

2011 Convention Theme: “All the Saints”

The Catholic tradition has consistently held that some believers so imitate their Savior that they share in his sacredness and reflect the glory of God in extraordinary ways. Indeed, this belief was a consistently neuralgic issue in the Reformation of the sixteenth-century that contributed to the separation of the churches, and thus played a role in shaping post-Reformation Catholic identity. This belief and its attending devotional practices have waned in some Catholic quarters since the close of the Second Vatican Council. Yet, it is astonishing to see their resiliency in the life of the Church and their power to capture the imagination of new generations of believers.

This belief and these practices will be the thematic focus of the sixty-sixth annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, which will be held at the Fairmont Hotel, San Jose, CA, June 9-12, 2011. Specifically, we will address the theme under the rubric “All the Saints,” a liturgical phrase that invites participants to explore saintly issues from a wide variety of perspectives.

The plenary sessions will be delivered by Maureen Tilley, who will offer historical perspectives on Catholic understandings of saintliness; by Paul Lakeland, who will consider the ecclesiological dimensions of the communion of the saints; and by Christine Firer Hinze, who will reflect on the saints from the perspective of social ethics. Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado will respond to Paul Lakeland’s plenary address and Christopher Vogt will respond to Christine Firer Hinze’s plenary address.

This theme lends itself to the concerns of many Topic Sessions and can easily provide a focus for papers and panel presentations. It would be interesting to consider the implications of the paradigmatic Christian life for theological ethics, theological anthropology, and practical theology; for the sake of new insights, to reverse the traditional relationship and consider what light the doctrine of the saints casts upon Christology; to explore the saints as eschatologically liminal figures whose lives anticipate the fulfillment of God’s kingdom; ecclesiology can find entry to the theme by weighing the influence of the saints in shaping various models of Church – hierarchical, People of God, communion, and so forth; from the perspective of liturgy and sacramental practice, the veneration of the saints, particularly with regard for the graceful power of their sacred remains, elucidates the Catholic understanding of mediation; the many ways in which Topic Sessions on Comparative Theology, History, and Spirituality might engage the theme are too obvious to exemplify here.

The theme suggests a host of other issues that might be addressed by consultations and in panel presentations:

- How has the doctrine of the saints inspired, or how might it inspire, liberationist theological perspectives? How has the same doctrine, in its traditional form, encouraged falsely universalistic claims for understandings of discipleship and community that liberation theologies judge worthy of criticism?
- How do popular devotional practices centering on the saints capture the *sensus fidei*?

- Why do the saints occupy such a central place in von Balthasar's theology and why are they rather peripheral to Rahner's theology?
- How might the traits of a heroically holy or prophetically committed life serve as a venue for Jewish-Christian dialogue?
- How have the traditional qualifications for a saintly life – martyrdom and asceticism – molded Catholic understandings of authentic discipleship and so historically authoritative ecclesiologies?
- How have popular devotional practices centering on the saints (Dia de los Muertos; Posadas; Martin Luther King; Dorothy Day) furthered a public ecclesial imagination?
- What might devotional practices centered on saints contribute to our understanding of the appropriation of faith and the traditioning of Christianity?
- How does contemporary devotion to the saints open up the mystical and prophetic dimensions of the Christian tradition?
- What are the consequences of the waning devotion to the saints in some Catholic communities?
- Given the often local dimensions of saintly devotion, what would the doctrine of the communion of the saints look like interpreted from the perspective globalization?
- How might the Catholic cult of the saints shed light on the aspirations at stake in the phenomenon of celebrity culture, and how might the traditional Catholic practice be employed to understand and criticize that phenomenon?

This list, of course, is far from exhaustive. No doubt, the theological imaginations of the Society's members will find many other ways of exploring this topic. May this announcement of our 2011 convention theme begin such theological creativity!

*During the First Week of July
Consult the CTSA Website (www.ctsa-online.org)
Homepage at the Link "Call for Papers and Selected Sessions"
to View the Topic Sessions' "Call for Papers"
and the "Call for Selected Session Proposals"*

*Three Consultations have also Posted "Calls for Papers":
Black Catholic Theology, Rahner, and Von Balthasar*