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Wealth, Work and the Holy Poor: Early Christian Monasticism between Syria and Egypt

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Abstract

This article examines the attitudes to labour that were crystallized among the monks of two different regions of the Christian world in the late third and fourth centuries. The monks of Syria opted against work. Along with the Manichaean Elect, they expected to be supported by the alms of the faithful. Work for them was inconsistent with the 'angel-like' life of the ascetic. This view was hotly contested by the monks of Egypt, who regarded labour as part of the duty of the monk and as the monk's link to a common, non-angelic humanity. Having sketched out the social and ideological background of both options, the article considers the implications, in Western Christianity, of the victory of the commitment to labour associated with the monks of Egypt.

Keywords

alms, angelic life, Egypt, 'holy poor', Manichaeism, monasticism, Syria, work

Only a century ago, few people would have approved of me for bringing the monks of Syria and Egypt to your attention. For, until recently, we had all tended to be heirs of the great British historian, Edward Gibbon, the first volume of whose monumental *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* first appeared in 1776. Gibbon spoke with the sonorous and confident voice of the 18th-century Enlightenment. For him monks were unpardonable. They were drop-outs. They were fanatics. He wrote of them, with ill disguised contempt, as


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Relating the Theologies of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Bernard Lonergan on Divine Action in the World

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Abstract

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Bernard Lonergan can seem to be quite at odds in their approach to trinitarian theology. However, there have been recent efforts to relate the two theologians favourably. The present author suggests such an effort on the basis of the First Vatican Council's teaching on human understanding and divine mystery. Balthasar's and Lonergan's approaches to achieve some beneficial understanding of the Trinity can be related as complementary: Lonergan's psychological analogy and Balthasar's connection of the economic and immanent Trinity. Besides that, the two authors can be viewed as comparable even in areas that seem opposed, for example, the anthropological method of openness to the transcendent. Perhaps Balthasar might even be open to Lonergan's later development of the psychological analogy. On the other hand, from the perspective of Bernard Lonergan's theology, some nuances to Balthasar's theology can be offered: (1) to the meaning of divine kenosis, (2) regarding the Father's attitude toward his Son who descends into hell, and (3) in the matter of change, even suffering, in God.

Keywords

Balthasar, divine impassibility, economic and immanent Trinity, kenosis, Lonergan, psychological analogy

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Bernard Lonergan can be paired as two prominent 20th-century theologians of the divine Trinity in the Roman Catholic tradition. At the same time, the theological trajectories of the two theologians are distinctly different.

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Recovering the Liturgical Background to Christian Atonement: The Approach of James Alison and Joseph Ratzinger

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Abstract

This essay explores a contemporary approach to Christian atonement theology based on the liturgical background to New Testament understandings of the Cross and Resurrection. This approach offers an important way of critiquing and undermining violently sacrificial understandings of the atonement that place the emphasis for violence on God, such as penal substitutionary theories. The essay outlines this liturgical approach to atonement theology based on the work of Joseph Ratzinger and James Alison, and as it is reflected in the New Testament. A liturgical approach captures the encounter- and event-nature of the atonement as presented in the New Testament, rather than theorizing the atonement into a rigid, rational system. We argue that Alison's identification of atonement as humans undergoing Jesus' atoning action as forgiving victim is complemented and deepened by Ratzinger's Christological perspective that this atoning action involves becoming part of Christ's sacrificial way of being, on the basis of a divine initiative.

Keywords

(James) Alison, atonement, Benedict XVI, (René) Girard, Liturgy, (Joseph) Ratzinger

This essay synthesizes and advances recent efforts in Christian theology to recover a liturgical understanding and experience of Christian atonement. While there are numerous ways of conceptualizing the salvific meaning of Christ's death and

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