

TOWARDS AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF SANCTITY

Convener: Jessica M. Murdoch, Villanova University
 Moderator: Anna Moreland, Villanova University
 Presenters: Jessica M. Murdoch, Villanova University
 Peter J. Casarella, DePaul University
 Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, Pontifical Catholic
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Three papers were presented considering the relationship between holiness and human knowledge. Dr. Murdoch read a paper entitled: "On the Relationship Between Sanctity and Knowledge: Holiness as an Epistemological Criterion." In it she argued, following the thought of St. Thomas, that holiness is necessary for both natural and supernatural knowledge. Epistemologically, Thomas' thought is typically understood as an alternative to Augustinian illuminationism. On this view, Thomas replaces the divine illumination that functions prominently as an epistemological ground in Augustine's thought with the agent intellect, a sort of natural illumination. A systematic reading of the pertinent Thomistic texts raises several questions: In what way is God the cause of human knowledge? What ultimately distinguishes natural from supernatural knowledge? And what, ultimately, is the role of sanctity in human knowing?

Dr. Murdoch noted that though it is widely accepted that the connaturality between God and the graced soul grounds supernatural knowledge, she would contend that Thomas also points towards a divine ground of natural knowledge. Holiness, defined as conformity of the soul to God, "increases being" and therefore, following the Thomistic convertibility of being and knowing, increases the capacity for knowledge, both natural and supernatural. Following this, Dr. Murdoch argued that sanctity produces an ontological change in the saint that results in a greater "degree of being" that corresponds to greater knowledge.

Dr. Casarella offered a paper entitled: "Communion of Saints and the Epistemology of Holiness." He noted that St. Bonaventure conceives of holiness as a medium between science and wisdom. The process of mediation is one that must be reiterated through a passage of the soul back to God. In Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, that process takes place within a progressive transformation of understanding through philosophical, theological, and mystical wisdom. Most treatments of this journey focus on the movement from the external world to the soul as microcosm and then back to God. By also looking at Bonaventure's sermon on the feast of All Saints, Dr. Casarella's presentation considered the role of participation in the communion of saints within Bonaventure's epistemology of holiness. By reading Bonaventure together with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thesis (*Communio Sanctorum: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*) and Alejandro García-Rivera's *The Community of the Beautiful*, Dr. Casarella developed some theses regarding the relationship between the communion of saints and the epistemology of holiness. Ultimately, the presentation

responded to the question of whether partaking in this life of the communion of saints makes a social claim on the epistemological role of holiness.

Dr. Bingemer offered a paper entitled: "The Epistemology of Sanctity According to Simone Weil." Simone Weil, in a letter to her friend, the Dominican priest Fr. Perrin, says: "Today, it is still nothing being a saint. It is necessary to have the holiness that the present moment demands, a new holiness, also without precedent." Dr. Bingemer argued that one of the contributions Weil brings to an epistemology of sanctity is the clear distinction she makes between morality and sanctity. Sanctity passes beyond the simple voluntaristic exercise of virtues. Intimacy with God and the need of interior exodus, of going out of the self and making an offering of oneself, is the seal of the saint. In other words, Weil speaks of the person who lives his/her faith radically. She defines the saint as the one who "tends to perfection less by a search for integrity than by loving God, in a burning faith which leads to total devotion and to forgetting himself/herself." Dr. Bingemer noted that like Weil, there are many others, men and women, well known or anonymous, "christians without Church," who can be paradigmatic figures within the uncertainty and obscureness of our modern and post-modern times, where human being, constrained to live in a world which lost the sense of Absolute, has the impression of having also lost the sense for living.

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