

CREATION FAITH AND THE CONTEMPORARY
CONTEXT—SELECTED SESSION

Topic:	New Applications of Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Creation
Conveners:	Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M., Boston College Kathleen McManus, O.P., University of Portland Stephan van Erp, KU Leuven
Moderator:	Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M., Boston College
Presenters:	Daniel Minch, KU Leuven Heather M. DuBois, University of Notre Dame
Respondent:	Stephan van Erp, KU Leuven

In his paper, “The Temporal and Economic Dimensions of the Ecological Crisis: The Importance of Edward’s Schillebeeckx’s Theology of Creation,” Dan Minch pointed out that Schillebeeckx never systematically articulated the meaning of “creation faith” (*scheppingsgeloof*). Nevertheless, nearly all of his major works presupposed the doctrine of creation as interrelated with Christology, soteriology and eschatology. For Minch, S.’s creation faith resists a cosmocentric, Augustinian pessimism in favor of retrieving a Thomistic anthropocentrism. Without minimizing the demonic aspects of history, S. casts them in a different light. For him, the scholastic turn emphasized the autonomy of creation, in which God placed a certain trust, extending to creatures both freedom and a responsibility for the world. God remains present in creation, but not in a way that impinges upon creation’s autonomy. For S., human finitude (or contingency) is not a flaw to be overcome, but characterizes God’s own divinely willed impotence, a yielding of power that safeguards creaturely freedom and illustrates the nature of this divine gift. Thus, salvation does not consist in God saving us from our finitude. With respect to the relationship between humanity and nature, Minch sees S. as committed to an anthropocentric view where humanity acts as nature’s protector. Unlike Aquinas, S. does not do away with plants and animals in the *eschaton*. However, since nature cannot pray, humanity mediates the covenant between God and nature. Thus, for S., “nature transcends itself in human beings, who are themselves a part of nature.” As the *symbol* of God in creation, “humans must protect nature and guard it against the chaos which human beings can make of it through misbehavior.” This causes Minch to sense a disagreement between S.’s view and the anthropology expressed in *Laudato Si’*. For Pope Francis, humans do not transcend creation altogether, since they are finite. All creatures receive their being from God and none can be said to “possess” another in an absolute sense. While S. does not deny that “each created thing gives glory to God,” he tends to regard such utterances as abstractions. Minch believes that humanity’s self-transcendence can give rise to a “downward causation” which has had terrible effects on creation. Thus, Schillebeeckx’s argument for the salvific achievement of humanity in Christ—which he refers to as “concentrated creation,” must always beware of the “hubristic short-sightedness” that Pope Francis critiques in *Laudato Si’*.

Heather DuBois’s paper, “*Extra Mundum Nulla Salus*: Edward Schillebeeckx with Judith Butler on Damaged Creation and the Mediation of Salvation,” addressed S.’s claim that, if God’s salvation is mediated in the world, then one must come to grips with the fact that we are “always already” embedded in ambivalent, material/social environments in which contradictory processes are at work. After reviewing the

Selected Session: Creation Faith and the Contemporary Context

scholarship on the role of humanity in S.'s creation-based theology, DuBois proposed the work of Judith Butler on interdependence and socio-political power as a way to re-think how salvation is mediated in and through damaged creation. She argued that Butler's "relational ontology" offers important insights into the "ubiquitous interdependence of vulnerability, 'precarity,' and the condition of the possibility of exploitation." Following Butler, DuBois claimed it is not enough, simply to call for better behavior in developing ecological sensitivity; rather, there must be collective effort to contextually disaggregate sources of power. In an analogy drawn from Butler's writing on war-making, DuBois illustrated the ambivalence of power in developing an ethic of ecological responsibility. According to DuBois, Butler says the means through which we are malformed are the same means through which we are well-formed—and through which we might be transformed. Without intending to put S. and Butler in conversation with each other (their differences are too significant), DuBois nevertheless sees them as coming to the same conclusion: we must learn to live through pluralistic dialogue and praxical solidarity, if we are to live together at all.

Stephan van Erp complemented both speakers for representing a new generation of theologians who have rediscovered Schillebeeckx as a conversation partner for constructing new theological responses to the pressing questions of our time. Noting that the focus of attention has shifted away from S.'s hermeneutics and Christology toward theological metaphysics, anthropology, and political theology, van Erp's response evoked a lively discussion.

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