

## CHRISTOLOGY

### AQUINAS' THEOLOGY OF THE PASSION: SUFFERING AS TRANSFORMATIVE

Presenter: W. Jerome Bracken, Immaculate Conception Seminary  
Respondent: Roch Kereszty, University of Dallas

Jerome Bracken made the following points about Aquinas' theology of the passion: (1) The passion of Christ is not necessary for God to effect forgiveness. God does not require a satisfaction rendered by Christ's death in order to save human beings. That Christ does suffer and die to save humanity is suitable but not necessary. (2) The punishment that comes with sin occurs from within history: it is not imposed by God from without. (3) The human soul of Christ is conjoined with the divine hypostasis of the Son, who in turn is conjoined with the charity of the Father. Human nature is thereby exalted in and through Christ and this exaltation is our salvation. This is not simply a *restitutio* of human nature before Adam's sin, but something genuinely new. The charity of Christ, expressed most powerfully through his passion, in turn excites the habit of charity in us, which is our exaltation and salvation. This is accomplished through a causation that is both efficient (with the human nature of Christ as the instrumental cause) and exemplary. (4) Jesus' saving activity continues as the risen Christ, effected through church and sacraments.

Roch Kereszty responded by saying that he would assume that the soteriology of Aquinas as presented by Bracken is basically true, but that he wished to make it more comprehensible to a contemporary audience. And thus he proceeded to give an "existential" presentation of the saving significance of Jesus' mission. Kereszty placed the stress on Jesus' human decisions to lovingly obey his Father. Jesus gives himself over step by step in a process that culminates in his death. His saving activity flows from this obedience which he gives freely and which is not automatic with his Incarnation. His decision to save is made definitive in his death and his total gift of himself is eternalized in his resurrection. There is then a gradual divinization of the Son's human nature. His decision to be the compassionate Savior evokes opposition that leads to his passion and death, which are the price of his saving mission, not a requirement for its efficacy. The passion is not a debt payment or satisfaction. Jesus converts the evil inflicted on him by transforming it into a communication of the divine-human love that saves.

A wide-ranging discussion followed the two excellent presentations. There was much talk about the death of Jesus. There was a clear intention on the part of many to get away from the idea that God planned it so that the Son would come to die a violent death and thereby render satisfaction for sin. Someone mentioned that the satisfaction theory was almost defined at Vatican I but went unmentioned at Vatican II. Furthermore, the language of satisfaction is virtually absent from the idiom of the current pope. The distinction that Aquinas makes between *convenientia* and *necessitas* came up more than once to show that what God chooses as fitting to save human beings cannot be squeezed into a system of rational necessity. The death of Jesus was not part of the original divine plan but the frustration of that plan. And yet God in Christ transformed the frustration of the plan into the culmination of the plan, which is to save humanity, not inflict suffering and death.

After the session, several participants met with the steering committee to choose a new convener and to decide on next year's topic. The new convener is Thomas H. West and the topic will be "The Christology of Piet Schoonenberg."

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## COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

### *THEOLOGY AFTER VEDANTA: AN EXPERIMENT IN COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY*

Presenter: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College  
 Respondents: Daniel P. Sheridan, Loyola University, New Orleans  
 Robert Schreiter, Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

A discussion of Francis X. Clooney's *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) moderated by J. A. Di Noia, was initiated with a brief presentation by the author. This was followed by responses from Daniel Sheridan and Robert Schreiter.

Clooney emphasized that his book was an experiment in the practice of a comparative theology that is "more attentive to how learning, writing and true knowledge follow from patient reading; more cognizant of the location of faith