

CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Grace at Work in the World
Convener: Christopher Cimorelli, Caldwell University
Moderator: Wendy Crosby, Siena Heights University
Presenters: Benjamin Hohman, Boston College
Sr. Chau Nguyen, O.P., University of St. Thomas (Houston)
Joe Drexler-Dreis, St. Mary's College of California

In his paper, “The Glory to Be Revealed: Grace and Emergence in the Eschaton,” Benjamin Hohman argues that, despite the merits of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*, the encyclical does not provide a comprehensive and systematic framework to unpack the larger understandings implied by Christian doctrine, particularly in the light of new foundations provided by an ecologically and evolutionarily conversant worldview. In section one, Hohman argues that an eschatology rooted in Francis’ vision of integral ecology must (1) actively integrate the insights of faith and reason (2) in relation to a proper understanding of humanity’s place within creation, and which is (3) oriented by an attentive subjectivity that is open to God’s ongoing action and (4) inseparable from God’s work in the redemptive order. In section two, Hohman argues that Bernard Lonergan’s understanding of “emergent probability” can help in constructing a systematic theology in accord with Francis’ vision that meets the four aforementioned principles. He affirms that Lonergan’s four heuristic methods—classical, statistical, genetic, and dialectic—for describing and predicting a world in progress help to provide the unitive account of the intelligibility of the evolving world order; yet full intelligibility is fractured due to the misuse of freewill, and Lonergan posits the supernatural as repairing this fracture. Hohman maintains, then, that emergent probability must give way to the surprising inbreaking of divine grace that repairs the world order beyond its own natural abilities. In the third section, however, Hohman suggests a re-visioning of the relationship between grace and emergence in Lonergan’s thought in order to provide a new and more complete explanatory account for evolutionary and ecological theologies in the work of transforming the singular doctrine that is creation and redemption. He focuses on thinking grace and emergence together, in order to free grace from an exclusively anthropic valence, highlighting the way that the logic of creation is deeply eschatological, with the constant inbreaking of grace. In the conclusion, Hohman reflects briefly on how Mary the Mother of God portrays the understanding of grace that has been developed to this point.

In her paper, “A Marian Key to the Nature-Grace Controversy,” Sr. Chau Nguyen, O.P., revisits the nature-grace complex from a Marian anthropology, and she argues that a Marian perspective substantively illuminates the problem in a manner history has oft-overlooked. Nguyen concentrates on the figure of Mary as exemplary of the ideal relationship of nature and grace, using the two Marian dogmas to highlight their interplay. In the first section, Nguyen develops the value of a Marian anthropology through Louis Bouyer and Karl Barth’s thought. The former focuses on Mary representing the pinnacle of creation as a created being. The latter believes that the Catholic view of Mary represents a “heresy.” In the second section, Nguyen puts scripture and tradition to work exploring protology in light of the Immaculate Conception. She ultimately argues that the state of “pure nature” can be reinterpreted as more than an abstract, Scholastic notion; rather, Mary uniquely possesses human

nature in its purest form, untainted by sin. She thus exemplifies how nature is oriented to the supernatural. In a substantial third section, Nguyen analyzes eschatology in the light of the dogma of Mary's Assumption, which points to the human participation in Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, anticipating the future glory of the children of God. Nguyen thus argues that the content of Barth's critique loses force in the face of this analysis. The third section ultimately argues that the church invokes Mary as an eschatological icon, who exercises a final causality upon nature, moving all creation forward to the peak of creaturely existence, not as the source of grace, but rather as the perfect reception of grace and its transformative power.

In his paper, "'Getting land enough to lay our Fathers bones upon': Perceiving God's Grace Outside Temporal Frameworks," Joe Drexler-Dreis raises and explores questions of what grace means within the particular history of the United States and North Atlantic exchanges centered on colonialism and slave trading. Drexler-Dreis argues for a retrieval of a theology of grace proceeding from a spatial vision of freedom founded in the connection to land as opposed to a linear vision founded upon productivity in an economic system. In the first section, he critically reflects on these two contesting visions as visible in the history of the Sea Islands of the South Carolina Coast in 1865 during the post-Civil-War Reconstruction. The first, more linear vision was propounded by Martin Delany and the Freedmen's Bureau and assumed that all economic classes of society shared the same interests and would assume the values of the marketplace. Freedom, as well as human worth, in this view, comes from the capacity to produce surplus value. This view, with God as the guarantor of the physical order and laws of the world, produces a theology in which God's self-offering to humanity is locked within the rules of temporal progress toward an economic end and capitalist rationality. Drexler-Dreis then introduces the perspective of the Committee of Freedmen on Edisto Island, which rejected Delany's capitalist option and perspective. For this group, freedom was seen as grounded in the ability to live on "land enough to lay our Fathers bones upon," to have a home in the land that they had worked. Their response was even written in the form of a prayer, articulating a hope for a relationship with God transcending the constraints of capitalist rationalities. In the second section, Drexler-Dreis argues that this vision of freedom has been suppressed through a host of structural, political, and racial systems and agendas since the time of Reconstruction. He provocatively brings together the theologies of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Vine Deloria. Gutiérrez's view, that the language of prophecy and contemplation resists being locked into particular ethical and epistemological systems, is paired with Deloria's efforts to question thinking of creation and eschatology temporally, instead thinking spatially. Drexler-Dreis does so to avoid a pitfall even for liberation theology, namely to abstract from concrete spaces and the voices within them as part of this temporal movement to God.

The conversation that followed brought forth a number of questions addressed by multiple speakers, though most were directed to specific presenters at first. Hohman was asked about how Christology and grace feature in Lonergan's understanding of emergent probability, perhaps toward an Omega point, to reference Chardin. He responded by noting the rational basis of emergence, which is quite useful for establishing a shared framework that makes sense in and for the present. In response to Nguyen's paper, conversation centered on a variety of topics, such as whether Mariology transcends hierarchies and binaries of exclusion, how Mary may have been subject to the structural sin of her time, how Mary mediates grace without being an

intermediary, and the need for systematic reflection on issues involving femininity and Mary's role in redemption. Drexler-Dreis was asked to explain how he views space as a primary category for thinking eschatologically. He advocated for a more primary focus on space but with time so as to avoid their separation to the detriment of theology. A more synthetic question emerged at the end of the conversation, dealing with linearity and doctrine, about whether an evolutionary framework and linear conception of doctrine might prevent people from seeing God as liberating today. Time constraints prevented a full exploration of this question, but its worth was noted.

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