

THOMAS AQUINAS – CONSULTATION

Convener: David Elliot, Catholic University of America
 Moderator: Gregory LaNave, Dominican House of Studies
 Presenters: Frederick Bauerschmidt, Loyola University Maryland
 Monica Marcelli-Chu, Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University
 Matthew Dugandzic, St. Mary's Seminary and University

Frederick Bauerschmidt addressed the conference theme of social salvation in a paper titled “Eucharist and Social Salvation in Thomas Aquinas.” Theologians such as Henri de Lubac and Marie-Louis Chauvet insisted on the connection of the Eucharist with ecclesiology partly in opposition to what was deemed an exclusive emphasis on transubstantiation typical of medieval theology, which led to a focus on the salvation of the individual. Bauerschmidt’s question was whether Aquinas can rightly be charged with ignoring the social/communal aspect of the sacraments, especially in light of the fact that he regards the Eucharist as being “completed” in the real presence of Christ, not in the reception of the Eucharist by the congregation. Bauerschmidt suggested that the medieval experience of liturgy and the sacraments presupposed a communal identity; it is our own age of individualism and isolation that insists on talking about community. The discussion that followed focused on whether this reading of Aquinas effectively responds to Chauvet’s critique. It was noted, among other things, that human community should not be regarded as an end in itself.

Monica Marcelli-Chu explored Aquinas’s category of “living with” as a way to approach an integral ecology in her paper, “Living with All Things: Navigating an Anthropocentric and Universal Common Good in Aquinas.” Aquinas takes from Augustine the distinction of “enjoying” the divine persons and “using” lower creatures and adds the category of “living with” rational spirits. Marcelli-Chu argued that this category affects our understanding of lower creatures as well. While one does not love nonrational creatures with charity, one does love them *out of* charity. All creation “waits for the revelation of the glory of the children of God.” Human beings are to “use” lower creation, but this involves recognizing the purpose of all things, the common good that is the ordering of the passing world toward glory; thus, “living with” describes the way in which we relate to all of creation as we move toward the glory to come. The discussion raised questions about how this delineation of a qualified anthropocentrism and the universal common good encompasses angels, or creatures of a rational nature who are not able to use reason.

Matthew Dugandzic raised the question of how we are to identify whether a particular sin involves grave or light matter in his paper, “On Light Matter in the Sin of Lying.” While much recent moral theology focuses on happiness and the virtues, there is less attention given to identifying clearly the difference between mortal and venial sins in terms of their matter, even though this is a crucial part of teaching moral theology. Insight on this point can be gained by a reading of the much-maligned commentatorial and manualist traditions. Some sins always involve grave matter, other always involve light matter, and others still, such as lying and theft, can admit of light or grave matter. Explanations for the distinctions differ: for example, one can see that murder always involves grave matter because, unlike theft, it does not admit of degrees;

certain actions are also classified as involving grave matter because, if generally admitted, they would cause grave harm to society (e.g., breaking the seal of confession); lying on the other hand can be grave or light depending on the harm that would accrue to society if it were generally permitted; and violations of justice that do not really violate another person's rights (e.g., failing to express gratitude) is intrinsically a light matter. The discussion highlighted the value of this retrieval of the manualist tradition, and explored the precise distinction between grave and light matter in terms of the social ramifications of particular sins.

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