

CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

Topic: Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity
 Convener: Elena G. Procario-Foley, Iona College
 Moderator: Kathleen Flanagan, College of St. Elizabeth
 Presenter: Claudia Setzer, Manhattan College
 Respondents: Gerard Sloyan, The Catholic University of America
 and Georgetown University
 Mary Doak, University of Notre Dame

The genesis of this selected session rests with the ongoing efforts of a group of CTSA members to form a developing group in Christian-Jewish Relations. The group began as a selected session at the 2004 meeting. Those of us who helped plan this session (including Elizabeth Groppe, who convened the 2004 group, and others too numerous to mention here) are indebted to guest-scholar Claudia Setzer for donating her time and sharing her expertise with us. In a happy convergence of events, the convention's resurrection theme provided our (at this stage) informal interest group the opportunity to spend a session discussing Setzer's recent book *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Brill Academic Publishers, August 2004).

Setzer provided us with an overview of her research and conclusions explaining that her interest in the topic was sparked by Caroline Walker Bynums's work on resurrection of the body, by recognizing the definitive value of the belief for many early Jews and Christians, and because it is an "optimistic expression of human hope." Her research incorporated the social sciences, studies in rhetoric, and the social-political interpretations of Richard Horsley and Neil Elliott.

Setzer describes resurrection of the body as a rich symbol that functions to define community identity and draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for both the early Jewish and Christian communities. For instance, the Mishnah does not count the one who denies the resurrection as a sinner, but rather dismisses that person from Israel. Resurrection operates as a powerful principle of identity because it condenses a number of other beliefs coalescing around the central belief in the power of a creator God. Setzer identifies five beliefs: God's power and providence; the unity of body and soul; the desire for justice; resurrection is proved by scripture; and the legitimacy of those who preach resurrection. Consequently, Setzer describes resurrection as "a highly developed condensation symbol" that "boils down to a creation theology that asserts God's power and providence as creator and the fundamental value of the created world, including the body."

Setzer observes that while there is a great deal of similarity between Jewish and Christian understandings of the resurrection, the early Christians generated a more sophisticated apologetic for the belief. She explains that Christians had a greater need to explain the concept because they needed to confront pagan accusations more directly and because they were quickly absorbing more new members than the Jewish community. While Christians needed to define themselves as distinct from

the surrounding Greco-Roman culture, Judaism enjoyed the benefit of antiquity and was already viewed as a distinct culture and lifestyle needing no explanation. Gerard Sloyan and Mary Doak offered responses that expanded the discussion in thoughtful and creative ways. Sloyan provocatively began by stating that he firmly believes that if Jesus had not been experienced as both brutally bludgeoned by the Empire *and* as resurrected, we would not have heard of him. Sloyan noted that while “Jesus’ teaching was sublime,” resurrection was at the heart of early Christian preaching. The point is that what God has done makes an enormous difference in the lives of Jews, Christians, and Gentiles alike. Early liturgical references to the resurrection comprised a good deal of Sloyan’s remarks. He remarked that there is a tradition that Easter commemorates both Jesus’ resurrection and ours. At the moment, Sloyan observed, this tradition is a tender plant for preaching, but he concluded with a fervent hope that the plant would grow.

Mary Doak posed a series of powerful questions, of which only three will be noted here. Reflecting on the eschatological significance of resurrection belief, Doak asked how the very particular differences involved (hope for Israel, hope in the event of Jesus Christ) factor into understanding the difference “these beliefs make for the constellation of beliefs in which resurrection hope appears in each community.” Secondly, Doak challenged us to consider how Christian eschatological thought might need to be revised in light of the recent Christian recognition that the Jews have not lost their covenant with God. Finally, in light of Setzer’s suggestion that resurrection no longer functions as the identity-maker it once did, Doak asked what are the central defining beliefs today that define Jews and Christians to themselves, each other, and to the wider community. Setzer’s work, according to Doak, involves implications for articulating contemporary constellations of belief that demarcate our identities and will help determine the course for interreligious dialogue.

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