

## MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

### OPTIONS FOR UNIVERSAL SALVATION IN THE WEST?

Presenters: Peter Casarella, Catholic University of America  
Katherine Yohe, LaSalle University

Respondent: John Cavadini, University of Notre Dame

Peter Casarella began the Medieval Theology session with an examination of some themes relating to hope and evil in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa: hell as a spiritual condition, Christ's descent into hell, and the vision of death. Cusanus conceived of hell as the spiritual condition in which the intellect is cut off from truth. It is, so to speak, "the maximally uninformed mind." Christ's descent into hell reveals the universality of Christ's suffering, the fullness of *kenosis*, and Christ's cosuffering with all of humanity, not just the elect. In this way, the descent is an offer of universal salvation. In the descent into hell, Christ also suffered the vision of death, which anyone who did not belong to Christ would behold eternally.

Casarella concluded his paper with some remarks on whether or not Cusanus shared with Hans Urs von Balthasar a hope for universal salvation. Even though Cusanus never explicitly expressed von Balthasar's hope, he did "pave the way" for it.

In the second paper, Katherine Yohe examined whether or not Julian of Norwich might have understood her revelation that "all will be well" to entail universal salvation. Julian's *Showings* raises the question of universal salvation, but does not provide an explicit answer. Her focus was clearly on God's all powerful love, yet she professed acceptance of all Church teachings, including those about the damned. Moreover, several of her revelations seem to reaffirm the eternal damnation of at least the demons. She is not grieved by their damnation, but rejoices that all their efforts to harm humanity have been turned against them. Julian also described the process of salvation in terms of a life of explicit Christian faith. Thus she appears to have had no framework for understanding how people could be saved without grace leading them to belief in Christ and the sacraments of the Church. Finally, what is to be made of her constant references to love for "all my fellow Christians" rather than stressing

love for all humanity? Does this reveal a lack of compassion for non-Christians or is it simply the lack of encounters with non-Christians?

John Cavadini's response focused on Augustinian themes of grace and trust, imbedded in authors who may not accept Augustine's theory of a densely populated hell. For example, in Julian's representation of Jesus as Mother there is an invitation to trust in "our heavenly Mother" who will never allow any peril to overcome her child. Perhaps this is an echo of Augustine's praise of his own mother, the son of whose "tears cannot perish!"

Cavadini concluded with an interpretation of Dante's *Inferno* which could provide the rudiments either of a theology of universal salvation outright or at least the hope of such. The *Inferno* can be seen, not as the mythic underworld, "but our own city of this earth, frozen, for a second in the judgement of God." Dante's allegory has the advantage of not underestimating the horror of human evil, while still including an invitation to reconciliation in Christ.

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## METHOD IN THEOLOGY

### IS THEODICY AN EVIL?

RESPONSES TO *THE EVILS OF THEODICY* BY TERENCE TILLEY

Presenters: Anne E. Patrick, Carleton College  
Peter Phan, Catholic University of America

Respondent: Terrence Tilley, University of Dayton

The full text of the presentations for this session appears in this issue of the *Proceedings* (192-211). What follows here is an account of some aspects of the subsequent discussion in which Professors Patrick, Phan, and Tilley participated, together with many members of the seminar.

In response to questions about the origin of his reflections on theodicy, Prof. Tilley spoke of his student years when he worked as a hospital orderly in the emergency and neurosurgery wards of a large hospital. Reflection on the immediacy of suffering in this context convinced him of the inadequacy of an abstract academic theodicy.