

SEMINAR ON MORAL THEOLOGY

The seminar addressed two topics this year.

I. ROMAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY AND TOLERATION OF EVIL IN OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO VICTIMS OF NAZISM AND AIDS

Presenter: Edward R. Sunshine, Barry University

Respondents: Christine Gudorf, Xavier University

Thomas A. Shannon, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Moderator: Reverend Michael D. Place, Archdiocese of Chicago

In his paper, Dr. Shannon examined how some Roman Catholic Church leaders in recent history have dealt with evil in the world. He focused on two cases which appear to be radically divergent from each other but which involve marginal and suspect populations: the Holocaust and the AIDS epidemic. It was his contention that the hierarchy's reaction to evil in these situations provides clues to the scope and limitations of inculturation by Christian churches. He proposed that church leaders ordinarily should react to evil in ways which express "solidarity with victims" first and give their interest primary weight in prudential judgments. Consideration of feasibility, scandal, and efficacy should be of secondary importance. If church officials decide to use denunciation and deterrence, they should mainly use them against the powerful, who act consciously and intentionally, rather than against the vulnerable. In certain cases (such as Nazi atrocities), and as a last resort, heroic resistance to evil in support of victims should take precedence over prudential considerations.

In his response Dr. Shannon raised the following points. How does one define evil? How does one establish a hierarchy of evils? What is the relationship between our natural law methodology and the reality of inculturation? Does the sociological dimension of being church require some cooperation with evil? Should our attention be directed towards the victims of evil or to the cause of the problem?

Dr. Gudorf offered three observations. First, she proposed that the danger of AIDS should be argued more strongly. The "premature nature" of the death of many with AIDS is different from death as it normally occurs. Also, the HIV virus can be communicated rather easily. Second, she said that the distinction between moral evil and natural evil must be attended to in this discussion. Third, there is need to move beyond the role of the institution when discussing cooperation in evil.

After the respondents completed their presentations there was a dialogue between the speaker and the participants. The exchange was a lively one.

II. VIRTUOUS VINDICTIVE ANGER?

Panel: Christian Gudorf, Xavier University
Edward Vacek, Weston School of Theology
Jean Porter, Vanderbilt University
Giles Milhaven, Brown University

Moderator: Patricia Beattie Jung, Wartburg Theological Seminary

Panel members and seminar participants alike reflected on the question of whether or not vindictive anger could ever be virtuous. In preparation for this discussion, we read some of the following: *Good Anger* by J. Giles Milhaven, especially the introduction and chapters 4-7; *Pure Lust* by Mary Daly, especially the section on emotions; *Seven Deadly Sins* by Henry Fairlie, especially the chapter on anger; and from the *Summa theologica* I-II, 46-48; II-II, 108 and 156, 4-159.

Some interesting points were made about the therapeutic value of expressions of anger, especially for the victims of injustice. It was also noted that there are significant variations in the way men and women are socialized to respond to their vengeful feelings. In addition to its healing function and role in gender formation, it was argued that vindictive anger has a political function, and when appropriately constrained may be a civic virtue of great importance.

Panelists and participants alike reached an interim consensus on these three points. First, careful and more nuanced distinctions need to be made between the concepts of anger, retribution, and revenge. Second, there will never be an easy or unconditional compatibility between the vengeful anger and the nonviolent meekness modeled on different occasions by Jesus Christ. Third, it was cautiously admitted that vengeful anger may indeed at times be appropriate, if not in fact good.

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