

FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD

Convener: James F. Keating, Providence College

Moderator: Karen Alliaume, Lewis University

Presenters: Robert Imbelli, Boston College

Megan Anechiarico, Boston College

Todd Whitmore, University of Notre Dame

In his paper entitled “You Alone Are the Holy One: the Christological Foundation of Holiness,” Fr. Imbelli opened with the near truism that the call to holiness among all the members of the Church was an important and pervasive theme of the Second Vatican Council. Yet, the Christological character of this call, that Christ is model and source of holiness, has often been neglected and needs further exploration. To lay a biblical foundation for this work, Imbelli offered a close reading of Paul’s *Letter to the Ephesians*, often seen as the most ecclesiological of the Pauline epistles. Here the life of holiness particular to Christians is presented as ongoing transformation in Christ beginning with our baptism and directed toward becoming a self that is truly “Eucharistic.” Next Imbelli looked at Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, a classic of spirituality not least for its diagnosis of the true evil of human sinfulness. In particular, in the *Purgatorio* sinners are drawn up the mountain by the power of God’s love working upon their growing freedom through encountering images, songs, and saintly examples that show forth a cosmos transformed by Christ. The presentation concluded with an argument that as Christological holiness is by nature ecclesial the liturgy must be reckoned the privileged locus of our encounter with the Christ, the Holy One of God.

Ms. Anechiarico presented the subject of her doctoral work, the Doctors of the Church as theological sources in her paper entitled “The Doctors of the Church as Theological and Ecclesiological Sources.” Knowing that her audience needed some background on this neglected category of theologians and important teachers of the Gospel, Anechiarico provided a thorough introduction to the origins and history of the development of a list of officially sanctioned “Doctors of the Church.” She focused on the criteria by which they were selected, their variety—recently increased by the addition of three women—and their collective capacity to speak to issues in the life of the Church. Beyond the historical background, Anechiarico offered an argument that the Doctors were intended to be an ongoing gift to the Church and that their relative neglect by theologians and Church leaders is unwarranted and constitutes a waste of precious resources.

The presentation concluded with a reflection on two women, thus non-ordained, Doctors: St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena. Both of these women exemplify holiness of life and eminence of doctrine and should be of special interest to the laity.

Dr. Whitmore made a powerful case that our consideration of the theological importance of saints has been too delimited by the official category in his paper, “All the *Living Saints*: The Care for Ethnography in Theological Method.” Drawing upon both his study of ethnography as an academic discipline and his

fieldwork in northern Uganda and South Sudan, Whitmore treated those assembled with examples of saintliness smudged by sexual sinfulness, fiscal compromise, and syncretism. His point was that ethnography allows theologians to confront the human and cultural complexity of lived-out sanctity, a holiness of which the ambiguities have not been brushed away by the hagiographical impulse to give Catholics pristine, even otherworldly, models to emulate. He gave us an example of a remarkably heroic and effective priest ultimately chased out of his ministry after his relationship with a teenage girl was revealed, a community of religious who did excellent but relatively comfortable work outside the warzone, and a non-Christian but deeply holy native ritual of reconciliation. These are saints and places of holiness that we must deal and ethnography is a resource for theologians seeking the holy in the all too human.

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