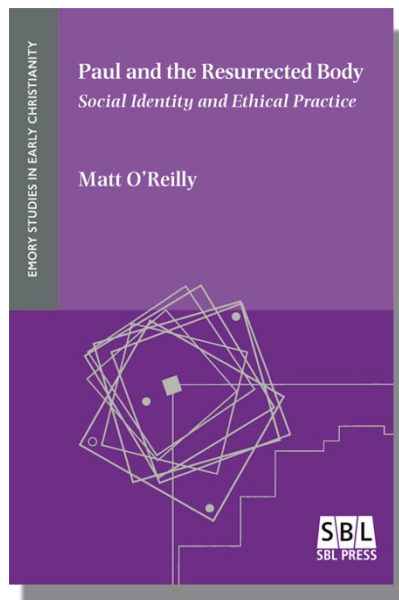


RBL 05/2021



Matt O'Reilly

Paul and the Resurrected Body: Social Identity and Ethical Practice

Emory Studies in Early Christianity 22

Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 250. Paper. \$41.00.
ISBN 9781628372762. Hardcover. \$61.00. ISBN
9780884144410. E-book. \$41.00. ISBN 9780884144427.

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In many theological studies, resurrection is conceived of as an eschatological event that has predominantly individual consequences and implications. In contrast, many social and corporate approaches to biblical studies focus on the ancient context and the present ramifications without significant eschatological engagement. This work, from Matt O'Reilly, seeks to address both of these lacunae through the investigation of the implications of resurrection on a Pauline theology and social identity and ethical practice. *Paul and the Resurrected Body: Social Identity and Ethical Practice* (2020) is a light update of O'Reilly's 2017 thesis under Andrew Lincoln.

Starting from a brief examination of ancient anthropology and Pauline eschatology, O'Reilly sets forth a mixed sociocognitive approach to the questions raised in the text. Based on the embodied nature of both Pauline resurrection and practice, this sociocognitive approach is situated within an understanding of how individuals interact through social dynamics. The investigation utilizes social identity theory (SIT) as the foundation of examining the social dynamics that are in play within the Pauline communities. Social identity theory proves an apt choice for this type of inspection, as it not only allows the interrogation of social interactions but also provides a framework for exploring the cognitive impact on members

of the social groups and communities. Additionally, O'Reilly helpfully leverages Marco Cinnirella's extension of Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius's "possible selves" proposal (35). This extension allows the examination of how individuals and social groups evaluate their identity as projected into a temporal future. In this context the framework of possible future selves is useful for not only evaluating future events for a group but also "provid[ing] an alternative an interpretative context for the current view of self" (35). Supporting this broader sociocognitive approach, O'Reilly utilizes rhetorical-critical method to "provide a legitimate approach for analyzing the persuasive nature of the Pauline epistles."

From this methodological basis, the study turns toward the Pauline corpus, starting in chapter 2 with a lengthy analysis of the longest resurrection passage: 1 Cor 15:12–58. Through an investigation of the cultural backgrounds for Paul's audience, O'Reilly sets out some of the social implications for Paul's audience embracing an argument for the embodied resurrection of the dead. Here O'Reilly carefully works through the rhetorical context to examine the cognitive and emotional dynamics that effect argumentative change for the epistolary audience. As he incisively argues, "if Paul's refutation is able to associate negative emotions with denial of future bodily resurrection, it increases the likelihood that his upcoming argument for the resurrection of believers will be persuasive" (65). This strong integration of the cognitive and emotional social dynamics along with the analysis of rhetoric appears throughout the work and is a key feature of the study. Furthermore, O'Reilly argues that the embodied nature of the resurrected being is intrinsically linked to the identity construction of both the individual and the social group (96). Therefore, he turns to the question: Is "a resurrected body ... able to 'enact practices' that run counter to its identity?" (97). This aspect is examined through the lens of 1 Cor 6, where he concludes that "Paul's theology of future bodily resurrection is also deeply intertwined with his expectations for bodily practice" (109). It is the possible future social identity of the resurrected body that serves to intertwine the bodily practice with the social identity at hand. The first example of rejecting a "πόρνη-union" on the basis of the future identity found in the resurrection is reinforced by a subsequent examination of Paul's own hardship in 2 Cor 4. In this section O'Reilly incorporates Paul's narrativized past into the present identity and possible future identity of the resurrection to show how the epistle portrays his sufferings as a means of highlighting shared categories and norms (119). The incorporation of the past into the social identity of the group reinforces and contributes to the "resurrection-oriented future social identity" (127).

After examining 1 and 2 Corinthians, O'Reilly turns in chapter 3 to the question of union with Christ and resurrection in Rom 6 and 8. In this chapter the epistle is analyzed as a piece of deliberative rhetoric seeking to mediate an intragroup conflict between the "strong" and the "weak" in Rome (130). Within this context, the identity construed through union with the resurrected Christ provides the embodied impetus for present holiness.

However, this future resurrection identity is not discontinuous from the present situation, but rather this possible future identity rhetorically “stands in temporal continuity” with the “life of embodied holiness” (148). From this continuous identity construction, O’Reilly extends the analysis to the end of the *probatio* in Rom 8. Here the *υιοθεσία* metaphor is integrated into the *already* and *not yet* paradigm of the embodied resurrection identity construction as an example of the Spirit-filled bodies that Paul presents for the believers (156). O’Reilly then identifies this future social identity with that of Abraham’s faith (Rom 4) in order to attempt the integration of “the members of each subgroup,” while allowing them to “maintain their distinctive identities and thus increase the likelihood of reducing conflict between them” (165). To apply this integrated future social identity, the study turns to the ethical question of table fellowship and calls both “Jewish believers and gentile believers alike ... to embrace a new identity in Christ which includes the future possible identity of bodily resurrection” (169). To be clear, O’Reilly does not advocate for a supersessionistic interpretation here, but a robust subgroup differentiation within the superordinate group. Thus if the groups “embrace bodily resurrection as a future possible identity, then it has potential to influence their social practices” (170).

Finally, O’Reilly rounds out the exegetical examination in chapter 4 by locating resurrection in Philippians as a possible future social identity. In this situation he locates the context of the letter as seeking to “cultivate a salient superordinate identity among the members of the Christ-following in-group” to overcome discord and stand against opposition (174). This context generates a discussion on the resurrection in Phil 3 that culminates with the *synkrisis* comparing the Christ-following in-group with the “enemies of the cross of Christ” outgroup (183). In this section O’Reilly argues that Paul proposes a *synkrisis* of positive characteristics for the in-group and negative corollaries for the out-group. This presents both persuasive rhetoric as well as social comparisons to maximize comparative fit between the groups. Furthermore, these identity constructions are linked with the narrativization of Jesus and Paul as a form of life-story exemplar for the group identity construction.

The book concludes with a brief summary chapter that highlights the contribution of each section of the work and the methodology and poses some intriguing future avenues for research.

At times the sociocognitive link between the past, present, and future seems somewhat incomplete. While O’Reilly does consider the use of narrative as a means of giving “coherence to the past, present, and desired future of the group” (36) and engages with this to good effect in chapters 3 and 4, some further reinforcement there would have clarified some of these links. For example, in Romans the deeper integration of Abraham’s narrative identity with that of Paul and the gentile believers would have clarified some of the moves made within chapter 3. Expanding the methodology with narrative identity research such

as that from Dan McAdams and Kate McLean would benefit further examinations that draw upon possible future selves and social identity approaches.

However, overall, this study is an excellent examination of the sociocognitive impact of eschatological futures for a social group. Throughout it wrestles well with the sociorhetorical content of the letters and the cognitive demands that they place on their audience. In addition, it builds a strong case for the consideration of the resurrection as a concrete possible future social identity that actively shapes members of social groups that anticipate such an eventual reality. The anticipation of an embodied resurrected future comes through clearly as a motivating factor for Paul and his rhetorical force for the epistolary audience. Indeed, as O'Reilly concludes, the "embodied life now anticipates and finds its fulfillment in the future resurrection of the body" (216).

There is much to recommend in this lucidly argued study, and it is a worthy investigation into the temporal and eschatological implications of social identity in the Pauline epistles. It is especially commended as an example of articulate engagement with social identity in biblical studies.