

THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

- Topic: The Significance of Scientific Cosmology for Christology
Convener: William R. Stoeger, Vatican Observatory Research Group,
University of Arizona
Presenter: Zachary J. Hayes, Catholic Theological Union
Respondent: David S. Toolan, *America*

Hayes' presentation was based on his article "Christology—Cosmology," *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism*, Vol. 7 (1997), pp. 41-58. He began by indicating that there are indeed serious problems in the way human beings relate to nature. Some suggest that the solution lies in religion, but others are convinced that the problem stems from religion itself—from Scripture and its interpretation. How is it possible to recognize a distinctive role for humanity and still see real value and meaning in other creatures? How can we keep Christianity from alienating itself and us from the cosmos, and provide an effective cosmology that enables believers to relate to the world in a way that respects nature and is consistent with their religious symbols? Hayes brings both the christology of the Franciscan tradition and insights of contemporary cosmology to bear on these questions—on the relationship between human beings and nature—and on the environmental issues flowing from them. These are the two key partners in the mutually enriching dialogue he pursues.

The fundamental ideas contributed by the natural sciences are that creation is a dynamic, unfolding process in which novelty is continually emerging under the action of the laws of nature and chance. Life arises out of the chemistry of the universe. All the processes which contribute to the creative dynamism of nature are intricately interdependent. At the same time, from the perspective of the sciences, no meaning or purpose is obvious in nature. This leads to deep ambiguity. Are we merely a transient episode in a much larger cosmic history? If so, then human values and human individuals are relatively insignificant. However, the anthropic principle suggests that this is not the whole story—the universe seems fine-tuned to bring forth intelligent life.

This dynamic and inclusive perspective of the natural sciences is strongly reinforced and complemented by cosmic christology in the Franciscan tradition, as represented by Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and others, and revisited more recently by Rahner. These resources conceive all creation—the cosmos—as the first and primal revelation of God through the divine Word, finding its completion and destiny in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a consequence human beings are profoundly linked with and embedded in the cosmos, and move toward our own destiny in Christ only in unity with all creatures. Christlike inclusivity based on the priority of expansive love is fundamental. We journey toward God and fulfillment only as part of the cosmos

and part of one another. This vision finds a more integral relationship with and responsibility for our environment.

David Toolan in his positive response emphasized the need to keep a Logos christology of this sort firmly inserted in the material world, not leaving it behind. This concern was revisited in the discussion. Toolan also emphasized the need for bringing the beauty of creation into the Christian tradition and called for a cosmic anthropology which would found cosmic christology, expressing the distinctive role human beings play in creation while also emphasizing the intrinsic value of all creatures, thus modifying how we conceive human domination and control over the world and its resources. Other issues arising in discussion were how such an approach would be compatible with respect for other religious traditions, and the deep need in Christianity to move away from world-denying spiritualities. The group suggested that some of these issues be pursued next year.

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

Topic: *The Church in America* and the New Path to Solidarity
 Convener: Peter J. Casarella, The Catholic University of America
 Moderator: Alejandro García-Rivera, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
 Presenter: Peter J. Casarella, The Catholic University of America
 Respondent: Lorenzo Albacete, St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie

Peter Casarella noted the difficulty of grasping the central theological message of the postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in America*" (=EIA). So many different policy proposals for both church and world are addressed that one easily loses sight of the three interlocking themes identified in the subtitle: conversion, communion, and solidarity. The hermeneutical key to EIA is "the encounter with the living Jesus Christ." None of what follows in EIA about communion and solidarity makes any sense without this. Ongoing conversion is tied both to communion, "because it enables us to understand that Christ is the head of the Church," and to solidarity, "because it makes us aware that whatever we do for others, especially for the poorest, we do for Christ himself" (EIA, #26).

The trinitarian communion of the church is the specific form of communion to which we are led through conversion. EIA notes many examples of this, all of which are centered in the Eucharist and "the invitation to solidarity" that follows that "outstanding moment of encounter with the living Christ" (cf. EIA,