

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

- Topic: All the Saints: Holiness in the World and Theological Wisdom  
Conveners: Barbara Sain, University of St. Thomas  
Nicholas J. Healy, John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family  
Peter Casarella, DePaul University  
Moderator: Barbara Sain, University of St. Thomas  
Presenter: Danielle Nussberger, University of Marquette

Danielle Nussberger's presentation, "Theologians and Saints: The Drama of Iconic Reflections," consulted Hans Urs von Balthasar as a resource for understanding the inextricable unity between theologian and saint—a togetherness that for Balthasar is a unity of mutually transformative reflections in which 1) theologians see the saints reflecting the Spirit's on-going work of enabling graced participation in Christ and the triune life, and 2) more saintly figures emerge in the contemporary Church as they reflect upon the theologian's exhortation to embrace and conform themselves to the Spirit's offer of love. She began by illustrating how Balthasar found models for this unity in theologians of the past whose dialog with sanctity was instinctive. Two such models were Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure.

Nussberger explained how Balthasar saw Pseudo-Dionysius's apophatic theology as a spiritually driven vision of the unseen God that invokes the saint's Christ-like willingness to be lost in the brilliant darkness of God's eternal mystery. She then described how he consulted Bonaventure's theology as an extension of the Dionysian vision. For Balthasar, this expansion involved Bonaventure's reliance upon St. Francis's courageous embodiment of the cruciform life as the means of practicing Denys's apophatic witness to the Godhead. Nussberger concluded this section by outlining Balthasar's attention to a three-fold cycle of 'seeing': 1) beginning with Francis's ecstatic vision of the angel that results in his body's reception of the very wounds of Christ in the stigmata, 2) followed by Bonaventure's re-telling of Francis's mystical experience as Bonaventure saw it, and 3) ending with Balthasar's reflections upon the impact that Francis must have had on Bonaventure's theology. This multi-layered interaction between theology and sanctity enriched Balthasar's own trinitarian theology; for, every saint whom he encountered was a Spirit-filled icon of Christ who displayed the meaning of graced participation in the inter-trinitarian dynamic of love as self-gift.

The final section of Nussberger's paper identified the role of the saint in Balthasar's vocation as theologian. She argued that he learned from theologians, like Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, that the proper mission of the theologian was to be the instrument of the Spirit who tells of the Word made Flesh. These theologians also taught him that a principal means of such telling is to speak the voices and lives of the saints who have striven to imitate the Word from one generation to the next. In turn, the saints schooled him in the nature of theology's expression of God's revelation in human language that consists of much more

than verbal assertion; theological communication is most truthful and relevant when it is carried out in flesh-and-blood acts of embodied mission that mirror divine revelation in the incarnational mode. Nussberger concluded that due to this interpenetration of word and deed, the missions of theologians and saints are wedded together in the plenitude of their contextual differences. In the end, the unity of theological speech and saintly embodiment of Christ—who is the Truth to whom theology bears witness—attests to the theologian's call to holiness and to the saint's vocation as a living apologetic of the veracity of salvation in the Word made Flesh.

The discussion following Nussberger's presentation covered a variety of topics, including the following: how theologians relate to the larger communion of saints, particularly those theologians within the tradition who have themselves been recognized as saints; how the saints contribute to the *sensus fidelium*; how the saints, by living out their individual missions, are the embodiment of God's work in the world; how Mary is the preeminent example in Balthasar's theology of a saint whose person was fully united with her mission of giving Christ to the world; and how Balthasar's theology of the laity as saints in the world shows the many different ways of embodying holiness in the world.

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