

CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation
 Convener: Elizabeth Groppe, University of Dayton
 Moderator: Daniel Scheid, Duquesne University
 Presenters: Christopher Hadley, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University
 Kathleen McNutt, Marquette University
 Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, Seton Hall University

The 2024 Creation/Eschatology session featured three papers that each spoke in a distinct way to the convention theme of social salvation from protological and eschatological perspectives.

Christopher Hadley opened the session with a reflection on “Doxological Contrition, Theosis, and Apokatastasis.” Drawing from Khaled Anatolios’ *Deification Through the Cross*, Hadley described our human sinfulness as a state of disglorification of God. The indispensable first step of return to the vocation to glorify God is contrition, which the sinless Christ enacts out of love on our behalf with lamentation. The Spirit of the risen Christ enables us to undergo a *metanoia* that is a participation in Christ’s doxological contrition and that attends in a particular way to those who suffer innocently. Hadley emphasized that the gift of Christ’s Spirit is cosmic in character, encompassing not only all humanity but all creation, which is groaning for redemption (Romans 8:18-25). Integrating the work of theologians including St. Irenaeus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bryan Massingale, James Cone, Pope Francis, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and John Thiel, Hadley articulated a social soteriology in which humans act in Christ to restore broken relationships through the gift of the Holy Spirit who desires to “love hell empty.” Hadley concluded with the words of a Byzantine hymn. In eschatological hope of cosmic *apokatastasis*, we can proclaim with hearts, bodies, voices, and deeds: “Behold: through the Cross, joy has come to the world.”

Kathleen McNutt’s “Deep Deification: Ecotheology and Theosis” opened with an account of Niels Gregersen’s theology of “deep incarnation” and its amplification by Elizabeth Johnson. Reflecting on John 1:14 and the theology of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregersen affirms that the flesh that the Word of God assumes includes not only human nature but all the animal, plant, and soil life from which human *sarx* is inextricable. Deep incarnation therefore implies a deep materiality and deep sociality that encompasses all the suffering of the created realm. Johnson contributes to Gregersen’s work a theology of deep resurrection, deep ministry, and deep ethics. McNutt proposed a correlative theology of “deep deification.” She developed this proposal with reflection on St. Maximus the Confessor’s commentary on an Epiphany sermon of Gregory of Nazianzus. The human vocation, according to Maximus, is to mediate the natural fissures of the universe (i.e. the divisions of the intelligible and sensible; heaven and earth; paradise and the inhabited world; male and female; and the created and uncreated.) In our sinfulness, humans have failed our responsibility as mediators. This vocation is restored in Christ, in whom our role of mediating divisions can be renewed through acts of asceticism, virtue, contemplation, concord, and peaceful friendship. The graced mediation of the ontological division of the created and

uncreated is deification. Deep deification, McNutt emphasized, like deep incarnation, includes all of the cosmos in diverse ways appropriate to the distinct character of each creature. This profoundly social soteriology accentuates our responsibility for one another and all creatures and “the graced and present work of knitting back together an unraveling world.”

Axel Marc Oaks Takacs’s “Who Saves Whom? Nishnaabeg Grounded Normativity and *Creatio ex Nihilo* for a Practice of Deep Reciprocity” concluded the session. Takacs invited reflection on a comparison of the culturally dominant White Euro-descended Christian (mis)reading of the Genesis creation accounts with a narrative of human origins shared by many of the Indigenous peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands and Great Lakes regions. Whereas the historically dominant interpretation of Genesis places humankind in a position of separation and domination over animals, plants, and land with a vocation to subdue them, the indigenous narrative “Skywoman Falling” emphasizes humanity’s dependence on other creatures and our need to learn from their wisdom. Today, Catholic social teaching and eco-theology correct historic misreadings of Genesis. And yet, Takacs noted, even these approaches continue to place humanity at the center of creation in ways that can easily reinforce Christian cultural presumptions of hierarchal relationships among creatures. Drawing from Indigenous wisdom as well as the work of St. Bonaventure and Thomas Gallus, Takacs proposed that an etymological understanding of *hier-arche* as sacred (*hieros*) source (*arche*) framed by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* could counter anthropocentrism and remind us that every creature has its source not in us but in the love of God. Or, he queried, is the word “hierarchy” so permeated by its misuse that it is not salvageable in our context? A rich and lively conversation followed this and each of the paper presentations.

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