

DEVELOPING GROUPS

THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

Topic: Relating Theology and Ecology to the Resurrection of the Body
Conveners: Jame Schaefer, Marquette University
Peter Ellard, Siena College
Moderator: Alex Mikulich, Saint Joseph College
Presenters: Aurelie A. Hagstrom, Providence College
Colleen Carpenter Cullinan, EarthRise Farm

In a presentation entitled “Resurrection of the Body and Ecology: Eschatology, Cosmic Redemption, and an Eco-Feminist Retrieval of the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” Hagstrom began from three related premises. (1) The whole of creation is included in God’s creative/redemptive plan through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (2) The theological locus of the process of cosmic recapitulation is the glorified body of the risen Lord. (3) The culmination of this process will be the *Parousia*.

She proceeded to use the dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary as a test case for a Christian response to the present ecological crisis. Among the questions she posed were: How can the traditional dogma of the Assumption of Mary be retrieved to engage the eco-feminist concern that the domination of women and the exploitation of nature are connected? What are the implications for a theology of ecology if Mary’s body is in solidarity with all of material creation and is now “fully united with God in Heaven”? When answering these questions, she wove her own thinking with works by Anne Carr, Sara Jane Boss, Carol Dempsey, Sheila McGinn, and Barbara Bowe.

The principal argument of her paper was that the dogma of the Assumption reveals the great capacity for material creation to be glorified and joined together with God and thereby opens the way for the whole physical cosmos to follow. She stressed convincingly that retrieving the dogma of the Assumption in the context of a “green Mariology” and a dynamic eschatology can help fashion a theology of ecology.

Cullinan reflected on three works by Terry Tempest Williams to provide a thought-provoking paper entitled “Red Is the Color of the Morning: Resurrection in the Writings of Terry Tempest Williams.” Williams wrote about death: the death of her mother, the deaths of wildlands and wild creatures, the death of cultures and cultural memory. Strangely, however, Williams is known for writing not about despair, but instead about hope. The living hope pulsing throughout her writing is, according to our second presenter, a dramatic expression of a particular way of seeing the world which constitutes a mode of vision that is rooted in the memory and promise of resurrection.

To establish the significance of being aware of the context within which Williams wrote, Cullinan began by playing a recording of Bernice Johnson Reagon’s “I Remember I Believe” which participants in the session were drawn into

singing. She proceeded to provide a brief overview of the theology and spirituality of resurrection in Williams's works, focusing on the idea that resurrection and new life are not limited only to the past (Jesus) and the future (the coming kingdom of God) but, instead, exist today in glimpses, foretastes, and parables that we can see only with Easter eyes.

Subsequently, Cullinan discussed the significance for the doctrine of the resurrection of the body that Williams' *Refuge*, *Red*, and *Leap* provide. She outlined the context within which Williams wrote each of these works, enabling our more cogent understanding of their meaning and importance. Throughout her presentation, she stressed the deeply contemplative engagement with the world that Williams demonstrated in each work which calls the reader to a mode of vision, rooted in resurrection hope, that persistently seeks out the fragile new flowering of life in the midst of death.

Cullinan ended her presentation with a personal reflection on the context of the place in which she works at EarthRise Farm and her life in an economically challenged western Minnesota rural community. She shared how her initial reaction to her life there changed over time as she became increasingly aware of the signs of hope that surfaced, signs that she identified as "parables of God's kingdom" on earth. She urged us to pay attention to the truth and details of our situatedness so we also can discern parables of God's kingdom in our lives.

The lively discussion that followed demonstrated the participants' high level of engagement with the two presentations. One participant noted the similarity of Hagstrom's contemporary thinking with John Duns Scotus's teachings on the resurrection of Jesus, which Hagstrom acknowledged but stressed her own desire to explore the assumption of Mary for its significance for a theology of ecology. Another participant thought she could accomplish with reflection on the Incarnation as "God with us" what Hagstrom accomplished with Jesus' Resurrection, though she again pointed to her interest in the Assumption as an opening to reflect on hope amidst death. Hagstrom's use of "perfection" language was problematic for another participant which led to considering "holiness" as a more fruitful concept in the Catholic tradition. Finally, when pressed about the emphasis Cullinan placed on contemplation at a time when activism on behalf of the natural environment is needed, she reinforced the fact that Williams' attentiveness to the wildlands of Utah led to her persistent political advocacy for their protection.

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