

'Green Theology' Emerging 21st Century Muslim and Christian Discourses on Ecology

International Conference
Cambridge, 30-31 March 2019

Identifying and articulating the various ways by which human beings inhabit and correspond with the natural world is a major preoccupation of world religions. The indelible connections which forge these relations are often accounted for by stories of creation and grand narratives which help elucidate the roles and responsibilities bestowed upon humans. The Abrahamic traditions which form a significant part of this discourse have variously dissected the means by which the 'Great Chain of Being' helps explain the existence of life through a benevolent creator. These attempts, discussed in reference to, amongst other things, as harmony (*musica universalis*), balance (*mizan*), stewardship (Qur'an 2:30 and Genesis 2:15) etc., all provide a sacred canopy through which we understand the world and our place therein. In the contemporary world, as claims supporting such traditional cosmologies are challenged by the directives of natural science, ideas of the sanctity of nature, human custodianship and the *mysteria* imbued in nature bear little, if any, resonance. Amongst the pressing cases where this rupture can be felt most sharply are global discourses on ecology, climate change, pollution, deforestation and forced immigration, all of which seem indifferent to potential theological contributions.

Ecology, echoing the importance of *oikos* as 'dwelling or habitation', confronts the human subject with the existential question of life and its continuation. To this end, and not without irony, it is the 'Anthropocene Age', which the international geological community now claims, which defines the present state of the earth, seen as one distinguished solely by the deleterious impact of human beings. Despite the limited role of religious discourses in these debates, modern ecology intimates questions about the nature of existence, life and consciousness, which demand theological responses. The idea of humanity as created in the 'image' of God and in Whom the subtleties of the cosmos subsist and are reflected comprises a longstanding tradition within Islamic-Christian thought. How such an anthropocentric orientation of the cosmos, tempered by Divine precedence, might offer a rapprochement with ecological questions of the day forms a propitious and pressing challenge for theological and interfaith debate in the 21st century.

Furthering the rich intellectual exchange held in Tübingen (March, 2018) on Theological Anthropology, this conference intends to continue the contribution of theological voices engaged in historical interfaith dialogues to contemporary debates. Drawing upon the rich heritage of theological deliberations upon the role, character and significance of nature, how these may bear on the ecological discourses of the 21st century frames the concerns of the conference. In so doing, this event will uniquely gather academics and experts from Christian and Islamic traditions as a means towards making decisive interventions in what and how ecology can be understood and deliberated upon.

Suggested Conference Panels

Panel 1 *Homo Sensibilis*: Harmony and Chaos in the Cosmos

This panel shall endeavour to open theologically-sensitive discussions concerning the cosmos and ecology. What roles, for example, have beauty, harmony, order and chaos played in the articulation of creation by religious discourses and what might this mean for a due human comportment towards it? What such possibilities might tell us about the Divine intention in creation within Christian and Islamic traditions forms the concern of this panel.

Panel 2 **Theologies of Nature: Divine Stewardship & Anthropocentrism**

Christian and Islamic discourses on human nature often begin with the importance of 'being made in the Divine Image'. The theological consequences of such an idea and its relations to a broader cosmological narrative are the running themes of this panel. A cosmos in which the human being stands at the centre necessarily entails certain responsibilities and ontological privileges. How religious discourses have attempted to reconcile the role of human beings in sustaining creation as well as mastering it is the preoccupation of presentations here.

Panel 3 **'Mother Nature': Poetics of Self in Nature**

Imaginary and cultured personifications of self in the natural order indicate how human beings have seen and continue to view themselves within the world. What are the implications of ideas of 'fallenness' and sin for ontologies of nature? This panel will interrogate the role of gender, images and sainthood within these discussions and what it might mean to spiritually 'transcend' nature as well as the natural state of the human subject.

Panel 4 **Thinking and Becoming: Animals & Non-Animal Life**

The vast diversity of life is the theme of this panel. From animals to non-animated entities, theologians and philosophers have discussed the idea of life in multifarious ways. Whilst discussions premised on the soul, consciousness and language have been used to arbitrate between living and non-living entities, what these discussions may tell us about a theology of life, which perseveres beyond humans, draws upon larger and important questions.

Panel 5 **Environment, Economics and Theology**

The increasing effects of global human activity in the 21st century have given cause to rethink traditional theological ideas about the role, place and status of the human being in the world. This panel will focus on dialoguing theological as well as interfaith perspectives with issues ranging from climate change, architecture, poverty and global health, in the hope of offering theologically-inspired responses to such challenges.

Tentative Conference Programme

Day 1

Conference Opening

PANEL 1: *Homo Sensibilis*: Harmony and Chaos in the Cosmos

PANEL 2: Theologies of Nature: Divine Stewardship & Anthropocentrism

PANEL 3: 'Mother Nature': Poetics of Self in Nature

Day 2

PANEL 4: Thinking and Becoming: Animals & Non-Animal Life

PANEL 5: Environment, Economics and Theology

VISIT: Cambridge 'Eco' Mosque for **Plenary Discussion**

Conference Close