

THE GRACE NEEDED FOR SALVATION: THE INSIGHTS
FROM THREE THOMISTS – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: The Grace Needed for Salvation: The Insights from Three Thomists
 Convener: Ligita Ryliškytė, S.J.E., Boston College
 Moderator: Jeremy W. Blackwood, Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
 Presenters: Richard Lennan, Boston College
 Matthew Louis Petillo, Boston College
 Roger Haight, S.J., Union Theological Seminary

By bringing into dialogue three Thomists—Karl Rahner, Bernard J. F. Lonergan, and Edward Schillebeeckx—the panel offered a systematic theological framework for contemporary attempts to uphold a non-exclusivist position on salvation outside the church. The panel began with twenty-five-minute presentations, followed by the panelists' responses to the comments and questions raised by several of the numerous attendees.

In his paper, "Beyond 'The Anonymous Christian': Reconsidering Rahner on Grace and Salvation," Richard Lennan pointed out that Rahner acknowledged freely that "the anonymous Christian," as a category, could be problematic. His interest was not in the term, but in understanding the universality of God's grace, and the access of all people to grace. Reception of Rahner's theology of salvation, however, has focused often on "the anonymous Christian," obscuring his broader framework. Lennan illuminated this framework by showing how, as uncreated, grace is the life-giving self-communication of God that brings creation into being, sustains it, and orients it to fulfillment in God. Grace is neither exceptional nor rare, but the defining constituent of the whole of creation. Likewise, the human capacity for the God of self-bestowing personal love is the central and abiding existential of human beings. Since the self-communicating God is also a transcendent God, human encounters with grace still can be "unthematic" and defy exhaustive analysis. Though universal, Lennan argued, grace for Rahner was never generic, never separable from its Christological, pneumatological, and ecclesiological dimensions. And yet, insisting both that salvation is not contingent on professed belief and that the fulfillment of grace is eschatological rather than historical, Rahner was at ease with the fact that a person receptive to grace might never embrace an explicit relationship to Christ and the church. Lennan concluded with explaining how Rahner associated salvific faith or the person's "Yes" to Christ with a broad sense of receptivity to the Spirit.

Building on Lonergan, Matthew Petillo proposed a theology of religions grounded on the historical mediations of grace. In his paper, "Divine Love as Conversational: New Directions in the Theology of Grace," Petillo first elucidated the transition from Aquinas' to Lonergan's theology of grace as a shift from "soul" to "subject," from powers of the soul to the complex dynamism of consciousness, from remote and proximate principles of acts to modes of self-presence. Next, Petillo demonstrated how this shift initiated a conversation that began to raise questions about grace in the terms generated by an intentionality analysis and offered a phenomenological language for expressing insights into religious data. Drawing on Lonergan's writings, especially his monumental philosophical work *Insight*, Petillo then considered what it might mean to

talk about the historical mediations of grace in a pluralistic context in a way that not only meets the demands of Lonergan's transcendental method, but also respects the concrete, embedded, relational, and deeply historical dimensions of religions. He proposed thinking of grace as a global and historical "integrator" and "operator": the source and mover of a series of ever more expansive and complex integrations of redemptive recurrences within the open field of history. Petillo concluded by proposing the meaning of "religion" as the concrete intelligibility of all spatio-temporal data on the vast ranges of redemptive flexible cycles of such recurrences, as inspired by divine love and informed by a divine Word.

Roger Haight's paper "Schillebeeckx and Theologies of Religious Pluralism," started off by clarifying how Schillebeeckx's views on creation were schooled by Thomas Aquinas, shaping an intrinsic basis and framework for his holistic Christian vision. Haight further argued that, for Schillebeeckx, *creatio ex nihilo* means that nothing can be brought between the world and God to interpret the relationship between them. Thus, neither "grace" nor "incarnation" represents a closer union of human existence with God than creation itself. Correspondingly, Schillebeeckx's understanding of salvation and Jesus Christ's role in it are located within the framework of creation faith and not alongside it. Jesus as "concentrated" creation is a revelation and embodiment of the God-human relationship. On this basis Christians can understand Jesus Christ in a non-supremacist, pluralist, non-zero-sum way that is dialogical and non-competitive. Haight concluded by reassuring that this position is not a universalist reduction of the religions but a comprehensive Christian interpretation of autonomous faith traditions. Such an interpretation affirms God's intimate loving presence in all creation without undermining Christ's divinity.

The subsequent discussion focused on normativity: If grace is not just universal but also specific and if Jesus Christ reveals both God and the goodness of creation, what does that mean for discerning the authentic manifestations of grace? Some differences between the interlocutors notwithstanding, all three panelists acknowledged that there might be certain prime instances that witness to human receptivity to grace: Lennan highlighted the love of neighbor, Petillo interpersonal love, such as among family members, while Haight stressed human collaboration in seeking the common good.

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