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Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of LMU Theological Studies

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Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of LMU Theological Studies

Introduction

Cecilia González-Andrieu

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of LMU Theological Studies*. I wish I could tell you that we held a fabulous launch party for the Journal, rejoicing in the completion of this our very first issue, but the truth is much more complicated. Perhaps, an unintended gift of our turbulent times is that telling the truth has become a conscious act of resistance, and because of this our theological inquiry has become urgently embedded within our pastoral action-in-the-world. As we research and write, we do so from a troubling context that can no longer afford to feign “neutrality” or pretend that theological research does not have real and vital applications to our common life. At this moment in our collective history, there is little rejoicing.

As a scholar who works in the field of theological aesthetics, I continue to argue against the idea of “art for art’s sake,” and join the work of Alejandro García-Rivera¹, William Dyrness², Kimberly Vrudny³ and many others in recovering what we call creative making as vitally interlaced with the joys and sorrows of human life. In referencing the arts, we replace the idea of “disinterested” enjoyment of what is beautiful, with the indispensable quality of experiencing beauty as an intrinsic good required for a full human life. In this we understand aesthetics and ethics as inextricably joined. Thus, we propose that “art is for humanity’s sake,” or even more expansively, that “art is for the cosmos’ sake.”

With this issue, we add a different type of “art”— our scholarship and writing as it reflects on the beautiful and fragile cosmos. It is this cosmos that we understand as God’s ultimate act of creativity. Our writing is a creative and original way to engage with what is real and celebrate the robustly unbreakable connections between beauty, truth and goodness. The undergraduate student authors in this issue invite you to journey with them into their lives and questions. They provide us with clear-eyed assessments and theological reflections from young people viewing the world and the

¹ Among his important works see: Alex García-Rivera, *A wounded innocence: sketches for a theology of art* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

² William A. Dyrness, *Senses of the soul: art and the visual in Christian worship* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2008).

³ Kimberly J. Vrudny, *Beauty's vineyard: a theological aesthetic of anguish and anticipation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, a Michael Glazier Book, 2016).

theological task from multiple vantage points. Their final goal: to illuminate that which harms or heals our common home in all its complicated beauty, and to offer theological reflection about why this matters in an ultimate sense.

That Was Then

We began our semester buoyed by two globally significant developments in relation to the planet’s health: The Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* (May, 2015)⁴, followed by the Paris Agreement (December, 2015).⁵ The Paris Agreement, drafted at a gathering of 197 nations and ratified as of press time by 134, constitutes the “first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal.”⁶ It was ratified by the United States on Sept 3, 2016.

The Paris Agreement builds upon the Convention and – for the first time – brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.⁷

Laudato Si is Pope Francisco’s articulate and interdisciplinary theological reflection and teaching about the dangers facing the survival of the global human family. Underscoring the primacy of the Catholic Church’s option for the poor, the Pontiff is concerned especially with its most vulnerable members as the structures of power and greed collude to destroy the one beautiful home we have. The Encyclical was received with enthusiasm around the globe, lending profound moral authority to what some falsely reduce to a “politically motivated” environmental movement. As Pope Francisco makes abundantly clear, caring for our world is a moral act of resistance against sin.

If we approach nature and the environment without [an] openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs (*LS* 11).

⁴ See: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

⁵ See: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

⁶ See: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/paris_en

⁷ United Nations Framework. Mauritania became the latest signatory shortly before press time.

This is Now

The end of the year 2016 ushered in a very different world. Yet, we can't claim total surprise at its rise. Pope Francisco and countless other voices around the globe had been sounding loud alarm bells for years. The election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency of the United States and the popularity of similar ideologies in Europe, have ushered in a time of extraordinary greed. We are experiencing a turning away from a project that understands the human race to share a common humanity and the earth to be our common home. Again, as Pope Francisco warned,

...a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves (*LS* 34).

As we go to press with this journal, the Trump Administration has announced major regulatory changes and proposed a budget that slashes funding for key agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. As *National Geographic* reports, what has been unleashed is “a triple whammy: cutting EPA, cutting very effective programs, and cutting substantially the state and local programs.”⁸ The attack on the environment from the Trump Administration is clearly fueled (pun intended) by the desire to increase profits from multinational businesses exploiting and selling fossil fuels. There is also a clear interest in increasing the exploitation of other national resources, such as national parks, and to artificially prop up dying industries contributing to climate change, such as coal. Even more troubling is that the budget cuts to programs meant to care for our common home will redirect our tax dollars to defense spending and to what destroys our common home. As the *Wall Street Journal* reports,

The Trump plan targets the EPA for the steepest cuts. It would defund the Clean Power Plan, meant to get states to cut carbon emissions; international climate-change programs; regional environmental efforts for the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay and other areas; and another 50 initiatives such as the Energy Star program of rating appliances for energy efficiency.⁹

⁸ Greshko, Michael “What you need to know about Trump’s proposed climate cuts,” *National Geographic* online, March 10, 2017. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/03/trump-cuts-epa-noaa-environmental-science-climate-change-impacts/>

⁹ Sparshott, Jeffrey and Ted Mann. "U.S. News: Budget Plan Slashes EPA, Aids Military --- Foreign Aid, the Arts, Public Broadcasting and Education are also on the Chopping Block." *Wall Street Journal*, Mar 16, 2017, Eastern edition. <http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1877714341?accountid=7418>.

The budget cuts and efforts at deregulation may almost be read as the word-by-word opposite of what Pope Francisco has defined as humanity’s responsibility to God’s vision as it is lived out in our earth and with one another. If Pope Francisco has put forth an image of a common humanity with our eyes and shoulders put steadfastly to the work of helping to usher in the kingdom of God as the ultimate act of faith, the Trump initiatives against the climate constitute a war on God’s kingdom and the work to establish an anti-kingdom. It is in this painful environment where our earth and its most vulnerable people cry out to God that we as theologians write, minister and pray. We hope future generations will look back on this time and see how people of good will all over the planet resisted the destruction of our world and built bonds of solidarity to work for its protection. At this juncture, we discern, we judge and then we work as we join Pope Francisco’s prayer as he closes *Laudato Si*,

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you! (*LS* 246)

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