

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### TH5/730–Process Theology and Human Existence: Following Christ into an open future

Vancouver School of Theology Summer 2020

July 6-10, 2020: 9am – 12pm

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**Purpose:** We often approach process theology through what it says about the divine, or about the metaphysics of reality itself. In this course we will ask how the human being and their existence appear through the lens of process thinking. In order to address the questions that arise, we will theologize together in conceptual spaces outfitted by Christian traditions and ways of knowing.

This course will be a collaborative exploration, propelled by questions, motivated by existential rather than academic or philosophical concerns. We want to identify the things about the human person for which meaning-making is critical. We want to look at the answers we've gotten to our questions about the human person throughout our lives -- what we have received -- and ask what meaning we can make together out of those materials. Our teachers to this point have been our parents, our pastors, our teachers (perspectives given to us); our experience, our reason, our own reading of scripture and other texts, our conversation partners (perspectives developed autonomously). What is the state of our understanding? How healthy are our meanings? In what directions should we work toward change?

#### **Competence objectives:**

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

- Relate concepts from process theology to the human person and their existence
- Identify the key facets of the human person and their existence for which we need adequate meanings
- Reflect theologically on the meanings given to us about human persons (from our socialization and our traditions)
- Reflect theologically on the meanings we've developed autonomously about human persons (from our experience and our thinking)
- Communicate a personal credo of meaning about the human person, developed theologically

#### **Texts:**

*Required for all:*

- Donna Bowman, *The Homebrewed Christianity Guide to Being Human* (Fortress Press, 2019)

*Required for those seeking academic credit, recommended for others:*

- Marcus Borg, *Convictions: How I Learned What Matters Most* (HarperOne, 2014)

## Assignments:

- **Attendance:** All students taking the course for Certificate or Degree credit must participate synchronously in all class sessions via Zoom. Auditors are encouraged to participate synchronously, but may request to watch class recordings asynchronously. 100% attendance is required of Certificate and Degree students.
- **Readings:** All students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings.
- **Class participation:** All synchronously participating students are expected to participate in all class discussions and activities. These will be set up via the Zoom technology.

### *For all students:*

- **Four (or Five) Questions:** Each evening, before the next day's class, submit answers to the assigned Four (or Five) Questions through Canvas. These answers will be used to build an agenda for the next class.
- **My Credo:** Construct a personal statement of belief about the human person, based on reflections you generated from class materials and discussions. Your credo should consist of at least 15 short statements (1-3 sentences each), each beginning with "I believe."

### *For credit-seeking students only:*

- **Constructive theology paper:** Write a paper elaborating on the theological basis for statement(s) from your credo.
  - *Basic degree:* 1500-2000 words, at least 5 additional sources. Discuss the theological basis of one (or two closely-related) credo statement(s). Support, compare, and/or contrast your position with reference to at least two other major theological positions/authors.
  - *Advanced degree:* 3000-4000 words, at least 15 additional sources. Discuss the theological basis of 2-3 credo statements. Support, compare, and/or contrast your positions with reference to at least five other major theological positions/authors.

## Format:

All courses offered in VST 2020 Summer School will only be available through distance learning, using Zoom for class sessions and Canvas, VST's online course platform, for course resources. All classes will be recorded on Zoom for password protected viewing by class participants only.

Zoom software requires minimum computer system requirements such as an internet connection – broadband wired or wireless, a camera and a microphone. For details please refer to <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362023-System-Requirements-for-PC-Mac-and-Linux>. Students unfamiliar with Zoom will be provided basic support by VST. For reference see <https://vst.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Zoom-Manual-for-Students.pdf>. Students will also be provided with basic support for accessing Canvas.

Work in the course consists of daily 3-hour Zoom classes that may include lectures and various in-class online discussions and small group exercises that will be accomplished through Zoom. All courses also include required readings to be completed before the course starts. As well

various assignments may include papers or exercises during the week, and one or more final papers due by August 31 for Certificate and Basic Degree students. All papers will be submitted to the instructor via email or as the instructor specifies.

**Selected Bibliography:**

Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* (Yale University Press, 2000)

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Penguin Books, 1982)

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (Riverhead Books, 2006)

James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (Free Press, 2007)

James Kugel, *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times* (Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 2017)

Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Fourth Edition (University of California Press, 2017)

Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman, editors, *Handbook of Process Theology* (Chalice Press, 2006)