

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: “All You Who Labor...”: Theology, Work, and Economy
 Convener: P.J. Johnston, St. Olaf College
 Moderator: Katie Mahowski Mylroie, Boston College
 Presenters: Michael VanZandt Collins, Boston College
 Anna Bonta Moreland, Villanova University
 Respondent: SimonMary Aihikhai, University of Portland

For the sake of developing the virtue foundations of ecological conversion, Michael VanZandt Collins’ paper, “The Virtues of Renunciation? Rearticulating Sobriety as a Moral Virtue,” offered a comparative study of temperance. In his encyclical *Laudato Si’* (2015), Pope Francis highlights sobriety as a virtuous habit for sustainable development. This, Collins proposed, invites comparison to the Islamic virtue ethics of Abū Hamid al-Ghazālī. In his presentation, Collins critically examined the mystical virtue of *zuhd* (“renunciation”) that al-Ghazālī develops extensively in close proximity to “poverty of spirit.” This theology of renunciation offers a “direct challenge” to those Thomist approaches that limit sobriety to food, drink or sexual activity; instead, this virtue touches so many aspects of life that it is “potentially boundless.” Temperance is embodied in various “renunciatory practices”; through such practices, according to al-Ghazālī, we attempt to exchange one set of desires for another, leading to greater intimacy with God. From this comparative engagement, Collins concluded that a broad understanding of sobriety can be seen as an integral aspect of Christian discipleship. He also argued that any Christian ecological ethic should recognize the need for contraction and dispossession as well as sustainable development in relation to the natural world.

In her paper, “Muhammad and the Prophetic Vocation,” Anna Bonta Moreland offered a summary of the argument of her latest book, *Muhammad Reconsidered: A Christian Perspective on Islamic Prophecy* (Notre Dame Press, 2020). After framing the conversation with an analysis of Vatican II documents that dealt with the relationship of Catholicism to Islam, she focused on the contours of what constitutes Christian prophecy in Thomas Aquinas’ theology and how that sets the stage for a consideration of the prophethood of Muhammad. She drew from extensive research in Thomist scholarship, arguing that within Thomas’ own account of prophecy, Muhammad should in principle be considered a prophet. She then offered an overview of the theological category of “private revelation” to show that the Catholic Church already has a category to cover post-canonical divine encounters, and that this category need not be limited to Christians. Moreland finished her presentation by briefly considering two objectors to her argument, Jacques Jomier, OP, and Christian Troll, SJ, and offered responses to their objections (in good Thomist fashion).

In his response, SimonMary Aihikhai drew in themes of decolonialism and the philosophical ethics of Emmanuel Levinas to raise critical questions of both presenters. “Is there legitimacy,” he asked, “in attempting to speak of and about other religions using the framework of Christian theology and doctrinal claims?” Noting the inextricable connection between modernity and coloniality established by such decolonial theorists as Walter D. Mignolo, Aihikhai offered a close, largely

appreciative analysis of Moreland's attempt to chart a path beyond reductive Christian stereotypes of Islam and resistance to encountering Muhammad as a prophet. At issue here is the "apophatism" of authentic encounter with the religious Other. In conversation with Collins, Ahiokhai further observed that al-Ghazālī represents a distinctive resource for interreligious learning, as a Muslim figure who engaged constructively with Aristotelian, Jewish and Christian traditions in his own life and thought. Virtue ethics represents a fruitful approach due to its close focus on relationality; a fuller approach to the ecological crisis would, however, also require a more holistic view of humanity and the natural world.

A short, rich conversation followed in the group of approximately sixteen to twenty participants. Questions were raised for presenters on various issues, including the relation of renunciation to world-affirmation and possible applications of Moreland's analysis to prophetic figures and scriptural traditions in new religious movements.

REID B. LOCKLIN
*University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario*