

MORAL THEOLOGY, II

Topic: "Saintly Life Today"
 Convener & Moderator: David Cloutier, Mount St. Mary's University
 Presenters: Kent Lasnoski, Marquette University
 Judith Merkle, Niagara University

This session explored the notion of living the saintly life today from two different angles. First, Kent Lasnoski presented "All the Married Saints: Canonizing Conjugal Life." Lasnoski's paper presented a historical overview of married saints, posing the crucial question: was marriage essential to their lives of holiness, or was it accidental? His study then analyzed characteristics of canonized conjugal life in an attempt to identify aspects of holiness particular to the married state, qualities of their heroic virtue and profound spirituality are tied intrinsically to their marriage itself. His survey of the 141 married saints and blessed indicated that there were many different patterns and examples, many tied to the times of their lives and/or canonization. For example, up to the Reformation, about 90% of married people canonized were nobles, whereas only 20% of married people canonized over the last 300 years belong to the ruling class. But what is common is that the stories of these saints often upset our expectations about both marriage and holiness. Lasnoski argued that the commonality one could trace in these stories was not an identical practice, such as mutual continence, but rather that these figures all brought a Christian intentionality to every aspect of their lives. This Christian intentionality encompassed their sexual lives, the faith of their children, the faith of their spouse, and their participation in the life of the Church (as many participated in tertiary orders or religious life). Thus, the married saints provide an example of an intentional willingness to break standard cultural narratives for the sake of living out their faith.

Judith Merkle presented "Being Faithful: Do We Have a Compass in Postmodern Times?" Merkle explained that our postmodern situation is a complex context, and drew on the work of Mary Douglas to identify the situation as "low grid, low group," i.e., lacking a sense of structure and permanent belonging in either micro and macro-social contexts. Merkle suggested that this context could elicit two responses, the building of new communities or cultural desolation and drifting. However, the new communities must be sensitive to the context. No longer can there be a socially homogeneous Christianity, but instead, Merkle claimed an understanding and experience of God in the everyday. She illuminated this "everyday mysticism" by drawing on the work of Karl Rahner, and then went on to explain how such a sense of the transcendent can function as a challenge to the dominance of consumer culture. Her paper concluded that the loss of embeddedness characteristic of postmodern culture can be problematic, but can also open up a new space for a person to be freed from the limitations of cultural grid and come to a greater responsibility for define one's life and goal.

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