

ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION, SPIRITUALITY,
AND SOLIDARITY—SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Ecological Conversion, Spirituality, and Solidarity
Convener: Christopher Vogt, St. John's University (NY)
Moderator: Nichole Flores, University of Virginia
Presenters: Christopher Vogt, St. John's University (NY)
William O'Neill, S.J., Santa Clara University

In his paper, "Ecological Conversion: A Call for Personal and Social Transformation," Christopher Vogt began with a brief discussion of the importance of repentance for conversion then examined some of the intellectual, religious, and moral dimensions of the changes that ecological conversion would require. He focused on the importance of a theological anthropology and theologies of creation that are theocentric rather than anthropocentric, emphasizing that hope for eschatological redemption extends to all of creation. Vogt asserted that the moral dimensions of ecological conversion are best understood as a call to embody virtues. He developed only one virtue in detail: solidarity. Vogt argued that traditional understandings of solidarity must be expanded beyond the recognition that each individual's good is tied up with the good of the human race to include also the affirmation that the good of both are deeply intertwined with that of the whole of creation. Solidarity requires expanding the scope of one's moral concern to include all creatures, and committing oneself to protecting and developing the common good in ways that facilitate human flourishing and the flourishing of ecosystems. More practically, it requires experiencing nature, cultivating a spirituality that reinforces human connection with the rest of creation, and social and political action to build up and protect the common good (e.g., through involvement in lay social movements).

In his presentation, "The Ethics of Our Climate: Conversion and Ecology," William O'Neill began by asking whether the spiritual could serve as a basis for an environmental ethics. He reviewed some of the "agnostic pieties" that have marginalized religion in the public sphere, reminding the audience of Max Weber's observation that our modern world is disenchanting. Divested of formal and final causality, disenchanting nature ceases to tell a moral tale; nature is objectified and practical reason reduced to technical or instrumental rationality. From this point of view, ecological appeals to religion, and *a fortiori*, to spirituality thus seem quaint—mythopoetic artifacts of an earlier ontotheological synthesis. O'Neill went on to offer an internal critique of these modern, agnostic pieties and a constructive argument for the rehabilitation of prudence. He claimed that prudence operates on complex, cultural systems of belief and that human dignity, rather than separating us from nature, must itself be embedded or inscribed in such systems. Spirituality then, as evident in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, should play a critical interpretative and justificatory role in a public, ecological ethics of care.

Discussion began with a question about intergenerational obligations. O'Neill and Vogt agreed that an understanding of the common good informed by ecological conversion must take into consideration the good of future generations of creatures. A number of participants raised questions about the possible application of rights to non-human creatures, and asked whether there was clarity about which rights might be appropriate and how they might be adjudicated vis-à-vis the rights of human beings.

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There was some agreement those questions remain unresolved and need further elaboration and development. Neil Ormerod pointed out that Vogt's paper lacked attention to issues of aesthetics. Vogt replied that attention to beauty and other issues of aesthetics were an important dimension of ecological conversion but had been omitted here in favor of more detailed consideration of expanded notions of solidarity and the common good.

The final ten minutes of the session were devoted to conversation about a 2018 conference sponsored by the Catholic Theological Ethics in a World Church Organization to be held in Sarajevo. James F. Keenan, S.J., and Linda Hogan explained that the goal of the conference is to grow a global network of theologians who work in dialogue with each other. The format of the conference will include poster sessions designed to foster conversation and engagement. The session concluded with the launch of the latest book in the CTWEC series from Orbis Press, *The Bible and Catholic Theological Ethics*.

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