

ANTHROPOLOGY – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Social Salvation
 Convener: Eric Daryl Meyer, Carroll College
 Moderator: Tiffany Hartnell-Howden, Boston College
 Presenters: Valentina Nilo, Boston College
 Timothy Perron, Fordham University
 Madeline Jarrett, Boston College

The Anthropology Topic Session called for papers related to the conference theme of “Social Salvation” in the context of ecological, political, and cultural challenges. Three scholars were invited to speak in this year’s session.

Valentina Nilo’s paper, entitled “The Victim’s Resistance as Salvation: A Decolonial Approach to the Reality of Imprisoned Women in Latin America,” brought the resources of decolonial analysis to bear on the artistic expressions of women incarcerated in Mexico and Chile, whom Nilo has come to know personally. Nilo argued that these women’s artistic expression—especially poetry—should be seen as a form of resistance to oppression that makes present the interiority, hope, and social connections of women who are otherwise isolated and alienated from society. Expressions of hope and resistance should be seen within the context of an extractive war waged on women and women’s bodies to constrain and control them. Building community through artistic expression is a praxis of hope that maintains agency in contexts of oppression. And while this resistance does not effect the much-needed transformation of the carceral system as it is driven by capitalist forces, it nevertheless holds open the possibility of another way of life, a step toward building a transformed and transformative community.

Timothy Perron gave a presentation entitled “Human Ecology as an Approach to Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Vatican Documents.” Perron’s presentation examined the magisterial discussion of ethical questions surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality through the category of “human ecology,” first appearing in *Centessimus Annus* in 1991. While Vatican texts employ the concept of human ecology in order to support ethical positions on sex, gender, and sexuality that are grounded in a compulsory, complementary gender/sex binary essentialism, Perron argues that the appeal to the category of “ecology” necessarily opens a door onto greater flexibility in these positions. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Perron argues that ecology always attends to the broad patterns in relationships among organisms as they respond to their ever-changing contexts. An evolutionary view of biology, build in to ecology, requires attention to the way that the patterns of relationships change over time—and is ill-suited to articulation of unchanging and hardened laws. While Perron did not specify the particular shifts that greater flexibility around matters of sex, gender, and sexuality might take within Vatican texts, he believes that “human ecology” invites new possibilities, possibilities that have been largely closed off by reliance on assertions of an abstract binary essentialism.

In a presentation entitled, “Risking Resurrection: Agency, Phenomenology, and the Feminist Ethic of Risk,” Madeline Jarrett argued for an approach to structural and cultural patterns rooted in an ethic of empowerment and risk rather than control,

certainty, and accomplishment. Jarrett drew on the work of Emmanuel Falque, who offers a phenomenological account of resurrected subjectivity where joy is the primary modality of resurrection, not as the eradication of suffering but as its transformation, the presence of eternity within the now. She combined Falque's work with the thought of Sharon Welch, who offers a feminist ethic of risk, which can be contrasted with an ethic of control. The power of the resurrection, Jarrett argues, may best be seen along the lines of an ethic of risk: the empowerment of people and communities struggling in the midst of injustice to respond with hope and the embodiment of goodness, even if their struggles do not decisively transform unjust systems. An ethic of risk encourages mutual empowerment and avoids pitfalls such as domination (grasping control), sacrifice (subordinating others), and resignation (giving up)—which makes it a good model for the work of God in and through the resurrection.

Lively discussion followed the three presentations with several audience members (and the presenters themselves) drawing substantial links between the papers.

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