

**TH 420 Studies in a Selected Theologian:
John B. Cobb, Jr., and Process Theology
Saint Paul School of Theology**

Spring 2003

Instructor: Nancy R. Howell
Associate Professor of Theology
and Philosophy of Religion
Kansas-Winger 308
(816) 245-4826 or ext. 126
FAX (816) 483-9605
www.nancyrhowell.com
howellnr@spst.edu

Office Hours: By appointment and
Tuesday, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Class Meeting: Monday,
1:10-4:00 p.m.
Kansas-Winger 307

Course Description

This course examines the thought and writings of a leading historical or contemporary theologian, such as Augustine, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bonino, Brunner, Calvin, Cobb, Cone, T. Cranmer, E. S. Fiorenza, G. Gutiérrez, E. R. Johnson, Kierkegaard, Luther, McFague, J. Macquarrie, G. Marcel, Moltmann, R. Niebuhr, H. R. Niebuhr, W. Pannenberg, K. Rahner, R. Ruether, Schleiermacher, Soelle, Tillich, and H. U. von Balthasar. [Prerequisite: three hours of Theology or permission of instructor and 25 hours of seminary credit] (3 semester credit hours)

The Spring 2003 offering of TH420 will cover the theology of John B. Cobb, Jr., whose philosophical theology is part of a larger movement known as process (or relational) theology. Process theology is particularly influenced by the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Other process theologians include Ian Barbour, Rita Nakashima Brock, David Ray Griffin, John Haught, Catherine Keller, Bernard Lee, Bernard Loomer, Sallie McFague, Bernard Meland, Shubert Ogden, Marjorie Suchocki, Daniel Day Williams, and Henry Young. Process theology is especially important for theologians interested in neoclassical theism, naturalistic theodicy, and integration of science and religion. Process theology is very successful in dialogue with Buddhism, feminism, science, and liberation theology. Historically, process theology developed under the influence of the Chicago School.

Course Teaching-Learning Objectives

1. The priorities for teaching and learning in this course are (a) the development and content of John B. Cobb's process theology and (b) imaginative integration of theology and philosophy for ministry contexts, as well as for addressing complex theological questions.
2. Teaching and learning begin with understanding method (how scholars investigate topics and draw conclusions), sources (what information scholars consult to form new ideas), and language (how scholars express ideas) in the integration of philosophy and Christian theology. Students should familiarize themselves with scholarly methods of religious studies.
3. Teaching and learning depend on sophisticated reading of texts. Students should develop the skills of empathetic and critical reading. The diverse contexts that form theology and philosophy create worldviews that may not be your own. Diverse worldviews demand charitable readings of texts for the sake of understanding the authors' points of view and with awareness that theology and philosophy are neither abstracted from culture nor limited to singular "correct" forms of expression.

Theological Method and Ministry

Cobb's theology is highly attentive to the needs of the church and the questions raised by Christians. Note how the following text outlines a theological method and makes the methodology accessible to laity. While reading, note how terms (such as *theology*) are defined. Try to understand the steps important to constructing theology. How does Cobb's book understand the church and its mission in the world? How is process theology reflected within the method and content of the book?

- | | |
|----------|---|
| March 17 | Due: Topical Reports and Presentations
Reading: <i>Becoming a Thinking Christian</i> |
| March 24 | Due: Topical Reports and Presentations
Reading: <i>Becoming a Thinking Christian</i> |
| March 31 | Reading Week |

Postmodern Concerns and Christology

Cobb's theology could have remained abstractly concerned with philosophy and theology, yet his broad concern for justice draws his theology into issues, such as anti-Semitism, feminism, racism, and environmentalism. In the following text, pay attention to how theological method requires both affirmation of Christian traditions about Christ at the same time that Cobb responds freshly to contemporary issues and further develops his Christology.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| April 7 | Reading: <i>Can Christ Become Good News Again?</i> |
| April 14 | Reading: <i>Can Christ Become Good News Again?</i> |
| April 21 | Reading: <i>Can Christ Become Good News Again?</i> |
| April 28 | Research Day |

Religious Pluralism and Christianity

Postmodern Christianity recognizes the truth claims of other religions. As you read, attend to how Cobb's process theology remains faithful to Christianity, yet opens the way for serious dialogue with other religions. Why is process theology an important facilitator for interreligious dialogue?

- | | |
|--------|---|
| May 5 | Reading: <i>Christian Faith and Religious Diversity</i> |
| May 12 | Due: Creative Research Projects and Presentations
Due: Reading Log
Due: Class Participation Self-Evaluation Worksheet |
| May 19 | Due: Creative Research Projects and Presentations |

Course Requirements

1. **Class Participation** is required of each student. By class participation, I mean that each student must attend class regularly and engage in discussions. Students must attempt all required reading and written assignments. This does not mean that students fully understand material, but that they are familiar with the texts and know which passages are puzzling. Class participation allows students to raise questions and to achieve some understanding of course content. Class participation requires collaborative small group work and may include ungraded writing assignments in class. Submitting required written assignments on time is important for good class participation. At the end of the semester, students assess the quality of their class participation and assign themselves a letter grade. This is accomplished through a self-evaluation work sheet, which makes explicit the criteria for good class participation. By consensus students determine what percentage of their grade is reflected in class participation. The instructor also assigns a class participation grade. The Class Participation Self-Evaluation Work Sheet (attached to the syllabus) is due Monday, May 12.
2. A **Reading Log**, listing titles and pages, is due Monday, May 12. The reading log is simply a record of pages read during the semester. Please list all reading (including research and reading for seminar papers). Do not list required reading listed in the course schedule.
3. The first writing assignment for the course is a **Topical Report and Presentation**. The purpose of this research paper is to report on a particular doctrine or theme in Cobb's theology. Because many themes appear in Cobb's theology, the topical report facilitates focus on ideas of special interest to students. Students may consult with the instructor to select a topic for the paper. Reports will be presented to the class on March 17 and 24, which means that papers must be distributed to the instructor and other students no later than one week before presentation. In addition to circulating the report for discussion, each student is responsible for assigning 20-30 pages of reading from relevant texts by Cobb. Class presentations will begin with a 15 minutes presentation by the student author, followed by responses and questions from other students in the course. Each student presenter is supported by other students who read the topical report and the Cobb assignment and prepare points for discussion. The topic report should be 12-15 pages long. The paper must be typed in 11 or 12 point fonts and double-spaced with margins of 1 inch. The paper must follow guidelines for form and citations found in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, sixth edition. The papers are due no later than one week before presentation. Students may co-author the ministry project. Presentations are scheduled March 17 and 24.
4. The second writing assignment is a **Creative Research Project and Presentation**. This paper allows students to pursue an application or critique of Cobb's theology in an original and creative project. The project will follow the same format and presentation as the topical report described above. Projects will be presented on May 12 and 19. Projects must be distributed (along with a 20-30 page reading assignment from Cobb) no later than one week before the presentation.

Professorial Idiosyncrasies: (1) Please do not submit written work in binders or folders—a single staple in the upper left corner is preferred. (2) Consider submitting papers printed on the unused side of scratch paper or printed on both sides of a clean sheet of paper made from recycled fibers.

Grading

Criteria for grading follow.

Students in consultation with the instructor determine how grading will be assessed. At the end of the term, students receive letter grade in accordance with policies and descriptions outlined in the 2002-2004 catalog (page 41).

Class Participation		<u>30</u> %
Self-evaluation	<u>15</u> %	
Professor evaluation	<u>15</u> %	
Reading Log		<u>5</u> %
Topical Report and Presentation		<u>30</u> %
Creative Research Project and Presentation		<u>35</u> %

Student Responsibilities

Student must abide by policies established in the Saint Paul handbook and catalog. Pay special attention to the policies on Integrity of Work Submitted and Class Attendance found on page 41 of the catalog. The professor reserves the option to fail a student for a single instance of plagiarism. The professor reserves the option to fail a student strictly for failure to attend class regularly or for habitual tardiness.

Professor's Responsibilities

My job is to teach with integrity the scholarship representative of my field, to see that students learn as much as possible, and to create a comfortable environment for learning. These goals cannot be accomplished without genuine attention to the unique strengths, experiences, and expectations that both the professor and students bring to the classroom. My goal is to provide encouragement and support for your learning. Sometimes flexible procedures and learning options are necessary to facilitate the kind of teaching and learning that should occur here. I am anxious to hear what energizes you, what disappoints you, where you disagree, and what helps you learn. PLEASE SEE ME IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR SPECIFIC NEEDS.

Learning-Disabling Conditions

It is the Saint Paul faculty commitment to facilitate the learning of students capable of graduate-level seminary work. Any student who has a condition that may prevent full demonstration of his/her abilities (e.g., difficulty seeing or hearing, dyslexia, or other learning disabilities) should contact the instructor and the Associate Dean of Spiritual and Professional Development immediately to discuss learning needs, alternatives that have worked for the student in the past, and mutually accountable accommodations to ensure the student's full participation and evaluation in the course.

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Please see me whether the accommodations you need are long-term or short-term.

Criteria for Evaluating Course Work

Regardless of whether you write a paper, answer an essay question, voice an oral presentation, or create any original project, the academic context requires that certain minimal requirements characterize your work. While there are subjective components in the grading process, most professors are concerned that you become well educated in four basic qualities of excellent academic work:

1. ***Demonstration of an empathetic understanding of the content of texts and resources.*** Your topic should not only be well researched in the library, through interviews and observations, and from assigned readings and class discussions, but you should be able to provide a fair description and a clear understanding of texts and resources. This is apparent in the ability to describe and discuss precisely and accurately what an author has written or a speaker has said. Evaluation, response, and critique follow accurate representation of another's ideas—earn the privilege of criticizing a viewpoint by showing that you really understand it.
2. ***Clear critical thinking that provides appropriate specific evidence for conclusions.*** Use the most precise historical, empirical, or contemporary data or information to support the claims of your thesis and paragraphs. Conclusions follow from and are supported by evidence. Be sure that your evidence is relevant, accurate, and detailed. Even creative writing requires logical relationships among ideas to assist your readers in following the plot or main point.
3. ***Creativity that moves beyond reporting someone else's ideas.*** Your creative addition to academic discourse might include questioning, evaluating, applying, criticizing (positively or negatively), developing, or responding. You might see a connection between two or more ideas. You might see information from a unique perspective. The minimal requirement of academic work is correctly reporting what is read or discussed. Excellent work moves beyond repetition of others' ideas to unique insights, organization, correlations, and theses. Work to find your own scholarly and professional voice.
4. ***Flawless grammar, spelling, and form.*** Excellent written work is conscious of proofreading and good communication. Oral presentations are equally accountable for careful expression. A brilliant thesis can be lost in a paper or project that obscures its ideas with careless communication. Your readers and listeners should not have to guess what you mean—help them by speaking and writing well.

Class Participation Self-Evaluation Work Sheet
Saint Paul School of Theology

Nancy R. Howell

Name: _____ **Course:** _____

Circle the number that best describes your class participation in each category if 1 is excellent, 2 is very good, 3 is average, 4 is satisfactory, and 5 is poor.

Preparation

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| I conscientiously attempted reading assignments. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I reflected seriously on reading assignments. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I worked to bring depth to comments and questions by preparing more than superficially for class. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I prepared written assignments on time and when the syllabus or my self-assigned deadlines required them. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I checked spelling, grammar, quotations, and footnotes before submitting papers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Class

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| I attended class weekly. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I always attended class on time. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I contributed to class discussions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| When I talked in class, I remained focused on the topic of class discussion. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I listened respectfully to comments and questions raised by other students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I brought my questions to class or to the professor. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I expressed disagreement constructively. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I shared my responsibilities for successful class sessions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I supported other students' efforts in class discussions or assignments. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Attitude

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| I remained involved and engaged in the course. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I was constructive in relationships with others. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I put extra effort into the course—such as study groups/partners, library research, recommended or supplemental reading. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I contributed my share of the work in collaborative writing or projects. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I made appointments with the professor when I needed assistance or wanted to discuss the course. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I took responsibility for my learning. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| My understanding of theology has grown. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

I assign myself the following letter grade: _____
(Enter A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, or F in the blank.)

Please submit any additional reflections on class participation that should affect your grade in writing on the back of this page. This work sheet is intended to assist you in thinking about the quality of your participation in class. Any interpretations, additions, or connections of criteria should be included in your additional reflections.

TH 420 Studies in a Selected Theologian Topical Report Writing and Presentation Guide

The topical report is an opportunity for students to shape the content of the course by selecting particular doctrines or themes for consideration in class. Students take responsibility for leading the class in study of a topic not covered by required texts. Students must select a doctrine or theme prominent in Cobb's theology and write a seminar paper, which is distributed to other students and the instructor prior to presentation in class. Individual students may select a doctrine or theme relevant to their particular research interests, but aimed toward deepening our study of Cobb's theology as a classroom community. (See the "Course Requirements" for further description of the topical report and presentation.)

The topical report is a formal writing assignment. A formal writing assignment requires conformity with an established manual of style and scholarly forms of research, written expression, and critical thinking.

I. Content

- A. Must research and discuss a doctrine or theme prominent in Cobb's theology
- B. May include doctrines, such as God, Christ, creation, evil, humanity, church, prayer, and nature among others
- C. May include themes, such as ecology and environmental ethics, science and religion, Christianity and religious pluralism, economism and economic justice, or evangelical and liberal theology among others

II. Form

- A. Length: 12-15 pages, roughly 200-250 words per page, 11 or 12 point font
- B. Typed, double spaced
- C. Margins: 1-inch
- D. Research paper
- E. Co-authorship permitted with another student in the course

III. Style

- A. Manual of style: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual of Style for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (for style questions not addressed by Turabian, see *The Chicago Manual of Style*)
- B. Elements: title page, page numbering, margins, footnotes or endnotes, bibliography

IV. Deadline

- A. Manuscript is due one week prior to presentation.
- B. Manuscript deadline options are March 10 or 17.
- C. Manuscript is distributed along with a 20-30 page reading assignment from primary sources by Cobb to students and instructor: (a) as a printed manuscript in class or in campus mailboxes or (b) as an e-mail attachment in Word software.

V. Presentation

- A. Distribute manuscript and a 20-30 page reading assignment from a primary source published by Cobb
- B. Prepare presentation for either March 17 or 24 (as determined earlier in the term)
- C. Begin presentation with a 10-minute commentary by the student writer
- D. Continue presentation with a 5-minute response from another student who may ask questions, make comments, or raise concerns about the report
- E. Open discussion to other students since all students should be prepared to reflect on the report and Cobb's theology

VI. Grading: See the syllabus, "Criteria for Evaluating Coursework"

TH 420 Studies in a Selected Theologian Creative Research Project Writing and Presentation Guide

The purpose of the creative research project is to give students an opportunity to apply, extend, or compare Cobb's theology to other topics, contexts, or issues. Individual students are encouraged to reflect in original ways on Cobb's theology and write a seminar paper, which is distributed to other students and the instructor prior to presentation in class. Students should generate ideas for papers based on individual creativity and curiosity, vocation and ministry, and strength and talents. Student presentations should enhance discussion of Cobb's thought and process theology. (See the "Course Requirements" for further description of the creative research project and presentation.)

The topical report is a formal writing assignment. A formal writing assignment requires conformity with an established manual of style and scholarly forms of research, written expression, and critical thinking.

I. Content

- A. Must be grounded in Cobb's thought and process theology
- B. Must pursue application, extension, or comparison of Cobb's thought to a new issue, context, or topic. For example:
 1. Comparison of one aspect of Cobb's theology with a different theological movement or perspective either inside or outside process theology
 2. Extension of Cobb's thought to feminist or black liberation issues
 3. Analysis of a political or scientific issue using Cobb's thought
 4. Development of an extended critique of an aspect of Cobb's thought
- C. Must be informed by careful library research, which may be facilitated by using bibliographies on the Center for Process Studies website

II. Form

- A. Length: 12-15 pages, roughly 200-250 words per page, 11 or 12 point font
- B. Typed, double spaced
- C. Margins: 1-inch
- D. Research paper
- E. Co-authorship permitted with another student in the course

III. Style

- A. Manual of style: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual of Style for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (for style questions not addressed by Turabian, see *The Chicago Manual of Style*)
- B. Elements: title page, page numbering, margins, footnotes or endnotes, bibliography

IV. Deadline

- A. Manuscript is due one week prior to presentation
- B. Manuscript deadline options are May 5 or 12.
- C. Manuscript is distributed along with a 20-30 page reading assignment from primary sources to students and instructor: (a) as a printed manuscript in class or in campus mailboxes or (b) as an e-mail attachment in Word software.

V. Presentation

- A. Distribute manuscript and a 20-30 page reading assignment from a primary source
- B. Prepare presentation for either May 12 or 19 (as determined earlier in the term)
- C. Begin presentation with a 10-minute commentary by the student writer
- D. Continue presentation with a 5-minute response from another student who may ask questions, make comments, or raise concerns about the creative research project paper
- E. Open discussion to other students since all students should be prepared to reflect on the creative research project and Cobb's theology

VI. Grading: See the syllabus, "Criteria for Evaluating Coursework"