

JUSTICE AND MERCY ON THE CROSS—SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Revisiting Anselm's Theory of Atonement
Convener: Robert J. Barry, Providence College
Moderator: Robert J. Barry, Providence College
Presenters: David L. Whidden III, Our Lady of the Lake College
Brandon R. Peterson, University of Utah
Amanda Alexander, Fordham University

David Whidden of Our Lady of the Lake College presented a paper entitled "Justice and Mercy in God, on the Cross, and in the Classroom: Anselm of Canterbury's Changing Thought."

He showed how Anselm, in his *Cur Deus Homo*, revisits his discussion of the relationship between God's justice and mercy from the *Proslogion*, where he solved the problem by means of the metaphysics of relations. In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm resolves the same problem Christologically, uniting justice and mercy in the person of Jesus, who makes satisfaction for all humans. He then applied Anselm's approach to the specific case of student plagiarism cases, showing how both justice and mercy might be made evident to our students.

Brandon R. Peterson of the University of Utah presented a paper entitled "Would a Forgiving God Need Placation? An Examination of Mercy and Atonement." This paper responded to claims that Anselm's God would be unmerciful if his honor required satisfaction from sinners if they were not to be eternally damned. Did the father of the prodigal son, critics ask, demand any such payment? Although recognizing that popular presentations of Anselm's theory may be guilty of this charge, Peterson showed how Anselm's theory of satisfaction itself does not propose the cross as a kind of divine mollification, but rather styles God as mercifully excluding punishment through a gracious transformation of the created order, an order in which his just God constantly delights. Despite this criticism of Anselm's theory being unfounded, Peterson considered whether Anselm's theory best communicates God's mercy in today's contexts.

Amanda Alexander, a doctoral student at Fordham University, presented a paper entitled "Bread of Mercy, Stone of Justice: A Eucharistic Reading of Anselm's Atonement Theory."

The paper first established that, according to *Cur Deus Homo*, the work of atonement is two-fold: First, God's honor must be satisfied. This part of the atonement theory is developed explicitly in *Cur Deus Homo* with regards to God's *iustitia*. The second work of atonement, however, is that the *iustitia* lost through sin must be restored to redeemed sinners if they are to enjoy beatitude. Alexander argued that, according to the theology implicit in Anselm's prayers and meditations, this latter work is accomplished through the reception of the Eucharist, whereby Christ's *iustitia* is restored to the soul of the sinner.

Each of the papers was followed by questions from the audience directed to that presenter, and then the group concluded with a panel discussion of the status of Anselm's atonement theory today.

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