

## THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

Topic: The Johnson-Bracken Exchange:

Searching for Metaphysics Adequate to Our Evolutionary Universe

Convener: William R. Stoeger, Vatican Observatory Research Group

Moderator: Anne M. Clifford, Duquesne University

Presenters: Mary Gerhart and Allan M. Russell,

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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This group continued the discussion of the Trinitarian Theology group, which focussed on Elizabeth A. Johnson's *Theological Studies* article "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance" (TS 57 [1996]: 3-18) and on Joseph A. Bracken's response (TS 57 [1996]: 30).

Allan M. Russell emphasized the importance of a proper understanding of statistics and probability in drawing conclusions, theological or otherwise, from quantum mechanics. The chance and uncertainty that are involved are very narrowly specified and constrained, and cannot be construed as indeterminism or acausality. He criticized Johnson's imprecision in this regard, and suggested that an overemphasis on the role of chance may undermine our appreciation of divine action through human agency. He also worried that the connotation of "evolution" and "creation" in both papers blurs the distinction between animate and inanimate matter, impoverishing the concept of *imago Dei*.

While recognizing with Russell that theology must cohere with what we know from the sciences and other disciplines, Mary Gerhart argued that the interaction between the two should be broadened to reflect the diverse, rich modalities our experience of God assumes. Theologians should not feel constrained to render theological formulations compatible with the details of particular scientific theories. Specifically, the metaphysics we need must be persuasive but provisional, moving beyond an exclusive concern for logic and certainty. It should also restore goodness as one of the primary analogies for understanding God and God's relationship to creation, instead of relying only on the analogy of being. Finally, this developmental metaphysics should be explicit with regard to genre, taking care to recognize the different genres expressive of our faith experience.

William R. Stoeger briefly highlighted some of the key ideas in Johnson's article. We live in a hierarchically structured universe, in which chance always operates within the context of regularity, and where the interplay of chance and law lead to the emergence of stable novelty. Constitutive relationships—relationality—and relative autonomy are key. Only a strong Trinitarian theology which incorporates God's respect for and vulnerability to creation, with God in some way taking time up into the divine life, will be able to ground an adequate theology of creation.

There was some discussion of scientific issues, including clarification of the meaning of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The startling image of replaying "the evolutionary tape" from a previous stage (S. J. Gould), thus yielding distinctly different species than we have, and possibly nothing like ourselves, was revisited. What theological weight can be given to this scientifically based speculation?

There was general agreement that any metaphysical model should be provisional and developmental. Something more flexible than a system is desirable. Here Lonergan's approach was suggested as providing some guidance. Several strongly agreed that we do need to recover the doctrine of analogy—both of goodness and being—while maintaining the sense of mystery. Finally, there was, consonant with Gerhart's insistence on metaphysical sensitivity to genres, a plea that in the interaction between science and theology social, political and cultural dimensions be included, along with the different types of narrative they represent.

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#### HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

Topic: Does Hans Urs von Balthasar Have a Political Theology?

Convener: David L. Schindler, John Paul II Institute, Washington, D.C.

Presenter: Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, Loyola College

Respondent: Brian Benestad, Assumption College

In taking up the question of "theo-drama and political theology," Bauerschmidt said he was not primarily interested in what Balthasar has to say about various political and liberation theologies, but rather in how his notion of theo-drama might actually shape our understanding of the "political." Balthasar's understanding of human existence as "dramatic" offers a much needed conceptual framework for those who wish to understand the distinctively "political" character of Christian existence.

While Balthasar sees certain affinities between his own theo-dramatic approach and political theology, he sees the latter as ultimately inadequate because it fails to see that "the message of salvation as lived and proclaimed by Jesus cannot be brought into a wholly univocal relationship with the structuring of the world's future within time." Political theology is prone to the same Promethean temptation as the rest of modernity, stressing *praxis* at the expense of *pathos*, thus losing the crucial sense of creaturely action as *Gelassenheit* and distorting the Marian form of the Church. In this way political theology risks