

## CATHOLIC THEOLOGY &amp; GLOBAL WARMING

- Topic: Confronting the Climate Crisis: Feminist and Sacramental Perspectives
- Convener: Jame Schaefer, Marquette University
- Moderator: William George, Dominican University
- Presenters: Anne Clifford, Iowa State University  
Colleen Mary Carpenter, St. Catherine University

Culminating the efforts of this interest group at CTSA conventions, two contributors to our project presented fruitful ways of addressing the global climate crisis from the perspectives of their research interests. Anne Clifford began with a feminist theological perspective, drawing upon Wangari Maathai's exemplary efforts in Kenya. In her presentation entitled "Trees—Living Symbols of Peace and Hope: Wangari Maathai and Ecofeminist Theology," Clifford focused on the methods used by the first African woman and first environmentalist to receive a Nobel Peace Prize (2004) that parallel Catholic social thought and action.

Maathai was lauded for establishing and leading the Green Belt Movement (GBM) in Kenya which successfully linked economic development by women, environmental sustainability, and peacemaking. Aware that women are strongly affected by the destruction of ecosystems, since they do most of the farming and wood collecting for cooking, Maathai invited women early in the United Nations' "Decade for Women" (1976-1986) to plant bands ("belts") of indigenous trees in areas that had been desertified by uncontrolled exploitation of forests, overgrazing, and agricultural malpractice. In the process of planting trees, the women became *unbowed*—able to stand upright with hope for themselves and their families to sustain themselves now and in the future. Integral to Maathai's efforts is countering the threat to peace in Africa as already poor people become poorer and persons holding power use force to control dwindling resources.

Clifford notes that Maathai, who received a doctorate in science and chose to be baptized as a Catholic, does not self-identify as an "ecofeminist." However, the term fits her because the GBM was formed not only to restore damaged ecosystems but also to encourage poorly educated women to embrace their God-given dignity through empowerment and self-determination. The methods she uses to engage women in the GBM are similar to the "See, Judge, Act" model of Catholic Action of Joseph Cardijn (Young Christian Workers, 1924). To this dynamic Maathai adds attentiveness to whose "mirror" (sense of self) the women are using when analyzing problems—the colonizers, government officials, their husbands, or their own? As the women grew in self-knowledge and hopeful solidarity, they took steps to achieve the common good. Maathai deserves our gratitude for a praxis-oriented ecofeminism *buoyed by hope and committed to peace*.

"Climate Change and the Sacramental Imagination" was the focus of Colleen Carpenter's presentation. She began with the claim that our traditional Catholic tendency to find the presence and goodness of God in the world around us is threatened by the changes we are forcing on the global climate. If we have

damaged creation so deeply that it no longer supports us, but instead seems to oppose our lives and health at every turn so we learn to fear the winds and waters and to mistrust the Earth that we have poisoned, how will that change our sense of God's presence in the world? Will the world around us come to be seen as revelatory not of God's goodness, but of God's anger, even God's punishment?

In order to answer this question, Carpenter examined two current theological proposals that consider different ways to understand and speak of the Spirit of God in the world today. Theologian Mark Wallace argues that we must begin to see the Spirit as cruciform, wounded, and even dying, whereas Beth Johnson focuses on the role of the Spirit as the One who heals what is hurt and renews the face of the Earth. Carpenter rejected Wallace's understanding of the Spirit as a "life form" whose suffering "engenders chronic agony in the Godhead," but she recognizes that his attention to both lament and prophetic grief are challenges that any serious pneumatology cannot ignore today. She suggested that we must cultivate our understanding of the Spirit neither as wounded nor simply as the Creator Spirit, but as the Renewing, Liberating, and Vivifying Spirit who is present wherever life blooms out of death and wherever human hands are acting to heal and restore what we have damaged. When we tend our damaged planet, we are participating in the Spirit's work of healing and life-giving, and we are renewed and strengthened by the Spirit as we pursue this work.

A lively discussion followed, much of which centered around the extent to which we can identify any species or ecological system as "natural" in light of changes human activities are forcing on them and the global climate. Several participants shared their hope that ecological concerns will be addressed at future CTSA conventions.

This final session of the interest group ended with an overview of essays by William George, Anthony Scigliano, Jane Russell, and Jame Schaefer that are included in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives* but have not been presented at CTSA conventions. Due to be released by Marquette University Press in September, this anthology consists of seventeen original essays, a statement on climate change issued by the U.S. Catholic bishops in 2001, and Pope Benedict XVI's Message on the 2010 World Day of Peace.

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