

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

statements and realizations not only as prior to theological activity, but also as continually recomposed in the light of and according to the requirements of that activity." Comparative theology is not just another subdiscipline of theology but a mode which should transform all of theology. Clooney explores the tension between the study of Advaita Vedanta and the construction of a Christian comparative theology based upon a "reflective reappropriation of reading as a primary practical avenue of knowledge."

Sheridan praised Clooney's book as a brilliant breaking of new ground (paradigm shift?) in comparative theology which uses "reading" as a method. This method of reading allows a critical understanding of Advaita Vedanta based on Advaita's own thousand year tradition of exegesis and commentary. Clooney avoids interreligious dialogue's methodology of creating new metapositions which sublimate the specific into the generic. Clooney's methodology avoids the presentism of much contemporary theology of religions, makes available for contemporary theology the theological genius of such Hindu theologians and commentators as Sankara and Vacaspati Misra, and then construes classical Christian theology in line with its own proper intentionality. Sheridan concluded his remarks with a lament that education in comparative theology is not possible anywhere among American institutions of Catholic higher education in theology.

Schreier focused on the nuanced way that Clooney was able to reread the classical passages of Aquinas on the names of God and on the necessity of the passion of Christ after having read closely the commentarial tradition of Advaita Vedanta. Schreier compared this rereading to the pragmatics of the social sciences and of intercultural communications theory. Clooney's experiment is akin to being bilingual where knowing one language opens up possibilities in the use of another. Schreier posed an important question to Clooney's work: Does not a more careful reading of the texts of another tradition reinforce the significance of difference rather than commonality, of incommensurability rather than comparability?

Both Sheridan and Schreier questioned Clooney's deferral of judgments about truth claims. What is left, as the horizons of understanding are being approached? A new universality or a new idolatry?

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