

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Topic: Theological Perspectives on the Body
Convener: Anne M. Clifford, Duquesne University
Moderator: Nancy A. Dallavalle, Fairfield University
Presenters: Pamela Kirk, St. John's University, New York
Anthony J. Godzieba, Villanova University

What does our understanding of ourselves as embodied human beings have to say about the way in which we read the Scriptures, interpret the tradition, comprehend the writings of mystics and do theology today? Elements of this important question were addressed in the papers of Pamela Kirk and Anthony Godzieba.

In "The Female Body Suffering and Glorified in Hildegard of Bingen and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz," Kirk explored the issue: "What if anything is revealed about female embodied subjectivity when viewed not from the perspective of the "other" (i.e., male interpreters) but from the perspective of the self" (in this case two female intellectuals). Providing a brief sketch of the historical-social location of each, Kirk then examined how Hildegard (d. 1179) and Sor Juana (d. 1695) treated the female body as (1) a site of intellectual reflection and (2) an object of desire. Hildegard wrote a book on simple medicines that showed her fascination with the female body and described her visions in terms that reflect her interest in physiology. Analysis of physiological processes also played a role in the poetry of Sor Juana who describes the feminine body as the source of the dream of comprehensive knowledge. In the imagery in the writings of Hildegard and Sor Juana, the personal beauty of particular women are given attention. Kirk's paper emphasized the importance of attending to the relation between the "bodied" imagining subject and the body as cultural artifact.

Godzieba's paper, "Bodies and Persons, Resurrected and Postmodern," saw eschatology and theological anthropology as mutually disclosive and asked which understandings of the body Catholic theology must presume in order to present a coherent contemporary eschatology. Following recent attempts (Greshake and Ratzinger) to "open up" the definition of bodiliness, Godzieba suggested a fourfold sense of bodiliness, analogous to the senses of Scripture, and thus real meanings of the body beyond the merely biological. He used both a strong assertion of Christ's bodily resurrection (Schillebeeckx) and postmodern gender

theory (Judith Butler) to argue for the performative, ecstatic and pluriform nature of embodiment (thus the allegorical and anagogical senses as well).

During the discussion that followed Kirk was invited to comment further on the lyrical quality of the poetry of Hildegard and Sor Juana and the ability of the two women to use their imaginations to express the body symbolically from the perspective of female consciousness. Godzieba was asked to clarify points related to the literal-empirical boundaries of bodiliness and the importance of the postmodern understanding of the body as "performative fiction" for the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection.

In the business meeting, Anne King-Lenzmeier agreed to serve as the convener for the 1998 convention and the steering committee began planning with members of the Comparative Theology steering committee for a joint venture about the body as a locus for theological reflection at the next convention.

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