

CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Justice and Mercy for all of Creation: *Laudato Si'*'s Contributions to the Doctrines of Creation and Eschatology
- Convener: Mary Doak, University of San Diego
- Moderator: Steven Rodenborn, St. Edward's University
- Presenters: Gregorio Montejo, Boston College  
Wendy Crosby, Loyola University Chicago  
Abigail L. Lofte, University of St. Michael's College

This session explored the eschatological implications of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si' (On Care For Our Common Home)*. Each of the presenters sought to demonstrate that further attention to the eschatological goal of all of creation is critical if theology is to support a more sustainable future, and particularly a future in which humanity treats non-human nature more justly.

Gregorio Montejo opened the session with a defense of Thomas Aquinas as a resource for eco-theology and environmental ethics. In his paper, "Creation, Eschatology, Justice, Mercy: Thomas Aquinas in *Laudato Si'*," Montejo noted that Aquinas's theology is often judged to be too anthropocentric to be a helpful resource for today's environmental crisis. Yet, Montejo identified three crucial elements in Pope Francis's critique of anthropocentrism that draw on Thomas's theology. Claims that all of creation images the divine, that non-human creation is also proceeding with (and not only through) humanity toward a common eschatological goal, and that God is actively present sustaining the existence and growth of all of creation are Thomistic ideas deployed by Pope Francis to counter "tyrannical anthropocentrism" and to defend the intrinsic value of creation. The theology of Aquinas, Montejo argued, can thus be seen to bear the seeds of a non-anthropocentric theology that can contribute to a better, more just account of the role of humans, and their responsibility to non-human nature, in the drama of creation.

Wendy Crosby's presentation, "Theological Tensions: Ecological Justice in *Laudato Si'* and the Doctrine of Providence," further explored the relation between an anthropocentric eschatology and abuse of the environment. She contended that the doctrine of providence, the divine guidance of creation to its eschatological goal, requires more attention than is provided in the brief comments about providence in *Laudato Si'*. In particular, ecological justice would be strengthened by a retrieval of the theological sources (such as Bonaventure) that make possible a more adequate account of divine providence in which all of creation—and not only human life—is understood to have intrinsic value.

The final presentation was by Abigail Lofte and was titled "*Laudato Si'*'s Call for Christian Witness to the Gospel: Expanding our Eschatological Mission to Sustainable Living with Earth." Lofte drew attention to Pope Francis's references to the risen and glorified Word as the basis for seeing God in all things. She argued that more explicit attention to the resurrection of Christ, especially as developed in the work of Edward Schillebeeckx, is integral to an eschatology that grounds Christian commitment to justice and mercy for all of creation. She also appealed to Thomas Berry's work, especially his concept of the viable human, as an important asset for an eschatological missiology that understands the Christian mission as one of being sent

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by the risen Christ to seek a sustainable future for all of the earth as part of the New Creation begun in Christ's resurrection.

A lively conversation ensued, with much discussion of how Pope Francis's call for greater ecological responsibility might be made more specific and how Christian theology—especially eschatology—might contribute to a deeper consciousness of the interconnectedness of all of creation. Some discussion concerned how to articulate the uniqueness of the human person and whether the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value is helpful.

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