

## CATHOLIC THEOLOGY &amp; GLOBAL WARMING

- Topic: Crafting a Theological Response to Human-Forced Climate Change
- Convener: Jame Schaefer, Marquette University
- Presenters: Dawn Nothwehr, Catholic Theological Union  
Daniel Scheid, Duquesne University  
Denis Edwards, Flinders University (Australia)

In “Bonaventure’s Franciscan Christology: A Resource for Eco-Conversion toward Halting Human-forced Global Warming,” Dawn Nothwehr recalled Sallie McFague’s claim that three ultimate questions lie at the heart of the dilemma concerning if and how humans will act to halt human-forced global warming: (1) Who Are we? (2) Who is God? (3) How shall we live?” Dawn argued that Bonaventure of Bagnoregio’s (1217-1274) Franciscan cosmic Christology provides grounding for an empowering and integrated theological, spiritual, and ethical vision that responds to McFague’s queries.

In the first part of her paper, Dawn situated Bonaventure’s thought within the Franciscan theological tradition and proceeded in the second part to place Bonaventure’s Christology in its theological context of a radically related, loving, fecund Triune God—the Creator of a radically related universe. Leading an integrated spiritual and moral life in Christ motivates and emboldens people to love one another and all of creation. Humans stand in the center of creation as mediators, giving voice to the other creatures while being inspired by them to praise God.

Informed by Bonaventure’s Christology, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Summary for Policy Makers, and Pope John Paul II’s call to ecological conversion, Dawn answered McFague’s third question, “How shall we live?” The presenter enumerated six social scientific studies to support her claim that Bonaventure’s Christology compels people to ethical ecologically responsible actions aimed at halting humans from forcing the warming of Earth.

Dan Scheid followed with “Thomas Aquinas and the Cosmic Common Good.” He began by highlighting the importance that the U.S. Catholic Bishops have placed on the good of the planet through their concept of “the planetary common good,” thereby expanding the traditional category of the common good to include Earth and its flourishing. From his perspective, the bishops’ position raises a pivotal question: Does the planetary common good exist primarily or even solely to serve humans, or does humanity fit into a broader purpose that God intends for all creation?

Arguing that Thomas Aquinas’ theology of creation enables us to articulate a “cosmic common good” that correlates the human and the planetary common good, Dan emphasized three key concepts: (1) the whole universe surpasses in excellence any individual creature, and God desires a multiplicity of types of creatures, not just an increase in individual creatures; (2) the most valuable feature of the universe is the order among its various parts whose interconnections

signify the temporal cosmic common good to which all should contribute; and, (3) the cosmic common good gives glory to God.

Global warming is a critical threat to the planetary common good which seeks the flourishing of Earth, of the many diverse and interconnected ecosystems, and of the myriad plants, animals, insects, etc. that they sustain—including humans. From Aquinas's teachings, God desires not just the flourishing of the individual human person or even the prosperity of the human community. God desires the flourishing of the universe comprised of diverse creatures and differing nobility who contribute to the ordered interconnections between them as a way of glorifying God.

In the final presentation, Denis Edwards began "Climate Change and the Theology of Karl Rahner: A Hermeneutical Approach" by exploring hermeneutical principles that emerge from a scientifically informed ecological consciousness in which global climate change is recognized as an urgent issue for theology to address. Five principles emerge from this understanding: (1) the worldview of big bang cosmology and evolutionary biology; (2) the science of climate change and its provisional nature; (3) the costs of evolution; (4) the intrinsic value of nonhuman creation; and, (5) the interconnectedness of all things.

Rahner's theology brings to the science-religion dialogue the theology of grace which enables us to see engagement with the issue of global climate change as the place of God. Rahner's theology offers five more principles that can contribute to an ecological theology: (1) creation and redemption as distinct dimensions of God's one act of self-bestowal; (2) redemption as the deification of human beings and the whole creation; (3) the transcendent God's relationship to creation as characterized by radical immanence; (4) divine action as non-interventionist action through secondary causes; and, (5) God's creation as enabling creaturely emergence through self-transcendence.

While Rahner's theology provides a fruitful starting point for an ecological theology, the ecological consciousness that Denis discussed challenges Rahner's theology at several points and invites further developments. In particular, it raises questions about biology. Rahner certainly takes matter seriously but seldom discusses animals or the biological world in general, and he does not take up the issue of nonhuman suffering. The costs of evolution, put before us by contemporary science, call for a renewed ecologically aware theology of divine action.

A lively discussion of these three papers followed. The status of this group's project was overviewed subsequently and additional theological perspectives were identified as needed for presentation at sessions in 2010 and 2011 and for consideration in the anthology that will be published.

JAME SCHAEFER  
*Marquette University*  
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*