

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR – CONSULTATION

- Topic: “All You Who Labor...”: Theology, Work, and Economy  
 Convener: Jennifer Newsome Martin, University of Notre Dame  
 Moderator: Christopher Hadley, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
 Presenters: Mark Yenson, King’s University College (London, Ontario)  
 Anne Carpenter, St. Mary’s College (Moraga, CA)  
 Peter Fritz, College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA)

In his paper, “Mozart as Theological Subversive,” Mark Yenson offered an exploration of the work of Mozart as a theological locus, with particular attention to the late operas *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Die Zauberflöte*. Noting the importance of Mozart among prominent theologians such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis, the paper provided an overview of Balthasar’s readings of Mozart, instances which range from passing mentions to illustrative analogies to more substantive pieces like his “Tribute to Mozart” and his meditation on *The Magic Flute*’s “Farewell Trio.” While recognizing the limits of Balthasar’s early *Entwicklung der musikalischen Idee* which sometimes exemplifies an “uncomfortable cultural chauvinism,” Yenson goes on to explore renewed possibilities of theological readings of Mozart rooted in the context of the Josephine Catholic Enlightenment, specifically, and the exigencies of the late eighteenth century more generally, making a case for why and how Balthasar’s lyrical interpretations “need to be complemented by a more historical-critical attention to the fissures, interruptions, and subversions in Mozart.” These include Mozart’s use of ironic disjunctions between text and musical form and the sense that both social community and acts of human forgiveness are fragile, provisional, and not guaranteed. In sum, Yenson argues that “such reading suggests not only harmony but dissonance, not only synthesis but juxtaposition, along with interruptions, deferrals, and disorientation. Mozart points not to a prelapsarian dream or utopian fantasy, but to society still *in via*. We may be given glimpses of *das Ganze im Fragment*, but these glimmers cannot lead to forgetfulness about our own facticity, our own situatedness, and the hard work involved in discovering attunement and harmony with one another.”

In “Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dismantling of Europe: Theological Aesthetics as Subversive Work,” Anne Carpenter took a cue from Achille Mbembe’s *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* in order to challenge the view of Europe and its colonies as occupying separate conceptual spaces. Rather, “they share a past, and so they share presence to one another;” this nested presence is exemplified concretely in cultural objects and artifacts held in Western museums, objects and artifacts often acquired through acts of violence and which in many cases represent a cultural loss insofar as their original use and context has been forgotten. Carpenter employed this idea to interrogate whether or not a Balthasarian theological aesthetics—often criticized as being overly “Western” or “European”—has the capacity for making present the “other” and the “elsewhere.” The paper found a productive point of analogy in Balthasar’s Christology, particularly the momentum of the Word into the silence and death of the suffering Christ: “The wordlessness of the African masks that fill our

museums, whose testimony is to violence and to a positive word that is no longer legible, bear an analogy with all human death. So also their legibility, their goodness, their existence as objects of meaning rather than of fascinated terror, has an analogy in the Incarnate Word who goes to his death.” Carpenter concluded her reflections with a call to action and a turn to the saints, recalibrated here as non-white subjects representative of “historical living—whose struggle, triumph, failure, even rage—preserves a Christian metaphysics in our present day.”

Finally, in “Avant-Garde and Christ: Artworks, Economy, and the Balthasarian Sublime,” Peter Fritz argued for internal resources in Balthasar for a stronger engagement with post-avant-garde art than Balthasar himself offered. Fritz opened his comments with a powerful visual juxtaposition of Sarah Sze’s 2017 artistic installation *Centrifuge* in the Haus der Kunst (Munich), with images of the same space eighty years previous, which had been the site of the *Ehrenhalle* in which Hitler had spoken and a locus for Nazi opposition to modern or avant-garde art. After noting Balthasar’s early antipathy toward avant-garde art, Fritz turned constructively to a possible “Balthasarian alternative” in the “Balthasarian sublime, which could provide an alternative to post-Nietzscheans, could welcome theological reflection on avant-garde and post-avant-garde art, and thus could reinforce his resistance to restricted economy.” Fritz finds resources especially in Balthasar’s Christology, particularly in his adoption of the “Augustinian and then Bonaventurian idea of *Christus deformis*,” a de-forming which can “interrupt this-worldly standards for beauty and demand their revision[.]” Balthasar’s openness to these Christological fragmentations, Fritz argues, has an analogue in the “reality fragments” of Sze’s art, both of which offer a kind of subversive resistance to totalizing systems of conceptual mastery and to economies of the hegemonic.

A wide-ranging discussion followed, with questions on analogy, human freedom and theopanism, the role of the saints, the notion of the sublime, the possible priority of the aural over the visual, the necessity of coupling dramatics and ethical action with an aesthetic framework, and the need to interrogate any stipulation of the cultural superiority of the West.

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