

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY—TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Natalia M. Imperatori-Lee
Moderator: Natalia M. Imperatori-Lee
Presenters: Thomas Ryan, Loyola University of New Orleans
Meghan J. Clark, St. John's University
Respondent: Joan Brown, O.S.F., New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light

Tom Ryan of Loyola University New Orleans argued for making the theme of creation more central to practical theology. His paper, "Creation as Integral to Practical Theology," reviewed the Loyola Institute for Ministry's long commitment to practical theology and then described the impact the addition of creation to its theological method has had on its graduates and curricula. This addition has not come without difficulties yet he pointed out that framing the human reality as derivative in relation to the rest of creation, seeing humans in solidarity with the rest of creation, and including a theological aesthetics of creation within practical theology have been and could be fruitful strategies for a practical theological engagement with creation.

Meghan Clark's paper, "Incarnational Solidarity: Encountering Homeless Persons in Rome and Albuquerque," laments the lack of attention in Catholic social teaching to persons experiencing homelessness, and highlights Pope Francis' efforts to take up the plight of the homeless as a cornerstone of his incarnational solidarity. To begin, she explored city-government initiatives in Albuquerque aiming to help people experiencing homelessness transition to stable work and shelter. This program, along with the Vatican's outreach to the homeless through the office of the Papal Almoner, exemplify two avenues which emphasize the human dignity of those suffering from homelessness. Clark sees these as particularly helpful illustrations of solidarity that echo the Incarnation: a solidarity that centers on human dignity, prioritizes dialogue, and foregrounds Francis' notion of encounter.

Sr. Joan Brown, a Franciscan sister and local activist, responded to both papers with a presentation of the work she is doing with New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light. As part of a group of faith-centered activism, NMIPL takes up issues related to the degradation of the environment in New Mexico and the surrounding areas. Emphasizing prayer and ritual alongside social action, NMIPL encourages people of faith to support initiatives such as an Earth Sabbath, the installation of solar panels and continued LEED certification for buildings associated with religious organizations. Sr. Brown noted that Catholics have lagged behind other faith groups when it comes to environmental concern and activism, but is hopeful that Pope Francis' leadership in *Laudato Si'* will foment a desire to bridge the gap between charity and ecology.

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The conversation that followed explored a variety of themes including the relationship between sacraments, liturgy, and ecological destruction; the hierarchical understanding many Catholics have with respect to social action and activism; and the need for Catholic institutions of higher education to partner with organizations like NMIPL in creative ways. The session ended with a rich conversation that confirmed practical theology's commitment to experience, to the local, and to the need for the ongoing interaction of teaching and research with transformative practices.

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