

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR SOCIETY

- Topic: Holiness, Culture, and Politics in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar
- Convener: Barbara Sain, University of St. Thomas
- Moderator: Nicholas J. Healy, John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family
- Presenter: Peter Casarella, DePaul University
- Respondents: Gill K. Goulding, Regis College, University of Toronto
William Portier, University of Dayton

The main paper of this year's session, presented by Peter Casarella, was entitled "Holiness, Culture, and Politics in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar." The paper examined the conference theme of the prophetic commitments of the theologian through an analysis of Hans Urs von Balthasar's engagement with Reinhold Schneider and the latter's opposition to German re-armament.

Casarella began with an examination of some of the principal and most principled criticisms that have been made against von Balthasar. These include the charge of elitism and the view that his defense of a supra-temporal Trinitarian event necessarily entails a flight from the everyday conditions of historical existence. These charges merit a detailed response from the perspective of the entire *Theo-Drama*. However, another element in the Balthasarian response, Casarella argued, is a more direct consideration of the historical and cultural conditions out of which his theology emerged, particularly in the period prior to the beginning of *The Glory of the Lord* and the subsequent volumes of the triptych.

The main part of Casarella's presentation then consisted of a historical reconstruction of the period of Balthasar's time working on *Stimmen der Zeit* in Munich just prior to his transfer back to Switzerland. The social engagement of certain Jesuits working on *Stimmen der Zeit* sets the context for his early theology and helps to elucidate his interest in the work of Reinhold Schneider as a witness to Christian responsibility and conscience in the midst of social upheaval. The fact that Balthasar published early on and then later *rewrote* a book on Schneider serves as an important testimony to his concern for culture and politics. Too little attention has been paid by scholars working on the thought of von Balthasar to the social and cultural conditions of his thought. Casarella's study is intended as a first step in a more comprehensive examination of this aspect of his early theological formation.

In the final part of his presentation, Casarella compared von Balthasar's understanding of the *analogia entis* to that of Erich Przywara, with particular attention to von Balthasar's discussion of Przywara in *Theologie der Geschichte*. Von Balthasar's more precisely Christological delineation of the *analogia entis* is key for his vision of a centrifugally catholic Church: commissioned to go forth into the world and witness to Christ.

The first response was offered by Gill Goulding. Initially this response highlighted the key influence on von Balthasar's thought of the Ignatian *Spiritual*

Exercises made during his Tertianship. Through the lens of freedom, Goulding then addressed the Christological *analogia entis* as a basis for a centrifugal catholic integration, and the ingredients of identity, vocation, and mission in the symphonic whole.

A second response was offered by William Portier, who urged Casarella to pursue and develop the thesis that von Balthasar's memory of the "German Christians" and their "political theology" lies behind his own political attitudes. As relevant to countering charges of failing to give history its due and consistent with the above thesis, Portier drew attention to von Balthasar's relentless critique of the introduction of "brute force" into the Church. Finally, he suggested that, at a time that finds Christian thought in the west living in the tension between a religious metaphysics and a Christocentric theology, a full-blown Christological *analogia entis* may be beyond us.

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