria⁹ pressed the notion of personification to its extreme, as in his writings the *logos* is presented as the primal emanation of God, somewhat akin to the Platonic notion of the world of ideas.

Drawing upon this dual heritage, the Johannine Prologue portrays the eternal *logos* (v 1) incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth (v 14) as the agent of creation (vv 3-4, 9-10), of revelation (vv 9, 14), and of redemption (vv 9, 12, 14). Unfortunately, much of the theological and ethical significance of these powerful assertions has been trussed up by the intellectual Gordian knot created when the early church tried to explain incarnation within a substance-based metaphysical framework. For theologians rooted in substance thinking, there simply was no way to give a rational explanation of the two natures of Jesus of Nazareth affirmed in the church creeds. A process-informed understanding of incarnation in general, and of the incarnation in Jesus in particular, evokes fresh possibilities for theological and ethical reflection; for example, new possibilities emerge for interreligious dialogue

and historical Jesus research.¹⁰ However, for the purpose of this essay—a Christian response to the ecological crisis—I will limit my theological and ethical reflections on John’s Prologue to the following.

The incarnation of the *logos* is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth. Quite the contrary, the *logos* “is continually coming” into the world (vv 3, 9-10), and thus is incarnate in all things. Indeed, life and light are “in the *logos*” (v 4); apart from the *logos* there would be no enlightenment, no life, no existence. Unfortunately, it is possible to be ignorant of this omnipresent incarnation of the divine (v 10). In fact, it may very well be the omnipresence of God that renders God hidden in plain sight. For this reason, at especially appropriate times the *logos* “is made flesh” (v 14) in specific individuals in unique ways for the specific purpose of calling attention to the presence and nature of God.

The belief that God is incarnate throughout nature may be distinctively Christian, but it is not uniquely Christian. The new twist in the distinctively Christian form of “animism” is that it avoids both the polytheism and pantheism that tend to be associated with most expressions of animism. According to the process-informed Christian doctrine of incarnation, God both transcends and is immanent in nature—and vice versa. Just as incarnation did not obliterate Jesus’ humanity, so too incarnation throughout nature

does not obliterate the individual entities comprising the natural order. Nevertheless—and here is the crucial point for this essay—the presence of God throughout nature resacralizes nature. All of existence is rendered holy. There is no secular realm, no time or place or thing devoid of God’s sanctifying presence.

Humans may be unique in being created “in the image of God,” but the process-informed doctrine of the incarnation carries with it an inescapable corollary that is especially relevant to the environmental crisis facing us today. The value of an entity, no matter how insignificant that entity may seem, is not exhausted by the measure of its instrumental value. Each entity has value in and for itself; it is sacred. As I noted in a previous article, we need to be gripped by the awareness

that God’s presence pervades all of creation, that God’s loving concern extends even to the wild and remote parts of the earth such as steaming tropical rain forests, arid deserts, and the frigid polar caps—regions we erringly assume are unimportant, even “godforsaken.” But God is lovingly present and active even in those lands where no one lives. . . .

If this vision is to grip us, it will have to do so on two levels. First, it must capture our reason. Intellectually we must

⁵ Ronald L. Farmer, “A Land Where No One Lives: Reflections on Job 38: 25-27,” in *Creative Transformation* 11/2 (Spring 2002): 12-13.

⁶ For a discussion of the shift from substance thinking and event thinking, see Ronald L. Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse: The Promise of a Process Hermeneutic* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1997) 58-68.

⁷ For more on the uniqueness of Jesus, see Ronald L. Farmer, “Jesus in Process Christology,” *Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 2001) 202-209; and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions about Process Thought*, ed. by Jeanyne B. Slettom (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003) 35-51.

⁸ Targums are Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible.

⁹ Philo (died ca. 49) was an older Jewish contemporary of the Fourth Evangelist. It may be noteworthy that P52, the earliest fragment of the Gospel of John (indeed, the earliest New Testament fragment), was found in Egypt.

¹⁰ For a discussion of some of the new possibilities for interreligious dialogue and historical Jesus research, see Farmer, “Jesus in Process Christology,” 209-13.

¹¹ “Aurora Leigh,” VII.821.

¹² Farmer, “A Land Where No One Lives,” 13.

Seeds Know How to Fly

You can't
put the seed back
after the pod has burst.
A feather-weight traveler,
the seed knows
how to fly.

On the edge of this little woods
I have seen the milkweed travel,
the one at the bend in the path
appearing across the ravine
after the snows have gone.

It might have been called a Miracle
– the plant that walks –
but for the rites of fall
like holy days

returning every year
to reveal this mystery:
pods splitting open
and the shiny, silken seeds
glistening in the sunlit air
taking flight in the wind
and doing exactly
what they were meant to do.

Seeds know how to fly
and plants travel
despite their roots.
Miracles happen all the time.
When we have learned this
there will be no turning back,
the journey having just begun.

– Karen Hering

Continued from page 7

abandon our arrogant anthropocentrism and embrace the fact that we are but a part of the vast and intricate web of nature. Furthermore, we must balance the notion of God's transcendence with the notion of God's immanence. All of the earth is sacred ground, even those lands where no one lives.

But merely giving intellectual assent to this new vision is not enough. Second, we must develop a sense of mystical participation in the web of life and a personal awareness of the presence of God in everything about us. We must personally experience what Elizabeth Barrett Browning felt when she wrote,

. . . Earth's crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with
God:
But only he who sees, takes off his
shoes,
The rest sit round it, and pluck black-
berries. . .¹¹

Only when the rational is combined with the mystical will the full power of this new (yet ancient) vision be felt. People of faith can render the world no more valuable service than to infect others with this transformative vision.¹²

Patricia's Ponderings

The Cloud of Knowing

Patricia Adams Farmer

"... Nothing floats into the universe from nowhere."

—Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki



California was, not so long ago, a place of nightmarish fire, smoke, and ash. And it made us all edgy. It made us sick. The smoke filled more than our lungs. It blackened our spirits with dread for the violation of homes and land, for the killing and displacement of people and wild animals. Like Hitler ravaging Europe, we all felt a maniacal force was at large in our land. When it finally rained, it was like D-Day, as if the tide of the war had changed, and we wanted to dance in the streets.

After the initial rain, the air quality improved. I took my first walk outside in the sunshine. And there it was: a white cloud perched low in the sky—not a thin, wispy, delicate thing, but a thick, lustrous, Herculean cloud—that seemed to be bellowing out to us below, “Everyone, look at me! Aren’t I stunning!”

I stopped in my tracks to take in this arresting puff of beauty floating on a sea of blue. For this resplendent punctuation in a crisp, clean sky is a sign to me, a sudden remembrance of my faith, that suffering is not interminable.

The dark, bruised, crying clouds are the ones giving us the true relief, but the fluffy white ones that pop out in the aftermath hang around to say, “We did it! Let’s revel in the glory of it!” Since clouds are not common in sunny Southern California, when you look up and see one so utterly remarkable, it takes your breath

Only a notion of a creative, relational God accounts for the presence of novelty and freshness in the universe.

away. And as it appears after the rain, in this scorched desolation, it is nothing less than a gift of rare beauty. I want to reach up, take hold of it, and pull it down to earth—and caress it with my whole being!

Snowy white, swirling—it looks like curls carefully coiffed into a head of hair that belongs to one

of age—a grandmother, perhaps, or an aunt sitting us down with a cup of tea and comforting words. Everything is going to be all right. That is what this white-haired cloud tells me. Oh, how happy I am to embrace the vision of this cloud!

My heart floats easy, like the cloud. “Nothing floats into the universe from nowhere,” says Marjorie Suchocki about Whitehead’s philosophy. Only a notion of a creative, relational God accounts for the presence of novelty and freshness in the universe, or of the presence of a cloud with such mystic powers on a single, beleaguered soul.

Only a God who knows—who feels, utterly and painfully, the panic of animals and the suffering of families, could come up with such a resplendent, floating, joyful rejoinder to earth’s sorrow. And if the cloud is a promise of newness, then the rain is divine feeling, like human tears, washing, healing, re-making the world.

“He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud.” Psalm 99:7

Process from My Perspective

Joseph A. Bracken, S.J.

In the many years that I have used the process-relational metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead for elaboration of my own work in systematic theology, one of my few disappointments has been the relatively cool reception by Roman Catholic colleagues in theology either to my own publications or to those of other process-oriented Roman Catholics like Robert Kinast, Jane Kopas, Bernard Lee, *et al.* In no small measure, this is due to the pre-eminence of Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner and, to a lesser extent, Urs von Balthasar in Roman Catholic systematic theology. The richness of their thought has sustained most Roman Catholic systematians for the past half-century. Likewise, one can point to the unfamiliar character of Whitehead's basic concepts (e.g., actual occasion, society, prehension, etc.) as a reason for Roman Catholics as well as many mainstream Protestant theologians to postpone or simply put off reading works in process theology even though the process image of God as being in active communication with the world of creation is otherwise very attractive.

The deeper reason for this unresponsiveness to the project of process theology, however, in my judgment lies elsewhere. Process theology is unhappily linked in the minds of many Roman

Catholics and mainstream Protestants with a tendency to reductionism in their cherished Christian beliefs. That is, doctrines such as *creatio ex nihilo* with its emphasis on the transcendence of God to the world, and classical eschatology with its promise of eternal life not only for human beings but for all of material creation, have been either set aside or significantly underplayed in the light of Whitehead's metaphysics. Too little effort has been expended in somehow adjusting Whitehead's philosophical categories to accommodate those same traditional Christian beliefs. The ultimate issue, therefore, for many Roman Catholics and mainstream Protestants seems to be whether one ultimately puts one's faith in a contemporary metaphysical scheme or in the established belief-system of one's church.

In the basic conviction that this alleged dichotomy can and should be overcome, I have worked for many years at a suitable revision of Whitehead's metaphysics so as to accommodate Christian beliefs such as those mentioned above. Along the way, I uncovered certain problems with Whitehead's scheme which on strictly philosophical grounds seemed to be in need of emendation. In particular, it became clear to me that Whitehead's category of society was notably underde-

veloped and that as a result Whitehead's thought was curiously atomistic since it focused almost exclusively on the concreteness of actual occasions rather than on the "societies" into which they normally aggregate. Thus, even though Whitehead was insistent that every actual occasion mirrored the world out of which it arose and contributed in some small way to the world developing around it, he did not think through sufficiently the need for "societies" to be more than just aggregates of actual occasions with a "common element of form" or enduring pattern of existence and activity. As a result, while his metaphysics is on one level a genuinely social ontology with strong emphasis on the dynamic interconnectedness of everything with everything else, on another level it remains atomistic in that it does not adequately account for the existence of strictly social realities ("societies") which are not simply reducible to the dynamic interplay of their constituent parts or members.

Recognizing that one could not in this instance revert to the classical notion of substance without undermining the basic presuppositions of Whitehead's metaphysics, I eventually discovered Whitehead's passing reference to "societies" in *Process and Reality* as "environments" in "layers of

social order” for their constituent actual occasions. Renaming “environments” as “structured fields of activity” for those same actual occasions, I felt that I had a metaphysical category different from that of substance but yet akin to it in its implicit emphasis on continuity and stability in the midst of ongoing change. Furthermore, as I saw it, the notion of field allowed for change and development in a way that the notion of substance logically could not. That is, given the priority of form over matter within the classical understanding of substance, substances can only change “accidentally,” i.e., within the parameters of what is permitted by the substantial form. A field, on the other hand, can over time change much more dramatically since its governing structure is from moment to moment the byproduct of the dynamic interplay of its ever-changing constituent actual occasions. Hence, gradual evolution of form and structure is clearly possible within fields but not within substances.

Further confirmation of this insight came with my reading of Ervin Laszlo’s *Introduction to Systems Philosophy* in which he described systems as field-phenomena hierarchically ordered from the most elementary to the most complex and comprehensive. In any event, given this field- or systems-orientation to reality as a complement to Whitehead’s focus on actual occasions as immaterial self-constituting subjects of experi-

ence, I have over the years gradually worked out an understanding of the God-world relationship in which all creatures come forth from God (or from what I call the “divine matrix”) and return to God as members of a cosmic community. Strong emphasis is laid on the freedom of the divine persons to create and the spontaneity of creatures in responding to the divine “initial aims.” What I have gained from this prolonged rethinking of Whitehead’s metaphysics is a deeper appreciation of the classic Christian belief that faith and reason in the end do not stand in opposition to but instead complement each other. Initial inconsistencies in point of view can over time be harmonized, to the ultimate advantage of both faith and reason. As Whitehead himself notes in *Process and Reality*, “God and the World are the contrasted opposites in terms of which Creativity achieves its supreme task of transforming disjoined multiplicity, with its diversities in opposition, into concrescent unity with its diversities in contrast” (PR 348).

Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., is retired professor of theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is the author of five books and editor or co-editor of two others on the link between trinitarian theology and process metaphysics. His most recent publication is The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).

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Process in Practice

The City that Kills the Prophets: Reflections on Matthew 23:37-39

Russell Pregeant

There is a sense in which the plot in each of the synoptic gospels tells not one story but two. One of these has dominated in the history of the church, sometimes almost to the point of suppressing the other altogether. Yet the other has resurfaced periodically and has played a crucial role in fostering reexamination of our most basic presuppositions about the faith.

One story is the account of the Son of God, whom God preordains to die on the cross for human salvation. The other is the story of a prophetic figure whose death is an act of human injustice that God answers with the resurrection. Both are central components of the historic faith, but it matters which we view as the controlling element. For the price of allowing the story of God's preordination of Jesus' death to dominate is that the concreteness of Jesus' message and ministry, and specifically their social-political thrust, is reduced to secondary status.

Taken by itself, Matthew 23:37-39—Jesus' lament over Jerusalem—seems to have little to do with social-political matters. Read in context, however, it appears as a key component in a plot ele-

ment that creates more than a little tension with the motif of God's willing of Jesus' death.

The theme of preordination is unquestionably present in the narrative. Against the background of Matthew's constant references to fulfillment of scripture, the three passion predictions (16:21-23; 13:22-23; 20:17-19) create the impression that Jesus' death is necessary. And this impression is reinforced by 20:28, which defines Jesus' mission specifically as "to give his life as a ransom for many" and 26:28, where Jesus links the cup at the final meal to his own blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The scene in Gethsemane (26:36-46), moreover, leaves little doubt that it is God's will that Jesus go to the cross.

It is equally clear, however, that Jesus' death is an injustice rooted in the intransigence of the Jerusalem leadership. In 26:59-61, where Jesus stands before the High Priest, the theme of false witnesses highlights the injustice of the charges. The role of human perversity in the matter is evident also from the fact that Jesus' arrest is the result of a secret plot (26:3-5). And the Barabbas incident (27:15-26) makes the

point explicitly: not only does Pilate's wife pronounce Jesus innocent, but it is precisely the manipulation of the crowd by the chief priests and elders that actually leads to Jesus' final condemnation.

The perverse character of the leadership, moreover, is evident from the beginning. John the Baptist attests the insincerity of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees in 3:7-10, and after the Sermon the Mount Jesus is almost immediately opposed by both groups (9:3, 11). Then the conflict escalates dramatically in chapters 11 and 12, so that when the reader comes upon Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, the impression is already secure that that they are completely corrupt and remain totally resistant to Jesus' preaching.

Jesus' lament over Jerusalem is thus precipitated by the hard-heartedness of the forces that oppose him. And coming as a prelude to Jesus' own death, it links this latter event with the entire history of the people's rejection of God's emissaries, both before and after Jesus. The plaintive phrase, "How often have I desired" in 23:37 must be

read against the background of 23:34: “Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify...” In both cases, Jesus speaks, from a trans-historical perspective, on God’s behalf. Thus the eventual condemnation of Jesus to death is clearly an act of human rebellion against God, parallel both to the maltreatment of the earlier prophets and the persecution of Jesus’ followers after his death.

But if Jesus’ death is a rebellion against God, it is not a rebellion on narrowly religious matters. For we must not sever the theme of the murder of the prophets from the messages those prophets preached. These were focussed largely on economic justice, and there are clear indicators in Matthew that Jesus’ message and ministry has a similar thrust. In the immediate context of the lament, Jesus lambastes the scribes and Pharisees for the neglect of justice and mercy (23:23) and for greed (23:25). On two occasions (9:13; 12:7), he quotes Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” in order to criticize the Pharisees for hard-heartedness in the face of human need. And not only is his entire message based on the coming of God’s Rule (4:17), a notion inherently wed to the theme of justice, but the Sermon on the Mount begins with that theme in the foreground. As recent commentators have shown, the terms “poor in spirit,” “those who mourn,” and “the meek” all refer in some way to the dispossessed.

Thus, for the sake of parallelism, the term *dikaiosyne* in 5:6 should be translated not as “righteousness” but as “justice,” so that it is specifically those deprived of justice whom Jesus blesses.

The price of allowing the story of God’s preordination of Jesus’ death to dominate is that the concreteness of Jesus’ message and ministry, and specifically their social-political thrust, is reduced to secondary status.

Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem, then, is based partly upon that city’s continuing rejection of those emissaries of God who confronted the leadership with a condemnation of injustice. And his death is therefore in a strong sense the martyr-death of a prophet. Interpreters informed by

Whitehead’s understanding of language can draw upon his notion of a “contrast” to hold this theme in tension with the notion of God’s preordination of Jesus’ death and seek a creative transformation of both elements. But it will be important to allow the former, with its links to the theme of economic justice, to take pride of place. For the notion of preordination is highly problematic if severed from the concreteness of the biblical witness to what Jesus actually stood for in the world of human affairs. And that is especially so for those of us who live in a nation with a long history of rejecting those who call it to account on matters of justice.

One way to effect a creative transformation in this case would be to interpret Jesus’ death not as actually preordained but as something tragically made necessary by human intransigence. That way we would see the cross not in terms of a substitutionary atonement for sin but rather as a paradigm of the redemptive love of a God who suffers with all creation in order to establish the reign of justice and of peace.

Russell Pregeant is professor of philosophy at Curry College. His academic interests include biblical studies and contemporary theology, in particular, process thought and the various theologies of liberation theology, including the feminist. He has written four books among which is the textbook Engaging the New Testament.

Racial Alienation versus the Beloved Community¹

Douglas Sturm

Racism, sad to say, remains very much alive and well throughout the world today, a seemingly indomitable obstacle to the creation of community in both this land and elsewhere. Any consideration of the virulence of racism nowadays might well begin with a recognition of the genius of W.E.B. DuBois, whose insightful, if controversial text, *The Souls of Black Folk*, was released 100 years ago, in 1903.² Much might be fruitfully explored in this elegant text, but I confine myself to two concepts from it, concepts that, alas, have retained their vibrancy ever since. These concepts—the “color line” and “double-consciousness”—constitute dominant themes of my remarks, which I contrast with a third concept—the “beloved community”—appropriated from Martin Luther King, Jr.

I. The “Color Line”: A Matter of Social Bifurcation

In the “Forethought” to his text, DuBois announces, with keen prescience, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.”³ Let us pursue that thought, aware that DuBois himself was born but a few short years following the Emancipation Proclamation, and was educated during a time when legalized segregation with all its trappings took hold of vast areas in the

United States—as he learned all too well during his education in the South. For five long and turbulent decades following his announcement, legalized segregation endured, provoking agonized opposition on many fronts reaching a critical point in the famed 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Topeka*, just fifty years ago.

That year, 1954, marked, at least symbolically, a moment of critical intensification of civil rights struggles whose twists and turns we need not here rehearse in detail—though through a period of two decades they gave rise to innumerable actions of high courage directed to the obliteration of those systems, structural and cultural, that had oppressed peoples of color for so many centuries in the modern world.

Yet the color line, as DuBois predicted, has persisted despite those struggles, continuing to obstruct the formation of community across the nation. In December 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr., testifying before a Senate Committee—acknowledging the intermingling of the color line with the class line—remarked:

All too many of those who live in affluent America ignore those who exist in poor America. . . .

Is there evil in America today? Not in the sense of the systematic physical extermination of a people but in the sense of the destruction of hope, after the raising of expectations, the forced separation of the poor, whether black or white, from the rest of society, the confinement to poverty and squalor of millions of Americans. To be born a Negro [sic] in an American city, for most of us, means to be “under” the main stratum of our society—to be underemployed, or unemployed, or underpaid; to be undereducated and ill housed; to face illness and perhaps death, undercared for; to face a life of little hope, entrapped by both color and need.⁴

The next year, 1967, confronted with massive riots in major cities across America, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to explore the causes of civil unrest and to recommend remedial action. In its 1968 report, the Kerner Commission affirmed, in an oft-quoted phrase, that “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” It concluded that racism along with its constant compan-

ion, economic inequality, constituted the impetus of the riots. It insisted, moreover, that “White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created [it], white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”⁵

Twenty years later (1988), Fred R. Harris, a member of the Kerner Commission, along with Roger Wilkins, published a follow-up report, *Quiet Riots: Race & Poverty in the United States*. In their introduction, they declared:

The Kerner Report is coming true: America is again becoming two societies, one black (and, today, we can add to that, Hispanic), one white—separate and unequal. . . . There are “quiet riots” in all of America’s central cities: unemployment, poverty, social disorganization, segregation, family disintegration, housing and school deterioration, and crime are worse now. These “quiet riots” are not as alarming as the violent riots of twenty years ago. . . . But they are even more destructive of human life.⁶

During the nineties, several studies reinforced the thesis about the color line pronounced by DuBois in 1903, echoed in the Kerner report in 1968, and reiterated in the 1988 follow-up—including Andrew Hacker’s *Two Nations: Black and White, Hostile, Unequal* and David K. Shipler’s *A Country of Strangers:*

Blacks and Whites in America, among many others.⁷

Six years ago, a thirty-year update of the Kerner Commission’s concern was published, *The Millennium Breach: Richer, Poorer and Racially Apart*. This study acknowledges the achievements advanced by the civil rights struggles: the expansion of the African American middle class, the significant increase in the proportion of African American officials throughout the nation, the increase in high school graduation rate among African American youth. But then it underscores the following trends, all contravening the construction of community in this land:

During the 1980s, child poverty increased by over 20 percent, with racial minorities suffering disproportionately. Today, the child poverty rate in the United States is 4 times the average of Western European nations. . . . America’s neighborhoods and schools are resegregating. Two-thirds of African-American students and three-fourths of Hispanic students now attend predominantly minority schools. . . . America’s housing policy for the poor and minorities has become prison building. . . . Today, the rate of incarceration of African-American men in the U.S. is 4 times higher than the rate of incarceration of Blacks in South Africa during the pre-

Nelson Mandela apartheid government.⁸

Is it any wonder that just a few months ago Henry James Young, an African American theologian and social theorist, following upon DuBois’s thesis about the color line, asserted “African American Identity versus the Myth of White Supremacy” retains its valence as “A Central Challenge for the 21st Century”?⁹

II. “Double Consciousness”: A Matter of Alienation

As a segue to the second theme of these remarks, we should take note of Albert Memmi’s tantalizing rendition of the structure of racism, which betrays something of its complexity and its breadth. Reflecting on his experience of colonialism as a Tunisian Jew, Memmi designates four characteristics of racism (defined from the perspective of the dominant party in the correlation): (a) the dominant party perceives the other to be singularly different in some respect; (b) the dominant party then assumes that, given that difference, the other is an inferior being; (c) the judgment of inferiority is radicalized to embrace a whole population of people; (d) those considered superior are therefore warranted in actions of denigration, exploitation, even annihilation of that population.¹⁰ So defining the structure of racism, Memmi suggests that, writ large, it embraces a host of interactions, which he designates, “heterophobia,” acknowledging that racism on the basis of

presumed color differentiation is but one subspecies. Antisemitism, xenophobia, orientalism, homophobia are other expressions of this same form of interaction.

W.E.B. DuBois, in his provocative concept of “double-consciousness” approaches the same historical reality, but from the perspective of the underside together with a complicating twist. DuBois avers that the “American world” allows African Americans

no true self-consciousness, but only lets [them] see [themselves] through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels [one’s] twoness,—an American, a Negro [sic]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹¹

Remembering that DuBois was at university in Germany during a time when Hegelian studies were popular, I dare to suggest that “double-consciousness” might be construed as a powerful form of alienation and that DuBois might have understood America as not just a country of strangers divided

by some sort of line into separate societies, but a land of estrangement; a land in which peoples—particularly but not exclusively subordinated peoples—are caught in a maelstrom of countervailing forces, cultural and structural; a land where, despite lines of separation, the lives of dominant and subordinate peoples are inextricably tangled up in complicated ways not only with each other but within each self.

Alienation signifies a kind of interaction that is at the same time symbiotic and agonistic. It is a relationship of conflictual co-dependence. The turmoil, both psychological and political, to which structures of alienation give rise is more readily experienced by subordinate peoples than by dominant peoples, for theirs is the more evident pain. Dominant peoples may in fact be largely oblivious to its presence, even as they enjoy its privileges. They may become defensive in response to the angry outbursts that it inspires. *But* they may also, animated by good intentions, seek ways to create space in their institutions for the subordinate class, declaring commitment to a principle of equality.

III. “Beloved Community”: A Matter of Radical Social Reconstruction

However, that gesture—an invitation to assimilation—is not always accepted as intended. The response of subordinate peoples to that seemingly generous offer, at least by those conscious of the dynamics of alienation, is neatly

encapsulated in Ralph Ellison’s review of Gunnar Myrdal’s classic study of *The American Dilemma*, accomplished in the 1940s for the Carnegie Corporation.

Myrdal sees Negro [sic] culture and personality simply as the product of a “social pathology.” Thus he assumes that “it is to the advantage of American Negroes [sic] as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.” This, he admits, contains the value premise that “here in America, American culture is the ‘highest’ in the pragmatic sense. . . .” Which aside from implying that Negro [sic] culture is not also American, assumes that Negroes [sic] should desire nothing better than what whites consider highest. But in the “pragmatic sense” lynching and Hollywood, fadism and radio advertising are products of the “higher” culture, and the Negro [sic] might ask, “Why, if my culture is pathological, must I exchange it for these?”¹²

Biblically cast, are we to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage, especially if that pottage be soured? Or is it the better course to sustain what is most precious of one’s own heritage—one’s own beliefs and values, culture and

traditions, sensibilities and concerns as in some sense a unique admixture of both African and American, indigenous and immigrant, Hispanic and Anglo, Asian and Western?

That sentiment (or something similar to it) informs those who now promote the laudable but limited cause of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism intends to honor the integrity of each people's historical reality—its distinctive cuisine and dress, language and music, rituals and moralities—given some sort of principle of self-determination, of freedom and autonomy, perhaps even of group rights. Yet multiculturalism, with its sincere asseverations of tolerance and civility, all too often tends toward superficiality, treating difference as “quaint,” while neglecting the hegemonic effects of dominant institutional forces, cultural and societal, within which a massive maldistribution of power perpetuates the pains and pangs of alienation.

Conditions of alienation cannot be resolved either by assimilation into the American mainstream or by multicultural appreciation of distinctive habits. It can be surmounted, in the final analysis, only by a movement directed to massive social reconstruction. DuBois knew that. So did Martin Luther King, Jr., whose assassination occurred five years following DuBois's death in Ghana, where he had been, significantly, residing in self-imposed exile for some time. King epitomized the objective of such radical social recon-

struction in his concept of the “beloved community.”

We cannot here pursue the full ramifications of this rich concept. Suffice it to say that, in King's comprehension, the concept of the beloved community derives from and constitutes the normative side of the relational premise: that all life is interrelated, that “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,” that “together must learn to live as brothers [and sisters] or together we will be forced to perish as fools.”¹⁴

In such a movement, directed toward the transformation of all those institutional structures that militate against the formation of human community—ranging from patriarchalism and racism, to modern tribalisms and corporate capitalism, including militarism and neocolonialism—we must call on the wisdom of a central principle drawn from Latin American liberation theology: the “preferential option for the poor,” on the sensible assumption that oppressed peoples tend to have keener insight into the injustices of the world than those who believe, in a grand display of self-deception, that they are the privileged and therefore a superior breed.

¹ In its original version, this article was presented at the opening plenary session of the Pennsylvania Sociological Society in California, PA., October 24, 2003.

² W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1969).

³ W.E.B. DuBois, xi.

⁴ King's testimony is available on the internet at:

<http://www.wadsworth.com/history_d/special_features/ext/ap/chapter29/29.1.king.html>.

⁵ Quotations from a CNN article on the internet:

<<http://www.cnn.com/US/9803/01/kerner.commission/>>.

⁶ Fred R. Harris and Roger W. Wilkins, eds., *Quiet Riots: Race and Poverty in the United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), xii-xiii.

⁷ Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992) and David K. Shipler, *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and White in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

⁸ *The Millennium Breach: Richer, Poorer and Racially Apart—A Thirty Year Update of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington D.C.: Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, 1998), excerpts from the Executive Summary, iii-iv.

⁹ See Henry James Young's chapter in Douglas Sturm, ed., *Belonging Together: Faith and Politics in a Relational World* (Claremont: P&F Press, 2003), 89-102.

¹⁰ Albert Memmi, *Racism*, transl. by Steve Martinot (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Appendix A, 169-182.

¹¹ W.E.B. DuBois, 45.

¹² Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 313.

¹³ James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 290.

¹⁴ James M. Washington, p. 620.

Incarnational Teaching in a Multi-Faith World

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore

As a teenager (1950s and 60s), I questioned whether Jesus was the “only path” to God or the only way of salvation. This was a major topic of discussion in our church youth group, and most of us found some theological way to talk about many paths or universal salvation. Many in my church came to different conclusions, however, and many people whom I respected thought differently from me. In the 1970s, when I was engaged in youth ministry, the youth with whom I worked were again concerned about this topic. An interesting development in recent years (at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries) is a re-emergence of this concern among theological students. Some believe that Jesus is the only way; some are convinced that Jesus is not the only way; and others actively seek to know *whether* Jesus is the only way.

These questions emerge in theological schools and continuing education events across the United States, often with reference to John 3:16-21. Why do people have such passion about the relationship between the Jesus Way and religious diversity? Of course, answers to this question are complex, but I will deliberate here on an explanation that is less obvious than some others. Building upon this analysis, I will

propose an educational reading of Christology and an educational practice of incarnation.

Looking back, I am struck with the contentious nature of each era. The late 1950s and early 60s were permeated by Cold War fears and posturing, which contributed to tensions around the Berlin Wall, in relations between the U.S. and Cuba, within many European countries, and among countries in the Middle East. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, racial tensions and the Vietnam War dominated U.S. politics and social spirit, stirring passionate and divided perspectives. During the same era, conflicts escalated in many African and Latin American countries, and in various parts of Asia. Now, in the 21st century, people worldwide live with life-threatening tensions. Fears of domination and terrorism run high, as hopes for negotiated justice and lasting peace plummet. Further, global tensions often foster scapegoating among religious and ethnic groups, sometimes to the extreme of genocide.

I propose that such contentious times contribute to competitive reflections regarding religious truth claims, including the claim that Jesus is the only way to God or salvation. When nations, and ethnic or religious communities, experience fear and seek to prove

their own strength or worthiness among competing communities, they naturally entertain questions about which community is better—whether in religious faith, social values, or political system. For Christians, this social-psychological dynamic can easily raise questions regarding the truth of Jesus Christ and its status in the world of competing truths. History uncovers this dynamic in the emergence of the Crusades during the Middle Ages and the Inquisition in sixteenth-century Spain.

In light of this discussion, I make a daring claim: *that political-economic tensions in the world, and competitive approaches to such tensions, encourage the “Christ as the only way” debates.* Consider the ways by which nations and peoples seek to resolve disputes over land, power, natural resources, values, or forms of government. Characteristically, people in besieged circumstances proceed by setting one group against another, naming “guilty” and “deserving” parties, and scapegoating the people judged to be the greatest offenders in a conflict, *or* scapegoating the people who have less power to defend themselves. Such patterns of thinking promote interest in comparative religious claims. For Christians, questions of Jesus’ status arise—whether Jesus is *the way, one way,*

or the *best* way.

Questions of status lead people away from pondering the *being* of Jesus as Incarnate Mystery, and away from the ethics of *loving* Jesus and *incarnating the mysteries* that he reveals. In face of these problems, we need a second daring claim: *that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ incarnate God's lure to the world, rather than God's coercive intervention in history; thus, Christian peoples are called to focus more on the being and work of Christ, than on the status of Christ in relation to other truths.* Christology needs to concern itself with the nature of Christ as God's incarnation in the messy textures of this world—the world's hungers, joys, sorrows, horrors, and hopes—rather than in competition with other paths of faith. If we take the biblical witness seriously, we cannot deny the importance of these messy textures to the God who has been creating, communing with, and guiding creation throughout the ages.

Following Jesus—the incarnational teacher

An incarnational Christology draws upon the Gospel image of Jesus as Incarnational Teacher. It inspires Christian people to discern what was revealed in Jesus' life and how his being and his work speak to our lives and reveal God's lure for the world. The Greek word *didaskalos* (teacher) is the most frequent descriptor of Jesus in Gospels, portraying the Jesus story as a story of incarnational teaching. Saying this does not set up a

competition among contemporary forms of ministry—worship, teaching, pastoral care, and so forth. Rather, it points to the heart of Jesus' incarnational life and ministry—one that uncovers, reveals, questions, inspires, and encourages. Jesus taught through the details of his life; he also taught through formal acts of care, proclamation, explanation, and storytelling. He taught through his very being, his acts of ministry, and his death and resurrection, however visible or obscure these are in the traditions we inherit. What kind of teaching does this inspire?

In light of this discussion, *the heart of Christological teaching is incarnational—loving Jesus and the perplexing questions raised by his life, opening to the complex mysteries of Jesus as they reveal God's mysteries, and responding to Jesus by incarnating God mysteries in our lives.* It has to do with seeking, engaging, and embodying the Divine.

Loving God and the God

Questions. Incarnational teaching has to do with loving and wondering—loving the God whom we cannot fully understand. It has more to do with touching mystery than communicating particular beliefs. Hebrew words for faith (the language of Jesus) do not even include belief. Thus, *incarnational teachers are called to love God and the God questions, and to share love and questions with others.*

Exploring the Wonder-filled Complexities of Jesus Christ. In incarnational teaching, the com-

plex textures of the Jesus story are more important than the questions about Jesus' humanity and divinity that troubled the church in early eras, or questions about the "Jesus of history" and "Christ of faith" that troubled other eras. When people narrow Christology to one question or one set of beliefs, they lose the fullness and mystery of incarnation. Christianity is always about many—hence, four gospels, many letters, many forms of church, many spiritual practices, diverse hymnody and literature, many theologies. The mystery of faith transcends attempts to give one explanation, or even two or three. *Incarnational teachers are called to love the complexities of Jesus' life and to share with others the wonder-filled challenges of these complexities.*

Trusting Mystery. Such teaching leads to the trauma of trust when Divine details are not computed in terms of "only" and "best." Yet, how can we say that the Jesus Path is the only true path when the God we worship is a mystery beyond comprehension? How can we say that Jesus is the only way when Jesus consistently pointed beyond narrow perspectives and judgmental attitudes? Asking such questions undercuts the competitive edge of Christianity in a contentious world. Yet, *incarnational teachers are called to invite people to delight in mystery and trust their lives to the God of mystery.* And Christians are called to incarnate this wondrous God toward whom Jesus points—a challenge indeed!

Road Signs

Robert and Adrienne Brizee

Our friend Jody wishes to join the church, but is conflicted about what she must say about Jesus Christ. She does okay with God and can understand a human Jesus, but she is led into muddy waters when wondering about Jesus Christ. What might we offer to Jody? We have decided to share meaningful road signs, from our process perspective, which may guide her quest. At each imaginary crossroad we have placed two signs: one pointing in a direction we find fruitful, a second pointing in a more traditional direction.

One model is not enough

The first road sign displays the real value of thinking within one world view which encircles both the ordinary and the mysterious in life. The other sign points in the direction of drawing a dividing line between our everyday life and the life of mystery, offering different ways of seeing each.

Experience is basic reality

Watch for experience behind and embedded in scripture, creed, or document. Ask what the teller of the story or the writer describing the event may have been thinking, proposing, feeling, or valuing. This road sign stands in contrast to the other direction of taking at face value that which is stated in the final form of the document.

Many relationships can occupy the same space

Wonder about how many experiences and relationships a bucket can hold. The answer is many. This allows the divine and human, though different, to be in the same place at the same time. The other sign says that if you put God into Jesus you must take something out, his will, his knowledge, or his personality. One rock added to a full bucket requires one rock to be removed. Until recently all thought about Jesus was based on substance, matter, atom, or thing as basic reality. So it was that the Council of Nicaea affirmed that the Son is of “one substance” with the Father.

God is revealed everywhere

Be inclusive rather than thinking that God is present only with humans. This road sign suggests seeking the divine in every happening in the universe. Thus, with every creature great and small, including Jesus and us, God is our companion. A contrasting road sign bids us to see that God is revealed only in sacred scripture or more specifically in special events within scripture: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God is present in Jesus and in us

See Jesus as basically like all humans. His experiences were quantitatively not qualitatively

different from ours. God, as Christ, persuaded Jesus with possibilities and God, as Christ, does so with us. The content of God’s possibilities and the fullness of the responses to those possibilities are the differences between Jesus and us. The same world view which describes us describes him. The contrasting sign is that Jesus Christ is fully God, Son of God, or the totally unique human person who has ever lived and will ever live.

God persuades and persons decide

Give importance to both God and Jesus in visualizing the personhood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is free to accept or reject the aims which God offers. No coercion exists, no overwhelming force is exerted, no unilateral power occurs. The same is true with us. The other road sign directs us to: God sends God’s only begotten Son to be given as a ransom, or sacrifice, to reconcile the world to Him.

The story of Jesus fits with the history of the universe

Consider how God has been co-creating for eons with entities, creatures, and humans. Wonder how Jesus Christ fits with that story. In contrast, starting with the biblical story of Adam and Eve leads one naturally in the direction

of understanding Jesus Christ as one who died for all the sins of humanity which began with the original sin of Adam and Eve

Jesus has a historical context

Understand the words and acts of Jesus within his day, the significant happenings in politics, religion, agriculture, business, and family. This backdrop of unquestioned assumptions about reality and the culture of Jesus' day can serve to highlight Jesus. The other road sign guides one to take Jesus' words and actions at face value just as they are written in scripture and assume that we, looking through the lenses of our era, will know what they mean.

All first-century documents are valuable

Be open to all sources, especially those nearest to Jesus. Reflect on all the information discovered recently, from the thirty-four gospels or fragments of gospels, to the three levels of the Q document embedded in the synoptic gospels, to those sources branded heretical. The other direction is to stay within the boundaries of the canon, the four gospels.

The teachings of Jesus are crucial

Immerse yourself in the reports of what Jesus said, even though some words have been put on Jesus' lips by later followers. Adventure by constructing a vision of Jesus from his purport-

edly authentic words. In contrast the church has largely proclaimed the acts of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection as described in the passion narrative.

Several stories of salvation exist

Give consideration to the new reality about which Jesus spoke and in which he lived, the realm of God. All are welcome at the table where God is intimately present. Jesus saves us by revealing the nature of God. These are a few of the proposed understandings of salvation that differ from the road sign offered by the church for centuries, that Jesus saves us by dying for our sins.

No past generation had all the answers

Know that each era will share experiences, make meaning, create symbols, develop visions, and offer answers. Each era will do the best it can to reveal the mystery and relevance of the event of Jesus Christ in its day. None will be the final and complete answer, the truth. The other road leads to affirming that those who canonized scripture and the bishops at Nicaea got it right, leaving no need to search further.

Each generation is limited by its worldview

Ask what lenses our forebears used to see Jesus, which concepts and ideas both illuminated and limited their vision. Early generations gave him the title of Christ. The bishops at Nicaea named him

“begotten,” “the only begotten Son.” Christian thinkers of the Enlightenment had to fit Jesus with the new mechanical world view. Wonder about the lenses, concepts, and ideas which limit and illumine our view of Jesus today. The other road sign beckons us to go back to believing the truth is fully expressed in sacred scripture and the early creeds.

New visions of Jesus Christ will be created

Be accepting that there is only so much our era can do to create meaning and understanding. We can wonder what the next era of quantum mechanics, parallel universes, and string theory will add to enrich our vision of Jesus Christ. As new understandings of our existence emerge, they will of necessity interface with the story of Jesus. The other road sign is bold and clear: “Jesus Christ: the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”

We hope that as Jody follows those road signs which appear authentic to her, she may be able to create a vision to which she may “give her heart,” the original meaning of a credo. The meanings she may make of Jesus Christ will be unique to her. At each crossroad, she has the freedom to follow either sign, each leading her in different directions. Our contribution is to share a process way of adventuring.

Christological Dimensions of Liturgy

Paul S. Nancarrow

Christian prayer is customarily offered in the context of a special relationship with Jesus. Prayers in the Christian tradition usually end with the ascription, “in Jesus’ Name,” or “through Jesus Christ our Savior,” or even with a full Trinitarian formula, “through Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is one God, now and forever, Amen.” Verbal forms such as these point to the traditional belief that when Christians pray, they do not pray in a vacuum, but respond to God within a communion established by Jesus’ relationship to God, on the one hand, and Jesus’ relationship to humanity, on the other. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 3:12, “in Jesus we have access to God in boldness and confidence.” More generally, we can say that prayer in relation to Jesus invites the pray-er into Jesus’ own relationship with God. All Christian prayer, therefore, has a specifically Christological dimension.

This is perhaps even more true of *liturgical* prayer. Liturgy is common prayer, prayer offered in a communal and social setting, in which a diversity of pray-ers is brought together through shared themes, shared words, shared ritual forms, shared ceremonial actions. Because it is social, liturgy emphasizes even more strongly that prayer happens in a

relational context, and the character pervading that context is the character of Christ. Liturgical prayer is the prayer of the Body of Christ gathered, and it is therefore preeminently prayer that draws its participants into sharing the relationship between Christ and God. All liturgy has a specifically Christological dimension.

Liturgy can draw worshipers into sharing the relationship between Christ and God, because liturgy represents the forms of definiteness that were characteristic of Jesus’ life and makes them available to be experienced in the contemporary lives of worshipers. In process-relational thought, a thing *is* what it *does*. A thing’s existence, or a person’s life, is a series of moments of experience; these moments are connected to each other by certain “eternal objects”—abstract qualities and past facts—that are reenacted from one moment to the next. A thing’s “nature” is that constellation of eternal objects that it reenacts consistently in its moments: my desk chair is a chair because in each moment its molecules together reenact the quality of *chairness*; I am a human being because in each moment my body, mind, psyche, biochemistry, and so on, reenact the quality of *humanness*. Traditionally, Jesus is said to have had two “natures,”

human and divine; in a process-relational formulation, this can be said to mean that Jesus in his life and ministry, his person and his work, enacted both human and divine qualities. Jesus did what humans do, and that makes him human; but Jesus also did what *God* does, and that makes him divine. In his earthly ministry, Jesus not only proclaimed God’s *basileia*, but Jesus enacted it, healing people as a sign of God’s reign come near, liberating people from the bondage of sin and separation, breaking down barriers between people and gathering them into new communities characterized by the *agape* and compassion of divine love. Because Jesus did what only God can do, Jesus *is* God; in Jesus, humanity and divinity are not two different “substances” that must be reconciled by some metaphysical paradox, but they are two qualities of action that are effectively united in one person’s acting.

Christian liturgy represents those qualities of Jesus’ acting, through symbol and ceremony, and makes them available to become constituent elements in the lives of worshipers today. In the liturgical reading of scripture, for instance, stories that illustrate the divine-and-human qualities of Jesus are read out, to be made available for reen-

actment in the hearing and imagination—and action—of the hearers. Stories from the Hebrew Scriptures that shaped Jesus’ own human consciousness are made available to shape the consciousnesses of Jesus’ followers. In liturgical prayer, the needs and concerns and celebrations and intercessions and petitions and thanksgivings of the worshipers are brought into conscious connection with the ministerial qualities of Jesus’ life and work. Especially in the Lord’s Prayer, when worshipers reenact the specific words of Jesus in their own hearts and voices, the qualities of Jesus’ prayer and the worshipers’ prayer are brought together, so that contemporary worshipers do again as Jesus does. Above all, in the celebration of the Eucharist, contemporary worshipers reenact the acts of Christ: in the Eucharist, worshipers reenact the symbolic meal of bread and wine which Jesus used to typify his own self-giving and sharing love, and in that reenactment the character of Jesus’ love is made available to characterize the worshipers’ loves as well. The “nature” of Jesus’ love is made available to worshipers’ experience through the symbols and ceremonies of the eucharistic action; and the experience of that love becomes a constitutive influence in the worshipers’ lives. Having felt Christ’s love reenacted symbolically in liturgy, participants become more able to enact that love in their own concrete persons and works above and beyond the liturgy.

In liturgy, and especially in eucharistic liturgy, worshipers do again as Jesus does. And if a thing *is*

Because Jesus did what only God can do, Jesus is God; in Jesus, humanity and divinity are not two different “substances” that must be reconciled by some metaphysical paradox, but they are two qualities of action that are effectively united in one person’s acting.

what it *does*, then in liturgical reenactment worshipers in some real sense *become* Christ. When the qualities of Christly love, exemplified in Jesus, are reenacted in worshipers praying in Jesus’ Name, then the nature of Christ is manifest in the worshipers as well. The experience of Christly love in liturgy becomes a kind of center around which other experiences are gathered, and an ideal to which other ideals and values

can be conformed. As that Christly defining characteristic becomes the center around which the worshiper’s present action is integrated, the Christian is conformed to Christ. When the worshipping community shares bread and wine, *basileia* service and ministry, in conformance with Jesus’ sharing, they are offering themselves to be the agents and instruments of Jesus’ own servant ministry. When the worshipers’ action is thus assimilated to Jesus’ action, they are

taken up into the divine society of Christ in God, their actions are coordinated to divine ends and are permeated with divine character. Liturgy thus includes worshipers in living relationship though Christ in God.

Therefore all liturgy has a Christological dimension, a dimension of real participation in the mystery of the unity of human and divine action in Christ. Liturgy is a means by which worshipers are *Christified*, to use Teilhard de Chardin’s phrase, for the creative transformation of the world.

EXPLORING THE PROMISE OF PROGRESSIVE SPIRITUALITY¹

Bruce G. Epperly

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star rising, and we have come to pay him homage . . . ahead of them went the star at its rising, until it stopped where the star was. When they saw that the star had topped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road (Luke 2:1-2, 9b-12).

In *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Philip Jenkins asserts that by 2050 the center of the Christian world will have shifted from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere.² While Northern hemisphere congregations will continue to struggle with pluralism and the impact of the scientific worldview, postmodernism, and secularism as well as the loss of social and political influence, the emerging Christianity of the Southern hemisphere will be characterized by moral and theological conservatism, speaking in tongues and an affirmation of the biblical gifts of the spirit, faith healing, and apocalyptic imagery. The rapidly growing Christianity of the Southern hemisphere will

gain greater political, social, and ecclesiastical influence across the globe, and may—as the recent controversies within the Anglican communion indicate—point to a further marginalization of progressive and liberal Christianity on the theological and ecclesiastical scene.

While we may view these growing evangelical and Pentecostal movements with dismay, we may also discern the movements of God's spirit in their openness to lively mystical experience, healing and wholeness, and embodied spirituality. Like the new age and new spiritual movements of the Northern hemisphere, these emerging movements challenge us to embrace mysticism, healing, and transrational experiences along with our progressive Christian commitment to a liberating, cultural-affirming, global faith.³

In many ways, the season of Epiphany reflects the open and unfettered spirit of progressive Christianity. The season of Epiphany proclaims that God's adventurous spirit breaks down the barriers of race, religion, and world view. Magi from the East witness to the light of the world. Stretching the orthodoxies of their own faith tradition, the magi discover God's revelation in the humble abode of a Judean family. Though they do not become explicit disciples of the Holy

Child, their faith grows in stature as they are creatively transformed by their encounter with the Divine Light that had been at the heart of their own faith's theological affirmations.

As progressive Christians, we affirm that Divine revelation is both universal and intimate in nature. God's lively spirit gives life and guidance to all things, inspiring them moment by moment to embody God's aim at wholeness, beauty, and creativity. Our faith is confessional and affirmative. Our own self-affirmation is grounded on our experience of the Divine and not the denial of God's presence in other faiths, except insofar as they challenge our own essential affirmations of faith.

In the lively, dynamic, relational world view of progressive Christianity, miracles—acts of power and releases of divine energy—burst forth to transform our lives; mystical experiences open the "doors of perception" to higher and deeper levels of reality; healing touch renews the spirit and enlivens the immune system. Still, progressive Christianity has not fully embodied the radical nature of its own theology of revelation, empowerment, creativity. In the words of African American theologian and spiritual guide Howard Thurman, I believe the truths of faith in my mind, but the rest of me hasn't caught up! While

our metaphysics and theology are ecological and postmodern in orientation, we are still held captive by the one-dimensional thinking and spiritual limitations characteristic of the modern worldview. These remaining vestiges of the modern, Enlightenment world view leave little room for spiritual transformation, mystical revelation, and healing touch. The lively faith of our brothers and sisters from the Southern hemisphere challenges our own reluctance to be creatively transformed by God's unfettered spirit.

As progressive Christians, our greatest theological and spiritual gift to the postmodern world of both hemispheres is our vision of the divine-human partnership. While we challenge traditional images of divine omnipotence, the God of progressive Christianity is anything but powerless. The extent of divine influence and immanence in the transformation of the world is often underestimated by progressive Christians. Working within all things, God is the primary actor in the ecology of life. God is the alpha and omega of each moment of experience, grounding each entity in an orderly past and luring each creature toward an imaginative future. Constantly urging the creative progress forward, God lures the world forward moment by moment, making possible both incremental change and decisive personal transformation and healing. Like the good parent, God's transforming power maximizes freedom, creativity, and

beauty in every encounter. The immanent energy of God calls us to a spiritual partnership that brings healing to body, mind, spirit, and relationships. Though we often socially and individually turn away from God's lively presence, opening to this divine-human synergy releases energies that transcend ordinary experience, even as it enables us to see the quotidian moments of life as manifestations of God's holy adventure.

While progressive Christianity is at the numerical margins of Christian world today, being marginalized can be a blessing in disguise. The margins may also be the frontiers and growing edges of the spiritual adventure. Our faith has the stature to embrace the many traditional gifts of the spirit, including speaking in tongues, mysticism, and spiritual and physical healing. The spiritual stature we gain from these encounters with the Holy refreshes and revitalizes our own commitment to theological reflection, partnership with physicians and scientists, economic justice, and ecological healing.

In the story of the magi, we see the interplay of giving and receiving in our own spiritual adventures. In sharing valued symbols of their faith and culture, the magi blessed the Holy Family and the Holy Child. But, in their travels and encounter with the Christ Child, they also received the gifts of the divine incarnation in ordinary life, a broader vision of reality and appreciation of other

cultures, and a greater commitment to embodying the Light that was at the heart of their own faith.

In our own dialogue with the emerging non-Western Christianity, we come with the gifts of imagination, openness to diversity and pluralism, commitment to partnership with science and medicine, a concern for justice, and a willingness to expand our theological and spiritual horizons. But, we also come open to their gifts of spiritual immediacy, trust in divine intimacy, and expectation of healing and transformation.

In the journey of self-examination and dialogue, our own horizons will be expanded and we will embrace lively spiritual practices that will revitalize our progressive faith in ways that respond to the needs of seekers within our congregations and in the broader culture. Our own spirituality will embody the interplay of heart and mind, contemplation and action, self-affirmation and openness to change as we explore in dialogue the frontiers of distinctively global and progressive Christian spiritual practices.

¹ This is the first of two essays exploring the spirit of progressive Christianity, which will be the theme of an upcoming book.

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ For more on the new spiritual movements, see Bruce Epperly, *Crystal and Cross* (Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 1996).

Process Resources

Critic's Corner: Film

Sonja Gravlee

Love Actually

Universal Pictures: 2003

Director: Richard Curtis

Starring: Colin Firth, Hugh Grant, Laura Linney, Liam Neeson, Alan Rickman, Emma Thompson

Actually loved it!

I had braced myself for disappointment. After all, what movie could ever live up to the promises of such a stellar cast? Emma Thompson, who may very well be the perfect actress . . . if not woman. Colin Firth, my not-so-secret latest crush. Liam Neeson, who always makes me think of naked guys since seeing him as Oscar Wilde on Broadway in *The Judas Kiss*. The always brilliant Alan Rickman. And no matter what his failings, I can't long resist the charms of Hugh Grant . . . often to my chagrin. Yet, even with Richard Curtis at the helm, good romantic comedies are hard to find, so I dared not hope too much.

Imagine my surprise. *Love Actually* actually is a delight. As the opening monologue relates, the prevailing wisdom in our world is that hatred and greed run rampant, overshadowing anything decent about humanity and its intricate relationships. But when we stop and look around us, it's amazing how much love there really is—among friends, partners,

family, and even colleagues. Just watch the arrivals at the airport to see the joy we bring one another. When faced with corporate scandals, bullying nations, and desperate terrorists, we too often we overlook the daily graces of life. Yet they continue . . . and even abound . . . for many of us. This film explores such graces through a multiplicity of relationships: a man (Neeson) and his stepson; an aging rocker and his manager; the new Prime Minister (Grant) and one of his staff; an aging, successful businessman (Rickman), his wife (Thompson) and his would-be mistress; a cuckolded man (Firth) and his cleaning lady; an artist struggling to adjust to his best friend's marriage; a woman (Linney) torn between her commitment to herself and her commitment to family . . . the list goes on and on. Like the intricacies of our lives and commitments, many of these plot-lines overlap.

Admittedly, in spite of the challenges of their relationships, these characters spend vast amounts of time in the lap of luxury, enjoying

privileges unknown in large sectors of society. Without a doubt, they're delightful eye-candy. Even so, like the rest of us mere mortals, they face personal challenges, disappointments, and even griefs . . . none of which are trivial . . . or trivialized. But somehow these characters survive . . . with plucky courage, humor, and even joy. In a world full of despair and degradation, *Love Actually* offers signs of hope both for creative transformation and for good's triumph—at least for those who can afford it. Julian of Norwich would've loved it: *All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*

And a number of things in *Love Actually* actually are well. Near the beginning of the film we witness the wedding between a white woman (Keira Knightley) and a black man (Chiwetel Ejiofor), and no one even blinks. Undercurrents abound around this wedding, but they aren't about race. How nice. And while the film doesn't demonize (or, god-forbid, glorify) Americans (thankfully), it does dare to poke

fun and even point-out some of our worst failings at present . . . in an oh-so-polite-but-stalwart British way. How refreshing.

But ALL is not well in *Love Actually*. For a film of 135 minutes, there are an inordinate number of fat comments, indicating a real laziness on the part of the writers who go for the cheap laugh rather than real character-driven comedy. Driving the film's excessive attention to size is its sexist undercurrent. Perhaps that's part of the film's appeal—it doesn't threaten or challenge or call to accountability in any way the “traditional” world where men wield power in the public sphere and women are subordinate to them, both in the office and in the home. In spite of the vast variety of relationships explored and the vast talent of the women in the cast, not one of the plot-lines is about a relationship between or among women. Ultimately, all of the stories revolve around

the needs, wants and problems of men—the women serve merely as foils. Important as the needs, wants and problems of men are, I suspect the women in this world have needs, wants and problems of their own. Sadly, in this film, we'll never know about any of those. So although Curtis & Co. envision a world in which persons are judged by the “content of their character rather than the color of their skin,” they fail miserably even to question a world run exclusively by men with full support from “their” women.

Like most romantic comedies, *Love Actually* abounds with the implausible and the outrageous. Such circumstances are part of the fun and easy to forgive. Would that its sexism had been portrayed as equally implausible and outrageous . . . still, for solid performances and reliable laughs in a romantic comedy, *Love Actually* actually can't be beat.

Whitehead International Film Festival

The third Whitehead International Film Festival (January 14-17) continues to grow, this year drawing an international audience and featuring, for the first time, one USA and one world premiere film showing. Visiting directors Louis Belanger (*Gaz Bar Blues*) and Michael Bergmann (*Aftershock, In Bed with my Books*) provided commentary on their films. The festival was a mix of short films, from classic to world premiere, feature films, and Saturday morning cartoons.

Prior to the festival, Marjorie Suchocki and James Wall offered a “Faith and Film” class that included film history, principles of film criticism, and theology in films.

Special guest John Cobb made the link between “Whitehead” and “Film Festival” in a lecture entitled “Why Whitehead?” This lecture will be available in a printed booklet from the Process & Faith office.

Features:

Gaz Bar Blues
Once Were Warriors
Whale Rider
Baran
Dirty Pretty Things
The Black Stallion
Rabbit Proof Fence
Shall We Dance
The General (classic)
The Gold Rush (classic)

Film Shorts:

In Bed With My Books
Moods of the Sea
Olympia Diving Sequence
Overture
Blue Like a Gunshot
Aftershock
Life & Death of a Moment of Boredom
One Week (classic)
The Immigrant (classic)

Critic's Corner: Books

The Heart of Christianity; Rediscovering a Life of Faith: How We Can Be Passionate Believers Today, by Marcus Borg
(San Francisco: Harper, 2003; hardback; \$22.95)

Reviewed by Adrienne Brizee

Marcus Borg now adds to his continuing work of keeping the heart of Christianity healthy, accessible and relevant to the many persons who feel it has been co-opted by those with a more fundamental or evangelical orientation. His earlier books, including *The God We Never Knew*, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* and *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* have given many persons an entry into the Christian faith or helped others to return or reclaim their faith. Having heard Marcus Borg in Wenatchee as one of our Albertson Lecturers, I can attest to how meaningful his words are to many persons.

I find his title appealing. He has woven the heart metaphor and image into aspects of his previous work beautifully. He begins by asking the question, "What does it mean to be a Christian today?" then proceeds to use his wonderful style to restate many traditional words and images in appealing or transformational ways. Several examples of these would be Born Again—A New Heart; Kingdom of God—The Heart of Justice; and Practice—the Heart of the Matter. Much of the first part of the book is a

helpful restating of his work in these earlier books, now woven into the heart metaphor and providing new language with which to think and talk about our Christian experiences, beliefs and life. I was especially taken by this question: "What opens your heart?"

The categories of Early and Emerging are used to contrast the differences between how the Bible is interpreted and what beliefs and claims are sometimes held to be the test of being a Christian. In the 'Early' view, certain beliefs are to be seen as true, to be believed. He then expands the definition of 'believe' to being "beloved," "held dear," "to prize," "to love." He does this with the Bible, creeds, the rapture, Jesus' death for our sins, sin and purgatory. He also clarifies views held both before and after the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

The latter part of the book held my attention most especially as he wrote of the Relational and Transformational visions of the Christian life. Under Born Again—A New Heart, he states that our life with God is both personal and political, as is the

biblical understanding of salvation. We all need a spiritual rebirth, an internal rebirth, a personal transformation, as Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. We "forget" about God and who God is as we learn who we are from family and society and need to reestablish (transform) our relationship with God.

The Kingdom of God—the Heart of Justice, is the "other" transformation, that of the social and the political. Borg cites God's passion for justice while pointing out that from the 4th century until recently Christianity was the religion of the dominant culture and personal salvation was the primary message. We have also misunderstood God's justice to mean our deserved punishment. We have, through our ethos of individualism, obscured the effects of social systems on people. Borg states that "none of us are self-made" and that we have a great deal of systemic injustice. He urges us to reclaim the political passion in the Bible. This would mean asking the question, "How would life be if God were 'king' and the present rulers were not?" He would include the earth in this concern. Jesus spoke of survival

Novel Theology: Nikos Kazantzakis's Encounter with Whiteheadian Process Theism, by Darren J. N. Middleton (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000; pp. xix + 256; hardback; \$39.95)

Reviewed by Patricia Adams Farmer

What is the relation between theology and art, philosophy and poetry? And why have process thinkers tended more toward rational argument rather than myth and metaphor? Perhaps not all. Meet Nikos Kazantzakis, a controversial Greek writer who enraged conservative religious communities with *The Last Temptation* and beguiled others with *Zorba the Greek*. Now we have the opportunity to see this controversial writer in the fresh light of Whiteheadian process theology, thanks to Darren J. N. Middleton.

In this remarkable book, Middleton asserts that Kazantzakis's fiction is a mythopoesis of process thought. Anyone who is drawn to both process thought and literature will find this work intriguing at every turn. But most important for those of us working within the Whiteheadian tradition is this: Middleton proposes a "a process poetics of faith, a way of thinking and writing theologically that incorporates literary forms" (220). He urges us to "think and write of God in ways that account for the dipolar alliance of metaphoric and conceptual understanding" (220).

What he means by this dipolar alliance is the need for process theology's well-established rational, discursive language to be complimented by literature's imaginative impulse. This makes sense to me. Without Whitehead's ingenious philosophical cosmology we would never satisfy our mind's craving for coherence and rationality. And yet, Whitehead promoted the idea of the need for literature, he himself having been immensely influenced by the Romantic poets.

And here is perhaps our first model—in all his wildness and irreverence—the Bergsonian-inspired Kazantzakis, out of whose metaphorical, mythic language emerged his unique process vision of God. Comparing Whitehead to Kazantzakis is comparing two opposite poles on a language spectrum, one pole being the rational, coherent precision of a scholar, and the other being an intuitive, metaphorical imprecision of the poet. If we want to talk about God, which kind of language on this spectrum is most useful?

Middleton argues convincingly that we need both. Although literature and theology are inher-

ently antagonistic, they are also complimentary modes of speaking about God. Middleton desires that "the two disciplines might be held together in a kind of creative dipolarity" (158). He shows us how this dipolarity works as he compares the works of three process scholars—John Cobb, Blair Reynolds, and David Griffin—with three respective fiction works of Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation*, *St. Francis*, and *Zorba the Greek*. Throughout each discussion, Kazantzakis's "Cry," which has always been compared the élan vital of Bergsonian process thought, is now deftly compared to the Lure of God in Whitehead. Kazantzakis's evolutionary panentheism and co-creative interdependence are familiar to all of us who work within a Whiteheadian framework.

It is important to note that with all of these similarities, there is also an immediately felt difference between Whitehead and Kazantzakis's expression of God that Middleton himself acknowledges when he quotes John Cobb: "There is a valid emphasis in Kazantzakis which is only partly to be found in Whitehead.

Continued on page 32

P&F Connections

Wenatchee, Washington

In November thirteen members of our adult class attended a two-day session at Pullman with John Dominic Crossan on "The Past of the Historical Jesus and the Future of American Christianity." Our connection met on December 7 to discuss the Fall issue of *Creative Transformation*. We're pleased that Julie Gotthold has accepted the invitation to serve on the P&F Council. Bob Brizee will offer a class soon on "From Global Empire to Global Democracy," based upon the October conference on American Empire in Claremont. For more information, contact Adrienne and Bob Brizee at brizeeab@aol.com

Minneapolis-St. Paul

In October, P&F: Twin Cities held another Process in Ministry Forum. The Reverend Audrey Zimmerman, chaplain at the University Good Samaritan Center, spoke of the ways in which process thought has helped her to lead Clinical Pastoral Education students in their ministry among older, chronically ill, and dying residents. The Reverend Linda Nelson spoke of her work with chemically dependent adolescents and their families. And Pastor Luther Dale related how parishioners have had their faith challenged and deepened in times of crisis and healing.

In December, we discussed process themes in the movie *Mystic River*. In January, we will plan activities for 2004. We are looking forward to the July 19-23 Kairos course, "Imaging God, Imagining the World: Process-Relational Resources for Ministry" which we have planned in conjunction with Luther Seminary. For further information about any of these activities please contact Kirsten Mebust at kmebust@twincitizen.net.

In Rochester, contact Carol Ann Wallace at CAW4805@aol.com.

Atlanta

Our reading group is doing wonderfully. We have a great group of faculty, students, chaplains, pastors and pastoral care counselors actively involved. We have finished reading C. Robert Mesle's *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*. We are currently reading Charles Hartshorne's *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, with the plan to compare Hartshorne's descriptions of God's power with Foucault's critique of power. Our conversations are always lively as we talk about process theology and feminism, therapeutic practice, theodicy and text. For more information, email Monica A. Coleman at revmonica@worldnet.att.net

San Diego

We had our initial organization meeting over a potluck dinner with Marjorie as our special guest in early November. Then we had our first "meeting meeting" in December and had a great and lively discussion of Marjorie's introductory booklet. There were about 25 people present and the promise of others who are interested. Our plan is to meet on the second Wednesday night of each month from now on. In January's meeting, we continued with Marjorie's booklet (since we had a fair number of brand new folks who had not had a chance to read it yet). Our discussion focused on the simple (?) issue of who/what God is and what God does according to the process theological model.

To other Connections: I'd be delighted to receive suggestions of other kinds of activities or discussions that your groups have done. Contact Michael Lodahl at mlodahl@ptloma.edu

Tennessee-Virginia-NC

John Martin is interested in starting a connection in Tennessee. Contact him at: jcmartin@charter.net

Drew University, NJ

A lively connection is underway at Drew University. Calling itself "Works in Process," the group

draws members from Drew and the New York/New Jersey community at large and is headed by a six-member steering committee. The group meets monthly and launched itself informally around a September campus visit from John Cobb. The first formal meeting of Works in Process occurred at the end of October. It was a planning meeting, followed by a brief lecture on introductory concepts in process thought. The December meeting was a lecture focusing on making process perspectives relevant to everyday existence. Future meetings are scheduled for February, March, and April. Catherine Keller will address the group in February, Griffin and Deegan's Hard Issues Booklet "How Are God and Evil Related?" will be the topic of discussion at the March meeting, and a professor of medical humanities Robert Clark will address the group in April. Contact Antonia Gorman at antoniag@ptd.net.

Phoenix/Tempe

An organizing meeting, with John Cobb, took place January 29 at 6:30, beginning with a potluck and followed by a brief presentation by Cobb. Contact Linda Miller at revlindamiller@cox.net

Orange County

Rick Marshall is offering a series of six introductory classes in process theology at Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC in La Habra Heights, located at 2000 West Road in La Habra Heights. Classes will be held on

Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m., beginning March 16. For more information, or to sign up for the class, call the Hillcrest church at 562-947-3755, or email Rick at bccrick50@msn.com

Seattle-Tacoma

Marjorie Suchocki will offer a "Faith and Film" class in conjunction with the Seattle International Film Festival (May 2-June 13). More information forthcoming! Contact Paul Ingram at ingrampo@plu.edu

Indianapolis

A reading group met last semester at United Theological Seminary (Dayton) and went through Whitehead's *Science in the Modern World* and *Religion in the Making*. Plans are now shaping up for the spring semester. Contact Helene Russell at brussell@cts.edu

Belgium-France

Freddy Moreau has undertaken the significant task of translation in order to make process more widely known by liberal Protestants in Belgium and France. Contact: freddy.moreau@skynet.be and visit his website at www.protestantismeliberal.be

Ottawa

Contact George Hermanson at tsauc@bellnet.ca

Bluegrass/KY

The Bluegrass Connection will have an informal meeting in January. Contact Charles Arterburn: crart02@yahoo.com

Arkansas

Jay McDaniel, Donna Bowman, and Paul Bube are interested in starting a Connection in Arkansas. Jay teaches at Hendrix College, Donna teaches at University of Central Arkansas, and Paul teaches at Lyon College. Contact Jay: mcdaniel@hendrix.edu.

Omaha

The Omaha Connection was organized in January and will meet at 7:30 p.m., the third Thursday of every month. They are beginning with a discussion of *Making God-Talk Make Sense*, by Vernon Goff, plus Goff's lectionary commentary from his web site (www.process-theology.org) Contact Alice and Vernon Goff at 44vg@cox.net

Fountain Hills, AZ

This Connection was organized by Alice and Vernon Goff in November. They will meet weekly, using Goff's book, *Making God-Talk Make Sense*. Moderators are Mary Ann and Jack McBride. Contact: jjama@prodigy.net.

P&F Affiliate: Tyler, TX

This group, featured in "Process from Our Perspective" several issues ago, began approximately five years ago and meets every week to study various theological themes. We just finished studying Marjorie's book, *Divinity and Diversity*, which by the way she dedicated to our group! Contact Jim Koukl at koukl@tyler.net.

Process Resources

Brizee, continued from page 28

issues, i.e. bread and debt. In referring to the Lord's Prayer, he quotes John Dominic Crossan as saying, "Heaven's in great shape: earth is where the problems are."

We are reminded of the political meaning of the Cross. The dominant system said "no" to Jesus: that was Good Friday. God's "yes" to Jesus was a "no" to the dominant system. The Cross is both personal and political, indicting the domination systems of our world. If God's character is consistent, God's passion for justice continues today, says Borg. He cites the wealth of the 1% (over 40% of the total wealth) contrasted with the decline of the annual income and net worth of the bottom 60%. He cites the many areas which need to be addressed for justice to be experienced by those now left out by the present systems. These include health care, the environment, economic justice and the use of imperial power by the U.S. He calls us to develop a spiritually engaged spirituality, leading us to the next chapter.

Dr. Borg discusses "Thin Places" in the Opening of the Heart section by referencing the use of heart in the Bible over 1,000 times. After listing numerous images and conditions of a closed heart, he talks of the need to "hatch" our hearts, to crack them open. Here listed are numerous ways to do this under a Christian lifestyle, including corporate worship, individual practices and finding the places which "open" our hearts. He proposes here to let go of sin as an umbrella description of our closed heart actions by paying attention to the words and music

used in worship and translating words such as salvation, sin, heaven and repentance. One example would be "to see salvation as life with God, in the presence of God, now and forever." Again, he encourages practice, meaning here that we pay attention to God and to what God loves, seeing Christianity as a "way," a "path," a way of life. This leads to a discussion later of pluralism as he shares that Judaism, Islam and Buddhism all have this view also. There is a long and creative section on practice, practice related to all aspects of our lives, personal, political, and economic.

The final chapter is Heart and Home—Being a Christian in an Age of Pluralism. Here is his plea for us to recognize the degree of pluralism in our country and the similarities between Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist beliefs. All affirm that there is "a More," or the real, the sacred; all affirm a path, a way; all have practical means of worship and all extol compassion as a primary ethical virtue of life. He pleads for an emphasis on community, that we need to "uncircle the wagons."

The second portion of this chapter is Marcus Borg's statement of why he is a Christian, or religious. His listing will be of interest to the reader. This book is packed full of great historical perspectives, a reframing of that history in helpful ways, and challenges to all of us who do claim in some setting or manner that there is "a More." Marcus Borg "opens my heart."

Farmer, continued from page 29

Kazantzakis perceives the Cry or call forward as terrible and terrifying. . ." (Cobb, *God and the World*, 56). Kazantzakis emphasizes human struggle and discontent rather than the more loving call of God that we see in Whitehead. This crucial difference may dull Middleton's initial thesis, but still he remarks, "My particular distinction between Whitehead's view of God's tender goading and Kazantzakis's notion of the Cry as more radical pushing may be a matter of emphasis. God's lure in

Whitehead's process philosophy is often for the less than gentle, for aesthetic value involves discord, intensity, and chaos" (146).

Whatever one thinks of these comparisons, Middleton's creative forging of two warring disciplines seems to me to be at the heart of a process philosophy that thrives on creative contrasts and a dipolar view of God. The most profound insight I gained from this work is this: the poet and the metaphysician need each other.

Conferences and Classes

Explore the Connections: Process and Women's Theologies

***April 30-May 2, 2004
Claremont, California***

Organizers: Carol Christ, Catherine Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki

The purpose of this conference is to explore connections between process theologies and theologies by feminists/womanists. Once before such a conference was held—at Harvard Divinity School in fall, 1978. The papers of that conference were edited by Sheila Greeve Davaney, and published as *Feminism and Process Thought*. In the intervening years theologies by women have multiplied. There are implicit or explicit incorporations of process-friendly ways of thinking in many of these theologies. Meanwhile, process theology has also continued to develop in ways that explicitly or implicitly incorporate insights gained from women's theologies. This conference seeks to promote further dialogue and relation by exploring contrasts and connections.

The conference also seeks to draw graduate students and junior scholars into the discussions. We will practice “mutual mentoring”—openness to the insights and critiques of newer scholars as well as those who have been long in the field. To this end,

we will include a small group “works in progress” session for women who wish to participate.

The conference will be held in Haddon Conference Room at Claremont School of Theology.

Housing is available from nearby Ramada Inn for \$59 per night, single or double occupancy, with shuttle service provided between the hotel and the campus. Breakfast is provided by the hotel; Friday dinner and Saturday lunch and dinner will be provided by the conference. Free housing for graduate students may be available by “student hosts” of the Women's Studies Program of Claremont Graduate University. There is a \$25 registration fee for the conference.

To register, contact John Quiring, Center for Process Studies, 1325 N. College Avenue, Claremont, CA 91711, or: (jquiring@ctr4process.org)

Sponsors: Center for Process Studies, Women's Studies in Religion at Claremont School of Religion, Drew Divinity School, Claremont School of Theology.

Beardslee Consultation

This year's topic is “The People of the Book and Economics.” The consultation will be held May 10 at the Masjid of the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Foundation in Los Angeles.

Imaging God, Imaging The World: Process Resources for Relational Ministry July 19-23, 2004 St. Paul, Minnesota

Created by the P&F: Twin Cities Connection, this week-long course is offered under the auspices of the Kairos program of Luther Seminary. Sessions will be led by Paul Sponheim, pastors and graduate students, and special presenter Marjorie Suchocki.

Our visions of God influence our choices and actions in all our connections with other creatures; therefore, our theological images matter for a future of hope and peace. This course is aimed at the adventure of congregational life and relational ministry and presents the implications of a relational world view for biblical interpretation, liturgy, education, spiritual care, and social justice in the local congregation.

Tuition: \$210

Register online: http://www.luthersem.edu/lifelong_learning/kairos/courses.asp

Summer course!
A Theology of Belonging
Taught by John B. Cobb, Jr. and
Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki
June 7-15
www.processandfaith.org



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