

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (II)—TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	Justice and Mercy in Athanasius and Anselm
Convener:	Daria Spezzano, Providence College
Moderator:	Rita George-Tvrtković, Benedictine University
Presenter:	Khaled Anatolios, University of Notre Dame
Presenter:	Bruce D. Marshall, Southern Methodist University

This session examined historical perspectives on the relationship of justice and mercy, in light of their ongoing relevance to contemporary thought about divine action in human salvation. Khaled Anatolios, in his paper, “Justice and Mercy in Athanasius’s Soteriology,” argued that Athanasius’s conception of the interrelation of divine mercy and justice in “Against the Greeks On the Incarnation” makes at least three significant contributions to modern discussions on soteriology. First, the Alexandrian bishop offers a strikingly distinctive account of the interplay of divine mercy and justice as complementary manifestations of divine goodness, both in creation and in the face of human sin. Secondly, Athanasius articulates a soteriological vision that altogether bypasses the fabricated modern dichotomy of “juridical” vs. “ontological” conceptions of salvation. For Athanasius, the juridical is ontological, simply because the divine law speaks the truth about being: the being of God, who is the source of all goodness; the being of humanity, which is entirely dependent on the reception of divine goodness; and the ontological consequences of the interactivity of humanity and God. Thirdly, Athanasius gives us a balanced and nuanced adjustment to post-Reformation conceptions of “penal substitution,” one that is akin to the position of Bernard Lonergan that Christ “took on but did not incur the punishment owed for” human sin. Christ does not satisfy divine justice by being the object of this punishment per se. Rather, he fulfills the divine law by entering into the place of our punishment through his death, but then cancels the punishment of death by transforming the very content of death from being a withdrawal from God which brings about annihilation to being a self-offering to the Father, which brings about Resurrection.

Bruce Marshall’s paper, “*Tolle me et redime te: Anselm on the Justice and Mercy of God*,” discussed Anselm’s developing account of the relationship between the justice and mercy of God and the salvation of sinners in his early *Proslogion* and later *Cur Deus Homo*. Observing that justice and mercy tend to be seen as opposites in everyday life and even in some scriptural teachings, Marshall began by examining the *Proslogion*’s claim that God’s justice and mercy are coextensive, especially in the forgiveness of sinners. God’s justice must be merciful to be a justice greater than which none can be conceived. The goodness of God is the conceptual bond between God’s justice and mercy. In the *Proslogion* Anselm leaves unresolved questions of how it can be just for God either to punish or spare the wicked, and why God justly punishes some yet justly saves others. In this text Anselm simply proposes voluntarism; what God wills is just.

In the *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm provides a *ratio* for how God’s forgiveness is both merciful and just. Anselm is no longer voluntaristic; the cross shows God’s wisdom in choosing this way of human salvation, for nothing more just and merciful could be conceived. That God wills only what is fitting and right counters modern voluntaristic notions that God might forgive sins by sheer mercy, that is, by a sheer

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act of will, without requiring just punishment of the sinner. That God will not forgive sins by mercy alone stems not from his justice towards us but from his justice towards himself. Anselm's radical solution is that in the incarnate and crucified Son, the satisfaction for sin made by the God-man is not an exaction from us that God requires, but a donation to us that God gives. Later medieval theologians would nuance Anselm's ideas of the "necessity" of this gift. Marshall concluded by discussing the relationship in Anselm's thought between Christ's satisfaction for human salvation and the need for cooperation by love and obedience of those for whom he offered it, especially through the Eucharist. So Christ says to his followers, "take me and redeem yourself."

An extended discussion engaged the speakers in considerations of the role of sacraments in justification, the way in which scriptural exegesis shaped the thought of Athanasius, necessity in relation to God, and the cooperation of human beings in their own salvation.

DARIA SPEZZANO
Providence College
Providence, Rhode Island