

CREATION/ESCHATOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

- Topic: Orthodox–Catholic dialogue in honor of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea
- Conveners: Daniel P. Scheid, Duquesne University
 Paul Schutz, Santa Clara University
 Kathleen McNutt, Marquette University
- Moderator: Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University
- Presenters: Jack Pappas, Fordham University
 Sarah Livick-Moses, Gannon University

In response to the conference theme of “One Baptism,” this panel focused on Orthodox–Catholic dialogue in honor of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Unfortunately, Anne Carpenter was not able to attend the convention, so the session consisted of two papers and a lengthy discussion afterwards.

Jack Pappas from Fordham University presented a paper entitled “‘In My End is My Beginning:’ Creation and the Image of God in Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.” Pappas begins with a common theme in Catholic and Orthodox theology, the radical otherness of God the Creator from creation. This general understanding, he proposes, is often rooted in the Nicene doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. Instead, Pappas contends that within the Eastern Christian theological tradition there is a basis for articulating a protological and eschatological identity between the Creator and creation. Pappas focuses on the figures of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, who each understand the whole of creation not as an abstract or self-enclosed reality in which God intervenes, but as the very unfolding of the relation between the Father and the Son within time. In doing so, Pappas demonstrates how Eastern theologies of creation can potentially offer a corrective to classical Western accounts of the relationship between Creator and creature that is both in continuity with the shared conciliar tradition and resonates with the work of more recent Roman Catholic and Orthodox thinkers.

The second panelist was Sarah Livick-Moses, Assistant Professor at Gannon University, who presented her paper entitled, “The Drama of Creation: Bulgakov, Balthasar, and the Promise of Ecumenical Ecotheology.” Contemporary ecological concerns offer a particularly fertile ground for dialogue between Orthodox and Catholic theologians as they both retrieve and reinterpret the doctrine of creation. In her paper, Livick-Moses explores how the theologies of Sergius Bulgakov and Hans Urs von Balthasar illuminate creation as both divine gift and human responsibility. Bulgakov’s Sophiology and Balthasar’s Christological aesthetics converge in a vision of creation that is sacramental, dynamic, and deeply participatory—especially around the category of kenosis. A theology of creation rooted in kenosis opens up ecumenical dialogue at both doctrinal and constructive levels. In both Bulgakov’s Sophiology and Balthasar’s theodrama, *creatio ex nihilo* grounds a shared commitment to creaturely participation in God and provides a promising avenue for thinking ecotheologically across ecumenical boundaries. By drawing on both historical and contemporary theological perspectives, Livick-Moses considers how a renewed theology of creation

can contribute not only to doctrinal and theological collaboration, but also to a shared Christian response to the ecological crisis.

Our guest moderator for this session was Aristotle Papanikolaou, who is the co-founding Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University. There was a spirited discussion afterwards, with many who were well versed in Orthodox theology generally and in the figures of Gregory, Maximus, Bulgakov, and Balthasar particularly. Given Carpenter's absence, Papanikolaou was able to intervene and pose detailed questions on the evolution of Bulgakov's thought, specific points of disagreement between Balthasar and Bulgakov, and how modern theologians differed in their reading of the Patristic fathers. The session proved not only a robust appreciation in the CTSA for the doctrine of creation and how it has been expressed in various historical periods, but also for a candid dialogue between Catholic and Orthodox theologians on points of consensus and divergence.

Thanks to Jack Pappas and Sarah Livick-Moses for their assistance in summarizing their arguments.

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