

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

cosmos from the beginning. Moral evil is a very late arrival in this process, as it arises only with the human and the possibility of free choice.

McCartney argued that Pittenger's processive understanding of reality treats evil in a manner that is not only coherent but also fruitful for pastoral practice. For Pittenger, God exists as the ground of all possibility, is active as the "Lure of love," and finally receives the world by sharing in its production of both good and suffering, willing only good but allowing evil. In Pittenger's thought, God is the love manifest in Jesus Christ, a love that is, however, noncoercive, and thus one that allows for genuine human freedom. In this the "despotic ruler" gives way to appreciation for the "brief Galilean vision."

Bracken reported that Suchocki's focus on sin as a violation of creation links both original sin and consciously chosen sin, with the result that sin is only indirectly a violation of God. In Suchocki's account, sin has a threefold relational structure: it emerges as violence, is perpetuated through human solidarity, and is inherited socially. Guilt and hope are found in the tension between sinful structures and the possibility of transcending those structures. Forgiveness, the willing of the well-being of the violator, is linked to an understanding of the extent of the violation.

Dallavalle responded that process thought too quickly confines God to human systematizing, overlooking the analogical dimension of theology and the transcendence of God. Process thought works well to explain human cooperation with God in the face of sin or violence in a context of human self-determination. It is hard pressed, however, to offer redemption for those whose relational experience is constituted by overwhelming evil, the "least" of the world.

Discussion ranged widely. On divine transcendence, it was noted that Teilhard presumes the transcendence of God more clearly than the Whiteheadians, but this could be addressed, argued Bracken, by a trinitarian schema. Observing that, for Teilhard, evil is concomitant with goodness, concern was expressed that sin then becomes part of a cosmological structure. But structure is not the issue in an evolutionary world view, rather the principle of creativity brings about greater complexity within the process itself. Thus, while traditional theodicies focus on the restoration of an initial structural perfection, the process view counters suffering by finding a continuing emergence of good. Reconciliation then involves the incorporation of evil into God as transmuted or transformed.

A short business meeting followed the discussion, chaired by Bracken. Mary Margaret Moore and Ralph Del Colle volunteered to join Bracken as the steering committee for next year's session.

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