

CREATION AND ESCHATOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Steven Rodenborn, St. Edward's University  
Moderator: Christopher Cimorelli, Caldwell University  
Presenters: Rhodora Beaton, Aquinas Institute of Theology  
Allison Covey, Regis College at the University of Toronto  
Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., Catholic Theological Union

This session included three papers investigating the relationship between human and non-human creation in contemporary theology. Presenters turned to projects in theological anthropology, the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, and postcolonial theory to question, reframe, and challenge the legitimacy of anthropocentrism in Christian theology.

Rhodora Beaton initiated the panel with her paper, "Past, Present, Future: Chauvet's Tripod in the Key of Creation." Beaton investigated the potential of Louis-Marie Chauvet's writings to support a Christian commitment to eco-justice for all creation by placing the theologian's work on human embodiment and embodied communication in conversation with contemporary neurological research. Her analysis began with a study of Chauvet's understanding of embodied subjectivity as corporeal, capable of symbolic interaction, and existing in the context of culture, tradition, and nature. Embodiment provides both the possibility of encounter and a kind of separation or absence which characterizes our relationships with others and God. Acknowledging that this theological anthropology is most frequently employed in thinking through the divine-human relationship mediated through the sacraments, Beaton then drew attention to its potential for clarifying the position and responsibilities of humans in the world. Turning to the work of Michael Arbib, she explored the manner in which the neurobiologist's research on the co-evolution of body, brain, and social structures in a variety of species intersects with and perhaps extends Chauvet's interests. Beaton concluded by converting these points of intersection into select suggestions for repositioning Chauvet in such a way that his project might engage creation through the logic of relational exchange, decenter humans within creation without compromising human particularity, and point toward a dynamic between humans and creation in which a kind of separation or absence mediates a relationship of respect.

In her presentation, "Toppling Humanity's Throne: *Imago Trinitatis* as Remedy for Theological Anthropocentrism," Allison Covey explored the capacity of the *Imago Dei* tradition to assert an equitable view of creation yet affirm a unique role for humans among created beings. She began by noting that scientists, philosophers, and theologians have long attempted to secure the superiority of humans over other animals with now tenuous claims to distinctive physiological or cognitive capabilities. Seeking to overcome this conflation of biology and the *Imago Dei*, Covey drew on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and John Zizioulas to characterize the *Imago Dei* as a theocentric rather than anthropocentric quality. She analyzed Balthasar's work on the *Imago Trinitatis* and the capacity of the human person and the whole of the cosmos to reflect, though blurred, the reality of the trinitarian life. Finding in that work a constructive relational ontology, Covey then turned to Zizioulas to develop a theological anthropology in which the human person is cognitively and genetically continuous with other animals yet possesses a unique vocation to become a Priest of Creation, consecrating the world to Christ. Here, Covey observes, the *Imago Dei*

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reflects the human capacity to unite the world to itself and to God. The human, then, serves rather than exercises instrumental dominion over creation and will find fulfillment only by taking account and care of non-human members of creation.

In the final presentation, “Deconstructing Anthropocentric Privilege: Reframing the Imago Dei and Nonhuman Agency through a Postcolonial Lens,” Daniel Horan took as his starting point the need to correct a pervasive anthropocentrism found in Christian theologies of creation and to reframe the Imago Dei to include non-human as well as human creatures. In response to this concern, Horan proposes that an anthropocentric privilege mars theology and requires critical unmasking. Analogous to other forms of systematic privilege (e.g., racial, gender, religion, and sexual orientation), an anthropocentric privilege compromises the ability of humans to recognize the interrelationship they share with non-human creatures. In theology, this privilege is seen in the restriction of the tradition of the Imago Dei to humans. Horan examines the propensity of anthropocentric privilege to function according to the logic of colonization, inscribing hierarchical and epistemological presuppositions in oppressive systems, and subsequently turns to postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “unlearning one’s privilege as one’s loss” as a process by which the dismissal of non-human creature may be recognized. In doing this, Horan suggests, humans may free their imaginations to see more clearly non-human creatures as capable of cognition, moral reasoning, emotion, and imaging the divine.

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