

Plenary Speakers

Presidential Address: Robert H. von Thaden, Jr., Ph.D.

March 16, 5:25 pm



Arguing with Children: Rhetorical Characters in Early Christian Literature

Early Christian texts argue with children. Although there is much debate about where on a scale between “real” and “figurative” many of these characters fall, the fact remains that the only children whom hearers/readers encounter in these texts are rhetorical ones. These rhetorical children, even in those rare instances where they are the momentary focus, serve larger arguments about the new reality revealed in Christ and its consequences for thought and behavior. These consequences, moreover, are neither straightforward nor consistent. Understanding the conceptual architecture available in ancient Mediterranean contexts that supported rhetorical children helps us see the various—potentially clashing—meanings prompted by these characters. The communities that produced these texts were active participants in their cultural environment as they theorized about and used images of children and families to support their rhetoric. They re-inscribed certain values and assumptions from their surrounding cultures while reconfiguring other cultural resources in light their proclamation grounded in the paradox of the cross.

Robert H. von Thaden, Jr. is associate professor and chair of the religious studies department of Mercyhurst University. He received his B.A. from Muhlenberg College (Allentown, PA), his M.A. from the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D. from Emory University (Atlanta, GA). He teaches a broad range of courses at Mercyhurst—this year he has discovered that teaching the Book of Mormon (and other LDS scriptures) is a fantastic way to discuss reconfiguration of biblical traditions. He has authored one book, *Sex, Christ, and Embodied Cognition: Paul’s Wisdom for Corinth* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2012; repr. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), and co-edited another, *Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration: A Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Reader* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), with Vernon K. Robbins and Bart B. Bruehler. His most recently published essay, “Apocalyptic America: Buying the End Times,” appears as chapter 19 in *Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Currents through History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), edited by Kelly J. Murphy and Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler.

Registration Closes 3/9/17 (see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/EGLBS/> for more information)

Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society

March 16-17, 2017

Doubletree Akron-Fairlawn, Akron, Ohio

Plenary Speakers

Guest Speaker: Gail R. O'Day, Ph.D.

March 16, 8 pm



Incarnation as New Creation: God So Loved the World

As is uniformly recognized, the first words of John, *en arche*, are identical to the first words of Genesis in the LXX. The themes of creation in John and John as an interpreter of Genesis are much discussed in Johannine scholarship. In most interpretations, the emphasis falls on the Word as the agent of creation—God's word in Genesis; the incarnate word in John (In the beginning God made the heaven and earth; in the beginning was the word). Yet this line of approach can turn a cosmological statement into an exclusively Christological statement—that the Word as the creator, not the world as creation warrants primary attention. So that, for example, John 20 is often presented as the renewed garden of Eden, with the resurrected Jesus as the new creator. The Gospel of John itself suggests otherwise, however. God's love for the cosmos is explicitly named as the impetus behind the incarnation, so that in the enfleshment of God's self-expression at 1:14, creation is already renewed, because God's love for the cosmos is made manifest and dwells in creation. The dwelling of the enfleshed Word in the world is the new creation; bread, grapes, water, light showing forth the love of God that makes all life possible.

O'Day's scholarly research focuses on the Gospel of John, the Bible and preaching, and the history of biblical interpretation. She has written a number of books and articles, including the commentary on the Gospel of John in *The New Interpreters Bible* (1996) and *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide* (Abingdon Press, 2007), and is currently working on a feminist commentary on the Book of Revelation. She is editor or co-editor of several volumes, including the *Oxford Access Bible* (Revised Edition Oxford University Press 2011), and the *Theological Bible Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). O'Day was the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* from 1999-2006 and General Editor of the Society of Biblical Literature book series, *Early Christianity and its Literature* from 2009-2014. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

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