

CHRIST—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Randall S. Rosenberg, Fontbonne University
Moderator: Kelle Lynch-Baldwin, Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks
Presenters: Kevin P. Considine, Loyola University, Chicago
Gloria L. Schaab, Barry University
Denis Edwards, Flinders University, Australia

The Christ Topic Session explored the mystery of Jesus Christ and the call to conversion in light of a variety of contemporary questions, prompted by both a critical encounter with the evils of racism and consumerism, and an ongoing consideration of the challenges raised by evolutionary science and ecological consciousness.

In his paper, "Does Jesus Need our Liberation? Emancipating the Risen Christ from Christian Idolatry," Kevin Considine argued that Kim Chi Ha's play, "The Gold-Crowned Jesus," illustrates that conversion requires the work of liberating Christ from Christian idolatry. The Korean playwright's image of the Gold-Crowned Jesus—a concrete statue with a solid-gold crown in which educated and wealthy Christians have imprisoned the Risen Christ—shows the unintentional idolatry of Christians and how nonpersons and nonbelievers might emancipate Christ from imprisonment. For privileged believers, to liberate Christ requires ongoing resistance to the sacrifice of victims to these idols. It requires, according to Considine, ownership and utilization of the finite creativity that God has endowed in our frail bodies. In dialogue with the U. S. context, with special attention to the work of William T. Cavanaugh and James Cone, Considine argued that Kim's image offers a useful metaphor for envisioning the conversion of Christians from racist and consumerist idolatry to encountering and serving the Living God.

In her paper, "Incarnation as Emergence: A Transformative Vision of God and the Cosmos," Gloria Schaab employed "evolutionary emergence" as a lens through which to interpret the Incarnation. This principle refers to the reality that forms of life emerge which are not reducible to the elemental forms from which they developed. While they bear an inherent relation to and actualize the potential of earlier forms, emergents require new terms to describe them in non-reductionist ways. Utilizing the framework of ascending and descending Christology, Schaab explored the ramifications of Incarnation as emergence for the cosmos and for the Divine. In an ascending approach, Jesus may be envisioned, Schaab suggested, as an emergent who actualizes the potential in the forms of life that preceded him, namely, the union of creation (present in his human nature) with its Creator (present in his divine nature). Thus, the Incarnation is a sign of promise for the cosmos as it foreshadows the fullness of time when divine, human, and cosmic being "all reach unity...attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In a descending approach, Schaab explored Incarnation-as-emergence as a mission of the Trinity. In the mission of Incarnation, something novel occurs within the life of the Trinity, which both demands a new vocabulary for speaking about God and is unequivocally continuous with the Divine from whom it emerged. Incarnation as emergence in God has two ramifications, according to Schaab. The first is that the Incarnation not only manifested but also involved the Divine in the suffering and joys, the death and new

life, of the cosmos and its creatures intimately, immediately, and inextricably. The second is that the Incarnation affirms the revelatory potential of the cosmos. When the Word of God reaches fullness in Jesus Christ, it does so as part of the universe that has always disclosed God's attributes and purposes in the very being and matter of the cosmos as God's creation.

In his paper "Incarnation and Ecological Conversion," Denis Edwards explored the relationship between the "ecological conversion" encouraged by Pope John Paul II and commitment to Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh. Edwards grounded his inquiry in the work of Athanasius. In his theology of creation, Athanasius envisions all creatures as held in being through the immediate presence of God to each, through the Word and in the Spirit. He understands the incarnation, understood as the whole life, death and resurrection of Jesus, as bringing about a deifying transformation of human beings and, in their own proper ways, of other creatures. The paper explored how this theology might have new meaning in an evolutionary and ecological context, suggesting that the Word of God might be understood as the divine Attractor in evolutionary emergence and the Holy Spirit might be thought of as the Energy of Love at work in creaturely reality. Christ the Attractor, lifted up in the cross and resurrection, draws all people and all things to himself. In the risen Jesus, part of the biological community of Earth is already forever in God. We cannot follow Jesus, the Word made flesh, without being converted to the matter and flesh embraced in his incarnation. Pondering the triptych of creation, incarnation, and resurrection, suggested Edwards, we learn of God's love for and unending commitment to Earth and its creatures.

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