

### **Chapter 3: Personal Experience of Abba**

This chapter develops the many ways Cobb believes God is active in our lives based upon his own experiences and theological assumptions.

1. God may be found in many different kinds of experiences: times of pleasure and satisfaction, during meditation, and in art and forms of beauty. Neither Jesus nor Paul advocated transnormal experiences, such as ones sought by mystics. For Cobb, God is found in the ordinary experiences of the heart and mind and body.
2. God is also experienced as a companion who is supportive and interactive. There is a deep connection between what one believes and what one experiences. If one experiences God as loving and caring, then one is most likely to be caring and loving as well. How we interpret our experiences makes all the difference. Our most vivid experiences are our own feelings, and the feelings of others. Feeling our feelings is the prime activity of God as companion. Cobb himself experienced a loss of God when the beliefs of the modern world, which are objectivist and reductionist, overwhelmed him. Only when he regained a new belief in God could he challenge the dominant assumptions of modernity.
3. There is no doubt that the past has a great deal of influence upon shaping the present moment. This aspect of the mechanical model of life is accurate, but it is not the whole story. We also experience ourselves making decisions that aim toward the future. Even the legal system recognizes we are to be held accountable for what we do. There is a difference between what could happen, based on the past, and what does happen when novelty is introduced into the situation by human action. When we realize that our choices involve values, some better and some worse, we feel obligated to select the higher values. This moral experience is what Cobb refers to as "the call forward." Since not all possibilities for actualization are contained by the past or in human imagination, Cobb believes all potential values exist in God's cosmic mind. God urges us to experience whichever value might be best given our particular situation. Whenever we feel the call to care for our neighbors, to open ourselves to new ideas, we are experiencing the presence of God.
4. Artists, poets, musicians and writers often experience moments of inspiration where they seem to be grasped by a power greater than themselves. In these moments they experienced the call forward from God. What God calls us to do in any moment is what that particular situation demands. When we are young we need one kind of call, when we're old we need another. God's call adjusts to the circumstances we face. This leads us to ask in what other situations God is acting. Does God call forth earthquakes, pestilences and major catastrophes? Did God approve of the Holocaust? For process thought, God does not do these things, since God does not have the power to coerce. God is not omnipotent, but has great power to persuade and lure us toward greater

creativity. Humans do hinder God's plans. Even though God may fail in some circumstances to influence us, God does not cease to call us.

5. The New Testament portrays Jesus as a healer. There is no reason to deny this. For Jesus, Abba is a healer. Intercessory prayer, where persons show their concern for others and evoke God's help, recognize that God is present even when we are absent. Just as human cells can be affected by human emotions, so our body and our minds are influenced by God's call and concern. When we open ourselves to one another, when we seek what is best for the other person, we open ourselves to the healing activity of God.
6. Many persons in the modern world do not believe there is any truth. Truth varies from person to person, and from culture to culture. Truth is whatever people want to believe, so long as it "coheres" with the rest of their assumptions. In contrast, Cobb subscribes to the "correspondence theory of truth," which he believes is in accord with common sense. If we think a person actually lived in history, then either he did or he didn't. It does not depend on whether we choose to believe it or not. Truth is not just a subjective claim.

Some ask: is there a real world apart from us, or is there only a world we claim is there? Philosophers, like David Hume, argue we only know sensations and appearances, and we can postulate nothing beyond those phenomena. We know what a tree seems to be, but what the tree is in itself is beyond our knowledge. So there is no way to know if our experience of a tree is true or not. If that is so, then science cannot tell us anything about the real world. Kant also said we cannot know what the world is in itself, but he argues our minds require us to think that it is real, so scientific inquiry is the best way for the mind to establish human knowledge. Since we also have to live day-by-day, a belief in God and the existence of values, Kant thinks, are necessary even if those beliefs are not true. We must act as if they were. But if the only knowledge we have is what we get through our senses, then we can never know God since God cannot be seen, heard, tasted or touched. If God is not actually real, then God is nothing more than a fantasy, and it would be more truthful to be an atheist. This is the conclusion that many have now reached in the modern world. Cobb challenges this skepticism.

Cobb claims our most vivid experiences do not come from our senses. We do not touch, taste or hear our memories of the past. We experience our own subjectivity without the aid of our senses, and our experiences of love go way beyond what we see or hear. Our loving and being loved are not illusions, nor are we just imagining them. Our common sense tells us love in its depths is real and true. Likewise, we feel another's pain or joy, not just our own imagination. Consequently, our deepest knowledge comes from experiences that are not just sense data. God, like love and joy, is experienced directly and not mediated by our senses. Common sense tells us our experiences of the world, of others, and even God are true. Since one person or a group of persons cannot know all of the truth,

it requires Abba, the ultimate source of Truth, to provide us with the deep confidence we need in order to find the depths of others and ourselves.