

THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

- Topic: The Neurosciences and Theology: Matter and Spirit
Convener: William R. Stoeger, The University of Arizona
Presenter: William R. Stoeger, The University of Arizona
Presenter: James R. Pambrun, St. Paul University

In his talk, "Science and Philosophy: Perspectives on the Emergence of Mind and Person," Stoeger focused on how to bridge the gap between the neurosciences and philosophy in order to provide a more adequate and scientifically accessible account of mind, person, and "soul." The neurosciences strongly indicate a very tight connection between brain and mind/person/soul. It is clear that the brain is a necessary condition for our automatic and our conscious behavior, including our sense of self, free choice, and cognition. But is it also a sufficient condition?

Stoeger pointed out that the vast majority of neuroscientists and philosophers of mind would say that it is, avoiding any kind of dualism. This can be supported philosophically if all the connections between the brain and the body are considered, as well as their relationships with their environment, both present and historical, that is, if the "soul" is conceived as the centered network of constitutive relationships, external and internal, synchronic and diachronic, horizontal and vertical, which make us what we are, or anything what it is. Essential underpinnings for us as human beings are sentience, episodic and working memory, and symbolic representation and communication. Through these we can form a coherent self-concept in relation to what is not self. This concept of "soul" is partially accessible to scientific investigation, as it should be, and consistent with the dynamic, relational character of God and the universe. Furthermore, many of the constitutive relationships, except those of the original biological substrate, remain in force after death.

Pambrun followed with his presentation, "A Theological Hermeneutical Approach to Neuroscience: Philosophical and Theological Reflections on Mind and Soul." In light of the findings of the neurosciences, how can we continue to advance and enrich our understanding of the human person and our sense of human freedom? Pambrun suggested that a key approach to answering this question is to focus on how both neuroscience and theology construct and communicate meaning, especially with regard to personhood and to freedom. He stressed, in particular, that, though theology has a great deal to contribute to these two central issues, it must find a language to communicate this in ways understandable within accepted neuroscientific and psychological frameworks. There is a cognitive core to theology that emerges in its history, and can be communicated in ways which mesh with what the sciences are finding. Stoeger's proposal looks to enable this.

The history of theology supports this contention in three recent episodes. First, in Karl Rahner's writings about the human person, there is a marked shift

in vocabulary (from "matter" and "spirit," "body," and "soul," to the "subject" and his/her "copresence in an act of openness to Mystery") and in style of argument as he moves from his essay "Hominization" (1956) to his work *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1974). In both cases, however, he stresses the unity of the human person. Secondly, in the view of phenomenology (Husserl and Heidegger), some of which was appropriated by Rahner, meaning and understanding are not fundamentally derived from the sciences, but rather realized in the sciences from our lived embodied experience within the world, with its basic structure of meaning—thus giving new impetus to our understanding of ourselves as subjects. This allows a deeper interrelation and harmony between theology and neuroscience, enhancing our sense of self and of freedom. Thirdly, hermeneutics brings to the interrelationship a deepened sensitivity to the different levels of discourse, of meaning, and of the different kinds of operations of meaning, enabling, among other things, a nuanced creative syntheses of neuroscientific and theological viewpoints. We begin to discover the consonance of the meaning flowing from the neurosciences with theological meanings.

In the discussion period these ideas were explored more fully, and several issues, such as the question of the relationship of unity and multiplicity in Stoeger's proposed definition of "soul," were raised as needing further clarification and development.

WILLIAM R. STOEGER
Vatican Observatory Group
The University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona

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ECCLESIOLOGY

- Topic: International Theological Commission: "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past"
 Convener: Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville
 Moderator: Edward P. Hahnenberg, Xavier University, Cincinnati
 Presenters: Bernard P. Prusak, Villanova University
 Christopher M. Bellitto, Paulist Press

Both speakers addressed the 1999 document of the International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (MR). Bernard Prusak began by noting that, historically, a document focused on the issue of the church asking for forgiveness is in itself quite remarkable. Unlike Pope John Paul II's *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* or the liturgy (March 12, 2000), MR does not specifically ask for forgiveness. Rather, it seeks to clarify "the reasons, the conditions, and the exact form of the requests for forgiveness for the