

## THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

- Topic: "Anxiety or Equanimity: Christoph Schönborn and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Relationship of Natural Science and Christian Truth"
- Convener: Gloria L. Schaab, Barry University
- Moderator: Ilija Delio, Washington Theological Union
- Presenter: Kevin Mongrain, University of Notre Dame
- Respondent: Gloria L. Schaab, Barry University

In an excellent presentation in which he effectively used the Chalcedonian protocol of "unity without confusion, without division, without separation, and without change" as his paradigm for assessing their proposals, Kevin Mongrain examined the insights of Christoph Schönborn and Hans Urs von Balthasar on the relationship of natural science and Christian truth. Through a careful reading of their work, Mongrain demonstrated that both Schönborn and von Balthasar have carefully surveyed the paradigms that represent either obstacles to dialogue or ways of moving the conversation forward in the interplay between theology and science. In his presentation, Mongrain illustrated how each tilts toward different responses with regard to the Chalcedonian protocol and to these paradigms.

The position of von Balthasar reflects the obstacles to dialogue cited in the literature. Concerned by the dangers that atheist science poses to Christian faith, von Balthasar prefers a theory of "double truth." According to this theory, theology and science would construct two circles of knowledge that co-exist in equanimity with their own respective existential postures and internal logics. Furthermore, because of their inherent dissimilarity, von Balthasar would have Christianity eschew the pursuit of intellectual or theoretical responses and focus its energies on developing authentic holiness as an answer to scientific atheism. Within the Chalcedonian protocol, this response tilts toward an equivocal paradigm.

While Schönborn is anxious about the threat "Neo-Darwinism" poses to Christian truth, he is not impeded by such an obstacle. He expects that Christian metaphysics working with an Aristotelian doctrine of final causes will put an end to the conceptual and theoretical independence of the natural sciences. As a result, Schönborn anticipates a reinterpreting of "natural" truth within the truth of Christianity's meta-narrative. To move the conversation forward, therefore, Schönborn would have science subordinate itself to theology. In the Chalcedonian framework, this tilts toward a univocal paradigm.

Gloria L. Schaab framed her response in terms of the theme of the conference, asking, "At the point of impasse, does the proposal of either Christoph Schönborn or Hans Urs von Balthasar move us *beyond*?" Schaab noted that, in contrast to both Schönborn and von Balthasar, several scholars have pointed out commonalities between theology and science, which make dialogue not only possible, but in fact indispensable. Moreover, Schaab maintained, at the point of impasse, neither Schönborn's nor von Balthasar's paradigm moves the conversation forward in mutually respectful ways. Schönborn's approach circumvents the

impasse by subverting the intellectual integrity that each discipline, while von Balthasar accepts the impasse by denying the natural affinity between the two disciplines rooted in the understanding of God as creator and the cosmos as creation.

In view of this, Schaab proposed two other avenues of dialogue to move beyond impasse: the relationship between theology and science as mutually illuminative interaction and natural science as an epistemological context for theology. In the relationship of mutually illuminative interaction, theology and science are in reciprocal relationship with insights from each discipline informing the understandings of the other. Natural science as epistemological context proceeds as other contextual theologies by providing the lens for interpreting and the touchstone for validating theological discourse in concert with the Christian tradition. Echoing the text of Mongrain's presentation, Schaab suggested that neither of these two approaches requires "amending Darwinian science" with a Thomist or Teilhardian perspective; "colonizing revealed truth" so as to regulate it according to pantheistic logic; resorting to a Deist notion of God; nor "marketing a total truth to the world that unites faith and science." However, each does require an affirmation of God's enduring relation to the cosmos in divine transcendence and immanence.

Schaab ended her response by posing the following questions for discussion: "Does the position of either Christoph Schönborn or Hans Urs von Balthasar move us *beyond* impasse? Could the approaches to theology and science as mutually illuminative interaction or as epistemological context move us beyond impasse? Are there other approaches we have not considered here show promise to do so?" A lively exchange ensued with great interest in the positions of both Christoph Schönborn and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

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