

There was some discussion of scientific issues, including clarification of the meaning of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The startling image of replaying "the evolutionary tape" from a previous stage (S. J. Gould), thus yielding distinctly different species than we have, and possibly nothing like ourselves, was revisited. What theological weight can be given to this scientifically based speculation?

There was general agreement that any metaphysical model should be provisional and developmental. Something more flexible than a system is desirable. Here Lonergan's approach was suggested as providing some guidance. Several strongly agreed that we do need to recover the doctrine of analogy—both of goodness and being—while maintaining the sense of mystery. Finally, there was, consonant with Gerhart's insistence on metaphysical sensitivity to genres, a plea that in the interaction between science and theology social, political and cultural dimensions be included, along with the different types of narrative they represent.

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

Topic: Does Hans Urs von Balthasar Have a Political Theology?

Convener: David L. Schindler, John Paul II Institute, Washington, D.C.

Presenter: Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, Loyola College

Respondent: Brian Benestad, Assumption College

In taking up the question of "theo-drama and political theology," Bauerschmidt said he was not primarily interested in what Balthasar has to say about various political and liberation theologies, but rather in how his notion of theo-drama might actually shape our understanding of the "political." Balthasar's understanding of human existence as "dramatic" offers a much needed conceptual framework for those who wish to understand the distinctively "political" character of Christian existence.

While Balthasar sees certain affinities between his own theo-dramatic approach and political theology, he sees the latter as ultimately inadequate because it fails to see that "the message of salvation as lived and proclaimed by Jesus cannot be brought into a wholly univocal relationship with the structuring of the world's future within time." Political theology is prone to the same Promethean temptation as the rest of modernity, stressing *praxis* at the expense of *pathos*, thus losing the crucial sense of creaturely action as *Gelassenheit* and distorting the Marian form of the Church. In this way political theology risks

putting the Christian into "the 'political' pigeonhole," failing to realize that "the impotence of the Crucified in death . . . remains the shape of even the most vigorous Christian life."

This does not mean that theo-drama has no relevance for something that might be called a "political theology." However, its relevance lies on the level of what Carl Schmitt called the "metaphysical image that underlies any politics." Political and legal concepts are not metaphysically or theologically innocent; rather, they are transpositions of the metaphysical image—or, one might say, "metanarrative"—that dominates that age onto the plane of social organization. This realization forces upon us the notion that an alternative metaphysical image might lead to an alternative politics. Within a given metaphysical framework there are a finite number of conceivable political possibilities, and a radically different understanding of the possibilities of human dwelling together involves a metaphysical shift, the instantiation of a different metaphysical image, the telling of a new metanarrative. What Balthasar offers us in his theo-drama is just such an alternative metaphysical image.

For Balthasar, the essential characteristic of a theo-dramatic approach is its willingness to take seriously the fact that the eternal God has appeared as an actor—as *the* actor—on the time-bound and space-bound stage of human history. The stage on which each of us enacts our role is the "acting area" that has been opened up by the saving event of Jesus Christ, and creation accomplished with a view toward this event. It is the archetypal mission of Christ that allots roles to the other actors in the theo-drama, making them into "theological persons." To be an authentic person is to be "in Christ." At the same time, to be in Christ is not to be lifted out of the drama, for the *person* of Christ is coextensive with his *mission* in history. His consciousness is not the all-seeing gaze, but a dramatic consciousness that makes him both *comprehensor* and *viator*. Thus being in Christ involves the renunciation of any perspective on the world stage that takes up a place outside of it. At the same time, it invests the subjectivity of those who are in Christ with a universal and world-historical significance. Thus theo-drama allows us to conceive of a universality that makes the claim to absolute knowledge, and a subjectivity that is not enclosed upon itself.

At this point it is necessary to move Balthasar's notion of theo-drama beyond the point to which he himself takes it, to transpose it onto the level of the political. Following Hegel, Balthasar positions the dramatic between the "epic"—the story told from the all-seeing perspective—and the "lyric"—the private, introspective story that the soul tells itself. Transposing these distinctions onto the plane of the political, we might say that an epic politics would emphasize order and tend toward totalitarianism, whereas a lyric politics would emphasize freedom and tend toward the privatization of all meaning, leaving the public sphere to be guided by pragmatic concerns. A dramatic politics, however, would seek a basis other than either "order" or "freedom." This raises the question of how one might renounce the desire of epic politics for an order that is transparent to either will or idea without lapsing into the lyric politics of the

individual life-project. To push the question even further, how might one conceive of a *theo*-dramatic politics—a politics that takes with complete seriousness the notion that the drama of the world reaches its high point in the becoming-human of God?

Such a *theo*-dramatic politics would not understand itself as operating either on the epic level of statecraft, nor on the lyric level of therapeutic self-cultivation, but on the level of Christian discipleship. It is only the capture of our imaginations by the alternatives of epic and lyric that blinds us to the dramatic possibility that in calling disciples Jesus inaugurates a real form of political existence. The church of disciples is neither the *polis* nor the *oikos*, but some new form of human dwelling together, a new politics (and economics). It is Balthasar's notion of *theo*-drama that makes such claims thinkable, for it makes it possible to see seemingly small acts of discipleship—baptizing and breaking bread, caring for the sick and visiting the imprisoned—as invested with world historical importance.

In his response, Benestad described Bauerschmidt's presentation as an attempt to discern how Balthasar's understanding of *theo*-drama might contribute to an understanding of the relation between politics and theology. *Theo*-dramatic politics, according to Bauerschmidt, rules out totalitarianism, fascism and a "politics that rejects any overarching good in the name of the good of the individual subject." This last kind of politics is, of course, the standard form of liberalism in contemporary democracy. What *theo*-dramatic politics recommends is to follow Jesus in a community of disciples. Since following Jesus is the shared pursuit of the good, the life of discipleship is a dramatic politics. The community of disciples is "the paradigm of human dwelling together in unity." So the first political task of the Church is to be true to herself by living discipleship in community and thereby to be an example of political life for the nations of the world. Benestad notes that, while Bauerschmidt was sympathetic to this vision of *theo*-dramatic politics, he was nonetheless critical of Balthasar for not carrying through his *theo*-dramatic approach to recommend a new political theology that would renounce the use of violence and embrace some kind of pacifism.

Benestad based his response to Bauerschmidt essentially on what Balthasar says in his "The Responsibility of Christians for the World." In this text Balthasar draws out the implications of his theology when he affirms that Christians would be irresponsible to "demand out of Christian charity and communion complete disarmament or nonresistance or pacifism." Since "total redemption has only been accomplished *in spe*," the ordinary structures of society cannot simply be abolished. This doesn't mean that Christians cannot do much work for justice and mercy in the world. In Balthasar's words: "The Christians' task is, as far as they can, to imbue the structures of the world with the boundless spirit of love and reconciliation, even though they will always encounter opposition throughout this imbuing."

To explain the implications of Balthasar's general proposals, Benestad offered a reflection on the Catholic understanding of the common good. His starting point was St. Augustine on the nature of a republic in his *City of God*. Augustine's second definition of a republic is "a fellowship of a multitude of rational beings united through a sharing in and agreement about what it loves. . . . It is a better people if it agrees in loving better things; a worse one if it agrees in loving worse things." Otherwise stated, there can be various levels of solidarity or shared common goods in any particular regime. Christians have a duty to work prudently to refine and elevate the agreement about what the political community loves. This kind of work seems to involve something more than what Bauerschmidt means by living in community as disciples of Jesus.

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COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

Topic: Buddhist Theology—Some Reflections

by a Contemporary Buddhist Scholar

Moderator: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College

Presenter: John Makransky, Boston College

This discussion of some questions in contemporary Buddhist theology took place within the general framework of comparative theology as understood over the years at the CTSA. When we begin comparative theology, we remain rooted in our own faith communities and continue to seek to know God better through understanding our religious experience, sacred scriptures and traditions, and through faithful theological inquiry; the distinctive mark of comparative theology is that we *also* seek to learn from other religious traditions in their rich particularities, and then to see our own faith and theology differently because of what we learn from the other tradition or traditions. Although comparative theology is most commonly practiced by Christians, in this seminar we had a rare opportunity—to learn from John Makransky, a practicing Buddhist thinker (in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition) who himself has also been learning from Christian spirituality and theology. This report seeks not to summarize all that Makransky said precisely as he said it, but to highlight some major points in his presentation, as understood by this reporter.

First of all, the term "Buddhist theology" is admittedly provocative, since Gautama the Buddha has generally not been thought of as a "god" nor as "God." Makransky's presentation therefore began with the affirmation that Buddhism is oriented to transcendence, a higher realization which takes the seeker beyond the