

## THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### EVIL AND HOPE: DILEMMAS FOR THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Presenters: Anne M. Clifford, Duquesne University  
Anne King-Lenzmeier, University of St. Thomas

The goal of the session was to identify significant errors that threaten both the future of humanity and earth and to suggest possible alternatives. In her paper, "Ecological Lament," Clifford placed neglect of nonhuman nature at the center of the evils facing creation. Clifford distinguished three views of the role of human beings in the present ecological crisis: (1) steward of creation, (2) participant in the hierarchy of being, and (3) ecofeminist kin to all creation. According to Clifford, the first perspective emphasizes the responsibility of human governance over nonhuman nature in imitation of God, but neglects the fundamental interdependence of all creation. The second view retrieves the strengths of a Thomistic theology that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things in a teleologically ordered world, but remains anthropocentric and legitimates hierarchical dualism in nature and society. In contrast, ecofeminism proposes a holistic vision that views the earth as a dynamic web of interconnected processes of which human beings are but one part. Clifford argued that the most urgent task of our era is to construct a Christian theology of the interrelationship between the human community and the rest of creation.

In the discussion that followed participants emphasized

- the value of mining ritual activity and liturgical perspectives on lament as sources for theological anthropology;
- a caution that ecofeminism may undervalue human agency when human beings are the only conscious transformers of creation;
- the importance of the stewardship model in view of human responsibility for ecological disasters;
- the significance of eschatology and retrieval of the symbols of "resurrection of the body" and "the Second Coming"; and
- the need for further constructive work on models of God as Creator, the doctrines of providence and concurrence, and a teleological view of creation, in the face of modern scientific models of indeterminacy and change.

In the second paper, "Confronting Nihilism," King-Lenzmeier contended that the greatest error facing humankind is a subtle, but pervasive, sense of meaninglessness, chaos, and loss of self. This broad form of nihilism, she suggested, results in two opposing ideological stances that endanger both individuals and communities: either (1) conformity to authority for security, values, and norms; or (2) dismissal of any grounds for values or norms as well as of any concept of the "core self." Drawing on depth psychology as a dialogue partner, King-Lenzmeier pointed to literature on the depletion of the self and various forms of narcissism and called for new understandings of evil, sin, grace, and hope. She further urged theologians to address the foundational questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and language theory to establish a basis from which to speak of God and theological anthropology in a secularized and pluralistic world.

The discussion underscored the importance of a theological understanding of the "self" and a critique of narcissism; the need for more diverse theological language for sin, especially in view of the distinction between guilt and shame; the importance of social and cultural analysis in any discussion of theological anthropology; and the value of dialogue between theological anthropology, psychology, and spirituality.

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## THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

### PROVIDENCE IN AN INDETERMINISTIC WORLD

Presenter: John H. Wright

Moderator: Cecilia A. Ranger

Convenor: William R. Stoeger

A growing interest in the dialogue between natural science and theology drew forty-one participants to the session moderated by Cecilia A. Ranger, S.N.J.M. (Marylhurst College). The conversation was set in motion by John H. Wright, S.J. (Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley), who summarized Niels Henrik Gregersen's article "Providence in an Indeterministic World" (*CTNS Bulletin* 14 [1994] 16-31).