

SELECTED SESSIONS

CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Convener: Colleen M. Griffith, Boston College

Moderator: Jennifer L. S. Bader, Boston College

Presenters: Colleen M. Griffith, Boston College

Nancy Pineda-Madrid, St. Mary's College and Boston College

Jessica Wormley-Murdoch, University of Notre Dame

This session offered a thought-provoking consideration of “resurrection of the body” from the contextual standpoints of human bodiliness (Griffith), sociocultural location (Pineda-Madrid), and postmodern time (Wormley Murdoch). How does “Resurrection of the Body,” understood in inaugural eschatological terms, serve to orient human bodily life? How does Guadalupe become a symbol of collective resurrection hope for U.S. Latinos/as? What are current warrants for and difficulties with “Resurrection of the Body” within postmodernity?

In her paper “The Practice of Resurrection: Eschatological Hope for Human Bodily Being,” Colleen Griffith reflected on the classic Christian claim for resurrection of the body from the standpoint of existential bodily life. Griffith proposed that intentional consideration of this tenet of faith from the context of the lived body yields a more fleshly view of it. She raised and addressed three questions. (1) Does the eschatological claim for resurrection of the body serve to orient persons’ bodily lives in meaningful ways? Is it, in other words, “good news” for the body? (2) What, in fact, is the bodily dimension of the life-to-come? (3) What does it mean to practice resurrection of the body in the here and now?

In response to her first question, Griffith answered both “no” and “yes.” She does not see the symbol to be helpful in orienting human bodiliness if it is expressed in either entirely futurist eschatological terms or completely realized terms. Nor does she find it helpful when this tenet of faith gets coupled with immortality of the soul, providing legitimation yet again for the hierarchically ordering of body and soul. Rather she favors a presentation of resurrection of the body in inaugural eschatological terms, one that leans closer to the notion “resurrection of the dead” and points to a way into the future to be lived and practiced now.

Regarding the bodily life of the world to come, Griffith insisted upon defining the hopes within us regarding bodily life, “lest we consign resurrection of the body to silence, sentencing it to minimal relevance, assuring it a place in a dust-filled corner of the attic of our tradition.” Drawing upon the work of Grace Jantzen, Griffith elaborated upon the biblically rooted notion of “flourishing” in this regard. Finally then, in her clear commitment to keep doctrine wed to spiritual practice, Griffith offered four specific practices involving a thinking and acting “from the other end,” a “bringing of a strong bodily hermeneutic to the realities of history in light of what awaits us.”

In her presentation, “Guadalupe: Resurrection Midst the Body Social,” Nancy Pineda-Madrid proposed that Guadalupan devotion expresses “a profound

recognition of eschatological hope because this devotion signifies the birth of the coming Reign of God in the present moment.” To contextualize her proposal she began by sharing a contemporary account of the devotion in which a *promesa* (promise) is made and a *milagro* (miracle) results. Three points were made in support of this proposal. First, the devotion to Guadalupe is best understood as an interpretation of the past (i.e., the original account set in 1531 of Guadalupe’s appearances and the resultant healings), toward the future (i.e., the realization of the Reign of God in its fullness), yet in the present (i.e., the experience of God’s Reign proleptically through promise and miracle.) Therefore Guadalupan devotions “serve not only as a public account of the community’s history of healings but also as a beacon of hope that future petitions will likewise be answered.”

Moreover, Pineda-Madrid argued, Guadalupan devotion is central not only in the life of the individual person, but also is central to the life of the community. Through devotional practices, the lives of practitioners become “part of something much larger because [they] extend well the bounds of [each one’s] conscious memory and beyond the bounds of [each one’s] limited life span.” This extension of the self in time (both into the past and future) necessitates an interpretation in order to develop “some sort of reason, . . . for taking on or resisting past glories and future promises.” This process of interpretation entails the formation of the “self-in-community.”

As her final point, Pineda-Madrid used the Arendtian notion of ‘natality,’ to argue that Guadalupan devotions inflame the mysterious allure of Divine beauty. This allure when heeded evokes a social experience of “birth which in the fullness of its realization is the coming Reign of God.” Pineda-Madrid then suggested that a significant task lies ahead. “[T]he traditions and practices of *promesa*, *peregrinación*, and *milagritos*, . . . suggest the need for a fresh consideration of resurrection, one that takes the body social seriously.”

Finally, Jessica Wormley Murdoch traced a historical understanding of the resurrection of the body from the patristic era to the contemporary context of post-modernity. Ultimately she brought Karl Rahner’s thought into dialogue with postmodern thinkers such as Levinas and Derrida, arguing that within this contemporary philosophical context one can indeed still speak of the resurrection of the body in a nonfoundationalist sense.

The general discussion that followed all three papers was engaging, involving participants as well as the presenters in fruitful dialogue around issues of the relationship between body and soul and its implications for immortality as well as the possible contributions to the session’s themes from sacramental theology.

JENNIFER L. S. BADER
Boston College
Boston, Massachusetts