

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (I)—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Justice and Mercy in the Christian Tradition  
Convener: Scott D. Moringiello, DePaul University  
Moderator: Shawn M. Colberg, St. John's University/College of St. Benedict  
Presenters: Anna Harrison, Loyola Marymount University  
Francis J. Caponi, Villanova University  
Agnes de Dreuzy, St. Mark's College,  
University of British Columbia

The Historical Theology session received many excellent paper proposals for this year's conference. We had enough interest in Anselm of Canterbury, for example, to warrant a separate session on that theologian, and that session was held in addition to the two historical theology sessions. The two historical theology sessions had papers that spanned from the patristic era to the modern era.

Of course, the three papers in the first historical theology section explored justice and mercy. These papers not only explored God's justice and God's mercy, but also how the people of God have sought to enact that justice and mercy through their lives of prayer and action, through their understanding of earthly justice, and through international diplomacy.

Anna Harrison began the first historical theology session with a paper entitled, "Justice and Mercy in the Purgatorial Piety of the Nuns of Helfta." Harrison gave a fascinating account of the thirteenth-century Cistercian monastery of Helfta, in Saxony. The nuns in this monastery drew from Anselmian atonement theology and from bridal mysticism in their understanding of God's justice and mercy. Drawing on visionary accounts that the nuns related, Harrison explained how the nuns understood their prayers and their everyday actions co-operated with Christ's redemptive work to free souls in purgatory. Harrison also pointed to important erotic imagery in the nuns' accounts, which, she argued, showed that the nuns believed they had a reciprocal relationship with Christ's redemptive work. He had much to give them and they had much to give him.

From thirteenth-century Saxony, we moved to thirteenth-century Paris with Francis Caponi's paper on Thomas Aquinas. Caponi's paper, "'I will give you what is just' (Matt 20:4): Thomas Aquinas and the Question of Merited Mercy." Caponi focused on two of Thomas's texts: *Summa Theologiae* prima pars question 21, and the *Commentary on Matthew*. By examining Thomas's commentary on the parable of the workers (Mt. 20), Caponi argued that, according to Thomas, God acts mercifully by going beyond justice, not acting contrary to justice. Caponi also stressed that, again according to Thomas, we can speak of merited mercy.

Agnes de Dreuzy brought us into the twentieth century with her paper "Justice and Mercy in *ius post bellum*: Pope Benedict XV (1914–22)'s Overlooked Contribution." De Dreuzy's paper retrieved the work of Benedict XV, who, long before Pope St. John Paul II's writings on just war, challenged just war theory as a way to guarantee peace. Benedict XV's writings were especially concerned with questions of justice *after* war, in addition to questions of justice *leading up to* and justice *within* war. The pope's writings, de Dreuzy showed, were concerned with the roles of forgiveness and reconciliation in peace building. De Dreuzy offered a close reading of important passages of Benedict XV's *Pacem Dei Munus*.

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A lively conversation followed the presentations. The audience asked about erotic imagery in the nuns of Helfta, about the precise relationship between justice and mercy and nature and grace in Thomas, and about how John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have drawn on the work of Benedict XV.

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