

## **Chapter 2: What Happened to Abba in Western History?**

Cobb assumes that the unique understanding of God by Jesus disappeared in Western history. This chapter suggests the reasons why that occurred.

1. The notion of the spirit was central to Paul's understanding of God. He connected it to Jesus. The major characteristic of the spirit is love. For Paul, to live in Christ is to live in an integrated Commonwealth, which was a counterculture movement loyal to Abba. These communities foster a notion of love that transcends morality; love is reciprocated and shared. In Paul's letters the notion of faith and the experience of love are not separated. Both faith and love allow marvelous things to occur. Unfortunately, Paul located the new Commonwealth in heaven, whereas Jesus expected it to occur in historical existence. Unlike Paul, Jesus thought that the looming historical crisis could be averted through human action.
2. The loss of Jesus's understanding of God began to occur after the first generation. Nevertheless there are important contributions that Christianity made to the transformation of world, especially during the Middle Ages. There was considerable more freedom in the Middle Ages than there was under the Roman Empire, and the church could provide a unity of culture without recourse to a military. It was a time of great cathedral and university building, but cities suffered because of the lack of wealth and the breakdown political order. Yet the God of Jesus was lost, because the church became the mediator between God and the believer. The compassionate role of Abba was taken over by Mary. It was in her the people found a sense of intimacy and love that was missing in the view of God espoused by the church. Another figure who brought God as father alive was St. Francis. For all of medieval society's achievements, it remained hierarchical in secular and ecclesiastical areas.
3. With the advent of nationalism the unity of culture dissolved and the church divided into different denominations. This process was aided by translating the Scriptures in the common language of the people. People began to be more loyal to their nation than to God. Political institutions were derived from nature without appeal to God, whose influence retreated into the practice of personal piety. During this period the notion that nature was a machine gained ascendancy. While at first humans were considered something other than nature, Darwin changed all that. Now humans began to be thought of as machines. Life could no longer be divided into matter and spirit; now there was only matter. The belief in God focused upon God as lawgiver and creator, but eventually these qualities no longer fit the modern view. The "spirit" remained alive, however, in the evangelical preaching of persons like John Wesley.
4. Cobb's thesis is that the theory of evolution developed by Darwin, especially the Neo-Darwinists, is not the only way to understand evolution. Humans are part of nature, but this does not mean the nature is simply objective, materialistic, or mechanical. If humans are part of

nature then the subjectivity that humans feel must be part of nature, too. The notion that subjectivity pervades the universe is developed in detail by process philosophy, especially by Whitehead. [Chapter 4 will develop this view more fully.]