

EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Topic: The Fathers on Resurrection and the Eucharist
Convener: Alexis James Doval, Saint Mary's College of California
Presenters: Theodore Kepes, Boston College
Mary Ann Donovan, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

In this session we explored the connections between this passing world and the resurrected world to come. Theodore Kepes's paper, "Athanasius and Quantum Physics: A Comprehensive Understanding of the Resurrection," discussed how the idea proposed by quantum physics that the entire physical universe forms a single, interconnected, unified field of matter and energy can support and complement Athanasius's similar proposal that there is an interconnected, unified field of spirit in the whole of creation as a result of being radically, ontologically transformed by the Incarnation.

The first part of the paper described several interesting and important discoveries of quantum physics that have occurred over the last century. Physicists like Niels Bohr, David Bohm and others have indicated that there is evidence that suggests that the entire physical universe is fundamentally interconnected. If it can be shown that the entire physical universe forms a single, interconnected, unified field of matter and energy, this may support and complement Athanasius' suggestion that there also exists an interconnected, unified field of spirit as well.

Kepes then presented an overview of Athanasius' understanding of the resurrection as it is expressed in his work, *On the Incarnation*. He suggested that the meaning of Athanasius' understanding of the resurrection depends upon the realization that the incarnation has brought about a radical, ontological transformation of the whole of creation. The realization of this universal transformation depends upon the existence of a fundamental, unified reality of spirit that underlies the whole of creation. This fundamental interconnectedness and relationality that is at the heart of what it means to be human is the very thing that allows God to transform the totality of humanity by becoming one with the single person of Jesus Christ. The moment God becomes one human being as the person of Jesus Christ, the whole of humanity is transformed as it is infused with the divinity that enters the shared, unified field of spirit. This divinization of the cosmos has transformed it into the one mystical body of Christ. For Athanasius, God became one with humanity so that humanity could become one with God.

Kepes concluded by discussing some of the consequences that may result by integrating several aspects of quantum physics with Athanasius' understanding of the salvific reality of the resurrection. Such a pursuit may serve to make the doctrine of the resurrection more viable and intelligible to both Christians and non-Christians alike, and ultimately may contribute significantly to the development of a more unified, comprehensive worldview that can account more fully for the way we understand ourselves, each other, the universe and God.

Mary Ann Donovan's paper, "Who Eats My Flesh Lives Forever: Irenaeus on the Resurrection," explored insights from Irenaeus of Lyons on the connection between the Eucharist, the Bread of Life consumed in this world, and the spiritual resurrected body for which the Eucharist is nourishment.

Donovan first showed how the thought of Irenaeus is governed by the content of the Rule of Faith: the one God Father almighty, who made heaven and earth and all that is in them; the one Christ Jesus, Son of God, incarnate for human salvation; and the Holy Spirit. The consequences of this governing presupposition affect both the Irenaean understanding of the Eucharist and the closely related concept of the resurrection of the flesh. Irenaeus's realistic position on Eucharist rests on the integrity of the connection among three components: first, a thank-offering to the Creator from among the gifts of creation; second, the incarnation of God in creation in the person of the Son; third, the continuation of the presence of the Son of God in the blessed bread and wine. The union through communion gives corruptible flesh the potential to continue the union in the resurrection. In the gnostic view as represented by Heracleon, to be saved one must take off the garments of body and soul. In an opposite approach Irenaeus boldly claims: "The fruit of the work of the Spirit is the salvation of the flesh" (AH V.12.4). Accepting the tripartite division of the human person as spirit, soul, and flesh, he argues that the union of flesh and Spirit makes the *living* human being: *living* by participation in the Spirit, a *human being* by virtue of the flesh. Fed on the Eucharist, and embracing enSpiritment, the entire human—flesh, soul, and spirit—is saved and enters resurrected life.

ALEXIS JAMES DOVAL
Saint Mary's College of California
Moraga, California