

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

Topic: Balthasar's Impasse and Contemporary Christology  
Convener: Barbara Sain, University of St. Thomas  
Moderator: Peter Casarella, DePaul University  
Presenter: Danielle Nussberger, Marquette University  
Respondent: Nicholas J. Healy, John Paul II Institute for Studies  
on Marriage and Family

The theme of this year's session was "Balthasar's Impasse and Contemporary Christology." Danielle Nussberger presented a paper entitled "Balthasar's Theology of Christ's *Impasse* and Dark Night." Responding to the recent debate regarding whether Balthasar's descent into Hell theology is continuous or discontinuous with the tradition, Nussberger's presentation offered a new exegetical key to authentically interpreting his theology of Holy Saturday. She argued that applying the fresh hermeneutical lens of Constance Fitzgerald's *impasse* reveals how Balthasar has composed a theology of the 'dark night' in a double sense. First, Balthasar speaks in analogical terms about Christ's 'dark night' of descent that manifests the inter-trinitarian kenotic distance of love. The economic impasse of the distance between Father and Son expresses their eternal love within the context of sin and death, depositing sin's dominion through Christ's humble power of faithful surrender to the distant Father. Second, Balthasar encourages the theologian's embrace of impasse that allows God to impart the apophatic wisdom of kenotic love that marvelously transforms one's kataphatic expectations.

Nicholas J. Healy responded to Danielle Nussberger's paper with a reflection on the relationship between death and Resurrection in light of the mystery of the Eucharist. For Balthasar the descent into hell is a consequence of the Word's becoming flesh and going to the end in love. "Christian community," Balthasar writes, "is established in the Eucharist, which presupposes the descent into hell (mine and yours)." While noting his substantial agreement with Nussberger's reflection on the theme of "impasse," Healy raised a question about the nature of reason: in what sense is human reason called to undergo death and Resurrection? How are we to understand the novelty of what Jesus Christ reveals about God in the event of his death, descent into hell and Resurrection in such a way that we do not do violence to human reason?

The two papers prompted lively discussion on the nuances of Balthasar's theology and on how his theology relates to other voices in the tradition. Some questions focused on the knowledge of Christ during Holy Saturday. Two points of particular interest for that topic were the roles of Christ's divine and human natures and the relation of knowledge and mystery, both for Balthasar and for other thinkers in the tradition, such as Nicholas of Cusa. Other questions addressed the influence of Sergius Bulgakov on Balthasar's understanding of kenosis or compared Balthasar's theology to Orthodox ideas of communion between the

divine and human. Another topic was the relation of activity and passivity in Balthasar's description of Christ on Holy Saturday and how his understanding of Christ's experience relates to the conference theme of impasse.

BARBARA SAIN

*University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota*