

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.

Some might argue that distance does not preclude compassion. For example, a physician may well be compassionate but still require a certain distance from the person of a patient in order to perform the tasks of healing. But classical theodicy deals too much in abstraction and distance. It carries with it too much objectivity. Moreover, it seems to render structural evil invisible. It is an approach which silences victims and obscures the need for resistance. Professor Tilley regards "defense," the defense of faith in the face of suffering, as a more adequate response because it avoids totalizing explanations and is thereby free to respond to the needs of the moment. It remains to be seen whether the classical forms of theodicy are irreformable and therefore to be abandoned, or whether theodicy could actually be reconstructed according to methods which can incorporate the experience of victims more directly. Unlike such professions as medicine or psychology, when theology speaks of ethical reflection, it rarely focuses on the practical consequences of its own activity. The reconstruction of theodicy might afford us that opportunity.

We must beware of too narrow a characterization of the Enlightenment. It was, after all, a complex movement which included many phases and many methods. It is true that during this long period the classical forms of rationalism came to dominate many of our methods, including the methods of theodicy. However, the period also included the emergence of hermeneutical methods and methods for the retrieval and evaluation of history and narrative.

Can suffering ever be regarded as redemptive? Suffering is dehumanizing, but never to suffer would also be dehumanizing. We do not ordinarily have a choice in this matter, for suffering is the very stuff of our lives. We Christians do not have experience of God apart from a world of suffering. Nevertheless, it seems virtually impossible to speak of suffering *per se* as redemptive. Jesus, and after him the Christian martyrs, are those who witnessed to the goodness of God in the face of suffering. Suffering in itself is an evil. Nevertheless, in our own prayer lives and as we struggle to console others, the spiritual language of suffering cannot be ruled out. We can authentically choose suffering for ourselves, but we cannot justly compel other persons to choose it.

Perhaps a revised methodology might begin with a careful listening to one another, asking ourselves within what metanarratives we situate the individual narratives of our suffering.

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