



BOOK REVIEW

Augustine M. Reisenauer, *Augustine's Theology of the Resurrection*

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'While its circumference is almost nowhere in Augustine's works, however, the center of the resurrection is almost everywhere' (p. 1). In his *Augustine's Theology of the Resurrection*, Augustine M. Reisenauer, O.P., offers an historical and thematically theological survey of St. Augustine's view of resurrection. His exploration especially attends to Jesus' resurrection, but it also considers how Augustine viewed the resurrection of all people both spiritually and 'fleshly'. For St. Augustine, Reisenauer argues, resurrection 'means nothing less than the revivification of dead humanity to the eternal life of beatitude in God.... It is our finest moment of resilience, the gracious accomplishment of which belongs to the God of the resurrection' (p. 5).

Reisenauer states his purpose for writing as an investigation into the teaching and preaching of Augustine on the resurrection of dead humanity to life, especially concerning the historical resurrection of Christ, but also concerning the historical and eschatological resurrection 'not only of the saints, but also of the damned, as Augustine describes them' (p. 9). He divides the book into four sections, each with three supporting chapters. The four sections are: 'Early Considerations of the Resurrection', 'The Resurrection of Jesus', 'The Resurrection of the Human Spirit' and 'The Resurrection of Human Flesh'. Reisenauer capably situates his study in the broader literature while acknowledging the gap in attention to Augustine's view of resurrection as noted by Marie-Anne Vannier, then taken up by Gerald O'Collins in his *Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception* (OUP, 2017). As has been acknowledged by John Cavidini and Frances Young, O'Collins' work creates space for further investigation, especially concerning the chronological development of resurrection in Augustine's thought, as well as attention to his view on the resurrection of humanity, both of which are incorporated into Reisenauer's work.

Regarding key insights, I will mention just three. First, Reisenauer quickly draws attention to Augustine's faith-first approach to resurrection. Near the end of his introduction, Reisenauer asserts with St. Augustine that 'resurrection can only truly be viewed and handled from the inside, from an intrinsic participation in the resurrection itself' (p. 14), a theme to which he returns explicitly in chapter 7. Reisenauer builds on this assertion in chapter 6, arguing that for Augustine 'only those who humbly embrace the risen Christ have minds open enough to grasp the wisdom of the God of the resurrection and hearts generous enough to give him glory and thanks for everything' (pp. 117–18).

Second, Reisenauer offers a careful and, I think, appropriate perspective on both Augustine's Neoplatonic commitments and the developments in Augustine's view on the human person throughout his writings. Both Augustine's relationship to Neoplatonism and the development of his thought are often overlooked, overstated or oversimplified. Reisenauer avoids all of these while offering a holistic and well-situated perspective – chronologically and theologically – of resurrection in Augustine, attending closely to the primary sources in context while responding to the relevant secondary conversations without distraction. Chapter 8 deserves special mention here for its passionate narration of *Confessions* through the theme of resurrection.

Third, Reisenauer offers a most clarifying and encouraging emphasis on double-resurrection of both body and soul for God's people. This double-resurrection is intrinsically coupled with Augustine's Christology, where the *soul* resurrects through Christ as God, while the *body* resurrects through Christ as man. Reisenauer adds, 'Augustine grasps that these two distinct resurrections are not the preconditions, but rather the outcomes, of two distinct hearings of two distinct voices...[and] both are of eternal duration' (p. 131).

Some readers might wish for more contemporary clarification and application of Augustine's doctrine of resurrection. Augustine's insistence on faith in the resurrection as the means of dethroning human reason, for example, seems immediately applicable in western churches and culture, where the motto has often become, 'I believe *when* I understand', rather than, 'I believe *in order to* understand'. Others will wish for more in the way of apologetic application, given Augustine's commitment to a bodily resurrection of both Jesus and the saints. However, some application may be drawn from chapter 9's insightful discussion of Christian funerals and Augustine's pastoral approach to such matters.

Nevertheless, Reisenauer delivers a beautifully written, well-researched and most thoughtful contribution to the study of resurrection in Augustine. In both method and insight, Reisenauer's work deserves high praise. I expect this volume will sit atop the field for some time as the definitive study of resurrection in Augustine in the English language.

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