

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).

Gregersen divides proponents of the doctrine of providence into "generalists" who equate providence with continuous creation having a uniform action and those who defend particular interventions. He then speaks of three localizations of providence: firsthand experience, Christian spirituality as found in the language used in worship, and the grand scale theological conviction that God governs the world.

Though science and theology engage each other in dialogue, they have two distinct identities. Science is neither proreligious nor antireligious, but areligious. While science explains the unknown in terms known through mechanisms and laws, theology uses symbolic language to redescribe reality from a more understandable source of reality, divine mystery. Theology does not explain the world in terms of causality or mechanisms, but reviews, rereads, redescribes the world already understood phenomenologically from the inside and explained scientifically from the outside.

These observations suggest but do not scientifically prove some indeterminism in the world: quantum mechanics, dissipative structures far from equilibrium, and chaos theory. Determinism and indeterminism are defined philosophically, since science does not yield a definite conclusion. Determinism means events as sufficiently determined by the past so that any present constellation of causes can have only one line of effect in the future; the real is the necessary, possibility is as yet unrealized necessity. On the other hand, indeterminism means events which are insufficiently determined by the past so that some present constellations of causes can have different lines of effects in the future; the real comprises the contingent necessity of the past, the contingent reality of the present, and the potential possibilities of the future. The sources of indeterminism may be described as (1) ultimate tychism (spontaneous fluctuations in elementary natural events), (2) beings with a capacity for selective information gathering and responsive action (human exercise of free choice), and (3) type-different causalities (interaction in different ways by different levels of natural causes). All three rest on the presupposition that there are relatively autonomous events, relatively autonomous entities, and different levels of interaction. By contrast, determinism rests on the presupposition of a single causal web that necessitates both particles and structural wholes.

Theology redescribes these situations of indeterminism in symbolic language with conceptual implications. God is creator of heaven, implying open possibilities, not near at hand, unseen; and of Earth, which points to the definitive, given, near at hand, seen. As a creator of a world of chance, God is an amoral creator: random events may be for the good of the whole but they do not necessarily advance the good of individuals.

But a provident God is more than this; God is Father of the good and the wicked, and acts in the indeterminacies of the world, both in the global process and in the local event. Gregersen explains his position by using the game of bridge as an analogy. God is creator of earth: God creates matter and its laws, as the cards are fashioned and the rules of the game set forth. God is also creator

of the heavens: God opens up richness of possibility for intelligent beings, as the rules of bridge provide such openness to the intelligent player. God utilizes chance, as randomly distributed cards offer challenges to the players' skills. And God inspires human agents, alerting the bridge players to possibilities. This provident God involves Godself passionately in all individual games (God's general involvement and empathy toward all) and addresses all active participants of the game, exerting a mental pressure for the best play but leaving the choice to the player (God's special providence).

Animated conversation followed the presentation. The group expressed an interest in exploring the question of evolution and the human spirit next year.

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TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Presenters: Emily M. Binns, Villanova University
James J. McCartney, Villanova University
Joseph A. Bracken, Xavier University

Respondent: Nancy A. Dallavalle, Fairfield University

Theologies using the work of Alfred North Whitehead and Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin provided the focus for this year's discussion of the convention theme. Emily Binns gave an overview of the place of evil and suffering in Teilhard's thought, James McCartney's presentation focused on the account of evil in the process theology of W. Norman Pittenger, and Joseph Bracken summarized the argument from Marjorie Suchocki's *Fall to Violence* (Continuum, 1994). Nancy Dallavalle responded and moderated the session, half of which was devoted to a dialogue between the panelists and the fifty interest group participants.

Influenced by his study of anthropology, Teilhard de Chardin rethought traditional theological categories in the light of evolution. Binns asserted that the question of evil is best understood in the broad context of Teilhard's focus on the entirety of creation, from the macrocosmic to the microcosmic. For Teilhard, evil is creation's "shadow side," present, as physical evil, in the process of the