

**GLOBAL ECOLOGY AND THE LIFE OF THE SACRAMENTS—
SELECTED SESSION**

Topic:	Global Ecology and the Life of the Sacraments
Convener:	Christiana Z. Peppard, Fordham University
Moderator:	Elizabeth A. Johnson, Fordham University
Presenters:	Erin Lothes Biviano, College of St. Elizabeth Christiana Z. Peppard, Fordham University
Respondent:	Elizabeth A. Johnson, Fordham University

This session, consisting of two papers, a response, and discussion, addressed the intersection between contemporary ecology and sacramental theology. The content focused on how ecological reality resonates with particular aspects of Catholic sacramental life and may refract back into Catholic theology and practice.

In “Living Water: Ecology, Sacramentality, and the Hydrography of Faith,” Christiana Z. Peppard expressed the vitality of fresh water and identified a series of theological and ethical connections. Her paper began with a narrative evocation of waters in the Hebrew Bible and moved into an assessment of normative ecology, sacramental theology, and bodies of water.

First, considering fresh water in a normative, ecological frame suggests that fresh water is a *sine qua non* of human and ecosystemic existence. Insofar as it is nonsubstitutable, it is also *sui generis*. These features are universally true but always contextually mediated. Second, recent developments in sacramental theology, drawing on patterns in twentieth-century Catholic theology more generally, have increasingly attended to history and historicity, embodiment, context, and ethics. These connections have been made explicit by scholars such as Edward Schillebeeckx, Susan Ross, and Louis-Marie Chauvet. An ecological inflection draws strongly on these currents of sacramental thought. What, then, do the sacraments have to do with “bodies of water,” riparian and human? Third, the paper depicted two “bodies of water” for theological and ethical consideration: the storied Jordan River and the plight of people worldwide whose lives are shaped by the demands of procuring fresh water. Each of these focal points contained a strongly Christological and ethical inflection, with implications for global ethics and Catholic Social Teaching as well as theologies of plurality in the global Catholic Church.

In “Concelebrating the Sacrament of Co-Creation,” Erin Lothes Biviano delved into the radical Pauline affirmation that “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom 12:5), but observed that in many ways the community of life—both social and ecological—is scarred by environmental degradation. What is the significance of sacramental theology in this context? Insofar as the earth itself can be recognized as an ongoing sacramental encounter with the love of God, Lothes Biviano suggested that the sacrament of creation invites us to deepen our relationship with God through ecologically informed discipleship. Drawing especially on Edward Schillebeeckx, Kevin Seasoltz and Paul Knitter, this paper explored how the multifaceted creation/degradation context universalizes the Church’s mission and includes ecological justice as a task of discipleship on levels of scale from the personal to the institutional and structural.

Elizabeth A. Johnson’s response highlighted several points of convergence between the papers, including the integral insight and theme of embodiment, the ongoing dynamics of ecological degradation and human responsibility in a global context, and the strong connections between systematic theological reflection and the ethical primacy of justice. A lively

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conversation ensued among session participants and presenters on topics ranging from baptismal waters to individual eco-activism, and from theologies of embodiment to theories of economy in light of environmental degradation.

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