

POLITICS OF DOXOLOGY—SELECETED SESSION

- Topic: The Politics of Doxology: A Theological Response to Giorgio Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory*
- Convener: Anthony J. Godzieba, Villanova University
- Moderator: Lieven Boeve, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
[unable to attend; substitute = Godzieba]
- Presenters: Yves De Maeseneer, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Kevin Mongrain, Duquesne University

This session focused on Giorgio Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (2011, part of the second installment of his *Homo sacer* series) and its central claim that the liturgy's doxological function, rather than having merely a transcendent referent, is at the root of the genealogy of modern political power. Yves De Maeseneer ("Doxology of Power? Giorgio Agamben on the Liturgical Roots of Western Politics") presented an analysis in light of Vatican II's claim that the end of liturgy is twofold ("the *sanctification* of humankind in Christ and the *glorification* of God" [*Sacrosanctum concilium* 10]), in which the latter end is understood as pointing to the vertical dimension. Agamben finds it is not quite this simple. "Glory" does have both a profane and a religious meaning. In an historical retrieval of ceremonial formulas, Agamben points at the mutual exchange between liturgy and politics. Christian doxologies (e.g., "Kyrie," "Gloria," or "Te Deum") borrowed formulas and symbols from the imperial cult; in its turn, Western political imagination drew upon Christian liturgy for its forms. Agamben claims that those parallels are not superficial but point to a similar structure: *doxology serves the ceremonial production of power*. To be more precise, glory hides its power by its blinding light, and in this very operation maintains the conditions in which power can develop itself. To use another metaphor, glory is to be understood as the fuel of the "machine" of modern political economy. All of this poses a critical challenge for theologians such as Barth, von Balthasar, and their followers in their use of "glory" as a fundamental theological category.

Mongrain ("Politics of Glory: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology as Source of Resistance") specifically took up Agamben's reproach of theology's blindness to the (hidden) dimension of power in the liturgy, especially in its doxological aspects. Agamben explicitly blames theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Barth for their reduction of divine glory to the category of "beauty." Mongrain contrasted Agamben's theory of glory with von Balthasar's perspective. Von Balthasar developed a liturgical-doxological theology of powerlessness, a theology that was presented as a way of transforming the very parameters on which Agamben's view of religion and politics is based. In the ritual memorial of the Crucifixion of Christ *glory radiates in powerlessness*. As such, Christian doxology detaches religion from the exercise of power in its own ecclesial sphere and in the non-ecclesial sphere, a shift that is revealed not only in liturgical forms but also in more contemplative ways of life. All these elements point to an alternative political imagination that both validates and desacralizes secular power.

Agamben's difficult and provocative argument elicited requests for clarification as well as substantive discussion from all the participants. What is the specific theological payoff of these claims? What is the specific genealogy of politics in von Balthasar, and does he valorize

Selected Session: Politics of Doxology

the state? Does von Balthasar's own argument need ideological critique? In light of Agamben's indebtedness to Nietzsche and Foucault, is any theological talk of "peace" naïve? If "glory" and "doxology" are so easily decoded into a political economy, what, in the end, keeps a project of holiness going? There was concession that liturgy does indeed impose glorification and power in some ways. In response to the question as to whether Agamben was a gnostic, De Maeseneer stated that he was not a gnostic but indeed has argued against Gnosticism, and that he has criticized Christianity's trinitarian theology for giving in too much to the gnostic schemes that lay at the basis of our modern political theory. Mongrain, in his closing remarks, compared Agamben's goal to that of the fourth-century desert monks and even to the early Franciscans.

ANTHONY J. GODZIEBA
Villanova University
Villanova, Pennsylvania