

CATHOLICITY AND MISSION—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Catholicity and Mission
Convenor: Amanda Quantz, University of St. Mary
Moderator: Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, Catholic Theological Union
Presenters: Abigail Lofte, University of Saint Michael's College
Eric Martin, Fordham University
Eugene Schlesinger, Marquette University

The concerns that shaped this session were Pope Francis' commitment to restoring the fragile environment, as well as his call to turn our attention to those who are impacted by humanity's often indifferent and sometimes reckless treatment of creation. The presenters reached into the Catholic theological tradition for models and moments in which the Church witnessed effectively to humanity's potential to cooperate with God's sanctifying work in the world. Drawing on *Laudato Si'*, together they highlighted the urgency of contemporary environmental crises and Christians' responsibility to see themselves as agents of hope, change, and renewal in light of the mission of Jesus. Ultimately this is a mission that seeks to integrate faith in the sanctifying work of Christ with advocacy and justice for the environment.

Eric Martin's paper, "The Church and the Bomb: Requisite Resistance, Duty of Disarmament," began with the story of Annie Chavez, who was a child when the US government detonated the first atomic bomb in 1945 at the Trinity Site in the New Mexico desert. Recognizing that there are victims of environmental disasters who have been forgotten by the US government, Martin shared with the session participants the painful details of Annie's life, including her premature death from stomach cancer. He included Dorothy Day's observation about the absurdity of our treatment of people and the environment: "If we wouldn't put people in gas chambers, why would we fling gas chambers [nuclear bombs] at them?" He also underlined the divide between Day's faithful social ideals and one Catholic judge's interpretation of her actions during her sentencing, in which he admonished her to read the Bible. Martin also lifted up the work of the Berrigan brothers and Jonah House in Baltimore for their commitment to carrying on Day's peaceful resistance to war.

In his presentation, "*Laudato Si'* and the *Missio Dei*: Theologia, Oeconomia, Ecology," Eugene Schlesinger noted that in *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis invites the church to do the creative work needed to expand its sense of mission to include the environment. Schlesinger suggested that the church can find substantial support for this work in a trinitarian view of *missio Dei*. Exploring Thomas Aquinas' and Bernard Lonergan's accounts of the trinitarian missions, Schlesinger considers Pope Francis' view of the need for a theological ecology rather than an ecological theology. This, Pope Francis notes, is consistent with Aquinas' view of God as the first agent and of creation as an expression of God's self-communicative nature. Schlesinger reflected on the idea that as creatures who have a unique capacity to impact creation, we have in the Trinity the ideal model needed to transform our relationship to the environment, as well as an opportunity receive God's sanctifying grace by cooperating with the *missio Dei*.

Abigail Lofte's paper, "An Insufficient Community: Eco-Missiological Considerations in *Laudato Si'* for Environmental Transformation," began on a hopeful observation: that as a core tenet of Christian faith, the resurrection, is a reminder that

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the church is founded on the principle of renewal. Reflecting on the work of Schillebeeckx and Thomas Berry regarding resurrection, mission, and the viable human, she noted that the resurrection is best understood in terms of community, through which it has the strongest impact. She views an ecologically-sensitive human agenda, one hallmark of which is a symbiotic relationship between humans and the earth, as a function of ongoing discipleship. Lofte provided a timely insight in noting that it would be helpful for Pope Francis to elucidate more fully what distinguishes the Christian mission to care for the earth from a general commitment to good stewardship.

The discussion began with a salient observation that the *missio Dei* is the same in the first and twenty-first centuries. One participant requested clarification about Schlesinger's selection of Lonergan as a theological dialogue partner, rather than Rahner, who would seem an obvious choice. He explained this decision both in terms of Lonergan's continuity with Aquinas, and his emphasis on the moral-intellectual-volitional transformation of humanity, which Schlesinger recognizes as an effective model to cultivate our conversion towards a theological ecology.

AMANDA QUANTZ
*University of St. Mary,
Leavenworth, Kansas*