

## HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (II) – TOPIC SESSION

Convener: Joshua R. Brown, Mount St. Mary's University  
Moderator: Rita George-Tvrtkovic, Benedictine University  
Presenters: John Zaleski, Loyola University Maryland  
Robert Trent Pomplun, University of Notre Dame  
Respondent: Mara Brecht, Loyola University Chicago

This session was comprised of two papers and one response paper, each approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes in length, followed by a question-and-answer session that filled the remainder of the allocated time.

John Zaleski offered the first paper, entitled “How Long I Forever? Medieval Christian and Islamic Reflections on Universal Salvation.” Zaleski’s paper focused on a comparison of Solomon of Basra’s *The Book of the Bee* alongside writings from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim. Zaleski emphasized that both authors combine theological and grammatical rationale for questioning the notion of “eternal” (*aionios* in Greek) in notions of “eternal punishment.” Zaleski showed how each author in their different contexts used similar strategies and shared similar underlying commitments leading them to attempt to reframe traditional ideas in Christianity and Islam about the fate of the damned.

R. Trent Pomplun delivered his paper on “Debates about Universal Salvation in Catholic Theology from Newman to Tyrrell.” In this paper, Pomplun traced the Roman Catholic contributions to debates about universal salvation held in nineteenth century English theology. The paper traced these English debates from St. John Henry Newman’s responses to Frederic Denison Maruice and Edward Hayes Plumptre through George Tyrrell’s “A Perverted Devotion” and his attack on scholasticism in that essay. Pomplun showed how, on the one hand, this nineteenth century debate inherited much background from the scholastic period, and that these figures were already discussing questions raised even in recent debates on hell and universalism.

The session included a response from a systematic perspective, offered by Mara Brecht. Brecht structured her response by first contrasting the historical projects of the papers with theologies of religious pluralism since Vatican II. She noted that the focus on time and the mystery of time after death was much more central in the figures discussed in the paper than in contemporary (or more recent) theologies, which tend to speculate about the scope of salvation. This led Brecht to critique more recent theologies of religious pluralism. The main critique she offered was that theologies of religious pluralism actually assume a kind of colonialist and racializing substructure such that Christian ideas about universalism are mixed up with race and whiteness, which an historical and comparative method might help assuage. Finally, Brecht concluded by observing the prominence of love and mercy in the two papers.

The session was attended by around nineteen people including the presenters and administrative team. Overall, this session was well-received, and the committee is excited to keep options open for historical-comparative collaboration in the future.

JOSHUA R. BROWN  
*Mount St. Mary's University*  
*Emmitsburg, Maryland*