

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

- Topic: Beauty and the Spirit of Reconciliation  
Conveners: Peter Casarella, The Catholic University of America  
David Schindler, John Paul II Institute  
for Studies of Marriage and the Family  
Presenters: Stephen Fields, Georgetown University  
Christopher Steck, Georgetown University

Fields presented "Analogy and Reconciliation: von Balthasar and the non-Christian Religions." Von Balthasar's theology, he stated, can be seen as a mediating course between Karl Barth's Christomonism and Karl Rahner's theology of the anonymous Christian. He highlighted three aspects of von Balthasar's thought: (1) culture and conscience as mediums for the immanent presence of God; (2) a christologically determined analogy that remains between nature and grace in spite the devastating effects of sin and the complete absence of any historically identifiable "pure nature"; and (3) the seeds of the incarnate Word (*logos spermatikos*) found in non-Christian religions. Von Balthasar differs from Barth in upholding the importance of analogical, natural knowledge of God through a unity in difference of nature and grace. He differs equally from Rahner in accentuating the decisiveness of the *fides quae creditur* for understanding the event of revelation and in maintaining a wholly realistic account of the personal and cultural distortions created by sin. On this basis, Fields offered a brief account of what might be said regarding both the truth and error in Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Steck's presentation, "Bridging the Church and World: The Mission of the Spirit in von Balthasar's Thought and its Implications for Interreligious Dialogue," made a novel approach to non-Christian religions from the vantage point of pneumatology. Balthasar's pneumatology, he argued, grounds a radical claim regarding the welcoming of the religious other. In his presentation, he focused on the relationship of the person of the Holy Spirit to the moral life and the implicit account of the religious other contained therein. The Spirit for von Balthasar is the uncalculated miracle of eternal fruitfulness, whose spontaneous appearance can be likened to an unanticipated outpouring of love in the birth of a child. The Spirit "liquifies" the presence of Christ and presents the Christian with a new way of living the present tense of one's life in radical anticipation of God's eschatological future. Seen in this light, pneumatology universalizes God's presence and creates a dialogical norm for understanding what God has revealed throughout the created order. A Christlike object is still needed to elicit the grace of creation. According to von Balthasar, saintly existence reveals the glory of the Lord. The lives of holy men and women are radically open to the economic labor of the Spirit, and the beauty of their lives opens a new path for interreligious dialogue. Since the saints have genuinely surrendered their lives over to God and since God's surprising presence in the world serves to break down the barriers

between the Church and the world, the saints' pneumatological witness demonstrates that the Spirit may also labor in the religious other.

During the open discussion, the question was raised about how Christians can learn from the non-Christian religions given the decisiveness of the revelation in Jesus Christ. Both panelists resisted the notion that von Balthasar advocated the idea that an adequately concrete form of revelation could be found in non-Christian religions. They also noted, however, that the form decisively given in the person of Christ can still be repeated in new ways in every generation and that the Church as the interpreter of the evidence of faith is always capable of unpacking that evidence more fully. Moreover, they stated, Balthasar's program does not presuppose that the Church is always free from error or ignore the work of the Holy Spirit in other religions. Another question concerned the meaning of the eternal "fettering" of the Spirit to the Son. Such fettering, it was noted, cannot inhibit the universal scope of the Spirit's activity in the world.

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#### RENAISSANCE AND MODERN THEOLOGY

- Topic: Between Modernity and Catholicism:  
The Theology of Erich Przywara  
Convener: William McConville, Raleigh, North Carolina  
Presenter: Thomas O'Meara, University of Notre

O'Meara offered a succinct overview of his recently published book, *Erich Przywara, S.J.: His Theology and His World* (University of Notre Dame Press). His aim in both the book and the presentation was to profile the life and work of Przywara (1889–1972), generally regarded as one of the most influential and creative German theologians of the first half of the twentieth century, a distinction he shares with the better known Romano Guardini. O'Meara is fascinated by Przywara as a theologian who was unafraid to engage in a sustained dialogue with the world of modernity in all its intellectual and artistic richness. In this he is an interesting "breakthrough thinker" in preparing the way for the Second Vatican Council. (Ill health prevented him from participating significantly in the council.)

Born the same year as Hitler and Heidegger, Przywara joined the Jesuits in 1908 and received his philosophical and theological education in the Jesuit studium at Valkenburg, Holland. The curriculum encouraged a serious dialogue between the Middle Ages and modernity, between Aquinas and Kant. The young Jesuit took full advantage of this situation and deepened his education with