

THEOLOGY IN A SEMINARY CONTEXT

- Topic: Theological Anthropology and Biological Evolution
Convener: Jack A. Bonsor, Santa Clara University
Moderator: Roger E. McGrath, St. Mary's Seminary
Presenters: Anne Clifford, Duquesne University
Michael Barnes, University of Dayton

Under the title "*Imago Dei* and the Evolution of Homo Sapiens" Anne Clifford responded to John Paul II's "Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution." While accepting biological evolution, the pope notes a plurality of theories about evolution's mechanisms. He judges unacceptable any theory which conflicts with the doctrine that "souls are immediately created by God." The pope takes this position to stress the ontological difference between human beings and the rest of nature. Reductive scientific methods cannot account for the ontological leap to human nature, the true meaning of which is revealed in God's plan for humanity and expressed succinctly as *imago Dei*.

Clifford suggested that John Paul's creationist account of the soul's origin is an obstacle to authentic dialogue between theology and science. She proposed a "theological generationism" as an alternative to the soul's special creation. Clifford argued that generationism is consistent with biblical anthropology, more respectful of the fundamental unity of body and soul, and more consonant with evolutionary science. Citing evolutionary theories which seek to account for the development of reflective self-presence and transcendence, Clifford argued that "in generationism . . . God is envisioned to be continuously acting creatively in the world through its natural processes." Naming the human *imago Dei* does not separate us from the rest of evolving nature. It expresses a worldly mysticism—humanity's eschatological destiny and capacity for communion with God.

In his presentation Michael Barnes argued that the Church has traditionally used Neoplatonist and/or Aristotelian categories for understanding the human self. These categories were once the best natural philosophy (science) available to Christians. John Paul II insists on this tradition as the basis for affirming the unique character, value, and destiny of the human person. Yet current science is now converging towards a rather different view. The evolution of hominids is a story of increasing brain capacity in some lines, with a simultaneous increase in the variety and sophistication of tools, as though intellection were a property that gradually emerged through the evolution of hominids. Neurophysiology moves closer to identifying brain processes which could account for intellection and

self-awareness. Citing *Hominisation* and *Theological Investigations XXI*, Barnes reiterated Rahner's caution that it may be wise for the Church to find ways to preserve the essentials of belief in the dignity and destiny of the person without tying itself too tightly to categories from ancient natural philosophy. John Paul II has acknowledged Galileo's contribution and is open to Darwin's. Catholic theology should continue this open and constructive response to science.

A lively discussion followed in which a variety of questions and perspectives emerged. Evolutionary anthropology underscores the need for more theological reflection on ecological issues. It ties humanity more closely to all of creation. What are the implications for a theology of resurrection? How are we to think about the period between personal death and the general resurrection? Cannot humanity's dignity and uniqueness, the reason for the pope's creationism, be grounded in our redemptive telos?

JACK A. BONSOR

Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, California