

ANTHROPOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Boston College
Moderator: Elizabeth Antus, John Carroll University
Presenters: Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Fordham University
Daniel P. Castillo, Loyola University Maryland
Catherine Wright, Wingate University

Jeannine Hill Fletcher, in her paper, “Supremacy in the Sense of the Faithful: Theological Anthropology and the ‘Various Ranks,’” argues that while *Lumen Gentium* offers a democratic opening in its explication of *sensus fidelium*, this opening is disingenuous and dangerous. It is disingenuous because *sensus fidelium* is not a concept of democratic equality but rather one that advances an ecclesial ranking of some human beings over others. This hierarchy of ranks presumes an ontological basis. It is dangerous “in the promise of certainty that it holds,” in that that it can elevate some human beings at the expense of others. Historically, the claim to being of the one true faith, an expression of this hierarchy of rank, has had dire consequences for non-Christian, non-White populations. Moreover, this sense of supremacy continues to be advanced today (e.g., *Dominus Iesus*). Hill Fletcher examines not only Catholic theological supremacy but also White racial supremacy all the while noting connections between them. In terms of the later, she asks: “What sorts of lingering instincts of White supremacy inform interracial parishes as Catholicism in the U.S. increasingly becomes non-White?” Hill Fletcher concludes that the damage caused by a theological anthropology of the various ranks can only be addressed by first placing those who rank lowest at the center of theological work.

In his “God, the Gardener, and the Human Vocation: The Biblical Foundations of an Eco-Liberationist Theological Anthropology,” Daniel P. Castillo considers how interpretations of *imago Dei* often tend to “degrade the value of non-human creation” by advancing a narrowly anthropocentric worldview. He seeks “the foundation for an ecological theology of liberation—which is to say a theology that locates a radical commitment to both the earth and the poor within the praxis of Christian discipleship.” This, he posits, can be found in Genesis 2–4. The Genesis 2 can offer an *imago Dei* anthropology that promotes “not only human well-being and rights, but also awareness of human limits, ecological responsibility, and the interrelatedness of all creatures in the larger community of creation.” For the love of God, neighbor and creation are all necessarily and essentially interrelated. The effect of sin distorts all relationships including humanity’s relationship with creation. Indeed, the Yahwist narrative sheds light on how structural sin distorts the three modes of human relatedness, that is, in relation to God, the poor, and creation. Castillo concludes that within this narrative “the symbols of gardener, city-builder, and city present themselves as particularly important representations for shaping the *sensus fidelium* in a world characterized by the interrelated crises of material poverty and ecological degradation.”

In her presentation, “The Promise of a New Cosmological Horizon of Meaning for the Theological Concept of the *Sensus Fidelium*,” Catherine Wright has two foci: (1) teasing out new ways of understanding the term “supernatural prudence”; and (2) how the *sensus fidei fidelis* can contribute to her argument that “the universe narrative is the larger context within which our everyday lives unfold, and a thorough

understanding of this will re-animate our theological imaginations and provide new ways of understanding Jesus Christ, divine revelation, and authentic witness.” Our imaginations have atrophied in terms of how we think about our relationship to the natural world. Humans today experience themselves as alienated from the earth. The history of this alienation provides a context for appreciating the contributions of many 20th-century thinkers who have advanced the universe narrative as a cosmogenesis. This history lays the foundation for a “distinctly ecological theological anthropology” which Wright delineates through four pillars: (1) eschatological hope; (2) the intrinsic worth of creation; (3) numinous cosmic communion; and (4) the kenotic-kinetic dialectic. Indeed, an emerging planetary consciousness reframes the *sensus fidei* such that human supernatural prudence is enhanced. This serves to encourage more enlightened human action in the world.

A lively conversation followed in which questions were raised concerning how the hierarchy of ranks extends to include creation; how the naturalizing of history poses a serious challenge today; and how the International Theological Commission’s 2014 document, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, contrasts instinct and rationality in problematic fashion.

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