

Artist Makoto Fujimura links culture care and creation care

October 29, 2018

WACO—A visual artist cited the work of a reclusive 19th century New England poet and a 20th century marine biologist to connect culture care to creation care.

The writings of poet Emily Dickinson and conservationist Rachel Carson and their shared appreciation for the beauty of creation offer guideposts to help Christians navigate the divided terrain created by culture wars, artist Makoto Fujimura told a Baylor University symposium.

Describing God as “the poet who sang creation into being,” Fujimura linked stewardship of creation and stewardship of culture.



Makoto Fujimura, director of the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary, delivered the Carl F.H. Henry Lecture at the annual Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Fujimura pointed to culture care as an act of generosity that sees the world not as a battleground in which people are competing for limited resources but as an “abundant ecosystem” filled with possibility and promise. He emphasized the “generative” and life-giving role of art that offers a foretaste of the New Creation.

Fujimura, director of the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary and author of *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life*, delivered the Carl F.H. Henry Lecture at the annual Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture.

‘Consider the lilies’

Dickinson composed more than 1,800 poems in about six years, but none of her neighbors in Amherst, Mass., knew her as a poet, Fujimura said. Instead, they knew her as a baker and a master gardener. Dickinson, a deeply spiritual but not conventionally religious person, named one commandment she was able to keep: “Consider the lilies.”

In her garden, she witnessed a hummingbird seeking nectar and wrote, “The Humming-bird,” which Fujimura examined line by line.

“Emily Dickinson acutely observed a singular, momentary event, only seconds long, and she expanded the glimpse of that micro-experience,” he said. “This is the nature of the poetic gift. The poet takes quick glance, a moment most of us would not even see, and expands it to a cosmic level of significance.”

Carson provided language for creation

care

Fujimura compared Dickinson's focus on the "minute particularities" of what she saw in her garden to the attention Carson paid to the tiniest lifeforms in the ocean, as she described them in *The Sea Around Us*.

"If Dickinson considered the lilies, Carson considered the ocean with scientific precision," he said.

In *Silent Spring*, Carson exposed the damage DDT and other pesticides were causing the environment. Through her "prophetic" writing, she gave birth to the modern environmental movement, Fujimura said.

"Before Rachel Carson, we had no language for creation care," he said.

The carefully chosen words of Dickinson and Carson had generative power as they called attention to the beauty of creation, even lifting readers into "an upward vortex toward the new creation," Fujimura said.

The "exiled voices" of artists "on the margins" who awaken a sense of wonder and awe have the power to bring healing to a politically fractured culture, he asserted.

"Stewardship of creation needs to be led by poets," he said.