

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR – CONSULTATION

Convener: Charles A. Gillespie, Sacred Heart University  
Moderator: Charles A. Gillespie, Sacred Heart University  
Presenters: Daniel A. Rober, Sacred Heart University  
Kristen Drahos, Baylor University

The Hans Urs von Balthasar Consultation held both our annual breakfast gathering and an experimental session on recent Balthasar scholarship. Both conversations emphasized new and wide-ranging opportunities for Balthasar scholarship and the intellectual and camaraderie welcomed by the Balthasar consultation of the CTSA.

Following our custom for the last few years, the Balthasar Breakfast featured a common reading to anchor our reflections. This year, inspired by the convention theme, we looked to Balthasar's essay "The Christian Form" from *Explorations in Theology IV* (Ignatius, 1989). Our breakfast discussion traversed how Balthasar's account of form—particularly the relationship of the Christian form to the human and to ecumenical relations—might be able to aid our discussions about human flourishing, non-human animals and salvation, and artificial intelligence and cybernetic technology (like Neuralink). We also took the opportunity to reflect together on the state of the field of Balthasar studies, higher education and academic publishing, how to support junior faculty, and a collaborative conversation about plans for the future of the Balthasar Consultation.

The consultation session focused on recent and new Balthasar scholarship engaging a characteristically Balthasarian interplay between theology, phenomenology, and literature. This year, the consultation attempted an experimental format loosely inspired by Balthasar's frequent calls for a "kneeling theology"—that is, a theology attentive to its response to God from the posture of prayer. We took that both literally and figuratively. First, the session began with a period of prayerful reflection and interpersonal greeting that invited all attendees to share Balthasarian themes that influence and impact their current work. Then the session engaged in a dialogical presentation where both presenters and audience could interrupt the flow of presentation for immediate dialogue. The result of this format transformed two different genres of brief prepared remarks into springboards for ongoing synthetic conversation rather than talks with questions and answers. (The reader should note that the format of the *Proceedings* implies a traditional panel, but this was an intentionally experimental session that did not list "presenters" in the program.)

Daniel A. Rober of Sacred Heart University turned our attention to two examples of recent Balthasar scholarship that treat Balthasar in respectively direct and indirect ways. First, Rober responded to *A Symphony of Distances* by Christopher Hadley, S.J. (Catholic University of America Press, 2022) by turning our focus to the role of Balthasar in shaping Jean-Luc Marion's recent forays into what Rober identified as more explicitly theological territories. Rober put Hadley's book into conversation primarily with Marion's *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere* (Stanford University Press, 2024). Metaphors of distance served to open questions about Balthasar's Trinitarian theology, Marion's icon/idol distinction and theory of the erotic phenomenon, the

relationship between philosophy and theology, and the status of recognition for revelation and gift.

Kristen Drahos of Baylor University offered a sketch of a new project that will put Balthasar's iconic image of the mother's smile into conversation with the literary fiction of Shusaku Endo. Drahos offered theo-drama readings of some complicated images of mothers from Endo's fiction—*Deep River* (New Directions, 1995) and *Portraits of a Mother* (Yale University Press, 2025) as well as a new translation of a famous sequence at the conclusion his novel, *Silence* (Picador, 2016). These images—ranging from a tour guide's account of a suffering goddess mothering oppressed communities in India to a retranslation that shifts an imperative command into an invitational surrender—prompted new ways to image the Christ-form in Balthasar and to discern theology in and through Endo. This love develops maternal care in the form of wounded love that we see in thinkers like Julian of Norwich. It acts as an inversion of and complement to the maternal love of Balthasar, widening and complicating understandings of divine love as maternal, dialogic love.

The session concluded its experimental format by inviting participants into an exercise that responded to the ideas raised in the conversation through bodily movement. Silly, strange, and occasionally insightful, physical gestures opened a final round of prayerful reflection and expressions of intellectual and spiritual gratitude.

CHARLES A. GILLESPIE  
*Sacred Heart University*  
*Fairfield, Connecticut*