

RESURRECTION–INTERRUPTION–TRANSFORMATION:
 INCARNATION AS HERMENEUTICAL STRATEGY

Convener: Anthony J. Godzieba, Villanova University
 Moderator: Michael Lee, Fordham University
 Presenters: Lieven Boeve, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
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 Respondent: Michele Saracino, Manhattan College

Christ's bodily resurrection at the beginning and belief in the resurrection of the body at the "end" of Christianity structure all of Christian life in between. This *inclusio* is the source of Christianity's fundamental commitment to incarnation and sacramentality, and impels Catholic theology to deal productively with the issues of embodiment and particularity. These aspects have been noticeably missing in postmodern discussions of theology and religious experience, which have tended to be "dis-embodied" and dismissive of specific religious traditions in favor of (ironically) general "theories" of religion. The presenters at this session argued for the important intervention of Catholic fundamental theology in this discussion, and especially for the employment of "incarnation" as a fundamental hermeneutical strategy, in order to develop a more adequate response to the embodied religious experience of Christians and the particularity of the Catholic sacramental imagination.

Godzieba (" 'Stay with us . . . ' (Luke 24:29)—'Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev 22:20): Incarnation, Eschatology, and Theology's Sweet Predicament") argued that Christ's resurrection, especially in its revelational particularity and confirmation of embodiment's possibilities, demands the development of a fully incarnational theology. Indeed, the resurrection is the intensification of the possibilities revealed in the incarnation. Both incarnation and resurrection locate divine presence *somewhere* in history, thus giving embodied particularity revelational value. Christian life and theology necessarily occur in "the luxurious and productive tension" between incarnation and eschatology—that is, between the desire for and recognition of the certainty of divine presence as mediated by historically-situated embodiment, and the acknowledgment that the fullness of divine presence will occur only at the eschaton. If theology were to fully activate the incarnational imagination, embodiment and particularity would be seen as the necessary preconditions for all the theological loci. Theological anthropology would be seen as fundamental theology and thereby provide a basis for a post-postmodern Christian humanism to which Catholic theologians from all across the spectrum could commit themselves.

Boeve ("Resurrection: Saving Particularity. Theological-Epistemological Considerations on Incarnation and Truth") focused on the problem of interreligious dialogue and proposed a way in which Christians can acknowledge their own truth claims while respecting the truth claims of others. He argued that the very particularity from which the Christian truth claim derives is irreducibly constitutive of the truth of Christian faith. Neither the inclination to universalize this truth claim (ex-

clusivism and inclusivism) nor the tendency to negate it (pluralism) can do it justice. The doctrine of incarnation signifies more than simply “the particular is the vessel of the universal.” Rather, it indicates that the particular is constitutive of the truth. Truth is real, concrete, incarnate, and can only be grasped as such. Therefore, Christology is the cornerstone of all theology and is necessary for a clear understanding of what, in theological terms, is the truth. By reinforcing the view that belief in Christ implies a very particular interpretation of history and reality, the resurrection confirms and supplements the theological-epistemological link between incarnation and truth—it “saves” particularity. For us human beings embedded in our particular histories, the risen Jesus opens up a future beyond death, not by lifting us out of particularity, but by healing and transforming it into life in plenitude.

In her response, Michele Saracino agreed with Godzieba’s call for an incarnational and eschatological hermeneutic as way out of the postmodern/radical orthodoxy strangle-hold. Thinking about the shape of his new anthropological subject, however, she wondered what the embodied subject of his post-postmodern theology would look like, since bodies signify a diversity of meanings, leading to issues related to power and authority. In reaction to Boeve, Saracino supported his argument that genuine interreligious dialogue must grapple with the incarnation. Any avoidance of this, Saracino granted, results in Christians watering down their religious convictions. At the same time, embracing the notion of a God who becomes human, as illustrated in the gospels, leaves Christians with no choice but to engage otherness of all kinds with respect and compassion. Saracino insisted that the embodied dialogue that Boeve calls for would undoubtedly be complicated by affective dissonance at the borders of self and Other. For Saracino, these visceral border disputes must be acknowledged and even embraced in any incarnational hermeneutic.

In the interesting discussion period that followed, one questioner called for a further particularizing of Godzieba’s proposed theological anthropology (echoing Saracino’s critique), while another wanted more details regarding Boeve’s epistemology of interreligious dialogue. The session ended with a comment from the floor that this discussion about incarnation, sacramentality, and particularity pursued by all three panelists was precisely what Catholic theology and the Church needed at the present, a point that met with agreement throughout the room.

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