

CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Freedom
 Convener: Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)
 Moderator: Elizabeth Groppe, University of Dayton
 Presenters: Dylan Belton, Villanova University
 Colleen Carpenter, Carleton College
 Respondent: Vincent Miller, University of Dayton

In response to a call for papers that related the topic session to the convention theme of “Freedom,” the Creation/Eschatology session featured two papers and a response.

Dylan Belton’s paper, titled “‘Openness’ to the Transcendent and Human Animality: Re-Reading Henri de Lubac’s *Mystery of the Supernatural*,” began with what has been described as the recent “animal turn” in the humanities. Belton notes that the work of a number of theologians reflects this scholarly development, singling out the work of Eric Daryl Meyer as illustrative. Drawing on Meyer’s 2018 book *Inner Animalities: Theology and the End of the Human* as a model for how to proceed in engaging classic theological texts in the spirit of this “animal turn,” Belton revisited Henri de Lubac’s influential study *The Mystery of the Supernatural*. In particular, Belton was interested in exploring what implications surface for de Lubac’s claim of the natural desire for the divine when examined through the lens of human animality and nonhuman animal agency as framed within the context of *Umwelt* as articulated by the philosopher of science Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944). After Belton drew on a range of twentieth-century theologians in his rereading of de Lubac, he turned to the concept of *Umwelt* in an effort to clarify its meaning and significance, especially for theological reflection on the human person and nonhuman creation.

Colleen Mary Carpenter’s paper, titled “‘Behold I Make All Things New’: Prophetic Eschatology and Climate Fiction,” argued that recent works of fiction have been opening our imaginations to the challenges of the contemporary global climate crisis. The impetus for this paper arose in response to a claim by Amitav Ghosh in the 2016 book *The Great Derangement*, that works of fiction have traditionally addressed important social problems, but that it is incapable of addressing climate change. Carpenter began her paper with a statement about the universality and importance of narrativity. Framing her exploration of several recent works of fiction (including Richard Powers’s *The Overstory*, Jessie Greengrass’s *The High House*, Charlotte McConaghy’s *Migrations*, Stephen Markley’s *The Deluge*, Kim Stanley’s *The Ministry for the Future*, and Matt Bell’s *Appleseed*) with a theological claim, Carpenter argued that what climate storytelling needs is a better way to engage the end of the world. Drawing on the works of womanist theologian Joan Martin and *mujerista* theologian Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, Carpenter argued that contemporary climate storytellers would benefit from a prophetic eschatology, which may provide such authors with tools and frameworks to tell the climate story in a way that provides a freedom that is lacking in the status quo approach to narrating the climate catastrophe. As a result, the story can then be centered not in a place of fear and destruction, but within the context of God’s

story of salvation that is ultimately a story of divine love that heals and renews all things.

Vincent Miller offered a thoughtful and probing response to both papers, lifting up some themes and contributions from each and then posing several questions to Belton and Carpenter. To Belton, he posed two sets of questions. The first pertained to the nature of the described disjunction between de Lubac's theological anthropology project and the benefits of further consideration of *Umwelt*. The second question related to the limits of claims about the distinctiveness of human intelligence and what *Umwelt* theory can help us to understand about ourselves and the more-than-human world. To Carpenter, Miller first posed some novel-specific queries. He then invited Carpenter to say more about what reading such works of fiction contributes to our eschatological imagination.

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