

Fall 2018

Gerhard Lohfink, Is This All There Is?

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Recommended Citation

Okoye, J. C. (2018). Gerhard Lohfink, Is This All There Is?. *Spiritan Horizons*, 13 (13). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol13/iss13/22>

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GERHARD LOHFINK, *IS THIS ALL THERE IS? ON RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE*. COLLEGEVILLE: LITURGICAL PRESS, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8146-8451-1. 978-0-8146-8476-4 (EBOOK). USD 32.88.

I picked up this book with three questions in mind. First, what is the current theology of death? Second, what is it really that is resurrected? Third, is the world set for destruction or redemption, and how imagine this? Lohfink grapples with these questions especially in Part Four, “What Will Happen to Us” (129-230), that he calls “the central part of this book...a theological interpretation of our statements of faith” (131). What goes before is necessary introduction, what comes after teases out the lapidary assertions.

On the first question, death is the culminating point when we must let go and hand ourselves over completely. It is an encounter with God (*visio beatifica*) in the risen or rising Christ. It is God who is our “place” after this life (St. Augustine on Ps 31:21). Earthly time ends with death. “Therefore the end of the world is present to the dying, ‘with death’; the return of Christ takes place ‘in’ death, the resurrection happens ‘in’ death, and so does the judgment of the world” (219). Resurrection and the encounter with the Christ of the *Parousia* take place “in” death (220). Lohfink’s valiant efforts to explain all this still leaves one in mystery. That encounter is both judgment and mercy. Only God can ultimately create justice, therefore, there must be judgment that reveals human history in all its dimensions. Sin and evil come to light, so does resistance to evil.

The church believes not in the immortality of the soul, but resurrection of the body/flesh. “Body” means the whole person – resurrection means that the whole person comes to God. To say that the “immortal” soul separates from the body at death seems to imply that the soul remains alive through its own power. This would suggest that one does not die altogether and is not altogether raised by God. To avoid this problem of the endurance of the soul in death, some invoke God’s memory – the dead live in God’s memory until the resurrection. But that would leave us with the problem of the continuity of the person dead and risen. Continuity is the function of the soul, “the epitome of what makes the individual person” (216), but soul as ever loved and sustained by God. Immortal soul is “dialogical existence with God” (Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 355). In transition, soul is guarantor of identity, and is purified (purgatory simply means “cleansing,” or “purification”). Judgment in death means the complete laying open and clarification of everything in the human person (160). Solidarity with the dead includes, beyond prayers, limiting, even eliminating, consequences of what they did wrong or unresolved issues in the family, forwarding what they left unfinished... Such acting against the consequences of sin by the grace of Christ, in the communion of the church used to be called “indulgences,” a term that has rightly fallen into desuetude. And what about hell (166-171)? Biblical talk about God’s vengeance and “eternal fire” merely invoke God’s power of restoring right order in the world. Not to be forgotten are the many texts that invoke God’s will and desire that *all* be saved, 1 Tim 2:4, through Christ to reconcile *all* things, Col 1:20, Christ gave himself a ransom *for all*, 1 Tim 2:6 *et cetera*. If a person decides to be his/her own meaning, live only for self, desire only self, will and do evil because it is evil, such

a person creates his/her hell; it is not imposed by God. Even then, God who requires of us a will to reconciliation, will he not do everything to win such a one? There is also what is called fundamental option/decision in which one's major and minor choices consolidate into a basic direction. This option, if towards God, keeps one open to God's grace.

On the third question, Lohfink answers with the notion of "participation" (chapter 12: 219-230). The principle is, "nothing can rise unless it was part of the history of the life in question" (225). The Trinity and creation are in one dance of sharing. The Incarnate shares in the glory of the Father. Humans are conformed to his glorified body (Phil 3:21). "The sub-human and pre-human creation shares in the glorification of believers..." (227). Put another way, "the world is created for resurrection because it is created for human beings—and human beings for Christ" (193). Non-human creation groans and sighs like a human being "for the revelation of the children of God" (Rom 8:19). We are not redeemed "from this earth" but "with it" (191).

Refreshing and provoking stuff, delightfully presented. Lohfink began with a historical and cultural overview of the matter and an examination of the doctrines and beliefs of the world religions.

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