THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

Edited by **Edward T. Oakes, SJ**
and **David Moss**

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) was one of the most prolific, original, and wide-ranging theologians of the twentieth century, and is now finally coming to the prominence he deserves. But because his speculations about the meaning of Christ's descent into hell after the crucifixion are so daring, and because he draws so many resources for his theology from literature, drama, and philosophy, Balthasar has never been an easily categorized thinker. Neither liberal nor conservative, Thomist nor modernist, he seems to elude all attempts to capture the exact way he creatively reinterprets the tradition of Christian thought. For that reason this *Companion* is singularly welcome, for it brings together a wide range of theologians – Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant – both to outline and to assess the work of someone whom history will surely rank someday with Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth.

EDWARD T. OAKES, SJ, is Chester and Margaret Paluch Professor of Theology at the University of St Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author of the book *Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (1996).

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The Beyond in art. – With profound sorrow one admits to oneself that, in their highest flights, the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false . . . If belief in such heavenly truth declines in general, then that species of art can never flourish again which – like the *Divine Comedy*, the paintings of Raphael, the frescoes of Michelangelo, the Gothic cathedrals – presupposes not only a cosmic but a metaphysical significance in the objects of art. A moving tale will one day be told how there once existed such an art, such an artist's faith.

Friedrich Nietzsche
Human, All Too Human

Contents

Notes on contributors

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Edward T. Oakes, SJ, is Chester & Margaret Paluch Professor of Theology at the University of St Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author of *Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Continuum, second edn, 1997) and editor of *German Essays on Religion* (Continuum, 1995). His translations of Balthasar's works include *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (Ignatius Press, 1992) and *Explorations in Theology*, volume IV: *Spirit and Institution* (Ignatius Press, 1995).

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David L. Schindler is Dean of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC; and Editor-in-Chief of the English-language edition of *Communio*. He is author of *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* (Eerdmans and T. & T. Clark, 1996); co-editor (with Doug Bandow) of *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny* (ISI Books, 2003); and editor of *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (Ignatius Press, 1991).

Geoffrey Wainwright, who holds the Doctor of Divinity degree from Cambridge, is Cushman Professor of Christian Theology at Duke University. His interest in 'the last things' began with his *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Epworth Press, 1971; third edn, 2002). He remains best known for his systematic theology, *Doxology: the Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (Oxford University Press, 1980). Since 1986 he has been co-chairman of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church.

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David Moss
Edward T. Oakes, SJ

Abbreviations

Works Written by Hans Urs von Balthasar

B
Bernanos: an Ecclesial Existence, tr. Eramso Leivà-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).

CL
Cosmic Liturgy: the Universe According to Maximus the Confessor, tr. Brian E. Daley, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

CSL
The Christian State of Life, tr. Sr Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983).

DWH
Dare We Hope 'That All May Be Saved'? With a Short Discourse on Hell, tr. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

E
Elucidations, tr. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975; reprint San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

ET1
Explorations in Theology, volume I: *The Word Made Flesh*, tr. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

ET2
Explorations in Theology, volume II: *Spouse of the Word*, tr. A. V. Littledale, Alexander Dru, Brian McNeil, CRV, John Saward, and Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

ET3
Explorations in Theology, volume III: *Creator Spirit*, tr. Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

ET4
Explorations in Theology, volume IV: *Spirit and Institution*, tr. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

FG
First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr, tr. Antje Lawry and Sr Sergia Englund, OCD

(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981).

FSO
'The Fathers, the Scholastics and Ourselves', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 24 (1997): 347–96, translation of 'Patristik, Scholastik und Wir', *Theologie der Zeit* (= Beiheft zu *Seelsorge*) 3 (1939): 65–104.

GL1
The Glory of the Lord, volume I: *Seeing the Form*, tr. Erasmo Leivà-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

GL2
The Glory of the Lord, volume II: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, tr. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, CRV (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984).

GL3
The Glory of the Lord, volume III: *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, tr. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

GL4
The Glory of the Lord, volume IV: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, tr. Brian McNeil, CRV, Andrew Louth, John Saward, Rowan Williams, and Oliver Davies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

GL5
The Glory of the Lord, volume V: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, tr. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, CRV, John Saward, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

GL6
The Glory of the Lord, volume VI: *Theology: the Old Covenant*, tr. Brian McNeil, CRV and Erasmo Leivà-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

GL7
The Glory of the Lord, volume VII: *Theology: the New Covenant*, tr. Brian McNeil, CRV (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

GQ
The God Question and Modern Man, tr. Hilda Graef, introduction by John Macquarrie (New York: Seabury Press, 1967).

HW
Heart of the World, tr. Erasmo S. Leivà (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979).

KB
The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation, tr. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

LA
Love Alone: the Way of Revelation, tr. not named (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

MCW
The Moment of Christian Witness, tr. R. Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

MP
Mysterium Paschale, tr. Aidan Nichols, OP (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990; second corrected edn, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).

MT
Mary for Today, tr. Robert Nowell (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1987).

MW
My Work in Retrospect, tr. not named (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

NE
New Elucidations, tr. Sr Mary Theresilde Skerry, HSAS (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

OP
The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church, tr. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

OSF
Origen: Spirit and Fire. A Thematic Anthology of His Writings, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, tr. Robert J. Daly, SJ (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984).

OT
Our Task: a Report and a Plan, tr. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

P
Prayer, tr. A. V. Littledale (London: Geoffrey Chapman Ltd, and New York: Sheed &

Ward, 1961).

PT
Presence and Thought: an Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa, tr. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

TA
A Theological Anthropology, tr. not named (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967).

TD1
Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume I: *Prolegomena*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

TD2
Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume II: *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

TD3
Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

TD4
Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume IV: *The Action*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

TD5
Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume V: *The Final Act*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

TH
A Theology of History, tr. not named (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

TL1
Theo-Logic, volume I: *The Truth of the World*, tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).

TL II
Theologik, Band II: *Wahrheit Gottes* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985).

TL III
Theologik, Band III: *Der Geist der Wahrheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987).

TS
Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism, tr. Graham Harrison (San

Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

2SS
Two Sisters in the Spirit: Th érèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity, tr. Donald Nichols, Anne Elizabeth Englund, and Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

2SW
Two Say Why : *'Why I Am Still a Christian', by Hans Urs von Balthasar and 'Why I Am Still in the Church', by Joseph Ratzinger*, tr. John Griffiths (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

WO
'Wendung nach Osten', *Stimmen der Zeit* 136 (April, 1939): 32–46.

Essays in Collections

BEM
Balthasar at the End of Modernity, by Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, and Graham Ward (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

L&W
Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

Note: English translations are always cited when possible. When this book went to press, however, two volumes of the *Theologik* had not yet been translated. To avoid possible confusion once these translations do appear, Arabic numerals always refer to the English translation of the trilogy, Roman numerals to the German edition. Balthasar's works are too numerous to list in their entirety in this table; all works not found here are cited in full at the location of the quotation. A full bibliography (running to a remarkable 174 pages) of all of Balthasar's works, including all translations up to 1990, may be found in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Bibliographie, 1925–1990*, ed. Cornelia Capol (Einsiedeln and Freiburg im Breisgau: Johannes Verlag, 1990).

1

DAVID MOSS, EDWARD T. OAKES

Introduction

At least among professional theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar tends to perplex more than he manages to inspire. To be sure, he can inspire. For example, the journal he founded, *Communio*, now appears in twelve languages (including Arabic). But subscribers never exceed the number – itself already quite small – usual for most other professional theological journals. More to the point, few Catholic departments of theology in Europe or North America consider it essential to have a Balthasarian expert on their respective faculties (a similar attitude towards liberation theology, transcendental Thomism, or feminist theology, by comparison, would seem vaguely revanchist).

To some extent, however, this situation has begun to change. In fact, this volume in the *Cambridge Companion* series testifies to what seems to be an incipient sea change in attitudes towards this unusually productive, subtle, and complex theologian.[1] For that reason, the editors wish to stress that this collection of essays by a wide array of scholars wishes not so much to inspire as to address the perplexity that seems to be an inherent part of everyone's reaction to Balthasar's thought. We make no claim to have *resolved* the perplexity that so many readers feel upon encountering his theology for the first (or even umpteenth) time. Perhaps, after all, *per*plexity is but the reader's inevitable response to an author's *com*plexity. Thus, all that the following chapters can realistically hope to accomplish is to *address* that perplexity through a careful exposition and critique of his complex thought.

The scholars who so generously volunteered to contribute to this volume – a task that cannot have been easy – come from a variety of denominational affiliations (Anglican, Catholic, Methodist), areas of expertise (ecumenism, literary theory, historical theology, feminism, patristics, systematic theology), and convictions about the value of Balthasar's work (from mostly appreciative to mostly critical). Contributors come roughly equally from Great Britain and the United States and include men and women, lay scholars and clergy.

One reason for Balthasar's relative isolation – perhaps even alienation – from the guild of professional theologians is that he does not come out of, or represent, a *prior* school of thought. Except, of course, his own. But that is just the point: liberation theology, transcendental Thomism, feminist theology, the religion–science dialogue – all of these were born from, and grew up out of, large social forces; they react to trends, internal or external, that will not disappear for a long time to come. But Balthasar has more or less single-handedly heaved up a huge mountain range of theology, one that perhaps cannot

be ignored as if it did not exist but certainly can be dismissed as *sui generis* and personally idiosyncratic. What is worse (at least for his interpreters), his positions cannot be easily categorized. Neither liberal nor conservative as these shopworn terms are normally understood, his theology is in fact extraordinarily subtle and learned, so much so that it not only cannot be aligned with any contemporary trend, but even sits uneasily inside *any* school of thought in the history of theology. Although Balthasar has frequently been compared to the Church Fathers (no surprise there, given the contributions he has made to patristic scholarship), he is in fact quite critical of the Platonic assumptions that govern early Christian thought. He is certainly no scholastic either and made no secret of his fury at the 'sawdust Thomism' in which he was schooled in his days as a Jesuit seminarian; yet he wrote an important monograph on St Thomas's theology of ecclesial charisms,[2] and his remarks on Aquinas in the volume on premodern metaphysics in the fourth volume of *The Glory of the Lord* are almost entirely positive.

One can thus readily imagine why it has taken so long for Balthasar to 'catch on' and to receive the kind of critical appropriation and assessment that he deserves (and, as the editors so fondly hope, that he receives here). It is normally the practice in volumes of this kind for the editors to give a 'preview of coming attractions' by providing an overview of the chapters to follow and fitting them into the purpose of the volume in question. In this case, however, the editors feel that the list of contents and the chapters to which it refers can speak for themselves. But since none of the chapters treats of the key moments in his life, and because Balthasar's isolation from the world of professional theology has certain roots in the accidents of his life's history, it seemed best to the editors that this introduction provide at least the bare outlines of his biography.

Born in Lucerne, Switzerland, on 12 August 1905 of an upper-middleclass family of noble stock (hence the *von* in his name), he quickly developed his precocious talents in music and literature at a Benedictine *Gymnasium* in Switzerland (he later transferred to a Jesuit *Gymnasium*, where he noticed a certain poverty of musical appreciation and training in the Jesuit *ratio studiorum* in comparison to the Benedictine curriculum[3]). Although to some extent his life might seem as uneventful as Immanuel Kant's,[4] he certainly lived through tumultuous times, and that tumult affected his family deeply, as his cousin, Peter Henrici, so vividly described:

> He came from an old patrician family in Lucerne which had given his hometown army officers, statesmen, scholars, and churchmen – abbots and abbesses, canons, and a Jesuit provincial of Mexico. His father, Oscar Ludwig Carl Balthasar (1872–1946), was the canton *Baumeister*, responsible, among other things, for the St Karli Kirche, one of Switzerland's pioneering modern church buildings. Through his mother, *née* Gabrielle Piezcker (d. 1929), cofoundress and first general secretary of the Swiss League of Catholic Women, he was related to the Hungarian martyr-bishop, Apor von Györ, who was shot by Russian soldiers in 1944 for harboring some women refugees in his house. His younger brother Dieter served as an officer in the Swiss Guard. His sister Renée (1908–1986) was Superior General, from 1971 to 1983, of the Franciscan Sisters of Sainte Marie des Anges. He spent much of his childhood at the Pension Felsberg run by his grandmother, where cosmopolitan attitudes and trilingualism (German, French, English) were taken for granted . . . As Balthasar himself has testified, his childhood and youth were pervaded by music, for which he had quite an extraordinary talent.[5]

But music was not to be his destiny, for he entered the doctoral programme in *Germanistik* (an interdisciplinary field of German studies, encompassing both literary and philosophical approaches to the canonical German authors) at the University of Zurich. Shortly before he graduated, he made a retreat in the Black Forest under a Jesuit renowned for his fervour and preaching skills and heard a call from God (that came to him, he said, like a bolt of lightning) to join the Jesuit Order and become a Catholic priest. His time in the Society of Jesus, however, was not particularly happy. The training he received in the Jesuits is what dismayed him the most, and the way he once described it speaks volumes about the kind of isolation that would later mark his whole life:

> My entire period of study in the Society of Jesus was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation. I could not endure this presentation of the Word of God and wanted to lash out with the fury of a Samson: I felt like tearing down, with Samson's own strength, the whole temple and burying myself beneath the rubble. But it was like this because, despite my sense of vocation, I wanted to carry out my own plans, and was living in a state of unbounded indignation. I told almost no one about this. [My teacher at the time, Erich] Przywara understood everything; [to him] I did not have to say anything. Otherwise there was no one who could understand me.[6]

These remarkable lines refer to Balthasar's time studying the prescribed manual Thomism during the philosophy part of his training in Pullach (near Munich). Things marginally improved when the time came to study theology in Fourvière (near Lyons, France), for there he met the great patristic scholar, the famous French Jesuit Henri de Lubac, under whose tuition he went on to write important monographs on Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Origen, among others. But to judge from his literary output at the time, his heart still seemed set more on literature, for he spent most of his time reading and translating into German the great figures of contemporary French literature, such as Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, and Paul Valéry.

After his ordination to the priesthood on 26 July 1936, he was assigned to the distinguished Jesuit monthly *Stimmen der Zeit*, headquartered in Munich near Ludwigstrasse, where 'the boots of the SS sounded ever more loudly . . . and no ear could escape the loudspeakers set up everywhere in the city' (*MW*, 13). As a Swiss citizen, Balthasar could leave Germany without travail, and his superiors gave him the choice of becoming a professor of theology at the Pontifical Jesuit University in Rome, the famous Gregorian University, or of assuming a position as student chaplain at the University of Basle. Given his alienation from the desiccated theology of his day, we are not surprised that he chose direct pastoral work. 'Fresh student life brought new life into unrealistic theoretical knowledge' (*MW*, 13), he said of that assignment; and for the first time he seemed happy and content with the life he had chosen.

Then he met the twice-married Protestant physician, Adrienne von Speyr, who converted to Catholicism under his auspices and who was the recipient, almost upon their first encounter, of mystical graces so intense that it eventually prompted him, under her encouragement, to leave the Society of Jesus in order to found a 'secular institute', a kind of religious order for lay people, without the external trappings of a habit or life in common. (It was the inability of the Jesuit Order to allow one of its own members,

working under obedience to Jesuit superiors, to direct a totally different canonical entity without interference that eventually, after a tenyear negotiation, forced Balthasar out of the Jesuits.) There can be no doubt that it was this encounter with Dr von Speyr, more than any other event in his life, that led to Balthasar's isolation from the wider guild of professional theologians. Not only must one accept his claims about the graces she received (on his account graces not seen since Teresa of Avila); but more to the point one must come to terms with his insistence that his own theology is *directly* derived from hers: '[I want] to prevent any attempt being made after my death', he said shortly before he died, 'to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr. [This] is not in the least possible, either theologically or in regard to the secular institute now underway' (*OT*, 13; translation altered for context).

One of the major apostolates of this institute, whose official name is *Johannesgemeinschaft* (the Community of St John), was its own publishing firm, the now famous *Johannes Verlag* (St John's Press), whose early books included such epochal 'liberal' books as Hans Küng's dissertation *Justification* (an attempt to reconcile Karl Barth's teaching on justification with that of the Council of Trent), Karl Rahner's manifesto *Free Speech in the Church* (an appeal that theologians be given more room for manoeuvre by freeing them of the fear of constantly being delated to Rome for heresy), and Balthasar's own *Razing the Ramparts* (an attack on the 'fortress mentality' of the Catholic Church in the wake of the Modernist crisis when Pope Pius X condemned all forms of historical criticism of the Bible and any attempt to find correlates in human experience to the data of revelation).

But perhaps most inflammatory of all was Balthasar's book on Karl Barth, which had the misfortune of hitting the bookshops a year after Pius XII issued his encyclical *Humani Generis* on 12 August 1950, which condemned Balthasar's teachers in France and insisted that all theologians maintain the teachings of the First Vatican Council that the existence of God can be proved by reason. In his Barth book, Balthasar had tried to meet Barth's critique of natural theology at least halfway by holding that, while Vatican I might be theoretically right that the existence of God can be proved, it had said nothing about those proofs actually out there for the testing – all of which, Balthasar allowed, in a concession clearly designed to effect a *rapprochement* with Barth, had been devised by postlapsarian man, whose reason was infected by original sin.

No wonder, then, that Rome grew suspicious, even to the point of opening a *miramur* file on him in the Holy Office. No wonder, too, that after leaving the Society of Jesus Balthasar could find no bishop to incardinate him.[7] And no wonder, finally, that none of the Swiss bishops invited him to join them as a *peritus* (expert theological consultant) when Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council, the most important religious event of the twentieth century.

The great irony in all this, of course, is that the Council represented the complete vindication of all that he was struggling for during his 'wilderness years' as a Jesuit and later as a rootless secular priest. Finally, just as Balthasar had long been hoping for, the most authoritative teaching body of the Catholic Church was solemnly calling for a

dismantling of the bastions of a fortress Church. Moreover, that same Council appealed to the Church Fathers as a collective fount of wisdom and opened itself to the very world of non-Christian and secular learning that he himself had spent a lifetime trying to master. But as everyone knows, that is not how things turned out: soon after the conclusion of the Council, Balthasar grew anxious about various trends that were being justified in its name, and he threw all his energies into openly opposing the majority trend in theology, especially as advocated in the pages of the international journal *Concilium*, which he cheekily countered with his own anti-accommodationist periodical, the journal *Communio*.

The upshot of all this can easily be imagined. In Hans Urs von Balthasar we encounter a man teeming with paradoxes: working in isolation, yet the founder of an entirely new school of theology; under suspicion first in Rome and then by his own national bishops, yet now regarded with almost equal suspicion, even hostility, by many professional theologians in the wake of Vatican II; the spiritual director of a woman whose story even Balthasar enthusiasts find unsettling, yet whose own theology is not so much mystical in the manner of St John of the Cross as it is 'aesthetic' and literary. In short, the man cannot be categorized, which is itself probably part of his isolation: what is not familiar and easily pigeonholed must perforce be ignored.

The editors wish to stress again that this volume makes no attempt to resolve these paradoxes or to force this elusive and subtle theologian into some preconceived category of either right or left, traditional or progressive, Platonist or Aristotelian, patristic or modern. Balthasar has treated almost every single theme that comes under the purview of systematic theology, and St Paul's manifesto, 'I capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5) could well serve as Balthasar's motto too. Each author in the succeeding pages seeks first and above all to come to terms with Balthasar's position on these matters and then to wrestle with his views – with varying degrees of critical appreciation. But given what was said above, it will not surprise the reader of this introduction that certain motifs arise again and again.

Perhaps the most important motif to note in the course of reading this book is the feature of Balthasar's theology that must surely be the oddest of all: as many authors explicitly, and nearly all implicitly, show, Balthasar is that most peculiar of theologians – one who is both intensely *traditional* (perhaps the most traditional of all twentieth-century theologians) and yet also astonishingly, startlingly *idiosyncratic*. Such a combination certainly makes for fascinating reading. If this *Companion* can convey at least a little of that fascination, it will have served its purpose.

Notes

1 Nor is this volume the only indicator, for books and monographs on Balthasar's theology are starting to appear with some regularity. In a perceptive notice of a recent book on Balthasar's ethics, one reviewer noted that the book under review 'in some ways signals the long-deferred mainstreaming of Balthasar among English-speaking theologians, his liberation from the ghetto of antimodernism or conservatism where some writers had interred him. As such, it offers hope that Catholic theology is moving beyond the misleading categories of liberal and conservative'; Fredrick Christian Bauerschmidt, review of Christopher Steck's *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Crossroad, 2001) in *The Thomist* 67/3 (July, 2003): 494–7; here 494.

2 *Thomas von Aquin: Besondere Gnadengaben und die zwei Wege menschlichen Lebens. Kommentar zur Summa Theologica II/II qq. 171–182*. Deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe, volume XXIII (Heidelberg: F. H. Kerle; Graz, Vienna, and Salzburg: A. Pustet, 1954), pp. 252–464.

3 To put it mildly. By Balthasar's account, things seemed pretty grim under Jesuit tutelage: '[In my youth] I spent endless hours on the piano; then at Engelberg [the Benedictine establishment] I had the opportunity of taking part in orchestral Masses and operas. When some friends and I transferred to Feldkirch [the Jesuit school] for the last two and a half years of my secondary education, we found the music department there so noisy that we lost the inclination to play' (*OT*, 36).

4 Tellingly, the only biography so far written of his life, the Italian Elio Guerriero's *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Milan: Edizione Paoline, 1991; German translation Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1993), had to content itself with mostly recounting Balthasar's books in chronological order. Only when scholars are allowed access to the archives of the Jesuit Order in Rome covering the years from 1940 to 1950, when Balthasar was attempting both to stay in the Order and to found and direct a 'secular institute' (a kind of 'religious order' for the lay state) with Adrienne von Speyr, and when the archives of the Swiss diocese of Chur are also opened covering the years 1950–56, when Balthasar was seeking incardination as a secular priest, can a critical biography be written.

5 Peter Henrici, SJ, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: a Sketch of His Life', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 16/3 (fall, 1989): 306–50; here 307–8. One sign of his musical gifts can be gleaned from the frequently recounted anecdote that when he had to move into a new house in Basle in 1967, he left behind the scores to all of Mozart's music: they were unnecessary to him, as he already knew them all by heart.

6 Characteristically, these remarks are made almost in passing in the course of the introduction that Balthasar wrote to Adrienne von Speyr's journals recounting her mystical endurances (mystical 'flights' would hardly be the term to do justice to what she underwent) in *Erde und Himmel: Ein Tagebuch*. Part II: *Die Zeit der grossen Diktate* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975).

7 In canon law a priest who belongs to a religious order and who leaves that order must first be recognized by a bishop and, canonically if not geographically, be incorporated ('incardinated') in that bishop's diocese. Without such incardination, the priest is forbidden to say Mass in public, preach, or hear confessions. From 1950 to 1956 (when the bishop of Chur incardinated him), Balthasar was just such a sacerdotal Ishmael. These years were a time of real poverty for him.

Part I

Theological topics

2

LARRY CHAPP

Revelation

REASON, REVELATION, AND THE LIBERAL PROJECT

It must be admitted that 'revelation' as a theological topic is not without ambiguity. The very definition of revelation is in dispute, with critics pointing to its rather vague delineation as a separate topic of theological discourse well into the medieval period. Rather than getting bogged down in these sorts of questions, however, perhaps the best place to begin a treatment of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of revelation would be with his most basic assertion: in revelation we have a sovereign divine action *pro nobis* that makes God known to his creatures in a manner that they can apprehend (*LA*, 7–8). It is God who speaks in revelation and it is humanity who listens and responds. Even if it must be admitted that divine revelation makes use of worldly forms and words, these structures are 'taken up' into an essentially divine act and given a new context within a divinely constructed 'form' (*Gestalt*). For Balthasar, revelation is not a species of a much broader genus that can be loosely called 'religious manifestations' or 'divine epiphanies'. In Christ we have an utterly unique event without parallel that judges all human expectations rather than being judged and tamed by them. There are definite affinities with Barth here in Balthasar's insistence that revelation carries within itself its own theological warrant, its own self-authenticating, 'engracing' logic. Balthasar does not deny that there is a role for analogy, philosophy, and 'natural theology'. However, the issue is whether anthropology and/or cosmology will be allowed to govern christology, rather than the reverse. And on that issue he is consistently, even rigorously clear: Balthasar will reject any systematic approach that attempts to locate the significance of revelation within an overarching ideological scheme of some kind, especially when the attempt is made reductively to 'explain' revelation as an outcropping or even as an epiphenomenon of various anthropological capacities or cosmological processes. Thus, *Christian* natural theology must be viewed as an *a posteriori* attempt to think about the implications of a revelation already given, and in whose light one can now see the inner meaning of worldly structures which were previously opaque. The model here is Anselm's 'faith seeking understanding' – an approach that is more than a methodological ploy, but is rather a profound affirmation of an altogether different kind of rationality than that found in the West since the Enlightenment.

What is at stake is much more than a simple debate over the legitimacy of a particular 'religious idea'. For competing notions of rationality colour the manner in which we do theology and, by implication, the manner in which we approach revelation. Balthasar, like

Barth, is responding to the twofold movement that began within nineteenth-century liberal theology: first to deny the importance of historical contingency as a vehicle for any rational truth that could be considered 'universal', and then to turn towards religious interiority as the only possible locus for revelation. The 'critical reason' of the Enlightenment, therefore, supplants the 'engraced reason' of Anselm and the Fathers, leading to the reductive domestication of revelation as a species of human feelings. Along these lines, Balthasar is fond of quoting Lessing and sees in him the quintessence of this liberal approach to religion (*TD3*, 60).

Lessing held that historical-contingent events were inadequate vessels for the timeless and universal truths of reason. In the wake of this critique, critical philosophy will question the validity of a historical revelation that claims immunity from the historicists' insight that all knowledge – including religious knowledge – is culturally conditioned. Therefore, the so-called 'hermeneutics of suspicion' engages in the deconstruction of the once-normative tradition in order to reconstruct it along the lines of modernity's canons of rationality. Liberal theology is, therefore, characterized by a deep distrust of the historical particularity of revelation and an even deeper distrust of the particularities of the ecclesial mediation of that revelation. The result is the liberal quest to distil the essence of revelation by boiling away the various 'media' of revelation (Scripture, Church) in the heat of critical abstraction in order finally to discover the residue of truth left behind.

What becomes very clear in Balthasar is his rejection of this spirit of critical abstraction and its cousin, the hyper-specialization of modern theology. The purpose of specialization in the liberal scheme is not to view *das Ganze im Fragment* (the whole in the fragment), but to dissolve the fragment's particularity into the overarching control of an abstract rationality that Balthasar describes as a form of titanistic, egoistic grasping. Balthasar views critical-liberal theology as a desiccated enterprise incapable of the contemplative posture required to grasp the divine form in Christ as a total *Gestalt* that speaks on its own terms. Instead, according to Balthasar, the liberal-critical project ends up 'functionalizing' Christ as an exemplary means to the end of human moral goodness and social betterment. The concept of revelation as the self-authenticating manifestation of divine 'glory' is lost, and the Promethean glorification of humanity takes its place.

What is left for anyone who desires to retain some semblance of a traditional theology of revelation is the flight into interiority as the last refuge from the withering glare of critical reason. However, Balthasar sees a latent atheism in this 'turn to the subject' as well (*GL5*, 15, 295–8, 546–8). Schleiermacher, for example, appeals to human religious experience as the locus of divine revelation in order to ground the latter in the realm of the empirical. And yet, how do we know that our feelings of absolute dependence or our intuitions are really encounters with God? How do we escape the Feuerbachian critique that God is a projection of our deepest anthropological longings (*GL4*, 227–31)? Modernity's 'masters of suspicion' (Marx, Freud, et al.) and the various genocidal catastrophes of the twentieth century cast a pall over the identification of human subjectivity with manifestations of divinity. Late modernity thus ends by seeing no

intramundane warrant for positing God as the source of these experiences. The turn to the subject, the desire to identify revelation with an anthropological dynamism, in the end freights our inner experience of the 'always more' with a weight it simply cannot bear. In short, the liberal attempt to evade the problems associated with the rejection of historical particularity by retreating into the realm of the intrasubjective is a self-defeating move that eventually leads to the suspicion that revelation is a creation of subjectivity itself, leaving atheism and the will to power as the only living alternatives. Liberal theology, says Balthasar, cannot escape from its inherent solipsistic ambiguity and leads, by an inner inexorable logic, to the nihilism that Nietzsche so presciently described as being at the very heart of the liberal, bourgeois project (*GL5*, 415–16, 624).

Does this mean, then, that Balthasar simply rejects modernity's notion of reason and retreats instead into a precritical form of rationality? Or would it be better to characterize him (as many do) as postmodern? While he may have certain affinities with both premodern (e.g. neo-Platonic, post-Chalcedonian) and postmodern 'intratextual' theologies, it would be misleading to reduce him to either one.[1] For Balthasar, theological reflection upon revelation must be 'elliptical'; that is, 'reasoning' from within the horizon of faith is the only truly *objective* way properly to reflect upon revelation, since the latter is a divine act whose true contours can only be recognized by an engraced form of thinking.[2] Every science has its methodology dictated by the nature of its object of study. In the case of theology, revelation is an 'object' unlike any other, for it posits its own interpretative moment as an engraced engagement of two asymmetrical 'freedoms'. Premodern theology, while remaining within this elliptical form of reasoning, was guilty of a certain naïveté, since it proceeded without recourse to the question of how, theologically speaking, the consonance between faith and revelation is to be grounded. Liberal-critical theology, as we have seen, is even more deeply flawed according to Balthasar, since it presumes to leave the ellipse entirely and to judge revelation using an instrument unsuited to its study: the truncated rationality of pseudo-objectivity.

The Balthasarian alternative to both premodern and modernistic ways of thinking does share the postmodern distrust of cosmological and anthropological 'meta-narratives' (*LA*, 11–50). Furthermore, his 'elliptical theology' would easily fall prey to the charge of mere circularity were it not for his development of a very 'postmodern-like' notion of participatory reason over and against modernity's embrace of 'autonomous reason'. However, it is also striking that, despite these affinities, Balthasar himself rarely makes these sorts of comparisons. While it is true that Balthasar rejects cosmological and anthropological meta-narratives, he does so only in so far as these narratives, generated as they are as extrapolations of the human religious *a priori*, are insufficiently or *inauthentically* universal when used to ground the notion of divine revelation. Therefore, his motives are neither deconstructive nor oriented against notions of universality as such. Rather, he is concerned to establish a unique trinitarian-christological concept of truth as the manifestation of divine 'glory' – a glory whose analogue is the earthly concept of 'beauty', where the aesthetic intelligibility of the object resides precisely *within* its structures and not 'behind' or 'in front of' the object of contemplation. Thus,

revelation is the authentic universal precisely in and through the historical particularity of the divine 'superform' that is concretely manifested in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus (*KB*, 383–4). For Balthasar, in Jesus the 'fragment' *is* the whole, thus establishing within the structures of contingent history a divine, trinitarian action that is able to overcome the false dialectic between time and eternity, the contingent and the necessary, the particular and the universal. Revelation thus provides us with a new kind of 'engraced reason' that alone can overcome the alienation created when the various polarities of our existence are viewed as heteronomous to one another. The entire history of metaphysics can be read as an endless vacillation between polarities that are caught in this false dialectic of alienation (*GL5*, 635–56). Therefore, in order to understand Balthasar's theology of revelation, it is necessary to summarize his construal of the history of metaphysical thought in the West and the manner in which only a trinitarian ontology of love, revealed in the form of Christ, can truly safeguard being and rationality.

TRINITARIAN METAPHYSICS

As we have seen, Balthasar is concerned that Christian revelation will be absorbed into the universalism of transcendental reason. This happens after the Enlightenment when Christianity is stripped of dogma and absorbed into idealism and romanticism. This universalizing tendency of reason, according to Balthasar, will always sit uneasily with the universal claims of revelation (*GL5*, 14–15). And what is universal in revelation is not a set of 'propositions' that have been established as 'reasonable' by an extrinsic principle, but precisely the self-authenticating glory of God. The authentic universalism of the divine 'glory' is the controlling theological motif that runs throughout Balthasar's discussion of revelation. The seven volumes of the theological aesthetics make the claim that the credibility of revelation is rooted in the self-authenticating nature of this 'glory' – much in the same way that a great work of art needs no justification outside itself for its existence or meaning. However, the analogy with beauty or art can only be pressed so far, since the 'glory' of revelation is not simply an 'object' of aesthetic contemplation and appreciation, but also a dramatic encounter with a sovereign and infinite freedom. That is why Balthasar follows up his aesthetics with the five volumes of the *Theo-Drama*. Indeed, the aesthetic rapture that God's glory engenders is not so much a passive awe in the face of an overwhelmingly beautiful 'object', as it is the ecstatic joy of one who has encountered the 'Thou' at the heart of being. Therefore, the universalism of revelation is not established by adopting a methodological stance that requires as its starting point a set of rational principles that 'everyone can agree upon' independent of all antecedent commitments, but rather is based upon the self-evident credibility of the self-manifestation of divine love. The truth of revelation is universal, not because it fits into the transcendental categories of a univocal concept of reason, but precisely because it dialogically and dramatically confronts humanity with a concrete choice that involves a response from the very depths of our humanity.

When we analyse our relationship to the world of finite beings, we find what Balthasar refers to as the 'fourfold distinction' within our primal experience of being. The first

distinction begins with an act of wonder or astonishment over the fact that 'I find myself within the realm of a world and in the bountiful community of other existent beings' (*GL5*, 615). The paradox of my existence is that my place in this world appears as radically contingent – I could just as easily not have existed and any number of other beings could inhabit the space I occupy – and yet I also experience my spiritual subjectivity as something more than a merely random concatenation of biological events. I am 'thrown' into existence and yet find it curiously non-fatalistic. Put another way, one could say that I experience my existence as both random and intended: beginning in infancy the world impresses upon me both a sense of the radically free and contingent nature of reality and a sense of my being 'allowed in' as an intended participant. Existence is 'both glorious and a matter of course' (*GL5*, 616). Through my dialogical encounter with finite 'others' I apprehend more than some point of human psychology. I get a hint of the 'glory' that is addressing me from the depths of being.

This leads to the second and third distinctions. In this primal experience of being 'allowed in' by a loving 'Thou', I am also aware that it is not the world as such that is addressing me – for the world as a whole is just as radically contingent as I am. Furthermore, all other finite existent beings stand in the same basic relationship to being as I do. Thus, I experience a deep ambiguity in my apprehension of existence; I am aware of being addressed from the depths of being, but I cannot locate the source of this address in the world. Furthermore, and this is crucial for Balthasar, I do not have a direct apprehension of worldly 'be-*ing*' as such but only of actual existent objects, being*s*. Thus, the sheer 'to-be' of the world does not seem antecedent to actual existent objects but seems strangely dependent upon *them* for *its* reality. Therefore, if all of the finite objects of my experience stand in the same relation toward worldly be-ing as I do, and if worldly being seems non-subsistent in itself and dependent upon actual existents, being*s*, for its reality, then it must be affirmed that I am confronted by a deep ambiguity at the heart of my experience: I have been 'invited in', but by what or by whom?

This paradox at the heart of human existence leads to a deep ambiguity in the history of metaphysics over the terminus of our inner *eros* for a fulfilment from 'above', from a realm of free and sovereign 'glory'. Balthasar traces the history of this metaphysical *eros* beginning with the world of myth, proceeding through the philosophical rejection of myth, and finally culminating in the realm of what he refers to as 'natural religion' (*GL4*, 24). The realm of myth maintains the dialogical structure of existence in its affirmation of the 'otherness' of the realm of divinity. However, it does so through a series of anthropomorphisms – the gods, though immortal, are essentially human beings 'writ large', and are, therefore, ultimately finite. Thus, myth tends towards both a dualistic and a parochial conception of the gods that philosophy will attempt to overcome through a rejection of the heteronomous particularism of myth coupled with an affirmation of a more universalizable concept of being. This philosophical quest was characterized by a desire to comprehend the 'All' in a single act of transcendental reason. Thus, where myth was dialogical, philosophy was monological; where myth sought an address 'from above', philosophy sought the all-encompassing rational 'act' of the intellect; and where

myth was open to the dramatic freedom manifested in the often contradictory divine epiphanies, philosophy sought closure and consistency. However, even in the midst of its rejection of myth, philosophy frequently turned to mythological images and constructions in order to express its deep wonder and awe before the mysteriousness of being. In modern parlance we would refer to this as the development of 'models' for the sake of explaining the 'boundary questions' that exist on the far fringes of rational speculation. Even Plato, despite the scorn he heaps on the poets, develops several allegories and myths to describe poetically what reason cannot reach in a more prosaic manner (*GL4*, 166–215). Balthasar will insist that this turning back to mythological images shows us that the philosophical ascent (*eros*) towards being contains a potential openness for a fulfilment from 'above'. All philosophy is, therefore, confronted with a choice: either take seriously the dialogical structure of existence and seek the fulfilment of reason in an encounter with a free, sovereign address from an Absolute Freedom, or else seek a univocal concept of being that falls completely within the purview of an utterly self-enclosed rationality. There should be little doubt where Balthasar stands on this choice – unless philosophy chooses a concept of being that is open to a divine world of 'glory', the concept of transcendent Being itself eventually will be lost in the nihilistic functionalism of modernity (*GL5*, 644–5).

The history of metaphysics, according to Balthasar, is, at its deepest and most persistent level, a history of the dialectical relationship between the polarities of the dialogical-dualistic world of myth and the monologicalmonistic world of philosophical reason. 'Natural religion' arises as an attempt to bridge this gap but ultimately fails, says Balthasar, because it will always exist in the concrete as favouring one of the polarities over the other (*GL4*, 216). What the ancient world lacked was a metaphysic that allowed for the 'otherness' of God without the dualistic 'objectifications' of God in myth. Absent such a metaphysic it was inevitable that philosophy would drift towards a monistic metaphysic of identity and that religion would vacillate endlessly between myth and pantheism. But a metaphysic that could overcome this dialectic was not possible without the breakthrough into the fourth distinction: the biblical doctrine of the absolutely sovereign and free Creator God in whose infinite and subsistent Being the being of the world participates analogously.

Even here, however, if God is conceived of as an enclosed and isolated 'monad' there is no hope of overcoming a dualistic and ultimately heteronomous concept of divinity. It is Balthasar's assertion that only the Christian revelation of the trinitarian God allows us finally to posit God as 'Other' in a manner that overcomes the false dialectic between dualistic and monistic conceptions of being. Balthasar favours a strongly relational view of the trinitarian 'Persons' wherein the divine nature is defined precisely as an infinite act of absolute self-possession in and through an infinite selfdispossession. God is not first a 'necessary being' onto whom a series of relations are added as a qualification. There is no compulsion in the trinitarian relations caused by an antecedent divine nature out of which relationality flows as a necessary emanation. Rather, God's nature is defined through and through as a series of absolutely free reciprocal relations (*perichoresis*)

where an infinite self-donation is perfectly coincident with an infinite self-possession (*TD2*, 256). Another way of saying this is that each divine Person is an interiority that is thoroughly characterized by an 'exteriorization' in the 'other'. One implication of this is that there is something analogous within God to 'duration' and 'distance'. Balthasar means by this that if we are to take God's self-possession as infinite self-donation seriously, then we must acknowledge that the relationality that this opens up is a real relationality. The trinitarian hypostases bear within their reciprocity both an infinite distance and opposition, and an infinite intimacy and presence to one another. The single divine nature is, therefore, 'subsistent' in an utterly non-static, non-univocal manner: God is 'One' as a dynamic relationality where infinite 'distance' is coincident with an infinite communion.

The significance of all of this for our purposes is that the trinitarian relations act as the ontological ground of possibility for the 'non-divinity' of the world. The infinite distance between God and creation finds its theological grounding in the intratrinitarian distinctions. The world finds its 'place' within the 'spaciousness' opened up in the trinitarian relations. The world can be taken up into the Oneness of God, because the divine unity already has 'room' for such otherness within itself. Balthasar states: 'The infinite distance between the world and God is grounded in the other, prototypical distance between God and God' (*TD2*, 266). The world, however, does not simply become a 'moment' within the trinitarian relations. The world's integrity as world is grounded in this intratrinitarian otherness in such a way that its creaturely being is not swallowed up by the divine Being in a univocal fashion. Just as each trinitarian hypostasis is infinite self-possession precisely through an infinite 'going forth' into the other, so too the world is never more 'worldly' than when it seeks its consummation through an obedient opening up to the divine Thou who called it into existence and who now addresses it. The 'space' that opens up within the trinitarian relations is not a void, an area of divine non-being – an essentially negative condition – but rather the strictly positive reality of the distance required for truly interpersonal communion. It is the mystery of the abyss of infinite love where there is never a 'boundary' or a 'limit', but an *excessus* and an ecstasy that can ground the reality of the world as 'not God' in direct proportion to the depth of the world's incorporation into God. Balthasar quotes C. S. Lewis here: 'The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, but not at all the less ours. Rather, most ours when most His.'[3]

Thus, for Balthasar, the revelation of the trinitarian God completes the human metaphysical *eros* for an address from Being – an address that begins to impress itself upon us in infancy with our inchoate awareness of the dialogical structure of existence, but which fails to reach full clarity in the ambiguous metaphysical systems of antiquity. When revelation is viewed in this manner it becomes clear that, for Balthasar, the credibility of revelation does not reside in the establishment of a universal concept of religion within the limits of reason – which is, after all, but a new form of ideological particularism under the guise of a putatively 'neutral' foundationalism – but rather in the

unveiling of a sovereign freedom whose gratuitous love for humanity appears as 'glory' in its shocking contrast with the vanity of our ephemeral existence. Balthasar summarizes this latter point: 'God's nature, theologically speaking, shows itself to be "absolute love" (*autocharis*) by giving itself away and allowing others to be, for no other reason than that this (motiveless) giving is good and full of meaning – and hence is quite simply, beautiful and glorious' (*TD2*, 272–3).

CHRIST: THE CONCRETE UNIVERSAL

The historical and temporal nature of all creaturely existence, including that of the so-called 'natural world', now takes on new significance. God's existence is pure act, not so much in the Aristotelian sense of an absolute actuality in contradistinction to the potentiality of the world (although Balthasar grants a certain legitimacy to the medieval reformation of Aristotle's notion of God as Pure Act), but rather as absolute *event*. The theology of revelation becomes incoherent when revelation is conceived of as an attempt to capture something of the immutable God in a bottle, so as to provide us with an indisputable, supernaturally provided, universal concept that all can agree upon. This is not only impossible, but it betrays a fundamentally Hellenistic conception of divinity with its opposition between the temporal and the eternal. For Balthasar, the credibility of revelation does not depend upon proving that it is a moment of supernatural immutability in an otherwise changing and temporal world. Rather, given the doctrine of God articulated above, revelation is to be viewed as the dynamic transformation of the temporal structure of our existence through an incorporation of that existence into the very heart of the trinitarian relations. The essential act of revelation, therefore, cannot be a heteronomous negation of the finite structures of our existence in order to impart to us the proper 'idea' of God – an overly rationalistic conception that leads to a notion of salvation as a simple intellectual assent to a set of divinely revealed propositions. And it is precisely this propositional concept of revelation that came in for some rude treatment with the post-Enlightenment discovery of the deeply historical contours of revelation itself. Once 'debunked', revelation was replaced by the equally ahistorical quest for a natural religion rooted in the universality of the rational concept. Thus, the source of our problem is precisely the expectation that 'religion', in order to give us the transhistorical, must give us something that is ahistorical. However, for Balthasar, this is precisely the opposite of what the revelation of God in Jesus is about. As Balthasar puts it (even approving of the basic intentions, if not the clumsy formulations, of the French Modernist Lucien Laberthonniére (1860–1932), whose books had been placed on the Index): 'History is itself the system in Christianity' (*KB*, 340).

In contradistinction to such ahistorical approaches, Balthasar develops the thesis that Jesus Christ is the 'concrete universal'. The temporal structures of existence find their inner completion, not in an ahistorical ascent that is, in reality, a negation of finitude, but in the concrete historical life of a single, unique, man. We do not, according to Balthasar, take seriously enough that it is the entire historical existence of the man, Jesus, that *is truth*. Once again, we tend to be too abstract and talk about his 'timeless' moral teaching,

or the immutable 'truths about God' that he reveals. In reality, however, revelation is the historical drama of his life – a fact which should also lead us to a deeper appreciation for the central importance of the paschal mystery. If the focus is on the didactic teaching of Jesus, then his Passion simply becomes but one more moment in the supernatural slide-show for our pedagogical benefit. However, if the trinitarian God is revealed in the real, lived history of a real man, then the Passion is a true drama where something of soteriological significance is genuinely accomplished. Along these lines, Balthasar quotes Guardini favourably: 'Christ has not come to bring the infinite but rather the unconditional; not the ever new but what is decisive; not the inexhaustibly various but the one thing necessary' (*KB*, 339).

This view of revelation also explains Balthasar's rather lukewarm attitude towards most of what passes for a theology of world religions in contemporary Catholic theology. The desire to view Jesus as just one 'saviour figure' among many once again returns us to a quest for the abstract 'universal' that attempts to bypass the essential historicity of revelation. Upon closer inspection, we see that the various candidates for 'saviour figure' cannot bear the weight of this designation, because the typology simply does not fit the reality. Nirvana is not 'heaven', and the Buddha is not Jesus in disguise – or vice versa. The scandal or 'stumbling block' here is precisely, once again, the fact that the modern world cannot see how a historically particular revelation can be universal. Nor is the problem of particularity overcome by simply multiplying the particularities. At root, the life of every historical person, no matter how exemplary it might be, is idiosyncratic; so the quest to find multiple saviour figures for each culture only compounds the problem. Modern theology recognizes this and turns instead to a religion of inner immediacy where the structures of 'institutional religion' are viewed as mere projections of the 'religious experience' of individuals. In this scheme revelation is denuded of its supernatural weight and a syncretistic religious expressivism takes its place.

Thus, in the end, both the propositional and the expressivist models of revelation betray a fundamentally ahistorical set of hermeneutical assumptions. The former seeks an unassailable, unchanging foundation in timeless propositions, while the latter seeks structures within human consciousness that are somehow 'pre-linguistic' and are, therefore, immune from the historicist critique of the cultural construction of religious consciousness. Balthasar begins, however, with the contrary assumption that the historical realm should not be viewed as an oppositional metaphysical principle to the realm of the atemporal. Rather, the realm of the historical opens us up to the event-like, incarnated nature of all truth. The historical structure of human existence cannot be 'got around', which means that we are faced with two stark choices: either we succumb to a nihilistic relativism that cannot get beyond the idea that every historical event is an idiosyncratic prison of incommunicable isolation, or else we must seek out from within those same historical structures a decisive juncture where the seemingly unrelated and chaotic *logoi* of history intersect with a vertical address from the realm of glory, an address that is not a heteronomous negation of history, but rather a definitive consummation of the world's inner *eros* for a fulfilment 'from above'. The unique

exemplary quality of the humanity of Jesus, therefore, resides in this juncture of the truly historical and the truly divine. Jesus is the prototype of every human being, revealing humanity to itself and granting to each individual person a unique participation in his exemplary existence, precisely because he is a real, concrete historical person hypostatically united with God. And it must be noted here that this union of natures must not be viewed statically/Hellenistically, but rather in the full light of the doctrine of God outlined above. The stolid-sounding metaphysical language ('hypostatic', '*homoousios*') must not blind us to the dynamical quality of the Incarnation as a completely trinitarian event that overcomes the dialectic between immanence and transcendence or between the One and the Many. As Balthasar is so fond of saying: God is so completely the 'Other' that he is, in fact, the 'Non-Other'.

MEDIATION AS PARTICIPATION

The astute reader will have noticed by now that most of this brief essay has been devoted to a summary of Balthasar's trinitarian christology. And that is precisely the point. For Balthasar, the 'what' of revelation is more appropriately referred to as the Who: revelation is given once and for all in a definitive manner in Jesus, but *what* is given is nothing less than the offer for historical humanity to participate in trinitarian eternity. In the 'concrete universal' that is the prototypical hypostatic humanity of Jesus, an 'opening' is revealed which can only be entered into by way of engraced participation. And since the life of Jesus reveals God, entering into that opening is an entrance into truth. All creaturely truth is finite and falls apart under the glare of critical reason because critical reason cannot provide the quest for truth with a proper *telos* that alone can preserve reason from cannibalizing itself – lacking a proper *telos*, reason succumbs to an inauthentic universal that distorts all of human existence. The Enlightenment's early flush of excitement after the assertion of reason's autonomy from ecclesiastical stricture and structure finally gives way under the weight of its own scepticism to the instrumentalist paradise of the brave new world, unleashing upon history for the first time the era of the post-human. According to Balthasar, only a moral-spiritual decision in favour of entering into the opening created by the trinitarian-christological event can provide us with an authentic form of 'critical reason', because only such a decisive act is properly grounded in an authentic universal. Faith is the act of human *reason* that responds to this revelation, perceiving the dramatic quality of historical existence and thus seeking the proper hermeneutical horizon for reason within the moral engagement of the self with the free and sovereign address from God.

It is only when revelation is viewed christologically as the dynamical juncture between human history and the intratrinitarian divine life that the proper roles of the various media of revelation come into focus. Both Scripture and Church must be viewed as the privileged historical witnesses to the Christ-event. However, neither is to be considered revelation as such, but the mediator through which the Christ-event is made contemporaneous to people of all times. Scripture especially, as the inspired witness, transparently mediates Christ and participates in the original revelatory event in a unique

fashion. The Church, primarily in her sacraments and teaching office, also mediates Christ, but she can render this originating event opaque through the sinfulness of her members. The salient point here, however, is that it is not the purpose of these mediations to render a historical event into a series of ahistorical truths, thus ensuring the timeless quality of revelation by denuding it of its character as a historical encounter. Rather, by rendering revelation contemporaneous to all generations the mediations are themselves to be viewed historically, that is to say, 'personologically', as living manifestations of the Christ-event that call forth a response in the form of a decision. This way of viewing the mediations is the only path to understanding the traditional teaching on the various 'senses' of Scripture as well as the assertion that the Church is not just a sociological institution, but also the eschatological presence of a divine Who.

Finally, Balthasar's insistence on the importance of the saints must be viewed in this light as well. The saints, for Balthasar, are more than mere 'models of holiness' meant to motivate us to imitation. They are the irruption of the personological/eschatological core of Scripture and Church into full historical view and are, therefore, part of the revelatory address from God calling us to decision. Were it not for the visible holiness of the saints, it would be all too easy to dismiss Scripture and Church as ideological deformations of an originating historical event. The holiness of the saints displays something of the compelling beauty of the form of God's revelation in Christ, drawing us closer and provoking from us a dramatic decision. The 'beauty' of the saints is the evident sanity and reasonableness of their trust in God's revelation. They have a universal appeal to anyone whose 'rationality' has been transformed by sharing in this same attitude of trust. To that end they provide us with a living hermeneutic for an authentic universal grounded in an engraced rationality rather than the 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. As Balthasar concludes: 'Suspicion is an unprofitable attitude and the reverse of inclusive' (*ET1*, 159) .

Notes

1 See Cyril O'Regan, 'Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology', *Gregorianum* 77/2 (1996): 227–60.

2 Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: a Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 65–7.

3 C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm* (London: Collins, 1977), p. 71; quoted in *TD2*, 193–4.

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MARK A. MCINTOSH

Christology

Even if this statement holds true for enough Christian theologians as to be almost a truism, it none the less bears stating at the outset: Jesus Christ stands at the centre of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology. While such an opening thesis-statement as this may sound unremarkable, yet, for Balthasar, the incarnate Son illumines the work of theology itself in a way that is hard to describe – even by comparison to other modern theologians. Certainly Balthasar shares a form of christocentrism with a figure like Karl Barth, such that all other realities take their bearing from the developing impact of Christ in the world. Even beyond this, however, christology becomes in Balthasar's hands a beckoning to the human soul, drawing theology into a very particular way of being – a stance in which theologians find themselves gazing at the unfolding mystery of Christ with eyes opened by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, beholding a self-giving so unutterable that created life itself is surrendered and re-created. While this prayerful stance for theology may be rather unusual in the modern era, it streams naturally from Balthasar's christology.

In his view the Church's unfolding understanding of Jesus becomes a transfiguring exposure to the divine momentum at work in the universe. He once described the calling to theology as follows: 'We need individuals who devote their lives to the glory of theology, that fierce fire burning in the dark night of adoration and obedience, whose abysses it illuminates' (*ET1*, 160). Not perhaps since Bonaventure has a theologian explored so profoundly those abysses made visible in Christ.

THREE PORTRAITS OF THE WORD

Because Balthasar's teaching about Christ permeates the entire vastness of his writing, it may be worth while to take some initial bearings by touching down briefly in three different reflections on Jesus, from three quite varied texts. These texts not only represent different genres within Balthasar's writing (historical study, systematic argument, and spiritual formation), but also hint at the chronological span of his work (coming from the early years of the Second World War up to roughly a decade before his death in 1988). My beginning with these short texts will allow us to see concrete examples of his christological thought as it actually unfolds and will also prepare us to recognize some leading ideas before I risk a more systematic consideration.[1]

Presence and Thought: Christ and Philosophy in Gregory of Nyssa

First published (1942) in his early years as a Jesuit, *Presence and Thought* studies the 'religious philosophy' of Gregory of Nyssa and explores the shaping influence of Christ on metaphysics (other early works on Origen and Maximus the Confessor also play a large role in the development of Balthasar's christological thought). In a late chapter of *Presence and Thought* ('Human Nature and Incarnation'), Balthasar argues that the Incarnation effects a reversal in philosophical thought: now *history* is discovered to have a real bearing upon metaphysical categories. Whatever philosophy may have meant by 'nature' has now been invaded by Christ in the historical events of the Incarnation, so this nature has been transformed from within by history and can no longer, *a priori*, set the metaphysical rules that history must follow. And there is a second reversal, for the metaphysical priority of the individual essence and the individual soul has been supplanted by a 'theological fact' that is 'radically social' in that Jesus' dying and rising is a communal reality (*PT*, 133–4). Both of these reversals, as Balthasar calls them, shape his consistently held view that the Incarnation accomplishes a cosmic transformation whose implications are still barely graspable, and that among the most important of these is the revelation of the radically relational structure of being itself.

Elucidating Gregory's views, Balthasar argues that Christ enters into an integrally communal human nature, which sin had kept divided and frozen, and sets this nature back into its authentic motion, a dynamic of love. In freely choosing to die in this fallen human nature, Jesus 'immolates' it and thereby hands it over to the Father. The Resurrection of Christ marks the regeneration of this humanity, now free from the immobility of sin, vivified by the Holy Spirit, and revealed in its own proper communal form (the mystical body of Christ) as intrinsically social (*PT*, 135–44). Humankind always has to *discover* its new centre in Christ, and to hand itself over to the transforming paschal action of Christ's dying and rising. This means that 'the invasion of nature by grace is a dynamism that requires a free assimilation on the part of man to the death of the Redeemer' (*PT*, 148). This transformation that slays and yet makes alive transposes nature into its authentically relational and social form, and therefore Balthasar notes that its proper 'place' is the Church – that communal pattern of interaction that is the sign of a new world born from the resurrection.

The Word Made Flesh: Systematic Explorations in Theology

The important essays in Balthasar's first volume (1960) of *Explorations in Theology* (*ET1*) afford a brief glimpse at many of the basic ideas he would unfold in *Glory of the Lord*, whose first volumes were starting to appear at this time. The first six essays are grouped under the heading 'Word and Revelation', and together they analyse many of the topics of systematic christology.

Balthasar shows how the Word appropriates the most fundamental structures of human existence in order to express the divine meaning. Christ is in no way conformed to these pre-existent features of human life, but rather these have themselves been produced as the direct reflections in time of the divine Word's continual momentum towards self-communication. In these essays Balthasar shows that the Incarnation is not

only the revelation of the triune life in the event of Christ, but also the revelation of the true meaning of human existence in all its many structures and rhythms:

> God in revealing his own countenance to man, has also disclosed to him his own human countenance. God is under no sort of necessity to make use of man for his own self-revelation; but once he has decided on this and done so in an incarnation, all human dimensions, known and unknown, are taken up and used to express the absolute person. (*ET1*, 70)

So God enters history not in some extrinsic way but precisely by drawing individuals and peoples into the fulfilment of their own true callings, their vocations. Each act of obedience to such an authentic calling is a making present, an incarnating, of the primordial divine calling (Logos) for whom and by whom all things come to be.

This is one of Balthasar's most central christological motifs: obedience to the call of God not only turns out to make that calling present in the world but is the means by which the respondents become fully the true persons they were created to be. (Indeed the doctrine of creation is in this sense fully christological, for it is a doctrine of creatures who have been called into existence by the Word and reach their fulfilment through participation in the Word's own calling or mission given him by the Father.) Almost the entirety of Balthasar's christology can be understood from this standpoint. Whereas other human beings are called into being to consummate their callings by sharing in the Word's mission, Jesus' humanity is called into being as the very expression in human historical terms of the Word's mission.

Balthasar does not overlook the communal and social structure of existence – which is also appropriated by the Word. For the Word who seeks embodiment in creaturely existence is of course an intrinsically relational reality – spoken by Another and addressed by the Spirit to many others. So once again the communal context of Israel and the Church is the essential matrix within which the living embodiment of the Word continues to unfold: 'This delicate network of temporal relationships is strong enough to hold the absolute truth, which is itself a truth of eternal relations in an eternal life' (*ET1*, 80). For Balthasar, the expression of the Word in the constellation of human lives that grows from Christ points inevitably to its trinitarian ground.

This brings us to a final and most central theme of Balthasarian christology. The pattern by which the Word effects his embodiment is not only relational but, yet more expressive of the trinitarian life, unstintingly self-giving. This trinitarian superabundance has a creaturely reflection in the fact that no human form of speech is its own end, for there always comes a time when words must pass over into action, reaching out beyond themselves into another's life, a time 'when speaking is not enough, when the witness of the whole person is imperative', as we see in marriage, politics, and martyrdom, for example (*ET1*, 83). This ecstatic or kenotic structure of human speech and intention thus reflects the eternal outpouring and othering of God's triune relationality. But in a fallen world in which this human structure is dysfunctional, the divinely self-sharing Word can only speak by stretching this natural human pattern of communication to the breaking point: 'What the spoken word could not do – it only provoked increasing resistance –

was done by the sacrificed Word slowly dissolving in the words of the Cross and, finally, fading away into the tremendous, inarticulate death cry which sums up all – the spoken and the unspoken and the inexpressible – that God had to communicate to us' (*ET1*, 83–4). In this way, Christ fulfils his humanity even in the self-giving of the Cross, for his natural human speaking and being with others is taken up and perfected in the Word's speaking of the Father's love.

The Christian State of Life: Christology as Spiritual Formation

The last exegetical sounding takes us to a work from the later years of Balthasar's life: *The Christian State of Life* (*CSL*), published in 1977, explores the various patterns by which followers of Jesus may discover the truth of their own lives as they come to discern their unique share in Jesus' mission from the Father. In a chapter on 'Christ's State of Life', Balthasar works with two further themes that feature largely in his christology: Jesus' consciousness of the Father, and the role of the Holy Spirit. For Balthasar (in common with most orthodox trinitarian thought), what distinguishes the Son from the Father is the particular pattern by which the Son eternally proceeds from the Father. The personal identity of the Son is thus given in his relation to the Father. What we learn in the Incarnation of the Son, Jesus, is that this filial relation is marked by a particular pattern of loving trust and obedience, an infinite desire to speak the truth of the Father's loving into the furthest and most alienated corners of creation. This is Jesus' sense of his calling, his mission, and his identity (it is *who* he is); and it is constituted entirely in terms of his relationship to the One he calls 'Abba'. So Jesus' fully human sense of his own identity is grounded in this loving call to him, which is none other than the Father's presence and relation to him. This is his human experience of the Son's relation with the Father, and though it is enacted in the stuff of a human life, it is the very same pattern of relation that distinguishes the person of the Son from the Father and from the Holy Spirit.

The implications of this christology for human spiritual growth are always at the heart of Balthasar's thought. To know the deepest truth of one's own being as the pure and unstinting loving of the Father – this would be a source of ceaseless transformation and hope. And this is precisely what Balthasar identifies as the ground of the Son's being: 'the Father generates the Son in love and the Son knows that his own essence consists in returning this love in the same infinite perfection in which he has received both it and himself from the Father' (*CSL*, 186). Thus all of Christ's earthly ministry is the presence in history, as mission, of the eternal procession of the Son from the Father. And everything he does and says can be seen as a reflection of this calling, this loving of the Father. Indeed everything he undergoes is a historical flowering of the infinite fruitfulness of the divine Persons' relations, 'outward expressions of the inner possibilities of divine love' (*CSL*, 189).

But in the broken and sinful structures of this world, it becomes increasingly difficult to hear the Father's calling, to discern one's true vocation and the fulfilment of one's identity. Thus what cannot be made clear as knowledge must become felt as the guiding

pressure of love, and so, in Balthasar's view, the Holy Spirit must play a director's role in God's drama of the universe. The divine yearning, Love in person, must bring the Word to birth in our world. The Spirit becomes for the incarnate Son the loving pressure of the Father's mission, the will of the Father (*CSL*, 190). But as Jesus follows that divine will further into fellowship with those who feel themselves cut off from God, the 'Spirit vouchsafes for the perfect identity of the Father– Son relationship even during the time of personal darkness (for the Son) and apparent absence (of the Father)'; and in this way even the alienated relationships of the world 'can be drawn into the trinitarian intimacy' (*CSL*, 191). It is this same Spirit (who sustained Jesus' loving obedience to the Father) whom the risen Christ can breathe upon the disciples, thus co-missioning them by pouring into their common life the personal will of the Father and drawing them into his own mission as the Son.

SYSTEMATIC ELEMENTS

We have seen some of the most fundamental themes in Balthasar's christology as they appear in particular works. This should make it a little less artificial if I now attempt to consider his christology in a more systematic way.[2]

Biblical interpretation

Balthasar's christology is grounded and nourished by his scriptural exegesis, and he approaches the Bible with the grateful yet knowing eye of a scholar trained in literature. Perhaps this training makes Balthasar both comfortable but discriminating in his relationship to academic norms of historical-critical biblical scholarship. While he certainly accepts the significance of the pre-history of a given text in determining its meaning, he does insist that this is only one stage in an unfolding of truth and meaning. This early stage is included within a developing understanding of Jesus' life and teaching in the canonical form of the biblical text. And that present form of the text is itself drawn into an ever deepening understanding as the ongoing life of the community participates in the living Christ (*TD3*, 123). He argues that a saintly life of sharing in Christ's mission opens one to the grace of contemporaneity with the gospel, even a kind of intuitive understanding of the deep and eternal significance of biblical events, and of the inner reality of Christ.[3] The Easter encounters of Jesus and the disciples are the paradigm of this, preparing the community for a transposed understanding of Jesus' earthly ministry that can be opened up by the Holy Spirit, and made transparent to the unfolding (and ultimately eternal) meaning of Christ's life in every era: the Spirit not only leads the disciples 'into the truth of what has taken place – but, in the same Spirit, they are given a participation in Jesus' own existence' (*TD3*, 131).

So Balthasar's scriptural exegesis is forthrightly correlated with his christology; that is, it assumes that Christ is indeed alive and that his testimony to himself through the community and through the community's reading of Scripture is truthful. This of course forces out into the open any claims by historical criticism to be a theologically neutral

science. Balthasar suggests that the actual historical dynamic of Jesus' life does indeed find expression in the Scriptures, that this dynamic is always open to the ever *greater* meaning of God's love, and that a biblical hermeneutic that forecloses this meaning as a historically determined specimen cannot in all fairness be called honest to the historical reality of Jesus.

A christologically informed use of historical-critical exegesis, therefore, would attempt (in Balthasar's view) to identify the basic historical features of a realistically authentic Jesus. The third volume of *Theo-Drama* affords the most extended example of this approach in Balthasar's christology (see also the final volume of *Glory of the Lord*). There he offers what must be counted among the twentieth century's most ingenious and theologically nuanced engagements with modern biblical criticism. Far from shying away from a fundamental *aporia* (impasse) disclosed by the historical-critical method, Balthasar suggests an illuminating theological interpretation of the 'dilemma' that the critics proffer (see *TD3*, 59–122).

On the one hand, he notes, the critics find that the early community 'read back' into Jesus' historical life their later belief that Jesus' words and deeds, especially of course his suffering on the Cross, were all in some way *for* them, and for the world; the growing belief that Jesus 'saves' comes to colour the scriptural depiction of the actual historical Jesus. On the other hand, and in supposed conflict with the first trajectory, the critics also find a strong strain of eschatology in authentic Jesus material – a strain that seems to show Jesus pointing away from himself so as to await any salvifically significant action as arriving imminently and unforeseeably from the hand of God. After a judicious survey of the critical options on these two points and a careful marshalling of the critical exegetical evidence, Balthasar suggests that the two trajectories are far from mutually exclusive; indeed, from a theological standpoint they prove to be mutually illuminating and suggestive:

> Might not Jesus's consciousness of his mission have been that he had to abolish the world's estrangement from God in its entirety – that is, to the very end, or in Pauline and Johannine terms, deal with the sin of the whole world? In that case, *after* his earthly mission, the decisive and (humanly speaking) immeasurable part was still to come. (*TD3*, 110)

Balthasar argues here that Jesus clearly *did* have a strong sense of mission that was intrinsically related to his eschatological expectation. But this is not *opposed* to a soteriological significance: his mission to speak the word of the Father's lordship within even the most alienated forms of life leads him to take up that sinful existence, to enter it himself, to bear it; and this bearing is salvific for the world precisely because Jesus does not claim responsibility for it himself, but holds it out, open and waiting, for the eschatological presence of the Father. In Balthasar's view, Jesus' suffering and dying is the point where the soteriological and the eschatological express their unity, for here 'his Yes to God is stretched beyond all finite proportions' (*TD3*, 113).

Balthasar allows these two features highlighted by historical critics to point, by their mutual illumination, beyond themselves to a theological ground. In this schema he is

concerned also to provide a critical exegesis that renders a realistically human Jesus, whose questions and aspirations are humanly conceivable if not finally encapsulable in exclusively human terms.

Incarnation and salvation: mission and obedience

To understand the very heart of Balthasar's christology, we should notice a crucial theological insight that he draws from his study of Maximus the Confessor (*CL*, 64–5, 210–12). Maximus had adapted a helpful distinction developed in the fourth-century trinitarian controversy and honed in the era of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This distinction is between essence (or nature) and the *personal* mode of existence of any given nature. In Balthasar's view, Maximus was able to use this distinction to highlight the gratuitous freedom underlying God's gift of creation: beyond the necessary *nature* of things is the delighted freedom of God in giving those natures existence and arousing in them a reciprocally free, *personal*, response. When a given nature is capable of consciousness, then its relational potential can be drawn into converse with others; and behind and beyond that everyday marvel, the natural subject begins to respond to the divine Other. As this happens, the conscious subject is drawn more fully into the true personal existence in relationship with God which it was created to enjoy.

In its original trinitarian usage, the concept of this personal mode of existence is precisely what distinguishes the Three from one another in God. This means that the particular pattern or mode of existence by which the Son exists is what distinguishes or marks out who he is as a Person. Adapting this notion to the exigencies of christology, Balthasar develops Maximus to suggest that it is this very same pattern of filial existence that marks out the personal identity of Jesus, that tells us *who* he is. The beauty of this approach to incarnational metaphysics is that it avoids any tendency to distort or undermine the full reality of Jesus' human *nature*; Jesus enacts his fully human nature in a particular personal way, with a personal identity that distinguishes him from Peter or Pontius Pilate – *and* this very same personal identity is what distinguishes him, as Son, from the Father and from the Holy Spirit (*CL*, 246–7).

> The Son's form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity, is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father. It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his 'I', his own inner dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in a reciprocal giving. (*TH*, 26)

And, Balthasar argues throughout his works, the Son can make this response to the Father from within the history of a human life; indeed, such a response is the personalizing consummation of his human nature.

This yields rich fruit in the development of Balthasar's christology, because it provides a conceptual basis for hearing the eternal Word in every aspect of Jesus' life, for glimpsing the divine radiance illumining his every human act. It is the Son's personal mode of existence that Jesus enacts, thus his whole manner down to the least word, the least gesture, betrays a human nature, yet a human nature transposed in its entirety to

another mode of existence (see *TH*, 28). Because we are thinking here in a category of free personal existence, not fixed essence, Balthasar is able to re-conceive christology in a much more personal, existential way. It need not be an ontological puzzle over the relationship of the divine and the human in Christ; rather christology can become a dramatic overhearing of the living, historical struggle of Jesus to discern the concrete direction that his sense of personal identity, his relationship with the Father, would move him in at every moment. This also allows Balthasar to recover an engaging sense of Jesus' human knowledge, for what is required by his personal identity as Son is not that he should have omniscient mastery of all metaphysical detail, but simply that his life be marked by the continually unfolding awareness in each situation of *how* to be the Son of the Father (see *TD3*, 163–202).

Moreover, Balthasar's comprehensive life-long study of Christian spiritual traditions afforded him a highly generative metaphor for thinking about this personal existence of Christ. One might say, in fact, that he is able to transform Maximus' concept of personal existence by configuring it within a fundamentally Ignatian vision of the spiritual journey, as found in *The Spiritual Exercises* and throughout the life and teaching of Ignatius of Loyola. The key for Balthasar is Ignatius' clarity about opening oneself to the call of Christ and the discovery that this call, while unique for each person, always leads to an inner participation in Jesus' mission from the Father, and that it is precisely the following of the call and the sharing in this mission that brings about the fulfilment of personal identity. Mission is constitutive of personhood because mission is the concrete form by which God turns to each being, drawing it out from the potentiality of its nature, into relational converse, and so onwards into the risk of free personal existence (see 'Two Modes of Faith' in *ET3*, 82–102).

We can see here the way this opens up Maximus' concept of the personal mode of existence even further to the real historical struggle of the human Jesus: he must in each encounter sense how to live into the Father's mission for him, and thereby to embody ever more perfectly the very Word of the Father.[4] In his book on *Prayer*, for example, we see how integrally related are mission and personal identity for Balthasar: he argues there that each human being is able to find personal fulfilment because Christ has given us a share in his personal mode of existence, which is his own mission from the Father (*P*, 58). Each human being, in discovering his or her mission in Christ, is enabled 'to commit his entire nature to the service of this mission; here, in this dedication, this worship . . . it will enjoy its particular, its absolutely personal fulfillment quite beyond its natural and imperfect abilities. It is this mission which, without fail, enables man's nature to go beyond its own powers and yield much fruit' (*P*, 59).

Balthasar believes that this fulfilment of our personal identity through mission is something we only discover by seeing it take place in Jesus: whereas other human beings are already conscious subjects who struggle in various ways to uncover the truth of their identity, Jesus simply *is* the personal mission (the Person) of the Son, and his fully human identity is given in and with his obedience to the filial relationship with the Father that this mission enacts. Balthasar depicts Christ as quite humanly labouring in each

situation to hear this calling to him from God, to give himself to it entirely, and thereby to discover the fullness of his personal identity – including finally the journey of the paschal mystery beyond the seeming limits of his human nature.

The soteriological implications of this approach are fully intrinsic to it. For in Christ, human nature which had fallen into bitter division and shrunken self-preoccupation is stretched open again to the relational fullness it was created to enjoy: 'the measure of man had been shrunk by the sinner, and the Lord had to wrench it violently open again in the extreme of suffering' (*TH*, 64). Humankind in Christ is rendered capable again of that ecstatic response to God's call that is its true consummation. So redemption is rooted in the restoration of relationships that takes place as humankind is drawn into Jesus' relationship with the Father in their Spirit.

We can see this fundamental soteriological perspective throughout Balthasar's writing. But he is hardly monochromatic in his interpretation. Following an extensive analysis of the history of soteriology, Balthasar distils what he sees as its most essential biblical motifs:

> (1) The Son gives himself, through God the Father, for the world's salvation. (2) The Sinless One 'changes places' with sinners. While, in principle, the Church Fathers understand this in a radical sense, it is only in the modern variation of the theories of representation that the consequences are fully drawn out. (3) Man is thus set free (ransomed, redeemed, released). (4) More than this, however, he is initiated into the divine life of the Trinity. (5) Consequently, the whole process is shown to be the result of an initiative on the part of divine love. (*TD4*, 317)

In an acute analysis, Balthasar then reviews the major (sometimes one-sided) tendencies in the history of soteriology, commenting dryly: 'we have seen that it did not prove easy to do equal justice to all these aspects' (*TD4*, 317). His own soteriology attempts to hold all five motifs together by grounding them in the eternal self-giving of the trinitarian life. As we have seen above, it is precisely the Son's self-giving obedience (itself the perfect reflection of the Father's own self-sharing) that identifies Jesus' personal existence. Thus, as Jesus enters into the place of alienated humanity, he does so at the invitation of the Trinity to restore intimacy. Salvation, in Balthasar's view, is not simply accomplished indivisibly by the Trinity but *is* the Trinity reaching out to restore alienated creation to communion in the triune embrace.

This trinitarian ground is also crucial to Balthasar's soteriology because it authorizes Christianity to speak of God's real sharing in the world's suffering *without* implying any passivity or dependency of God upon history. Jesus' self-offering upon the Cross for the sake of the world is possible because it springs from the ever-greater eternal self-sharing. There is, in other words, a 'something' that 'happens in God' that justifies God's sharing in the world's suffering in a way that does not at all diminish God (*TD4*, 324). Jesus' loving self-emptying is the visible historical form of an eternal trinitarian giving way to the Other that is not the extinction but the very constitution of God's self-giving life. And in this way Balthasar's christology proves the key to his treatment of all the other doctrinal *loci*, for the 'primal kenosis' of the Trinity 'makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into the world; they are simply its consequences' (*TD4*, 331).

Human being: called to participation in Christ

By now it should be clear that Balthasar's understanding of human existence is a direct reflection of his meditation on Christ. It is Jesus' own life that irradiates the authentic features of humanity's form of being (see *TA* and *TD2*). We have seen all along that, based on an analysis of Jesus' identity as response to the Father's call, Balthasar has understood the progress of human subjectivity as a journey towards full personhood by sharing in Jesus' own person-constituting mission. Indeed, he argues that since Jesus is the 'idea' of God's beloved child in whom and for whom all things were created, when a conscious human subject awakens to its own unique calling, it may grow into full personhood precisely by following Christ into relationship with the Father. As this happens, human beings discover themselves called into a realm of infinite life, and the startling recognition dawns that one has been invited – in all one's unique humanity – into God's unbounded love for the world. Participating in Christ, human beings discover their own true calling and personhood as they are drawn into God's drama with the universe, into the encounter of the finite with the infinite (*TD2*, 302–11).

This divine–human relation, of course, implies a real distinction between God and creature. And this realm of difference *ought* to have been a reverential space in which creatures could accomplish their true destiny by handing themselves over in love and freedom to one another and to God, thus making of the world a sacramental sign of the primordial trinitarian self-sharing. But (Balthasar follows Maximus closely here) because sin had deafened humanity to the calling of God, humankind as the priestly offerer on behalf of creation no longer heard its true calling, no longer offered itself and the world into the loving hands of the Creator. Thus the space, the 'room', which God had made for the creature to respond to divine life was either collapsed into idolatrous creaturely self-assertion or else distorted into an angry distance of fearful and bitter alienation. And with that distortion, all the other differences within the created order became toxic and antagonistic divisions.

On such a stage, the human being could never pursue the calling which would lead to relationship with God and thus to authentic personhood. But Balthasar's christology re-situates human being within its true acting space, upon a stage whose structures and rhythms have been purified and reconfigured by Christ. In Balthasar's view this is possible because the divine Persons have themselves, on the Cross and in the Resurrection, revisited the alienated distance between humanity and God, emplotting it once more within the 'space' between the Father and the Son:

> The extreme distance between Father and Son, which is endured as a result of the Son's taking on of sin, changes into the most profound intimacy . . . The Son's eternal, holy distance from the Father, in the Spirit, forms the basis on which the unholy distance of the world's sin can be transposed into it, can be transcended and overcome by it. (*TD4*, 361–2; see also *TH*)

The christology of Balthasar opens up Jesus' existence to reveal a universal stage upon which God's advent can be seen to draw near, and all humans can discover the truth of their calling – that unimaginable destiny in God that Christ's Resurrection has

inaugurated.

Notes

1 There are a number of other good brief starting points for reading Balthasar, for example, *Heart of the World*, *A Theology of History*, *Prayer*, and *Love Alone: the Way of Revelation*, among others. Christology is at the heart of all these books.

2 On the other hand, the whole point of attempting to conceive the work of God in Christ in *dramatic* terms (in *Theo-Drama*) was for Balthasar precisely to *avoid* an artificial presentation that would drain all the event-ful and exhilarating quality from history: 'What I am trying to do is to express this in a form in which all the dimensions and tensions of life remain present instead of being sublimated in the abstractions of a "systematic" theology' (Balthasar, 'Another Ten Years', in *The Analogy of Beauty*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), p. 226).

3 For example, see Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity', a highly important essay in *ET1*, 181–209.

4 For a highly intriguing and thought-provoking example of such an approach, strongly influenced by Balthasar's christology, see Raymund Schwager, SJ, *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*, tr. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998).

4

ROWAN WILLIAMS

Balthasar and the Trinity

TRINITY AND HOLY SATURDAY

What does it mean to identify, as the definitive embodiment of God in human history, someone who declares himself abandoned by God? This is the question that motivates Hans Urs von Balthasar's entire theological vision; but it is particularly central to what he has to say about the trinitarian life of God. Throughout Balthasar's major writings, especially in his trinitarian thinking, there is a consistent stress on the governing priority of Jesus' crucifixion (with its necessary corollary, for Balthasar, of the descent into hell). If Jesus is the self-communication of God in flesh, then the cry of dereliction from the Cross is a communication of the selfhood of God: God is revealed when there is nothing to be said about God, nothing to be said about God by God incarnate. In *Mysterium Paschale*, Balthasar sets out with an astonishingly powerful clarity the necessary centrality to the work of Christ of this 'hiatus' represented by the silence of Holy Saturday. 'It is for the sake of this day that the Son became man' (*MP*, 49).

Why so? Because only in this way can God display the divine freedom to embrace completely what is not divine, and thus display what divinity concretely, triumphantly, and unalterably is. God's 'hiding' of God in the dereliction of the Cross and the silence of Holy Saturday is in fact the definitive revelation. Balthasar writes, 'It is precisely the unsurpassable radicality of this concealment which turns our gaze to it and makes the eyes of faith take notice' (*MP*, 52). This does not mean, as one kind of modern theology would have it, that Holy Saturday establishes that the transcendent God is dead, emptied out into the pathos of the crucified; quite the opposite. Transcendence, in the sense of radical liberty from the systems of the created world, is given definition by God's *enduring*, as God, the depths of godlessness. Equally, this is not some kind of privileging of human vulnerability over impassibility, as if, *pace* the German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, God can only *become* truly or fully God by incorporating human suffering into divine activity (*MP*, 65–6). The emptiness of Holy Saturday is precisely the fullness, the already actual fullness, of God; God can only be in humanity's hell because of what God already and eternally is (*MP*, 137).

God must be such as to make it possible for divine life to live in the heart of its own opposite, for divine life to be victorious simply by 'sustaining' itself in hell. But this directs us clearly to the conclusion that the divine identity cannot be a straightforward sameness or self-equivalence. God's freedom to be God in the centre of what is not God (creation, suffering, hell) must be grounded not in an abstract liberty of the divine will

(such a contentless liberty would only divide the divine will from any coherent account of divine consistency and thus divine personal dependability), but in the character of God's life. If God can be revealed in the cross, if God can be actively God in hell, God is God in or even *as* what is other than God (a dead man, a lost soul). Yet that otherness must itself be intrinsic to God, not a self-alienation. If we are serious in regarding God as intrinsically loving, this otherness must be something to do with divine love. Once again, we cannot think of God's presence in the otherness of death and hell as if God initially lacked something which could be developed only through the process of Jesus' experience.

In the pages of *Theo-Drama* devoted to the theme of 'Cross and the Trinity' Balthasar picks his way through a number of flawed attempts to negotiate this question (*TD4*, 319–32). Karl Rahner, he is clear, resolves the matter by failing to give any ground for speaking of a love *internal* to the divine life; his Trinity is the self-mediation or self-expression of a God fundamentally conceived as a self-identical subject (*TD4*, 320–1). Moltmann, whose rhetoric sounds a good deal closer to Balthasar at first hearing, misunderstands the act by which God takes hell and abandonment into the divine life as a drama within God's life that is in effect conditioned by the history of the world, so that God is or becomes fully God because of this history. But if the otherness within God is true otherness and if it is in no way conditioned from beyond, then it can only be imagined as the action of love and freedom; and an act of love and freedom that causes real otherness to subsist can in turn only be imagined as a self-emptying, a kenosis. Balthasar several times draws on the theological writings of the great Russian thinker Sergii Bulgakov[1] for this language of an eternal kenosis in the life of God which itself then makes possible the kenosis involved in creation (*MP*, 35; *GL7*, 213–14; *TD*2, 264, note 27): God the Father pours out his divine life without remainder into the Son; his identity is constituted in this act of giving away, which Bulgakov dramatically describes as 'self-devastation' and Balthasar as a divine godlessness:

> In the Father's love there is an absolute renunciation of any possibility of being God for himself alone, a letting-go of the divine being, and in this sense a (divine) godlessness (a godlessness of love, of course), which cannot be in any way confused with the godlessness found within this world, although it is also, transcendentally, the ground of the possibility of this worldly godlessness. (*TD4*, 323–4)

Thus reflection on the implications of the cry from the Cross has led us to the point where the identity of God appears as a free and loving self-differentiating, a totality of giving so radical that God's giving energy generates *that which it is not* and lives wholly and unreservedly *in* that which it is not. It should be clear how this differs from the idea that God undertakes an identification with suffering humanity in order to be more adequately divine, or from a theology of the Trinity as a sort of internal selfdevelopment of God. God as source of all (Father) simply is supremely what he is or who he is in giving everything away in and to the life of the Word, the divine offspring (*TD2*, 256). And, as the discussions in *Glory of the Lord* and *Theo-Drama* insist, following the original insights of *Mysterium Paschale*, the self-emptying of the incarnate Son becomes

in turn the manifestation of the life received from the Father, which continues to be a life realized in unreserved gift (*MP*, 89–95; *GL7* 115–235; *TD3*, 149–229). The obedience of the Son to the Father in the time of his incarnate life is nothing other than the reproduction in time of the eternal Son's conformity to the 'character' of the Father's self-bestowal (*MP* 90–1; and the long discussion of finite and infinite freedom in *TD2*, 189–334); it is just this interweaving of eternal and temporal movement towards the Father on the part of the Son that underlies the entire enterprise of 'theodramatics', the attempt to think through the whole structure of theology on the basis of the model of drama, through which historical indeterminacy and creative purpose can be held in proper tension.

And the vision of this obedience takes us back to Balthasar's starting point in Holy Saturday. In his sometimes disturbingly intense and lyrical meditation *Heart of the World*, he addresses the Son directly: 'Do you know what you have chosen, Lord? Are you quite clear about the consequences of your obedience?' (*HW*, 75); and he proceeds, in language that is as startling and challenging as anything he ever wrote, to evoke what the Son's abandonment means. 'You call into the void: Father! The echo returns . . . The Father no longer knows you . . . He has gone over to the side of your enemies . . . Father, your will be done for them [human beings] and for me. Your loving will for them, your wrathful will for me' (*HW*, 109–10). As he will explain more fully in *Glory of the Lord*, volume VII and *Theo-Drama*, volume IV in particular, the trinitarian exegesis of Christ's dereliction enables us to reconceive the traditional theological theme of substitution, Christ suffering in our place: in that the incarnate Son is free (because of his infinite difference from the Father) to be anywhere where the awareness of the Father is absent, he can stand in the place of the lost and condemned, and by standing there constitute it as the place of God's habitation (because in his infinite difference from the Father he is infinitely obedient to and thus present to the Father). Thus also Balthasar's controversial handling of the possibilities of universal salvation equally has its roots in his trinitarian scheme. On the basis of the fundamental question of how God is to be identified in someone crying to an absent God, a conception of divine difference has opened up so radically that it affects everything that can be said of God's relation to what is not God, and thus every dimension of theology, from the nature of creation itself to the nature of prayer (on which more later). And, as *Glory of the Lord*, volume V and the whole of the *Theo-Logic* will demonstrate, there is a comprehensive metaphysic implicit in Holy Saturday.

TRINITY AND DIFFERENCE

Patristic theology had frequently taken up the Platonic theme of a unifying ideal form holding all things together, a pattern of divine rationality in and through which all specific intelligible forms are related to their divine source; this was, for many of the Fathers, a structure into which could be fitted the role of the second Person of the Trinity, the Logos in whom the *logoi*, the intelligible structures of all things, had their ground and coherence. Balthasar had written about this theme in the Fathers, notably in his

groundbreaking monograph on Maximus the Confessor; but in his own constructive work he developed this notion in a quite new direction. 'The eternal Son, the Word of God, has become flesh in our actual world and has set forth in the cross the Father's perfect love for us. Thus the exemplary Idea of the world is finally made concrete; and there can be no other Ideas alongside it, independent of it and converging with it' (*TD2*, 270, see also 267). It is not simply that the Son is a sort of container for the structures of created things: his active relation to the Father, as seen in the incarnate life which represents the eternal life, is the prototype for the relation of all things to the Father – the foundation of analogy, to touch on a pervasive theological interest in Balthasar's work (*TD2*, 267). This means, as *GL5* makes clear, that there must be something about the very character of finite being that we can only fully understand in the light of christology and thus of trinitarian theology. From our christology we learn what authentic finite freedom is – the reproduction of the divine freedom to give away life into the other. All finite being exists because of God's giving-away; and it bears the marks of its origin, because in the scheme of finite reality all things give themselves to be known and loved – for, by, and in the other, as intelligible form and radiant beauty. The first volume of the *Theo-Logic* elaborates this in greater depth in relation to the structures of knowing (*TL1*, 138–58): finite being is always, we could say, moving towards being seen, being understood and delighted in; it has an inherent mystery, an inexhaustible quality, but not a protected hinterland of individual, unrelated essential being. Put briefly, reality is kenotic and 'ek-static', moving out of itself at every level and in every mode. It is in virtue of this that we can say not only that the eternal Logos is the prototype of everything that is, but that the Logos specifically as revealed in the Cross and Holy Saturday is the prototype of everything.

The structure of created being itself thus presupposes a trinitarian foundation once it is recognized as centring upon the incarnate Word. And it is equally clear that the *act* of creation involves the same presupposition. Again, we find some hints of this in patristic theology, especially in the insight of Athanasius that we could make no sense of the concept of creation unless we knew, through the trinitarian revelation, that God was by nature 'productive' (*contra Arianos* II.2). But Balthasar relates this, as we should expect, to the fundamental theme of the production of radical otherness:

> This divine act which brings the Son to birth as the second possible way of participating in the one identical divinity, and of being that divinity, is the positing of an absolute, infinite difference [or distance; *Abstand* can mean either], within which all possible other differences, as they may emerge within the finite world, including even sin, are encircled and embraced. (*TD4*, 323)

This is another area in which Balthasar's rhetoric is particularly bold: he argues that the infinite difference between Father and Son in the divine life necessarily entails infinite *mutual freedom*. The Father does not determine the Son, but rather gives the Son infinite space to be who he is. And in this free being-who-he-is, in free acceptance of the freedom the Father has given, the Son gives infinite space to the Father to be who *he* is; out of that free return of loving gift comes the Holy Spirit, given life in freedom by

Father and Son so that creatures may be freely brought into the Son's total response to the Father. 'The hypostatic modes of being constitute for each other the greatest opposition we could think of (and so are always inexhaustibly transcendent to each other), precisely so that the most intimate interpenetration we could think of becomes possible' (*TD2*, 258). There is a kind of 'nothingness' within the divine life, Balthasar suggests, a groundlessness of freedom in the generation of such total otherness that gives a new meaning to the doctrine that God creates 'out of nothing'; God creates out of the freedom that is first and eternally realized in the trinitarian life (*TD2*, 266). Only so can we develop a theology that makes sense of a created freedom that is truly other to God, yet in some way oriented *to* God and fulfilled in conformity with the divine life.

Trinitarian freedom is both active and receptive; both the bestowing of life and the grateful receiving of life, a letting-be and a being-let-be. It is thus a twofold negation of individual self-assertion, a refusal to be for oneself alone and a refusal to look for the ground of one's being in an individuality divorced from relation. Because it is both active and receptive, it can be the ground and foretype of finite freedom; for created being to reflect divine being, it does not have to aspire to some illusion of self-sufficiency. There is therefore a spirituality and an ethic as well as a metaphysic in Balthasar's trinitarian thought. The work of grace makes us ourselves; but we are ourselves only in the eternal Son. Our prayer is a process of growing into his prayer; our self-realization is a process of discovering that unique relation to him which will show us our unique calling (*TD2*, 284–311). Sin, in such a perspective, is the attempt to conceive and exercise freedom outside the acknowledgement of this relation. When this happens, finite freedom condemns itself to frustration (this is analysed at length in *TD4*, 137–201); it binds itself in an inability to be dependent and to receive, so cuts itself off from its roots. It constructs a fictional account of power which, by refusing to recognize the fundamental form of power to be the freedom of self-bestowal and self-receiving, leads to an absolute impotence. Balthasar lists some of the ways in which contemporary culture deprives the person of authentic power and installs a 'hegemony of instrumental reason' (*TD4*, 156). The trinitarian account of freedom is the only resource, in Balthasar's view, that will equip us to resist the twin threats of impersonal management and arbitrary individualism.

Thus *Holy Saturday leads us to the very beginning of creation*; the character of creation leads us into a critical perspective on Western modernity; and the whole is held together by the revelation, in the Cross, of a nonidentical identity in God. There is nothing prior to or beyond difference; that is one of the main programmatic themes of all Balthasar's work – even though one can ask whether he is consistently successful in articulating it or resisting the lure of *some* kinds of weakening or downscaling of difference. But what is quite clear is that there is at least a threefold denial of certain tempting strategies to reduce the tension of non-identity.

First, Balthasar will not countenance a reduction of God to a single self-consciousness. What exactly this means about the 'consciousness' of the trinitarian Persons is something to which I shall return; but it allows him steadily to maintain that difference (in God or in creation) cannot ever be purely instrumental. If God were a single self-consciousness,

plurality in God would have to be (as Balthasar thought Rahner was arguing) ultimately *a way of being one subject*; and without an irreducible difference in God, difference in creation would have to be seen likewise as ultimately instrumental.

Second, Balthasar refuses to erode the ontological distance between God and the world. Of his complex relation to Hegel, there will be more to be said later; but every reader of Balthasar will be familiar with his constantly reiterated reference to the formula of the Fourth Lateran Council: 'there can be no likeness noted between Creator and creature without at the same time noting the greater unlikeness between them'. The *major dissimilitudo* not only insists upon the folly of treating God and world as two 'cases' of existence; it also, certainly in Balthasar's hands, evokes the dynamic of dissimilarity. Difference is always an *excess*; as, in Balthasar's trinitarian theology, the divine Persons transcend each other in freedom, so in the relation of creature to Creator difference unceasingly opens out – as space for movement, not as alienation.

And third, though this is a tantalizing area, Balthasar's wrestling with the very idea of drama, even when he constantly moves towards what Ben Quash has identified as an 'epic' resolution to history's tensions, especially in regard to the history of the Church, illustrates a willingness to cleave to the saving discomfort of historical/temporal difference as a necessary element in thinking through the analogy between history and divine life. Balthasar's Church is always at one level a fully reconciled body, the 'Marian' Church which perfectly receives what is given in Christ and accordingly bears fruit for God; and it is also a tangible institution in which sinful persons are formed by concrete disciplines of living (see especially *TD3*, 351–60).

We can read this as an apologia for obedience to the concrete actions of the Church's authority; and this is certainly a large part of how Balthasar intended it to be read. But there remains the acknowledgement that what is taken up in the saving act of Christ is real historical dereliction, unconsoled and unmeaningful failure or suffering. Balthasar, as so often, says more than his systematic impulse allows for. And if we really apply in *this* area just the principle of *major dissimilitudo* that is so central elsewhere, we might well approach the conclusion that the necessary absence of any resolution within time of tensions and sufferings is involved in the identity-in-difference that is between God and creation: the receptivity of the Marian Church is never *the same* as the receptivity of eternal Son to eternal Father; and that may oblige us to think again about the sense in which the Church concretely realizes any perspective beyond the 'dramatic'.

TRINITY AND GENDER

However, these themes lead on to a set of issues in Balthasar's work that presents very complex problems. In the most general terms, this is to do with how the plurality of the divine Persons is to be imagined or conceptualized; in particular, they raise questions about his construction of gender identity and his speculative projection of some sorts of genderspecific language into the trinitarian life. It is clear – and Balthasar is explicit about it at several points – that there is an assumed analogy between the 'I–Thou' relation in the world and the *Gegenständigkeit* that exists in the divine life (how does one translate

Gegenständigkeit here? – 'objectivity' does not quite work, and we need something like 'over-againstness'). In this light, it must be possible to speak of the trinitarian hypostases in terms ordinarily used for individual subjectivities. This is massively qualified by the *major dissimilitudo*, of course, and by the significance of Balthasar's use of Nicholas of Cusa's *non aliud* to express the theological difference between God and world, and thus, by extension, between God and God (see, for example, *GL5*, 222–38, 626; *TD2*, 193, 230); God is never 'other' in the sense of a member of a series or class to be counted along with comparable instances. Yet difference in God is the foundation of difference in creation, and of that most complex created difference which is interpersonal otherness. In Balthasar's book on contemplative prayer, much is made of the way in which the eternal Son is the form, the prototype, of contemplation, eternally possessing an otherness to the Father in which creation's life can be 'gathered' and offered; yet the Son's divine identity also means that he is not, in relation to us, simply a created other. He can incorporate us into his divine sonship, giving us his 'mode of existence', which at the same time fulfils perfectly our created destiny, the unique calling of each individual, realizing in us afresh his own 'imaging' of the Father's self-giving (this thesis constitutes the central theme of Balthasar's book *Prayer*).

Behind this lies, as with so much of Balthasar's trinitarian thinking, the visionary perspective of Adrienne von Speyr. Her 1951 book, *Die Welt des Gebetes*, discusses 'prayer in the Trinity' as a kind of corollary of the mutual transcendence of the divine Persons. If each 'exceeds' the other(s), each must in some sense relate as a worshipper to the other(s): the otherness of the divine Persons to each other is, again, the foundation for the analogical otherness of God to creature, and must therefore be the foundation for that dimension of otherness which we experience as an excess drawing us into adoration. And for Adrienne, the obedience of the Son already presupposes this, in so far as obedience assumes something like faith, something like a following *beyond* clarity – and hence adoration of what eludes possession, as the trinitarian Persons eternally elude each other's possession. But as we trace this further, Balthasar appears to argue, we must conclude that we can speak of activity and passivity in God: there is a doing and a being-done-to – though not in any simple way. The Father gives to the Son and the Son receives and then gives in return; thus it is not only that the Father is 'active' and the Son 'passive'; the Father gives, but also allows himself to be defined by what is given, 'becoming' Father through the 'consent' of the Son and the Spirit to be given life from his abundance. This is mentioned briefly in *TD3*, 519: since the Father has given everything to the Son, he now *depends* on the Son for his own self-representation, for the fulfilment of his purpose and work, as the Fourth Gospel implies (John 10:37). But it is in the last volume of *Theo-Drama* that this is developed still further and – again picking up hints in Adrienne, who is cited throughout this volume – related to gender differentiation.

Initially, the Father's role as primary giver suggests a 'hyper-masculinity' in the Father and a 'hyper-femininity' in the Son (on the Son's 'femininity', see the brief remarks in *TD3*, 283); but there is also the Son's share in the Father's masculinity in the generation

of the Spirit (who thus becomes 'hyper-feminine'). And this is further complicated by the sense in which the Father is passive or dependent on the other two Persons, defined by them, so that he too has some dimension of 'hyper-femininity' (*TD5*, 91). Balthasar is evidently aware that this is, to put it mildly, a contentious approach to trinitarian difference; but his defence is that if *every* created difference has its analogical foundation in God, this must apply to sexual differentiation as well. The *Zweigeschlechtlichkeit*, the twofold sexuality, of human beings is somehow grounded in the doing and being-done-to of the several hypostases. And while we are of course not talking about any fixed sexual identities in the Trinity, the use of this language allows us to think of the work of creation and grace as once again an analogical foundation for fertility in human sexual relations. The problem here has been well explored by commentators who know something of the recent history of European feminist thought: woman is construed as essentially passive, the recipient of meanings at best donated, at worst imposed from a masculine Elsewhere; and while Balthasar can hardly be rebuked here for a crudely patriarchal model of God, this inner quasi-gendered dialectic within God between a sort of masculinity and a sort of femininity does not contribute to any transvaluation of the feminine but fixes it firmly in a secondary and responsive position, not very satisfactorily modified by the notion that there is eventually a reciprocal activity upon the primary agent on the part of the derived feminine second. The trinitarian ground of sexual difference as interpreted here in fact transcribes the unclarities and tensions of Balthasar's broader considerations of the male–female polarity, discussed at greater length in *TD3*, 292–360, as well as in numerous essays from various periods in his career.

Balthasar takes it for granted that the *kind* of difference there is between the sexes is essentially that between first and second, agent and patient; but there might have been other ways of dealing with this. There is bodily difference itself, with sexual differentiation as a peculiarly focal case of functional difference; the question remains open of whether this functional difference entails other levels of difference, and whether it so overrides differences between diverse male and diverse female subjects as to allow us to assume a basic and defining polarity. There is the difference enacted in sexual desire – a difference which is commonly but not universally related to gendered bodily difference. And to consider these matters in relation to trinitarian difference, bearing in mind that trinitarian difference does not strictly allow of 'first' and 'second' but assumes an eternal simultaneity, suggests a far less tidy analogical structure even than that which Balthasar sketches in *TD5*. It could be said, for example, that there must be a foundation in God for the difference of desire; but this would not bind us at once to saying that what comes first is a masculine gaze towards a feminine object; or we could say that bodily difference is analogically grounded in God, in the sense that the impenetrability and spatial inexchangeability of bodies has something to do with the mutual irreducibility (transcendence) of the eternal hypostases – and even perhaps that the possible sexual conversion of this impenetrability into a language of intimacy is analogically grounded in the way in which the absoluteness of trinitarian difference is the condition for the absoluteness of the mutual dispossession in love of the Persons. But the point is that

such discussions are short-circuited by the assimilation from the start of passive–active to female–male difference, in what some would read as a reductive fashion.

It is worth spending what may seem a disproportionate amount of space on these possibly marginal speculations if only because they illustrate not only the complexity and uneven coherence of Balthasar's thinking about sexuality, but also the difficulty and risk of a thoroughgoing 'dramatological' perspective on the trinitarian life. On the one hand, the dramatic approach allows us to say that God cannot be thought of as a single agent to whom everything is passive: the very 'passivity' of what is made is foreshadowed and made possible in God – which means that the receptivity of creation does not exclude radical participation by grace in the divine life. Thus God's inclusion of all difference, the fundamental insight of all Balthasar's trinitarian thinking, fully takes in the polarity of doing and being-done-to – and does so in a way that pushes the receptive, responsive, attentive modality of love right to the heart of divine life, rather than isolating some purely active self-donation on the part of a primary agent, the Father. On the other hand, there is an inevitable risk of creating a divine narrative, a story like the stories of contingent agents, of the kind that mainstream trinitarian theology has consistently sought to avoid; and this risk is compounded by the association of certain characteristics with certain divine persons, above all the association of unconditioned agency with the Father which Balthasar both subverts and endorses. What Balthasar does is both to open up some extraordinary new insights which thoroughly and usefully confuse our assumptions about love and action, and to link them with a set of far more problematic 'fixings' of gender roles. It could even be said that Balthasar unwittingly provides some of the tools for rethinking gender differentiation in a theological context precisely by complicating in the divine 'subjects' the roles of agent and patient in a way that should warn us against fixing and isolating action and passivity as belonging on different sides of any embodied human polarity, gender included.

HOLY SPIRIT

If the heart of Balthasar's trinitarian model is the inexhaustible otherness between Father and Son, it is obvious that his understanding of the Holy Spirit will pivot upon this point. *TL* III sets this out in the clearest way, though there is nothing here that the attentive reader of any of the earlier works will find surprising. To experience the life of the Spirit is to know that the Son is absolute truth (*TL* III, 13) – that is, to know that all that is knowable and sayable, all that is contingently real, is activated by and coheres in the one who is made known to us in the paschal events. So to know the Holy Spirit is not to have some third object put before the eyes of our theological understanding but to live within the reality of an eternal divine witness to divine life as the gift of 'otherness'. As Father and Son show us that giving as perfect mutual 'investment' of life and love, so the generation of the Spirit constitutes the mutual gift as open to be given again: there is in God also a free, self-forgetting act of pointing to the free mutuality of Father and Son. The divine life is not taken up completely in a mutuality that is inaccessible to what is other than God. The Spirit bestows all that is needed for us to share in the movement

between Father and Son. This is finely summed up in the words of Aidan Nichols: 'Intimacy with the Spirit means entry into the divine "space" of the Son's relation with the Father. If the Spirit is to lead into all truth in this pregnant sense, he must also be, as the New Testament tradition attests, the Sanctifier.'[2] The Spirit is interpreter, 'exegete', of the Son; but this exegesis can only be truthful if it is a personal power and activity making us sharers in the Son's life, since the truth that is in the Son is not something knowable from a distance, knowable as an exhaustive set of statements. And in this way also, the Spirit shows us how our own interpretation, as exegetes and theologians, has to be done: it must be a facilitating in the Spirit's power of deeper immersion in the Son's life. And this means, for Balthasar, that exegesis and theology are always, absolutely necessarily, acts of the Church, not the individual (a theme worked out in great detail in the section on 'objective Spirit' in *TL* III).

Balthasar's sympathy for the Western formulation of the Spirit's procession from Father and Son together (*filioque*) makes perfect sense against this background (see *TL* III, 190–200). We cannot with theological consistency imagine a Spirit whose identity was not wholly bound up in the receiving, reflecting, and transmitting of the relation between Father and Son. If we could, we should be implying that what the Spirit gives is really something other than what is in fact the central reality of divine life, the mutual dispossession in love of the three hypostases. Even to say that the Spirit always proceeds from the Father as Father *of the Son*, a solution that has recommended itself to some who seek a way of mediating between Eastern and Western Traditions (including the drafters of the recent agreed statements for the Anglican–Orthodox Theological and Doctrinal Commission) would not be wholly adequate for Balthasar: the Father as Father of the Son is inextricably linked in relation with the Son (he is not just the source of the Son's being as if, having generated the Son, he remained 'essentially' separate), so that this *relation* must be seen as the ground for the Spirit's hypostatic life. Take this away, and the Spirit can become quite misleadingly associated with some kind of general principle in the cosmos unrelated to what is enacted on the Cross and in hell; and thus the whole foundational logic of trinitarian thinking is emptied away (see *TL* III, 380–92).

In all this treatment of the Spirit in *TL* III, Balthasar freely uses phrases familiar from Hegel ('absolute truth', 'objective Spirit', and so on); but his distance from Hegel becomes plainer than ever. Hegel's trinitarian structure, as Balthasar understands it, depends on a scheme of formal negation rather than positive otherness. The first term is posited and then – point by point, so to speak – denied; non-identity is first of all denial. Then, in the denial of the denial, the next positing occurs and the process resumes. Absolute truth, the reality of the nature of Spirit itself, appears when (in the historical moment of the Cross) a complete meaning is posited by the revealing act of God, then denied by all contingent systems of meaning, and this denial is in turn denied by the advent of whatever makes it possible to see in the dead and 'damned' and meaningless Jesus the centre of all meaning. But for Balthasar what is lacking in this scheme is the 'excess' between the terms: if identity is first denial, then there is no positive overabundance of being in the second term of the model. Even if you say, as a good

Hegelian would have to, that the possibility of the denial of the denial leading to something other than just a return to the same first term suggests an excess beyond pure formal opposition or negation, it is hard to get much purchase on anything like the sense of gratuitous, free, *depth* in the otherness of Son to Father which Balthasar is struggling to evoke. In a slightly surprising way, Balthasar's use, discussed at length above, of sexual otherness as a type for trinitarian difference helps to give concreteness to this: the otherness of male and female is not one of denial, of formal *oppositio*, but has about it something of the gratuitous character that Balthasar puts in central place. The mysteriousness of the hypostases to each other, that which makes possible – in however stretched a sense – the language of worship or prayer to characterize the relations of the trinitarian Persons to each other, this requires something other than a simply Hegelian otherness. And while Balthasar is a little reticent in exploring this, it also requires something beyond the scholastic use of *oppositio* to describe the difference between the Persons; St Thomas can sound remarkably like Hegel after you have read Balthasar!

CONCLUSION

As in so many areas of his thinking, Balthasar's writing on the Trinity is both intensely and self-consciously traditional and astonishingly (and for many gratingly) idiosyncratic. The fundamental themes are the ones that have always animated trinitarian theology – the revelation of the possibility of living in the closest intimacy with God as Father because there is an eternal Son who keeps a place for us in what St John calls the *kolpos*, the bosom, of the Father, and whose Spirit equips us with all we need to grow into this destiny. But Balthasar brings to this schema at least three novel and immensely suggestive insights. First and most important, there is the anchoring of it all in the specificity of the Cross and the dereliction of the Crucified. The way of incarnate Sonship leads through hell and thus defines in a new way the nature of the otherness between Father and Son. And in pursuit of this otherness, Balthasar introduces his second radical step, the analogizing of trinitarian difference and sexual differentiation. Both of these new emphases help to define the distance he seeks to put between himself and Hegel, by intimating models of radical difference that cannot quite be reduced to negation. Arising from all of this, the third fresh contribution, though the least easy to pin down in any one explicit text or group of texts, is the way in which Balthasar effectively makes trinitarian difference the basis of all analogy, all identity in difference, so that there truly is a metaphysic, an account of reality as such, that emerges from doctrine. Unfinished business remains, needless to say: the speculations on gender, the exact sense in which the Persons can be said to be mysterious or impenetrable to each other, objects of reverence to each other, without reinstating a highly mythological model of three real subjects – and thus the whole question of the nature of divine unity.

Balthasar would probably say that, given the scriptural boundaries within which we have to work (and we should in no way underestimate the depth of the biblical grounding of this doctrinal scheme), we can only articulate divine unity as that absolute coherence of action which is not destroyed by the most extreme of negation imaginable to us. This

is indeed one of those areas where it is illuminating to read Balthasar and Barth together. The two most original and significant trinitarian theologians of their age, they show how a biblically based theology of the Trinity can veer towards something a bit like Sabellianism (Barth's insistence on 'modes of being' as the proper language for trinitarian distinctiveness) and something a bit like tritheism (the mutual worship of the Persons as Balthasar proposes), and yet be held in a unifying tension by the sheer fact of the narrative of Jesus Christ at the heart of the whole discourse. Barth has to develop his profound account of the Son's obedience in ways that undermine any residual modalism; Balthasar has to wrestle with what it means to think of *one* act of love throughout the dramatic processes he evokes. But both succeed triumphantly in using their trinitarian theologies to restate what the primary calling of all theology must be: to trace the path of the eternal Son to the eternal Father in time so as to rekindle our own longing for and confidence in the gift of the Spirit which makes that path our own.

Notes

1 For some key texts, see R. Williams, ed., *Sergii Bulgakov: towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

2 Aidan Nichols, OP, *Say It Is Pentecost: a Guide through Balthasar's Logic* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), p. 136.

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NICHOLAS HEALY, DAVID L. SCHINDLER

For the life of the world: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist

In the solemnly promulgated teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the Church defines herself as 'an *instrument* for the redemption of all, sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth'. But the Church also defines herself as the '*sacrament* [efficacious sign; embodied form] by which Christ's mission is extended to include the whole of man, body and soul, and through that totality the whole of nature created by God'.[1] As the mystical body of Christ, the Church thus is the instrument for God's plan to gather 'all things' (Eph. 1:10) in Christ, as well as the eschatological form of redeemed creation. In other words, the Church is indeed a tool, but also (at least by anticipation) that for which the tool is used: she is paradoxically both means and end – however provisionally that end is to be understood. But even provisionally, *she embodies the end above all in her celebration of the Eucharist*. For in the gift of the Eucharist, Christ endows the Church with the 'real presence' of his body and blood together with an inner participation in his mission to the world. If the mission of the Son is to redeem creation by means of an exchange (*admirabile commercium*) in which he offers himself eucharistically to the world and receives the world as gift from the Father, then the Church is called to enter into Christ's life and mission *by eucharistically receiving creation in its entirety as a gift that mediates and expresses the triune life* – thereby confirming and fulfilling God's original plan for the world.

This intersection of the mystery of the Eucharist and the original purpose of the created world brings us to the heart of Hans Urs von Balthasar's understanding of the Church. The various themes addressed by his writings on the Church – the priority of Marian holiness, the identity of person and mission, the evangelical counsels and the lay state – all converge on an understanding of the Eucharist as a reciprocal communion between Christ and the Church, and ultimately between the Trinity and the entire cosmos. Precisely as a gift of communion, the Eucharist unveils both the trinitarian life of God and the ultimate nature of created being in their difference and unity. To reformulate Balthasar's proposal in terms of the language of *Gaudium et spes*, we can say that the mystery of the Eucharist presupposes that the temporal order possesses its own 'stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order' (§36) even as the Eucharist discloses the ultimate meaning and destiny of the temporal order in its entirety. All of creation is destined to share in the divine life by being gathered into the Son's act of praise and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to the Father.

The first step in presenting Balthasar's understanding of the Church therefore involves a discernment of the original purpose of the created world. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter will introduce the main lines of Balthasar's interpretation of the ancient teaching that the world was 'created in Christ' (cf. Col. 1:15). Only then will we be in a position to consider, in the second section, the Eucharist as the innermost essence of the Church's missionary presence in the world. Finally, in the third section, we will briefly situate Balthasar's understanding of the Church's eucharistic mission, in terms of the Council's affirmation of the 'proper' or 'legitimate' 'autonomy' of the world.

CREATION IN CHRIST

As set forth in the Letter to the Ephesians, God's plan is not merely to redeem the Church, but to gather 'all things' into the triune life of God. 'The goal of the entire ecclesial reality', Balthasar writes, 'is the salvation and rescuing of the world, and the Church – as the supernatural society of those who have received grace and who have been made members of the body of the Redeemer – does not stand as an end in herself but presupposes the world of creation for her meaning and purpose' (*ET2*, 316). As sent by Christ, the Church's mission extends to all human beings and ultimately to the whole cosmos, precisely because all things were created in Christ and for Christ.

Balthasar's most concentrated reflection on the theme of Christ as the ground of creation is found in *A Theology of History*. The aim of this short work is to show how a unique historical being can attain absolutely universal significance for all of history and all of being. After a discussion of Christ's mode of time as receptivity before the Father, Balthasar develops the patristic idea that Christ's historical life is a 'recapitulation' of the whole order of salvation history. All of the prophecies, promises, and covenants of the Old Testament find their true fulfilment in Christ:

> God the Father set up the Covenant, promulgated the Law, and sent the Prophets in order to prepare the Son's way on earth by creating something which to a certain degree corresponds to him, a proportion, a possibility of reaching understanding through faith and suffering . . . The very fact there could be any such thing as a paradise, a fall, a flood, a covenant with Abraham, a law, a prophetic history, *all has its meaningful center in the appearance of the Son*, although the Son obediently submits to the pattern of what has been and what is. (*TH*, 55, 59; emphasis added)

But we must go further and extend Christ's role of recapitulating salvation history (in the narrow sense, meaning Old Testament history) to include the history of the whole world. The justification for this extension is Paul's retrospective realization that the world was created in Christ and for Christ (Col. 1:15–20; 1 Cor. 8:6). Christ's life is, so to speak, the 'world of ideas' which gives meaning to all of history and creation; everything is ordered to Christ as promise to fulfilment. But unlike the ahistorical Platonic *eidos*, it is precisely as incarnate in history that the person of Christ recapitulates the whole order of creation. In other words, it is not merely the divine Logos who is the centre and norm of all being and history, but Jesus of Nazareth.[2]

As *incarnate*, the Son not only provides the measure and norm for the relation

between God and the world 'from above, by the standard of heaven', so to speak, but also and simultaneously 'from beneath and *from within*, using his humanity, body and soul, as the unit of measurement' (*TH*, 65; emphasis added). The sense of 'from within' in this passage can be taken, in the first place, to refer to the full reality of Christ's experience as man; namely, his being tempted, his hunger, his sorrow, his anger, his 'learning obedience through suffering' (Hebrews 5:8), and so forth. At a more profound level, the prior claim that all things were created in and for the incarnate Christ entails there being no human experience that Christ himself does not experience in some sense from the 'inside'. Reciprocally, existing things refer back to Christ in their essence and reality and have their subsistence in him. But because there is no created reality whatsoever that is not recapitulated within Christ's incarnate existence in this way, Christ can be called with justice the concrete *analogia entis*:

> In this sense Christ can be called the only *concrete* analogy of being, since he constitutes in himself, in the union of his divine and human natures, the measure of every distance between God and man. And this union is his person in both natures. The philosophical formulation of the analogy of being is related to the measure of Christ precisely as is world history to his history – as promise to fulfillment, the preliminary to the definitive. (*TH*, 74)

Let us begin, then, by looking at Christ's mission to reveal the love of the Father. Balthasar's seminal insight is that Christ's obedience does not merely express the true posture of the creature before his Creator, but also expresses the manner of the Son's eternal reception of the Godhead from the Father.[3] The incarnate Son is given the task of representing to humanity a perfect image of the transcendent God (in terms of the Gospel of John, the love or 'glory' of the Father) while simultaneously representing to God the true form of humanity – a humanity that has been profoundly wounded by original sin. This twofold representation does not fracture into a dualism because both as man and as God, the Son receives his being in gratitude and thanksgiving from the Father who is the 'ever-greater' (John 14:28) source of his existence:

> The trinitarian analogy enables the Son, without abolishing the *analogia entis*, simultaneously to do two things: he represents God to the world – but in the mode of the Son who regards the Father as 'greater' and to whom he eternally owes all that he is – and he represents the world to God, by being, as man (or rather as the God-man), 'humble, lowly, modest, docile of heart' (Mt 11:29). It is on the basis of these two aspects, united in an abiding analogy, that the Son can take up his one, unitary mission. (*TD3*, 230, note 68)

Taken together, these two aspects of the mission of the Son provide a pattern for understanding how the rest of creation *already has* and *will be* taken into or 'included' within Christ. In anticipation of the argument that will follow, a preliminary thesis can be formulated: the realm of creation is taken into the mission of Christ (and thus 'deified') to the extent that it shares in his mission of mediating the trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Spirit by realizing its original purpose in being created. This is what Balthasar means when he says, at the end of the *Theo-Drama*, that 'the world acquires an inward share in the divine exchange of life; as a result the world is able to take the divine things it has

received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a divine gift' (*TD5*, 521). God's hidden plan for creation is for the world to be a gift from the Father to the Son that mediates and expresses the divine life of the Trinity:

> The world can be thought of as the gift of the Father (who is both Begetter and Creator) to the Son, since the Father wishes to sum up all things in heaven and earth in the Son, as head (Ephesians 1:10); thus the Son takes this gift – just as he takes the gift of Godhead – as an opportunity to thank and glorify the Father. (*TD2*, 262)

If the mission of the incarnate Son involves receiving all of creation as a gift from the Father only to return it back to the Father, but now redeemed by his death, then the Son only accomplishes and completes his mission through the Holy Spirit and the Church by bestowing on the Church the mission through the Spirit of continuing to transform the world through her celebration of the Eucharist.

SPIRIT AND EUCHARIST

We are attempting to shed light on the Church's missionary identity as the body and bride of Christ. As the sacrament of Christ's redemption of the world, the Church is both the abiding presence of the incarnate Christ and the continuation of his mission. But at this point, a dilemma arises, as Balthasar is well aware: if the incarnate Son was given an absolutely universal mission, why did he not bring it to completion himself? Why does he leave it to the Holy Spirit and the Church to lead his followers into all truth (*TL* III, 180–8)? Obviously, Balthasar does not mean to deny the sense in which the Son does bring his mission to completion. The question, then, concerns the missionary collaboration of the Son and the Spirit.

Following Irenaeus, Balthasar describes the Son and the Spirit as the 'two hands of the Father'. 'These two hands', suggests Balthasar, 'do not work next to one another, or after one another (as though the Spirit comes only when Christ's work is finished), but with and in one another, so that the Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ' (*TL* III, 169). If the twofold mission of the Son is to 'interpret' or represent the Father to the world and the world to the Father, Balthasar sees the Holy Spirit as the 'interpreter' of Christ. The Spirit is sent by the Father (John 14:26) and the Son (John 15:26) in order to make known the full depths of what has been accomplished in Christ. Thus, on the one hand, as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit does not issue a new revelation, but rather reveals the full truth of the incarnate Christ's words and deeds (John 16:14). On the other hand, it is necessary that Christ go away in order for this truth to be fully revealed: 'it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you' (John 16:7). Only in and through Christ's departure can the Spirit make known the full depths of what the Father has accomplished (and continues to accomplish) in the event of Christ's Incarnation and Passion. The Holy Spirit is both the 'gift' and 'fruit' of the mutual love between Father and Son, and the ultimate gift that is bestowed as the fruit of the incarnate Son's life-giving death. In this sense, the newness of the Holy Spirit and his mission of guiding the Church into 'all

truth' (John 16:13) is an unveiling of the true depths of Jesus' self-surrender as a revelation of the love of the Trinity.

How do the 'two hands of the Father' work together in the consummation of the Son's mission? I attempt here to articulate an answer to this question in three stages:

(i) The Son's mission needed to be consummated within the limits of a historical and bodily existence. Only thus could he truly redeem and bring to light the inner meaning of our finite existence. The patristic axiom, 'that which has not been assumed cannot be restored' (Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistle 101), is unsurpassable. This applies in a particular way to our death, which has to be endured from the inside. For this reason, the Son must live in one particular era and not another, must die like all other living beings, and must encounter only a limited number of companions who will share in his mission. For that reason, if his mission is really to be as universal as his Father intends, he must send us his Spirit to continue his mission.

(ii) The Son's mission also involves an unveiling and handing-over of the depths of God's own life. Of particular pertinence here is the Johannine idea that the mission of the Son comes to a climax in the 'hour' of Cross and Resurrection. This is the 'hour' of glorification when Christ tells us 'plainly of the Father' (John 16:25). If the entire mission of the Son is characterized by a love which goes 'to the end' (John 13:1), it is his death on the Cross and the ensuing gift of the Spirit (together with the Eucharist) that provide a perfect image of the Father's eternal act of giving everything to or begetting the Son. Although the whole existence of the Son communicates the inexhaustible fullness of the trinitarian exchange, it is especially his death and Resurrection that bring to light the ultimate meaning of God's being love. Indeed, it is only when the Spirit has been given that we are able to interpret the moment of extreme distance between the Father and Son as the highest expression of their being absolutely one in love. For it is precisely at that moment that the Spirit, together with blood and water, is poured out and continues to be poured out. Again we see the necessity of the Son's 'departure' for the Spirit to be able to lead us into the trinitarian realm of truth.

(iii) Despite the appearance of the Spirit coming 'after' the death of Christ, the Spirit was in fact present all along as co-accomplisher of the Son's universal mission. The involvement of the Spirit is evident already in the event of the Incarnation itself, which was not actively brought about by the Son (unless we consider his obedience active) but accomplished through the working of the Holy Spirit (*TD3*, 183–91). Because the Spirit was always already present in Jesus' life, the realm of truth into which the Spirit leads the Church – the realm of the infinite love between the Father and Son – is coextensive with the fleshly life of Jesus. This is symbolized by the unity of blood, water, and Spirit as the fruit of Christ's life and death (1 John 5:8). What is decisive here is the idea that also for Christ himself the eucharistic 'universalization' of his body and his life is not something foreign to him, but something he already allows as a gift and participates in through his relation to the

> Holy Spirit and the Church. Balthasar articulates the unity of Spirit and Eucharist as follows: 'There can be nothing of the Spirit in the Church that does not also coincide with Christ's reality, christologically, that does not let itself be translated into the language of the Eucharist – the surrender of Christ's own flesh and blood' (*ET4*, 237–8).

Once (i), (ii), and (iii) are grasped in their inner unity, we see how the eucharistic gift of himself, together with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, is the most perfect form of the Son's truly completing his mission himself. More precisely, Christ fulfils his mission at the moment he surrenders himself in the Spirit by gathering others into his ecclesial body and thus endowing others with an inner participation in his mission. This is why the theological tradition has always understood the true birth of the Church as symbolized by the blood and water coming from the pierced side of Christ, the new Adam, from whose side comes the new Eve. In the person of Mary, the Church is also present at the foot of the Cross to receive the gift communicated by Christ. The Church is both the body and blood of Christ poured out for the salvation of the world and the bride who, in receiving the substance of Christ's life in the Eucharist, brings new life to the world.

The image that allows us to affirm a proper sense of the Eucharist as the real presence of Christ together with a participation in his ongoing mission to the world is a spiritual and bodily 'life-giving exchange'. For Balthasar, the Eucharist is just that – the event whereby Christ communicates the whole of his human and trinitarian life by gathering into himself the whole of creation; and the event whereby the Church offers herself and ultimately the whole cosmos by receiving the gift of Christ and entering into his mission to renew the cosmos. We shall consider in turn each side of this reciprocal exchange, remembering throughout, however, the fundamental unity of the Eucharist as a single event.

From the first moment of the Incarnation, Christ's life is a 'thanksgiving' (the Greek term for which of course is *eucharistia*) directed to the Father. Both his hidden life in Nazareth and his public ministry are characterized by an obedience to the will of the Father that is willing to go to the extreme lengths of allowing the substance of his life to be distributed for the salvation of the world. The crucial insight that Balthasar takes over from Odo Casel is that because the whole life of Christ is eucharistic, *the gift of the Eucharist includes the temporal history of incarnate Son*:

> Christ, in surrendering his sacrificed flesh and shed blood for his disciples, was communicating, not merely the material side of his bodily substance, but the saving events wrought by it . . . The fundamental presupposition is that the person of Jesus is really present; but along with the person comes his entire temporal history and, in particular, its climax in cross and Resurrection. (*TD4*, 391–2)

It was noted above that the mission of the Spirit consists in 'universalizing' the concrete figure of Christ. According to Balthasar, the Spirit 'universalizes' or 'interprets' Christ by including the Church within the temporal and bodily existence of the incarnate Christ, which means that truly to receive the Eucharist is to enter into all the particular aspects of Christ's existence from his birth, to his hidden life, to his expropriation and death. There

is thus no aspect or detail of Christ's historical life that does not represent an infinite source of life for the ongoing mission of the Spirit and the Church.

There is more, however, to the gift of the Eucharist than the totality of Jesus' bodily and historical life; the Eucharist is essentially a trinitarian gift: 'it is the Father who gives his Son's Body for the world through the unitive mediation of the Spirit' (*TD5*, 477). The idea developed in the previous section about human words and deeds of Christ as an interpretation and mediation of the triune life allows us to see the Eucharist itself as an expression of the Son's eternal gratitude to the original gift of the Father. What I have called a 'life-giving exchange' between Christ and those who are gathered into his body presupposes and reveals the eternal 'life-giving exchange' of the Trinity. The Eucharist, writes Balthasar,

> implies much more than that [Christ] merely stands before the Father as mediator in virtue of his acquired merits; likewise more than that he merely continues in an unbloody manner in heaven the 'self-giving' he accomplishes in a bloody manner on earth. It ultimately means that the Father's act of self-giving by which, throughout all created space and time, he pours out the Son is the definitive revelation of the trinitarian act itself in which the 'Persons' are God's 'relations', forms of absolute self-giving and loving fluidity. In the Eucharist the Creator has succeeded in making the finite creaturely structure so fluid – without fragmenting or violating it ('No one takes my life from me', John 10:18) – that it is able to become the bearer of the triune life. (*NE*, 118–19)

We have not yet spoken directly of the other side of the reciprocal exchange, of the Church's giving a gift back to God. It should be noted that when we speak of the 'other side' of the life-giving exchange, we do not step outside the mystery of Christ, who is both God and man. If the original plan of God is for creation to be a gift from the Father to the Son in the Spirit, then the Church's participation in the life-giving exchange is first to be a gift within the trinitarian exchange. In so far as the form and content of this gift unfold within the mission of the incarnate Son, *the Church receives the gift that she is by giving herself away for the salvation of the world*. In the words of *Lumen gentium*, '[the Church] is used by Christ as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth' (§9). The foundation of the Church's existence-for-others is her ability to receive others as a gift; that is, to receive them as a 'new' expression of the inexhaustible depths of the reciprocal love between Father, Son, and Spirit.

Through receiving and offering the Eucharist, the Church is taken into Christ's missionary gift to the world; *missionary* because members of the Church are expropriated and called no longer to live for themselves, but for others; *gift* because the source of life that the Christians 'bring' to the world is not themselves but the divine Other. In other words, the gift that the Church brings is a Marian reception of the divine self-communication in history by receiving the reality of the world as an ever-new expression of the trinitarian life and love. It is in this sense that the Christian is called to contribute to the ongoing reciprocal exchange between God and the world.

This leads to a second observation. What I began by calling the Christian's contribution within the life-giving exchange must be deepened and broadened to avoid an

anthropological reduction. It is not simply a human 'we' that is capable of giving something to God. The reality of the world itself, in all of its natural objects and natural rhythms of time, contributes to the life-giving exchange of the divine life. If human beings have been given a special task of recapitulating the whole, this task requires that they receive precisely the whole world as image of the divine life that is its source and destiny.

THE LEGITIMATE AUTONOMY OF CREATION

By way of conclusion we can return to the theme of the Church's recognition of the legitimate autonomy of the temporal order. *Gaudium et spes*, in a text whose importance has been widely (and rightly) noted, highlights the need for Christians to affirm the proper stability and indeed the proper laws and order of created being (§36). How are we to interpret this 'just and legitimate' autonomy, in light of the Church's trinitarian-eucharistic mission to the world – which is to say, in light of what is thereby the world's own trinitarian-eucharistic destiny? We can consider Balthasar's answer to this question first in relation to the text of *Gaudium et spes*, §36, itself:

> If by the term 'the autonomy of earthly affairs' is meant that material being (*res creatas*) does not depend on God and that man can use it as if it had no relation to its Creator, then the falsity of such a claim will be obvious to anyone who believes in God. Without a Creator there can be no creature. In any case, believers, no matter what their religion, have always recognized the voice and the revelation of God in the language of creatures. Besides, once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well.

Thus the rightful understanding of the autonomy of the world and of earthly affairs turns on the nature of the creature's relation to God. The relevant point for Balthasar, in light of what has already been seen above, is twofold: the creature's relation to the Creator is intrinsic, and the God to whom the creature is so related is the trinitarian God present in the Church as the sacrament of Christ's eucharistic mission to the world. *Gaudium et spes*, §36, in other words, rightly interpreted, is to be understood in light of the 'integration' of christology and anthropology affirmed in *Gaudium et spes*, §22,[4] according to which it is Christ's revelation of the Father's love that reveals the meaning of man to him- or herself, and, through man, the meaning of the world in its entirety. It is not implied by §22 that man, being *created* in and for God in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15–18), does not require participation in Baptism and the Eucharist for his meaning and destiny to be fully actualized – does not imply that the world, already created in Christ, does not yet need to be *transformed eucharistically*. It implies simply that the human being, and indeed all of creaturely being, is created for the single ultimate purpose of sharing in God's life, though this purpose is (yet) to be actualized through participation in Christ's sacramental *communio*. Created being is structurally *called* or *invited* from the beginning of its existence to share in the Eucharist.

The key point for Balthasar, then, relative to the question of creaturely autonomy, is that this autonomy occurs always and everywhere *from within* a dynamic relation to God in Christ. It is crucial to see that Balthasar means thereby not at all to attenuate the

creature's autonomy but only to insist that this autonomy, rightfully understood, occurs from the beginning and all along the way only *relationally*. What he means to deny is that, for rightful autonomy to occur, it must somehow occur (first) *outside* the ordination toward (and from) the trinitarian love revealed in Christ and his Eucharist.

That the intrinsic nature of the relation of the creature to God indicated here does not short-circuit the stability and consistency, or indeed the laws and order, proper to the creature as such is for Balthasar implied already in the christological formulations of Chalcedon. According to Chalcedon, the hypostatic union of God and man in Jesus Christ does not suspend or supersede (*aufheben*) the differences between divine and human but on the contrary renders these differences 'perfect' in their nature as such. Thus on the one hand, the two natures are genuinely unified in a single hypostasis, such that they can no longer be rightly conceived as merely external, or juxtaposed, to one another. On the other hand, the two natures remain genuinely distinct, but only from within their intrinsic relation – *union* – with one another. There is, of course only one hypostatic union. Balthasar's point, as indicated earlier, is that this hypostatic union none the less discloses what is the concrete-analogical 'measure of every distance between God and man' (*TH*, 65).

Relative to the postconciliar theological situation, then, Balthasar can be said to exclude two dominant views of 'proper' or 'legitimate' autonomy. On the one hand, maintaining an enduring distinction between the human being in its created nature as such and its eucharistic destiny, he resists a *reductive* reading of that created nature in either direction: he resists, that is, both a reduction 'upwards', which would (prematurely) absorb created nature into its eucharistic-redemptive destiny ('supernaturalism'); and a reduction 'downwards', which would (prematurely) absorb the (originally intended) eucharistic meaning of the creature into the creature's essential meaning *as a creature* ('naturalism'). At the same time, Balthasar resists a *dualistic* rendering of creaturely autonomy that would construe eucharistic destiny as an 'addition' to a world first constituted on its own terms and in abstraction from that destiny. Such a positivism would imply an original relation of either mere juxtaposition or indifference between the world and its Christic-trinitarian destiny. Balthasar, in short, rules out as a matter of principle both reductive and dualistic readings of creaturely autonomy because these readings both miss, albeit from opposite directions, the *mutual-asymmetrical implication* of constitutive relation (to God in Jesus Christ) *and* autonomy in the original, and indeed abiding, structure of the creature as such.

It is the simultaneity of asymmetry and mutuality in this constitutive relation between God and the creature that clarifies the summary meaning of Balthasar's idea of creaturely autonomy as implied in the argument of the first two sections of this chapter. This simultaneity ensures that creaturely autonomy, precisely in its distinctness as creaturely, is *deepened* and *not reduced* by being taken up into the Church's eucharistic mission (*asymmetrical*-mutual relation); even as that autonomy, deepened through its participation in the Church's eucharistic mission, thereby itself contributes something new to that mission, by virtue of what is now its augmented meaning *as* distinctly creaturely

gift (*mutual*-asymmetrical relation).

CONCLUSION

These remarks regarding what our earlier presentation implies for Balthasar's conception of the just autonomy of earthly affairs remain highly schematic. Recognizing the need for more development than can be provided here, we wish in conclusion only to draw attention to the far-reaching scope of Balthasar's view. The radical and comprehensive point is that, for Balthasar, the cosmos as a whole, and every entity and every aspect of every entity in the cosmos, has an originally 'different' structure, by virtue of its being originally created for participation in the trinitarian exchanges of love, through the Church's eucharistic mission (*GL1*, 677). Thus (even) space and time and matter and motion, in their nature as such, bear an aptness for this participation in love, for being recapitulated eucharistically. The point bears emphasis: the ordination towards love, which is to be brought to its eucharistic term in and through human agency (Maximus the Confessor), reveals the order of space, time, matter, and motion in their original and deepest *reality as such*. Similarly with respect to the order of human action: freedom, 'natural law', and 'worldly' prudence all realize their just autonomy, or original and proper nature as such, only from within love, the love whose true meaning unfolds in the *sequela Christi* and is concretely summed up in the Beatitudes. Finally, 'worldly' institutions – the economy, politics, and the academy – as extensions of human being and action themselves bear an ordination towards love in their original-rightful meaning *as institutions*.

Thus, in sum: Balthasar's reading of creaturely autonomy, shaped by his eucharistic or *communio* ecclesiology, sets aside the extrinsicism of the modern liberal world that would construe Christ's trinitarian-eucharistic love as something (always yet) to be *added* to a space and time, a human action, or a worldly institution first constituted *outside* this love. To be sure, (Anglo-American) liberalism typically insists that its way of construing the autonomy of worldly creaturely realities and structures is a matter of strategy and not of 'ontology': that is, it is more an effective way to approach things (in a pluralistic, secularistic age) than it is a claim about the way things really are. Liberalism, however, when and in so far as it (re-)introduces trinitarian-eucharistic love into the meaning of space and time, human action, and worldly institutions, characteristically does so in terms of what is now a positivistic addition – and its original strategy therefore implies just the ontology it took itself to be successfully avoiding.

At any rate, Balthasar rejects such a strategy, precisely because he presupposes a different ontology, one that takes things, all things, to be intrinsically dynamically ordered to the divine exchanges of love revealed in Jesus of Nazareth through his sacramental *communio*. Balthasar does not imply by this that the name of Jesus need be introduced explicitly into every discussion, treatment, or practice concerning space and time, human action, and worldly institutions, nor that it be *imposed* on these – in fact, the love that is the term of each of these renders imposition illicit as a matter of principle. Balthasar's point is simply that the intended eucharistic destiny of all things requires an intrinsic, and

therefore abiding, openness in each of these discussions, treatments, or practices to the love whose ultimate trinitarian form is revealed in Christ through his Church. This is the sense of 'worldly' autonomy implied in Balthasar's insistence that the Church pours itself out for the life of the world, even as the world finds herself in the life of the Eucharist.

Notes

1 *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) §9; *Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World) §41; emphases added.
2 *TH*, 64–5; quoting Colossians 1:15–20 and Revelation 3:14.
3 In *FG*, 59, Balthasar credits Adrienne von Speyr with providing the key insight that 'the obedience of Christ is, on the one hand, "interpretation" (John 1:18) of heaven, of the interior life of the Trinity, and, on the other hand, the "epitome" (Eph. 1:10) of the proper attitude of all creatures before God'.
4 Pope John Paul II states that this 'integration' of christology (theology) and anthropology may perhaps be the most important teaching of the Second Vatican Council: *Dives et misericordia*, opening paragraph.

6

LUCY GARDNER

Balthasar and the figure of Mary

> . . . in Mary two things become visible: first, that here is to be found the archetype of a Church that conforms to Christ, and second, that Christian sanctity is 'Christ-bearing', 'Christophorous' in essence and actualisation. To the extent that the Church is Marian, she is a pure form which is immediately legible and comprehensible; and to the extent that Christians become Marian (or 'Christophorous', which is the same thing), Christ becomes just as simply legible and comprehensible [to the world] in them as well. (*GL1*, 562)

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest years of Christianity, mention of Mary in the Gospels and creeds has ensured that whenever the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, the name of his Mother, Mary, has also been heard. For that reason, the earliest doctrinal debates nearly always included reflections upon this woman's significance as part of the early Church's efforts to come to terms with the significance and uniqueness of how God was acting in Christ. But in later Christianity, theology and devotion have not always reflected on the place of Mary when considering the person and work of Christ, with the result that the Blessed Mother began to take on a certain quasi-independent role in Catholic theology while she receded far into the background in Protestant theology and devotion.

It remained a firm, but sometimes perplexing, conviction of Hans Urs von Balthasar that reflection upon the significance of Mary and her place in the economy of salvation was urgently needed in the Christian churches of his day. Consequently, a certain 'Marian watermark' can be detected throughout his massive theology and clearly forms a significant aspect of his work, even though he – and no doubt like many of his potential readers – felt some unease at the excesses and general direction of much Marian piety and theology.[1]

Both Balthasar's general uneasiness at post-Reformation developments in mariology and his consistently maintained attentiveness to the subject of the Mother of God are theological responses to, and discernment of, his context. That is, his reflections upon Mary were articulated within the continuing reverberations of the modern papal pronouncements of Marian dogma (such as Pope Pius IX's proclamation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in his papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854; Pius XII's proclamation of the bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven in his Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* of 1 November 1950), in a thoughtful reception of the deliberations on Mary of the Second Vatican Council (particularly its location of mariology within the doctrine of the Church), and in the face of the rapid and far-reaching changes in gender relations in the secular world and the Christian churches. In

his repeated reflections upon Mary's significance, Balthasar attempts to express for his own time something of the eternal truths to which the Christian faith has always been bound. At the same time, he seeks to show something of the manner of that binding and of the forms of its reception, and to make available some discernment of the truth concerning the world of his time. As a result, we encounter in Balthasar's work a mariology which is both deeply traditional and startlingly idiosyncratic.

Despite its centrality to his work, then, the Marian theme of Balthasar's theology can be difficult to follow. There is a relatively small number of texts and sections of text devoted specifically to the treatment of Mary and mariology (most notably *Mary for Today* and the sections appearing under the title 'Woman's Answer' at the heart of the third volume of *Theo-Drama*). The study of these, however, would be insufficient to the task of delineating the contours of Balthasar's mariology, since his theology comprises a dense interweaving of images and themes, and his complex reflections on Mary's significance are implicated in many of his dominant motifs.

Abstracting briefly from numerous references throughout his texts, we may say that, for Balthasar, Mary stands for the individual Christian and for the Church. She attracts attention because of her unique vocation: to have been mother of Jesus Christ, the woman who bore God incarnate to the world. She is numbered among the witnesses of Christ and stands as a witness to Christ. She is not only present at Christ's birth and death but also, importantly, to be found at the heart of the Pentecost experience. These simple facts harbour much significance: Mary's life is the pre-eminent example of a prayerful obedience, an existence wholly conformed to Christ, utterly directed to God and to the salvation of the world, perfectly receptive to, accepting of, and compliant with God's will.

Christians should not, therefore, simply try to see things through her eyes as though this most important spectator of the original Gospel events could offer us a window onto Christ. We must learn much more to see her as *part* of those events. Her own life offers us a story in which we can contemplate the unfathomable mystery of engraced human co-operation with divinity. She is truly humble, yet greatly exalted – the paradox so strikingly expressed in the *Magnificat*. She is both 'above' and 'alongside' Peter in the Church: she not only represents the Church, she is the Church (*MT*, 27–32). She is also, for Balthasar, perhaps more controversially for today's readers, utterly 'feminine': in her the whole 'feminine principle' of creation is realized. All this (and more) is largely assumed in most of Balthasar's work and often difficult to disentangle from other dogmatic considerations.

The task of interpretation can also be frustrated by the fact that Balthasar himself describes his own intuition of Mary's significance by means of a wide range of tropes, which seem to be used in an apparently interchangeable, unscientific manner, and yet each of which also seems to be used with specific intent and purpose. Thus, for him, Mary is model, type and archetype, symbol and example; there is a Marian principle or profile to the Christian Church and in Christian life; there is a Marian aspect or dimension to all Christian theology, indeed to all creaturely existence. In one sense, this should come

as no surprise: each of the myriad titles which have accrued to the Mother of Jesus Christ during the history of Christianity has been insufficient to her uniqueness; the same is true of each of the tropes used to capture her unique significance. And yet, if Balthasar's mariology is to be justly considered, then some account of the form of this hermeneutic of abstraction needs to be given. In what follows, Balthasar's perception of Mary as at once type and archetype of both the Church and the individual Christian, by virtue of her unique relationship to Christ, is presented as the determinative understanding for these other descriptions.[2]

In turn, this plethora of descriptions is complicated by the implication of Balthasar's mariology in his idiosyncratic presentation of the nature, role, or significance of 'Woman' *per se*, for whom (or for which) Mary is the key. Balthasar's allusions to Mary are mapped to a quite definite comprehension of sexual difference, and this can present hermeneutical difficulties for the contemporary reader. To give but one example, 'Mary', Balthasar claims, 'is woman, pure and simple, in whom everything feminine in salvation history is summed up'.[3]

What are 'enlightened' intellects, of howsoever many schools of thought and shades of opinion, to make of this strange, even distasteful, deployment of a certain essentialization of 'woman' and 'femininity' in a hermeneutic which seems capable of eliding all women (in the Bible and beyond) with this one woman (Mary) merely on account of an apparently over-simplistic linkage between biological, social, psychological, and grammatical 'gender'? Similarly, we may ask: what are readers of a critical or post-critical generation to make of Balthasar's apparently naïvely literal, uncritical readings of the Gospel stories, combined as they are with an insistence on unrecorded psychological 'facts'? Consideration of Balthasar's mariology will also require an attention to the style in which this hermeneutic of personal identity is presented and a consideration of the 'politics' to which it might attach. This essay attempts a reading in which these ascriptions are understood within a typological framework, rather than as the sinister symptoms of a patriarchal agenda, but turns in conclusion to reflect on the possibilities for contemporary assessment of the relation between Balthasar's mariology and his accounts of sexual difference.

More germane still to the study of Balthasar's mariology is a question concerning the content of his comments, rather than the form and style in which they are written. Throughout his writings, the figure of Mary is presented both as an image of simplicity and purity (as in the above quotation) and as a theological person of complex and manifold significance (as in the opening quotation). Mary's significance is also understood (again in a coincidence of simplicity and complexity) both in terms of a certain identity with the Church, and in terms of an individual, indeed the archetypal, Christian. Reflection upon Balthasar's mariology will, therefore, also demand some attention to the complex and sometimes paradoxical content of his hermeneutic of theological-personal significance, captured perhaps pre-eminently in the coincidence and inversion of the roles of Bride and Mother in the figure of Mary, and of the motifs of virginity (Balthasar accepts the belief in Mary's 'perpetual' virginity) and fecundity.

MARIOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGY

Two essential clues to negotiating the theological hermeneutics at work in Balthasar's mariology (and elsewhere) can be found in consideration of one central, critical fact to which his entire exposition of Mary points: that is the weddedness of mariology to christology. For Balthasar, we must never forget that Mary points to Christ.

First, the union between mariology and christology explains something of the centrality and the persistence of the Marian theme in Balthasar's work (which seeks always to give an exposition of the entirety of existence within an exposition of the life of the Word made flesh) and suggests that Balthasar's reading of Mary is thoroughly typological. It is of a symbolic order, which takes account of and includes human history in understanding it to be directed to and from Christ, but which is directed towards an account of the spiritual dimension or destiny of that history. The Church Fathers understood the patriarchs to be types of Christ, prefiguring him for us; so Balthasar understands Mary to be a type of the Church and of the individual Christian, prefiguring us for us. Moreover, in this case not only is the typology ordered to Christ, but Mary's archetypicality is figured precisely in her being uniquely, personally, and historically ordered to Christ, as his Mother and as his spouse or helpmate, her Second Eve to his Second Adam.

This typology, then, does not exist merely in the realm of ideas, nor even in the tactile progression of the events of salvation history through the emerging identity of the nation of Israel. It exists in and springs from the historical, personal, physical, biological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual (that is to say: *real*) relationship between this Mother and her Son. No one shares Mary's unique vocation (God-bearer) – just as no one shares Christ's unique identity (as truly God and truly human in the hypostatic union). And yet, the thrust of Balthasar's very spiritual theology is that we are all called to participate in 'bearing God' with Mary, as we come, like her, to take our part in sharing Christ's life.

Second, the union between mariology and christology indicates something of the nature of the connection between Balthasar's mariology and his central (again spiritual-doctrinal) theme of nuptiality: the Church is, for Balthasar, the 'bride' of Christ, just as Israel was the intended spouse of the God of Abraham and Isaac. For him, Mary is the culmination of Israel, both physically and spiritually; she is also (again, both physically and spiritually) the first member of – the mother of – the Church, and in some sense, therefore, *identical* with Mother Church. Christ's Mother is thus also his Bride. At the same time, the theme of nuptiality is central to Balthasar's theology not only because it describes the relationship between the Church and Christ, but also because it applies to the relationship of God to the world, by virtue of its application to the union of the divine and the human in the person of Jesus Christ.[4] The theme of nuptiality also compasses the themes of obedience and fecundity which are central to Balthasar's appreciation of Mary's import and to his understanding of the creature's relationship to the Creator and of the Church's relationship to Christ.

It is precisely because of his typology's *concern* with history (rather than typology's popularly supposed *disregard* for history) that Balthasar insists on placing his

mariological reflections at the heart of the centrepiece to his great triptych.[5] Indeed, we could well be justified in suspecting that the placement of his treatment of theological topics in the *Theo-Drama* is even more important in the case of Mary than in that of Jesus, since his (Jesus') masculine consciousness develops in a 'straight line', whereas her (Mary's) significance is more circular in nature. True, the exact lineaments of her story are difficult to find in the remarks on the ensuing pages of the *Theo-Drama*, particularly in its relation to Mary's appearances in the Gospel, but this lack may be seen to be made good elsewhere, in particular in the short book, *Mary for Today*. As Balthasar points out elsewhere, 'Mary's life must necessarily be misunderstood when (like the form of a purely "historical Jesus") it is read in dissociation from the mystery enveloping it' (*GL1*, 564–5).

The remainder of this essay intends little more than a line-drawing of Balthasar's interpretation of the figure of the woman he sees as suspended between the Old and New Testaments, between the aeons, and between time and eternity themselves (*TD3*, 318–39). To accomplish this, I shall reflect on and use each of three different types of material in turn: Gospel stories (Mary between the Testaments); other biblical passages (Mary between the aeons); and Marian dogma (Mary between time and eternity). In each modality, Balthasar reflects upon the utterly new beginning made in Christ which fulfils rather than negates the old, and which, though clearly and firmly located 'in' Christ, cannot be identified with a single isolated moment (or a 'second' act of God). The new beginning begun in Christ cannot be told as a moment, but must be told as a *history*, a history which will include the story of his mother not as some incidental biographical detail, nor as some curious, explanatory psychological factum, but as an earthly life, graced by God, through which the whole of human history, especially that of Israel and the peculiar identity of the Church, is reflected as in a lens or prism.

HAIL MARY, FULL OF GRACE – MEDITATIONS ON GOSPEL SCENES

The first section of Balthasar's triptych considers a theological aesthetic under the title of *The Glory of the Lord*. This represents a vast endeavour which seeks to teach its readers how to read the world and human history as showing forth the glory of God. In this there is also an attempt to overcome the antithesis between theologies of the Cross and theologies of glory by considering how it is that we see either, and indeed how we come to understand, with the writer of the Fourth Gospel, that the glory of God is to be seen from the foot of the Cross. This is a significant step in a catholic theology which seeks an authentic witness to the nature of the Church in her relation to Christ, because it refuses any simple location of the 'birth' of the Church in one particular moment of human history. Nevertheless, there are significant moments to be considered: the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ and the 'event' of Incarnation (which of course continues as a series of events), the events surrounding his crucifixion and the work of redemption, the experiences of and witness to Christ's Resurrection and of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. All of these are included in Balthasar's reflections on Mary.

For the task of a theological aesthetic, Mary is significant not by virtue of any beauty or glory of her own, but on account of her having been overshadowed by the glory of the Lord. In Balthasar's reading, the story of Mary – her part in Christ's conception (the moment, as it were, of Incarnation), her accompanying of his life and teaching, her presence at his crucifixion (the moment when God dies, and in which the atonement is in some sense accomplished), her witness of the Resurrection, and her presence in the early Church – this story encompasses the story of Christ, leaving Mary with a foot in each Testament. Her story also encompasses the story of the Church, presenting and representing to us the Church's mysterious 'birth', relationship to Israel, relationship to Christ, and finally relationship to the world. In consideration of Balthasar's attention to Mary's story, this chapter will consider here but two determinative scenes from the Gospels to which Balthasar attributes particular significance: the annunciation and Christ's exchange with Mary from the Cross.

Balthasar's reflections on the annunciation tend to begin from Mary's response. In the story of the one destined to receive the Word of God into her own body, and in meditation upon her (spiritual and physical) acceptance of that destiny and of that Word, Balthasar finds a type of the individual Christian, an example of a 'perfect' and perfected creaturely response to the trinitarian God. Overshadowed by the Spirit, Mary consents to the Father's will and allows his Son to enter her body and her life. Here we find Balthasar's characterization of Mary as at once pure receptivity and unpredictable fecundity.

In her faithful response at the annunciation, Mary represents the individual Christian and the contemplative aspect of Christian life which Balthasar so prizes. In the simplicity of Mary's (eventual) answer and acceptance, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38), Balthasar sees mirrored all that each one of us has to say and do in response to God. Christian prayer, indeed the whole Christian life, can be read as the practice of disciplines which incline us to this faithful disposition: to listen to and to hear God's Word, and to give free, ready, and willing consent to it, accepting it into our lives and accepting the life it will shape for us, whether or not we fully understand it.

The unfolding of the events of Mary's life and destiny unfold for us more of the complexity of this 'simple' graced acceptance of God, for Mary at once grows *into* the One whom *she* accepted into *her* body, and displays the fact that she and indeed the whole world is already only 'in' Him. For Balthasar, this models for us something of the mystery of the creaturely co-operation which the divine operation always invites – a mystery which, for all its demonstration in our world, remains perpetually elusive, nondemonstrable (that is unprovable), and ultimately indescribable.

Turning from Mary's response to God's address in Gabriel's words, Balthasar sees and hears in the angelic proclamation the motif of unique and individual vocation or mission. Although Balthasar is able to delineate an array of *general* theological styles and a series of Christian 'types' (*GL2/3*), these generalities arise only from the conviction that each and every one of us is called, *personally*, by God to fulfil a unique and particular part in

the Church and in the salvation of the world. This moment in the Gospel story, indeed in the entire history of the world, in which Mary accepts her part to play in the economy of redemption, marks the 'new beginning' of re-creation, which has nevertheless already begun before this. It provides a lasting provocation for anyone pondering God's will in their lives. Moreover, it is in the construal of the typological – that is christological – sense of a human life that the idea of a 'theological person', so central to the organization and exposition of Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*, is born.

A fuller understanding of this dramatic concept of theological person and the manner in which Mary represents *the* theological person (or christological character) *par excellence*, however, requires us to move from the beginning of Christ's life to its ending, and thus from the quiet privacy, domesticity, proximity, and intimacy of the annunciation to the solitude and desolation of the very public spectacle of the crucifixion: the moment at which Simeon's prophecy (Luke 2:25) is fulfilled, and Mary's soul is pierced as her Son dies – another witness to the intertwining of their lives. The foot of the Cross, in the story relayed in the nineteenth chapter of John's Gospel, is where Balthasar locates the 'birth' of the Church, if one moment and place must be found. This preference, however, is not simply to favour the depths of Christ's sufferings over the heights of his Resurrection and Ascension, nor is it to make a theological and historical disregard of the Resurrection.

As a christological, typological reading, Balthasar's theology takes history utterly seriously. The last act of the dying Christ, the last thing he makes (or 'institutes') in this life is the 'community' between Mary, his mother, and John, the beloved disciple, as a 'first cell' of the Church (*MT*, 52–5). Thus, at the heart of this public spectacle we find again certain intimacies, and in some sense a certain 'domesticity' – but these have been rent open, and will be rent further, by an unimaginable distancing. The restoration of relation which occurs in the redemption does not merely put back together broken pieces of a fixed constellation; the sundering of creation from God is pursued by the Son of God to its bitter end; all earthly relation is rent asunder, turned inside out, in order to be transfigured and re-incorporated in the Son's relation to the Father within their relationship to the Spirit.

At this point we begin to see both the sense in which Balthasar will understand Mary as 'mother of the Church' and the manner in which Mary's singular vocation is made available to all, in direct parallel to and in conjunction with the manner in which Christ's unique identity is made available to all. But before considering this theme further, I shall first attend to Balthasar's reflections on other New Testament writings to gauge his appreciation of Mary's significance for Christian life and theology.

FROM MOTHER TO BRIDE – REFLECTIONS ON SCRIPTURAL IMAGES

Mary for Today, begins, as it were, at the end, with a meditation on the identity of the woman clothed with the sun, crying out in travail (Revelation 12). This signals for us the sense in which Mary's life spans the Church's and is therefore to be read as suspended 'between the aeons'. In this woman, Balthasar sees the whole hope and experience of

Israel summed up. On this historic, prophetic-apocalyptic basis, rather than simply on the basis of a conservative or romantic essentialization of 'Woman', this woman is identified at once as Israel and as Mary, and therefore as the Church (*MT*, 8–9). Thus we see Mary's identification with Mother Church connected not only to her experience at the foot of the Cross but to her identity with Israel. In her we see a condensing of the destiny of Israel together with (and therefore as) a prefiguring of the destiny of the Church. The vision is one of a great hopefulness – there will be much rejoicing, and tears and crying shall be wiped away. But there is also a stern warning: the people of Israel were exiled into the wilderness; the woman of this vision is in flight; the Church must make its home, suspended between the aeons, in a wilderness that cannot be crossed before the end of time.

These identifications presage an understanding of the span of Mary's life – her progress from the remnant of Israel at the beginning of the New Testament to her implication in the universal offer of salvation in the descent of a new heaven and a new earth, and the marriage feast of the Lamb at its conclusion – as her progression from Mother to Bride, in a reversal of earthly relations which echoes the divinely worked reversals proclaimed in Mary's *Magnificat*. We thus see something of the form, style, and content of Balthasar's reading of Mary's significance for the Church: as the physical mother of Jesus, who spiritually consents fully to her motherhood of God, she is identifiable as the true Israel, and as the true Israel also the true spouse of God, and as both of these then also truly 'Church'.

This point can be further elucidated by brief consideration of the significance of Ephesians 5 for Balthasar's mariology. Here, two images of the Church are revealed as one reality: the Bride of Christ is his Body: Christ's Church is his Body and his Bride. The sacramental unity between the Church and Christ is analogous to the physical and spiritual unity of husband and wife, itself an intimacy and communion which is at once sacramental (by virtue of its implication in the order of redemption) and analogous to, nay closer than, the unity and intimacy of a single body with itself. The woman who bears the Son of God in her body becomes the first member of the Church – his Body. As his mother and as original member of his Church, she becomes 'Mother of the Church'. The Mother of Christ thus becomes his Bride, just as her 'offspring' and the Church which is 'born' from Christ's pierced side also become his Bride. The sacramental unity of Christ and Church, and of Christ and Mary, is at once the same as and more than the unity of mother and child and the unity of husband and wife. The bond is one of a mutually (although differentiatedly) self-sacrificing love.

MARY-CHURCH, SOLITUDE AND SOLIDARITY – EPLICATIONS OF MARIAN DOGMA

The final, ultimate new beginning will only occur at the end of history (will be the end of history). And yet, that new beginning has already begun; and its effects are to be read in the world – together with intensifying opposition to it, reflecting the intensification of opposition through the course of Christ's earthly mission. In so far as the Church is

shown something of her own ultimate destiny in Mary's, and in so far as Mary's ultimate destiny is already shown to the Church, Mary stands as a figure between all time and eternal reality. Balthasar traces two relatively recent and controversial Marian dogmas which consider Mary's ultimate identity and destiny – the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception – to patristic roots, although he also locates a divide in the history of mariology between an initial period, concerned primarily with her position in relation to Christ and the Church, and a later period directed to consideration of her location 'between the aeons'. He is himself concerned with the coincidence of these two aspects, hence the triple suspension that I have traced here.

Within the demands of a theodrama, Balthasar understands both dogmas as attempts to tell something of the spousal part that creation is given to play in response to the saving initiatives of its Creator God and of the mysterious manner in which that part must be played out in utter freedom and yet requires divine assistance to assume the role at all. The provocation offered by Mary is the enactment of that role.

To begin again at the end, which determines the whole in any case: the events and story of Christ inaugurate a new age – the age of the new covenant – in which the kingdom of heaven is anticipated. The dogma of the Assumption presents Mary as already enjoying that which the time typifying her existence (between the aeons, between time and eternity) anticipates. It thus presents her, for Balthasar, as theological person *par excellence*. As primary correspondent in the drama of redemption, as the one in whom the history of the Church is encompassed, she is 'oriented to eternity' (on account of her own heavenly attributes, on account of her Son, on account of her adversary, the devil, and on account of her other offspring).

Far from simply crowning her with dubious privileges which render her own humanity and thus her solidarity with other human beings questionable, the dogma of the Assumption offers a concrete ground for hope of the fulfilment of all that is promised in Christ: that we, too, with Mary may be made partakers of his Resurrection and become 'residents' of heaven; and indeed that some will be spared the taste of death. Mary's entry into heaven is to be seen as a very real token of our own destiny: communion with the Father by union with the Son, in the power of the Spirit – a harmonious living within the triune life. But this is not the reason for its promulgation. As Aidan Nichols remarks, for Balthasar, the Assumption is implied in the convergence towards, and mutual illumination of, various aspects of Mary's mission (vocation-destiny): her sharing in our originally righteous nature, her participation in the Incarnation, her co-suffering with Christ, and her relationship to the Church as our Mother. From these it follows that she is 'utterly whole and holy in body and soul' and this is the express content of the dogma of the Assumption.[6]

Similarly, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is for Balthasar implied within Mary's story, particularly in the apparent simplicity of her assent to God's will at the annunciation. And again, *far from endangering Mary's solidarity with sinful human kind, it makes that solidarity possible*. At the point in human history at which one might most simply be able to locate the 'beginning' of the Incarnation, we find that that

moment has been prepared for through the whole of history, from the foundation of the world. But more than this, Mary is utterly dependent upon God's grace precisely in order to be able freely to utter her consent to God's will and thus 'inaugurate' the Incarnation.

This grace is only made available to Mary as a result of the crucifixion and Resurrection of the One Whom she will consent to bear – events still yet to come from the perspective of chronological time. Thus the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, with its concept of Mary's 'pre-redemption', does not simply trace Christ's miraculous origin (in the virgin birth) back to another, unaccounted for miraculous origin (a supposed 'immaculate' conception, demanding no doubt a similar series of wondrous births right back to our proto-parents), but rather indicates the wonderful interactions between God's 'time' and ours, between eternity and time, in which Mary is conceived as and remains immaculate.

Thus, in solidarity with the rest of humankind, Mary is saved in the same way as any other human being: as a result of Christ's death and Resurrection. But, like others born 'before' Christ to whom God has reckoned righteousness, she is saved by a 'retroactive' effectiveness of the Cross and Resurrection, and, unlike any other human being, she is 'eminently' saved in being 'spared' sin. Nevertheless, being thus spared from sin, for Balthasar, in fact exposes Mary to a greater vulnerability than any other human being, a vulnerability which enables her to 'share' in all human weakness. Whilst she does not come to know the bitter taste of sin 'from the inside', as must her Son on the Cross and in the descent to hell, she recognizes that bitter taste in witnessing the effect that sin has on her Son, and tastes something of its bitterness in the effect that that effect has on her.

Reflecting on the event of the Incarnation, on the fact of Mary's consent, on the necessarily 'pure' and 'free' nature of that consent – understood as the consent of the handmaid to become her Lord's Mother and therefore also as the consent of the Mother to become Bride of her Son – and on its dependence upon the events that, speaking in purely physical-historical terms, it inaugurates, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception attempts a faithful account of the co-operation of human freedom with divine freedom, which is revealed in the tableau of the annunciation and in which all are ultimately invited to participate.

CONCLUSION: READING THE FIGURE TODAY

> Without mariology, Christianity threatens imperceptibly to become inhuman. The Church becomes functionalistic, soulless, a hectic enterprise without any point of rest, estranged from its true nature by the planners . . . From the cross the Son hands his mother over into the Church of the apostles; from now on her place is there. In a hidden manner her virginal motherhood holds sway throughout the whole sphere of the Church, gives it light, warmth, protection . . . It requires no special gesture from her to show that we should look at the Son and not at her. Her very nature as handmaid reveals him. (*E*, 72)

As we have seen, the complex figure of Mary-Woman-Church is central to Balthasar's theology, in both its dogmatic and its more spiritual aspects. Reflection upon the provocations of Mary's life (in its widest sense) has an integral part to play in most, if not all, of his major themes. And this is no quirk or accident, but the result of a firmly held

double conviction: Christian theology must always take account of Mary if it is to take proper account of God, the world, Christ, the Church, and itself. Moreover, Christian theology will only arrive at any worthwhile understanding of human being and the history of salvation, and thus of the Church and of itself, if it is prepared to contemplate the nature and significance of the differences between the sexes, a task desperately necessary, he felt, in the churches of his day. But how are we, today, to read Balthasar's fascinating interpretation of the image of Mary? As he writes in a telling passage in the *Theo-Logic*: 'The human spirit, gazing on images, contributes a dimension of depth, which they do not themselves possess. It draws from them a wholeness of form which is more than the simple contours of the appearance alone' (*TL1*, 134; translation altered).

Balthasar presents Mary to us as just such an image: a figure to whom we 'add' a dimension of depth in our contemplation. To some readers these 'additions' will seem distasteful, erroneous, sinister, even heretical. But Balthasar does not suggest that we should add meanings at will. In conferring meaning on (or reading meaning from) images, we do not simply 'make it up'. Rather, we understand them in relation to things which are 'extrinsic' to them and yet utterly real. For Balthasar, the image – the icon – the reality to which all images (indeed all things) are to be referred for their true meaning, which is *at once* extrinsic *and* intrinsic to them, is that singular image of the Trinity: God made flesh in Jesus Christ. We shall not misunderstand Balthasar's theology if we see Mary as one of the images whose meaning is only to be read in relation to Christ.

At the same time, however, we must attend to the force of Balthasar's theological pedagogy: the images whose true meaning can only be read in relation to Christ may nevertheless stand as reliable witnesses to that in whose meaning they participate – the Word Incarnate. This can, of course, appear to be an interminable circle, through which 'criticism' can only cut uncertainly and jaggedly, or from which it must stand back in frustrated awe.

The stereotyping at work in Balthasar's thought clearly owes something to his cultural milieu, although it would seem to be more directly influenced by his relationship to Adrienne von Speyr's work, than by any general *Zeitgeist*. Despite attributing humility, compliance, a lack of autonomy, and the like, to femininity, Balthasar argues for something other than an anachronistic romanticization of the domestic goddess in the Woman (Church) who is even now at once in travail and sheltering in the wilderness. Clearly, 'Mary is not feminist' in Balthasar's eyes; but nor is she mere chattel. His expositions of the themes of receptivity and acceptance reject passivity and quietism.

The fabric of Balthasar's theological argument is at once remarkably plastic and yet frighteningly fragile: able to encompass and account for literally everything it might encounter, and yet so tightly woven in ever greater intensities that one minor fault or imbalance might seem to threaten the whole edifice. Since Balthasar's mariology is marked by his perception of the differences between the sexes, and since that mariology is inextricable from his theology, it is tempting to wonder whether his theology must, as it were, stand or fall today by the accuracy or acceptability of its account of sexual difference in which woman appears to be always second, receptive, responsive,

response, never first – always man's, never her own self, always eliding with difference.

A more subtle brand of adjudication is suggested by Kevin Mongrain, who argues that the practice of an internal critique opens the possibility of accusing Balthasar's theology of a residual dualism which works against its own good intentions. Here, flexibility is read as instability: the question is whether or not the condition is fatal. Thus, in the case of sexual difference, one might suggest that Balthasar sets out to prize sexual difference and femininity, espousing difference in equality, but unfortunately another (patriarchal) law is at work in his writings which frustrates these attempts and turns them to opposite effect.[7]

On either approach, one might be tempted to try the impossible task of disentangling the supposed 'good bits' and jettisoning or altering the rest. But we would seem to make nonsense of the whole that Balthasar regards as present in each fragment if we were to attempt to view his theology apart from the mariology and the account of sexual difference which contribute so much to its structure and its fabric.

A third option would be to essay a more patient and laborious reception, less immediately satisfying, perhaps 'riskier' but hopefully potentially more fruitful, and certainly more in tune with Balthasar's own fierce critique and lively appreciation of other theologians. This would be to recognize what might be at stake in Balthasar's configuration of sexual difference, christology, mariology, anthropology, and ecclesiology beyond his own credibility: the dignity, not only in theory but in practical, dayto-day, social, economic, political, and ecclesial life, of more than half and therefore of all of the God-made human race which Mary can be seen to represent; the adequacy of the Church's reception of doctrinal truth; and the trustworthiness of her representation of the Christian faith; perhaps the truthfulness of Christianity itself. But this would also in fact be to suspend any decision for or against Balthasar's theology, and to attend to both the parts and the whole, testing not so much their 'accuracy' or 'acceptability' on predetermined terms but rather eagerly searching out, precisely in the flexibility and instability of his accounts, the eternal truths to which Balthasar, like Mary, points and which he, like every Christian and theologian, at once 'sees' and yet spectacularly misrecognizes.

Notes

1 Balthasar firmly distances himself from the 'very questionable shifts in empha-sis . . . in so-called "popular piety"', which has regarded Mary as mediator to the Father rather than Christ, and within (modern) academic theology, some of which has been over-exercised with the privileges attending the Mother of God: see espe-cially 'The Marian Principle' in *E* for an elaboration of Balthasar's critique of an 'unmoored' mariology; also *MT*, *passim*.

2 Brendan Leahy takes a similar approach when he runs these various tropes together as the 'Marian Profile': *The Marian Profile* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 2000).

3 'Our Lady in Monasticism', *Word and Spirit* 10 (1985): 52–6; here 52.

4 On this theme, see, for example, Aidan Nichols's helpful account, *The Word Has Been Abroad: a Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 249–50.

5 Balthasar's most extensive treatment of mariology occurs at the midpoint of his trilogy: the *Theo-Drama* constitutes the second panel of his trilogy and consists in five volumes, in the third of which he devotes one hundred densely packed pages to Mary. Moreover, volume III has five parts to it, and the whole of the *third* part comprises a treatment of mariology. Structurally considered, therefore, Balthasar's mariology is located in the

exact centre of the triptych.

6 See Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: a Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), pp. 114–15.

7 See Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad/Herder & Herder, 2002), p. 15.

7

DAVID MOSS

The saints

> It is not dry manuals (full as these may be of unquestionable truths) that plausibly express to the world the truth of Christ's Gospel, but the existence of the saints, who have been grasped by Christ's Holy Spirit. And Christ himself foresaw no other kind of apologetics. (*GL1*, 494)

INTRODUCTION

Hans Urs von Balthasar is a theologian whom one never reads indifferently. He himself decried the 'sleek and passionless' theological treatise as the sole form of theological presentation; and, while never suggesting any abandonment of intellectual rigour, he urged upon theology 'movement, sharp debate (*quaestio disputata*) [and] the virile language of deep and powerful emotion' (*ET1*, 204). Thus, if readers of Balthasar's *oeuvre* are oftentimes led to marvel at the sheer range and erudition of his presentation, just as much as they are sometimes left puzzling over the undeniable risk of his 'creative invention', it is when they come to his treatment of the saints – those men and women of prayer who have taken their sanctification by the triune God most seriously – that they become most profoundly aware of the passion and indeed strangeness of his theological itinerary. For what we have to reckon with here is the impact of that powerful and disturbing experience of lives formed and informed by divine love; that is to say, the making and remaking of human beings into the image of Christ. And this, as Augustine well demonstrated in his *Confessions*, involves no smooth and untroubled elevation to a higher plane of existence, but the struggle and turmoil of discovering at ever deeper levels of one's existence the purification that obedience to the call of Christ involves.

But, we may nervously wonder, is all this not a matter more properly for the practice of the confessional and for manuals of spiritual direction? And to the extent that the individual charisms of the saints can be depicted within the more general laws of providence, then should this not be the business of ascetical, or even pastoral theology today? At any rate, certainly not the business of dogmatic theology.

There can be little doubt that for many Balthasar's singular concentration upon the place of the saints in his dogmatic theology (and most especially, and fundamentally, upon the saint *par excellence* – Mary) lends to this theology a somewhat mystical air which would demand of the reader a *sensitivité* to spiritual traditions that are becoming for most people increasingly esoteric. Are we then to ignore this theme, concentrating instead, for example, on his theological aesthetics as a heady antidote to the drab 'correlationism' of much modern theology; or, perhaps, on his more speculative explorations of the pathos of God, which seem to fit so well with such popular efforts as

those of Jürgen Moltmann? And all this in ignorance or avoidance of what he has to say about the central place of the saints and the struggle for holiness? But if we are to plunder his theology in such a way and with such a view to our modern obsessions, then we should at least be aware that, according to Balthasar himself, these very obsessions are a product of a near fatal rupture in the heart of theology itself – a rupture in that place where holiness and theology, faith and understanding, had always been bound together in the catholic tradition. That is to say, precisely in the lives of the saints.

According to Balthasar the saints present no far distant 'ideal' for Christian existence. An ironic assertion, that; for in the popular imagination the saints are felt to be so distant from us precisely because of their very holiness and enthusiasm. What is more, the very idea of sanctity is being threatened today by psychology's 'hermeneutics of suspicion', which would demolish the ideal of sanctity as a disguised psychopathology or as a play for power. But for Balthasar the saints stand at the 'heart of the world'; they set before every generation, in objective and subjective terms, 'a new interpretation of revelation' (*2SS*, 25).

This point is axiomatic for Balthasar. For if the destiny and privilege of ordinary Christians is to follow Christ through the drab 'greyness of everyday' existence in concentric circuits of faithfulness, then the saints, while never released from this existence, enjoy a more eccentric trajectory which both draws them nearer to the burning core of divine love and sends them further out from this source in *missions* that streak across the sky of the world like fiery comets. If we were to extend this cosmological analogy, then we may suggest that much as astronomers search the night sky for eccentric movements in planets that indicate unseen concentrations of immense power and force, so likewise for Balthasar do the eccentric movements of the saints so act as to point us continually to the veiled source of the light that streams through them. It is their movement or rhythm that should forever alert our startled gaze to the identity and action of the God who moves them.

The exegesis of the saints' objective mission, which is received from God and from God alone, is, Balthasar claims, a central task of the theologian. Even more so, it is a task that, in a certain sense, only the theologian can accomplish. For just as a neurologist depends upon his psychiatric acuity in order to reach good clinical judgements about his patients' mental disorders as being chemically, biologically, or psychologically caused, so also is the discernment of the theologian required in order to speak of God's working in the souls of the saints: what is from God? what is personality-determined? historically superseded? perennially valid? We should not miss on this count the high calling that Balthasar sets to the theologian, who is to undertake this delicate task in a manner that presupposes his or her own participation in the life of sanctity in some way – that is to say, in a discernment of the very *form and content* of revelation as it appears in this particle of saintly existence.

Saints set before us the form (*Gestalt*) of a thoroughly 'theological existence'. And this means that their mission is *not* to be interpreted simply through the intensity of their moral or ascetical achievement. No doubt this is a component in their identity as saints

and in this respect they give us an 'ideal' to strive for, however odd their living of this may be (saints can be unbelievably irascible, imperious, temerarious, unhygienic, your all-round unpleasant neighbour). However, for Balthasar, the universality of their effect is revealed not through their personality but through the *singularity* of their mission.[1]

The saints bring to light scarcely suspected treasures in the deposit of faith. They return us to the wellsprings of the Christian faith, and this not merely in terms of ecclesial obedience or reverent discipleship, for example, but in terms of returning us to the very source of all life that is the triune life of God himself. This is where we may find the sole measure by which to discern the missions of the saints. Moreover, this explains why Balthasar's treatment of the saints unfolds (as we will see) by way of a theological glossary that precisely coincides (analogically speaking) with the language he will employ to interpret those two central foci of the Christian faith itself: the Trinity and Incarnation.

In a move still more daring and contestable, Balthasar will in turn let the dogmatic construal of these two central mysteries *stand under* the unique experience of the saints, thereby giving to Church dogma what he claims to be its truly existential depth. Thus, for example, in order to indicate how we are to understand Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross – however feebly and inadequately – Balthasar will direct our attention to the 'dark night' experience of certain saints and mystics.

It is in this way, then, that, through the mediation of the saints, Balthasar claims that the dogmatic tradition becomes available to us as renewed and refreshed in every generation. To miss this remarkably fruitful dialectic between holiness and theology – enacted in so many styles and levels of intensity throughout Balthasar's work – is quite simply to miss the novelty and fidelity of his achievement. It is to fail to see what in Balthasar's thought never leaves one indifferent: the enrapturing form of God's glory.

THEOLOGY AND SANCTITY

This last claim may seem a little excessive, for after all, in the colossal and symphonic structure of Balthasar's theology, do we not come across numerous other melodies and themes that, from a distance, seem to carry his theology along? Nonetheless, in the 'Preface' to his brief essay *Love Alone: the Way of Revelation*, which in many respects presents, in severe concentration, the ambition of his great theological triptych, Balthasar places inspiration and provocation together in a single breath. This essay, he claims, shows *no other inspiration* than the theological tradition of the 'great saints': those great lovers 'who know most about God and must be listened to'. If this tradition is not to move our age at this moment, then, Balthasar darkly concludes, 'there is not much chance that Christianity in a pure form will be discovered at all' (*LA*, 10).

It is a disturbing claim, and in order to grasp what is at issue here we must first turn to his programmatic and now well-known essay 'Theology and Sanctity' (*ET1*, 181–209). For in this manifesto we are presented with the barest sketch of a genealogy that seeks to trace and locate the very predicament of theology today; and in this the saints play a central role.

'Theology and Sanctity' begins with Balthasar's puzzlement over one of the most

noticeable – and yet by the same token ignored – features of the post-scholastic Catholic tradition: the almost total absence of theologians who were also great saints. Not so, he remarks, of the evidence of much of the Great Tradition, where an Augustine, Bernard, Anselm, or Aquinas (to name but a few) could be seen to set before the faithful a lived 'unity of knowledge and life'. Colloquially, we may be tempted to say that these great saint-theologians 'practised what they preached'. But for Balthasar there is a good deal more at stake here than a reasonable consonance between inner belief and outward testimony. What is at stake is testimony to that miracle of movement whereby, according to the fundamental law of the Incarnation, the world and all it contains, including the humanity of Christ, can become an expression, superseded but not destroyed, of his divine person and truth.

The great saint-theologians drew no distinction between Christian life and Christian doctrine, frequently writing one into the other, because the 'fullness of truth' they sought to communicate is revealed through a 'walking in the truth' of the One whose very life reveals the truth of God – Jesus Christ. What this means is that just as the truth of Christian life (spirituality) is not to be discovered in some interior realm but in objective (incarnated) forms of following Christ (bishop, pastor, teacher, evangelist, poet, and so forth), so the nature of this 'theological existence' admits to no prior philosophical (and later psychological) description that would allow one to prescind from the properly doctrinal. The truth of doctrine, in speaking of 'things eternal', illuminates and directs, while never abandoning, the creaturely struggle for holiness – and vice versa.

What Balthasar reaches for here, in praise of these great saint-theologians, is that 'fruitful' dialectic – a word that will also characterize the life of God himself, as we shall see – whereby the most persuasive material for exemplifying the truth of the Christian gospel – one's own life – far from elevating 'my' own spiritual journey becomes the *form* through which the truth of Christian doctrine is grasped and becomes 'followable' in the Church. And followable not as some sort of abstract geographic instruction, but as the handing-over or handing-on of the very gift which makes such a way possible in the first place: the (eucharistic) life of Christ. In short, according to Balthasar, the teacher of Christian truth (doctrine) is by an 'inner necessity' a saint (holy).

This great fusion, however, was fragile and, according to Balthasar, falls away with the rise of 'modern secularism' – a change in which the Church herself, it should go without saying, plays a fundamental role. With the immense categorizing impulse of Aristotelianism influencing theology from the thirteenth century onwards, the modern sciences of nature and mind begin to carve out for themselves an arena of investigation apart from theology. Over time, this colonization became so triumphant that the (holiness-seeking) theologian is banished from the very academy of worldly discourse where the drama of existence is supposed to be made intelligible. In place of the dynamism of Christian existence (holiness) that had provoked the 'necessary transposition' of creaturely conceptuality (doctrine), the philosopher and scientist now engage only with the 'diaphanous remnants' (to use Hegel's term) of a theological language and experience that are now cooling to extinction like a burnt-out star. In

consequence, doctrine bows before the norms and criteria of a strictly philosophical propaedeutic; and spirituality draws itself away into the rarified atmosphere of religious sentiment and piety.

Thus, if would-be saints occasionally find few waymarks to guide or interpret their path in the desert of modernity, theologians have almost entirely abandoned this existential drama as a resource for investigation and employment. In place of the fruitful dialectic of the theologian-saint, one encounters two distant colonies of Christians, separated by the twin modern standards for rigour and authenticity: science and piety. And this divorce, Balthasar concludes, is no local phenomenon but has rather sapped the vital force of the Church of today and the credibility of her preaching of eternal truth.

This presents *in nuce* the lineaments of a story (the coming of modernity) that Balthasar will tell and retell in many places throughout his work.[2] To the character and purpose of this story, which finds for the saint so central a place in its narrative of loss, we will need to return in conclusion. However, for the moment we need to circle back to examine the saint *in nudo*, as it were. For just as much as the experience of loss sets the agenda for Balthasar's thorough reworking of theology, so also does he understand that *this* reconfiguration can only find itself as one more unfolding of the never-to-be-superseded event of revelation. But, as we have just seen, this is an unfolding whose loss would imperil the Church. And why? Precisely because Jesus Christ, as the revelation of God for us, is *the* Theologian, just as he is *the* Holy One. One could say then that theology and sanctity coincide in Jesus Christ as an 'inner necessity'. But so also, according to Balthasar, are theology and sanctity fundamental dimensions for the *prolongation* of revelation – of the Good News transforming lives. Thus we are required to ask: how do we define what a saint is if we assume with Balthasar that the gospel has a history and revelation is prolonged?

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENOLOGY

What is a saint? How should we set about answering this question? For sure, we can take the easy way out and reply in crudely juridical terms: the saints are deceased believers who have been canonized, inscribed on the list ('canon') of officially recognized *holy ones*. Alternatively, we may be tempted to reach for those psychological strategies that would reveal to us how seismic historical forces began to resonate first in these sensitive souls, 'distant early warning systems' of shocks to come.[3]

However, for Balthasar, the presence of the saints in our midst demands something more of theology than psychological abstraction or pietistic coloration. They demand, rather, a hagiography 'from above' as it were; or what Balthasar calls 'a sort of *supernatural phenomenology*' (*2SS*, 26). A saint is a man or woman entrusted with a unique and personalizing mission (*Sendung*). The saint is sent to the Church; and, if truth be told, is often received 'out of season', for the Church is forever ill-prepared to receive those who would revivify her life and sharpen her proclamation. The saint is the Christian disciple taken into the service of that mission with which he or she has been entrusted *alone*. It is the witness to this *mission* (the saint's objective 'office') that

matters, and not the *person*, for the mission will always outrun the person just as grace will always outrun nature. Thus, the theologian, by way of this 'supernatural phenomenology', should first and foremost be concerned to exegete this mission. Not that the saints' personalities become jejune, of course. To the extent that the true saints of God will forever seek to coincide with their respective missions, so theology will seek to understand the fruitfulness of these transfigured personalities for the Church's life and faith.

The richness of Balthasar's vocabulary here and the range of his engagement with many saints down through the ages should not surprise us, for we are dealing with the *freedom* of God. The saints are gifts from God, which is to say that in being sent from the inner life of God – lively trinitarian love – *just so* do they erupt into history with spontaneity and novelty. But phenomenology speaks of essences, as Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, so often insisted. Thus any phenomenology of such a novelty would, even if it did not threaten to become a contradiction in terms, at least suggest the danger of a dire abstraction. Nonetheless, Balthasar suggests, the task of such a phenomenology involves reaching towards a person's essence (his or her *Gestalt*) in order to discern there the concrete manifestation of a personal mission. Neither one without the other: neither mission without person, nor person without mission; although, of course, it is the mission alone that is perfect and the person only secondarily so. Thus, as Balthasar puts it, theology is set to discern in the lives of the saints the '*intelligibile in sensibili*', where the *intelligibile* is precisely something supernatural.

Now we can establish no formal model to undertake this task, and Balthasar's approach here does not so much aspire to the pretension of a sheerly scientific and objective phenomenology, as it tries to respond to the givenness, or inner order (*taxis*, *ordo*) of God's love. Thus, in accordance with the language of Husserlian phenomenology, the 'reductions' or 'bracketings' of Balthasar's approach seek that Christian rhythm whereby the lives of the saints become real parables for the inner-divine life of God, based as these lives are upon the foundation of that coincidence of mission and person that characterizes the chief protagonist in the drama of salvation: Jesus Christ.[4] Only in this way are we to understand that the lives of the saints participate in, by way of their Marian 'Yes to God' (*Jawort*), the *diffusivum sui* (self-diffusion) of God's goodness, truth, and beauty.

In order to bring Balthasar's wide-ranging and endlessly 'improvised' theological choreography of sanctity into some sort of unity, I suggest that, present and embedded in Balthasar's every treatment of the saints, there is a series of reductions that we may call the theological, christological, and mariological dimensions of saintly existence – and that these in turn reveal to the eyes of faith those dimensions of unity, obedience, and fruitfulness that God's commandment to love always brings with it (John 15:12). I now attend to each in turn.

'In truth, the saint is a person of the beyond', Balthasar comments in his essay on Elizabeth of the Trinity. His comment, though, should not mislead us. For this 'beyond' indicates nothing of that 'otherworldliness' that we may intuitively associate with the

naïvely virtuous or with those who would seek flight from this world into various forms of quietism. For sure, we may also accord heroic saintliness to those whose 'disinterested' care for others puts into dark shadow our own miserable efforts. But in both cases we are in danger of defusing the syntax of saintliness by transforming God's call and commandments into the mere wishes of a 'natural attitude'. Only at the point where commandment does not shade off into vague regret but retains the force of its obligation, only there does the saint step forward, or is rather drawn forward, into light. And what is this light? It is quite simply, Balthasar tells us, the light of love – divine love.

Immediately, then, we may see how attention to the saints may help us to navigate one of the most unappealing of modern doctrinal controversies, which concerns the relationship between God's love and justice; Balthasar attends to this with particular care and insights in his treatment of Thérèse of Lisieux.[5] But more than this, we are alerted to the fact that for Balthasar the authenticity of Christian existence is verified neither through the intensity of activity nor in the transcendence of contemplation, but precisely in an ever deepening experience of that existential drama of existence that belongs to all Christians and which Balthasar explains as follows:

> On the one hand, [Christian life] means resolute action, the determination to do one's utmost – 'when you have done everything you can'. It is the very opposite of moral or dogmatic quietism, which 'leaves it all to grace' and drowns works in a flood of faith. On the other hand, all this action simply means making room for God; it is a preparation for contemplation, for God to 'increase' for the self to 'decrease'. (*2SS*, 302)

This 'beyond', then, marks the saint in the midst of life and indicates, precisely by the way the saint ignores the severing of love and obligation, that this unique mission will *return* us to the universal source of new life which is the very life of the triune God. The dynamics of this movement indicate a fusion or complementary indwelling of all those contrary dimensions that mark our finitude: source and end; unique and universal; subjective and objective; heaven and earth. Thus, in the life of the saint, what is intimated (for those who would read with faith) is a creaturely transcription of that inexpressible *unity* that belongs to the triune life of God alone. Thus, just as we must give theological explication to the life of the saint before eliciting its existential coloration, so we should first read the saint against the horizon of divine aseity such that 'precisely that which distinguishes the creature from God now becomes that within which the creature is like God: otherness in unity' (*2SS*, 476). It is this passionate and rhythmic contrasting of union and difference that is the key to any doctrinal reading of saints and indeed the communion of saints. But how so?

The saints often appear in traditional iconography as a fellowship, a communion, gathered about their Lord. It is the Lord at their centre who points to their various 'examples' (although the word is barely adequate) as setting forth for every age and different situation a translation of his union with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. I cannot now see the face of Christ as his mother or disciples did. But in what the saints share with me (their *koinonia*-in-Christ), I can see how their lives reveal his life in its unfathomable dispossession and giftedness. In this sense, the horizon of their every

action is that unity of the triune God manifested in the *self-giving* of Christ and poured out in the Holy Spirit. The communion of saints reveals an image of unity-in-diversity as no pale family resemblance but as imaging the kenotic life of God that instantiates mutual constitution and recognition at its core. Or, in the creature's terms: substitution and prayer. Saints reveal the unity of God as 'being-for-one-another' – a locution that Balthasar claims comes nearest to any 'definition' of God. This is what it means to refer to the Persons of the Trinity as 'constituted' entirely in and through their ordered relations: the Father in the begetting of his Son; the Son in his being for his Father; and the self-giving of both which is a still further being-for-another distinguished as the Holy Spirit. Likewise (although analogically speaking) the 'being-for-one-another which is given in the communion of saints . . . opens up the individual to the other precisely from the apex of his personality' (*E*, 59).

If the first 'reduction' of this supernatural phenomenology is to be determined as strictly *theo*-logical (the pattern of God's unity), then it is this – and thereby fruitful – only in so far as the saint imitates that primordial image of being-for-another which constitutes the mission of the Son in obedience to the Father's love. The authentic saint is the one who always 'confuses himself the least with Christ and who, therefore, can most convincingly be transparent to Christ' (*GL1*, 215). For the unity of the communion of saints – and more so the parable of unity that the saint's life displays – is achieved not through any decorous representation of the sociality of three intimates, but strictly given only through 'the superfigure of the Cross'. The saints 'are readable only on the basis of the Cross', Balthasar trenchantly writes; and this principle, we should understand, is absolutely axiomatic (*ET3*, 63).

In what we could call a second christological reduction, the saints' existence is interpreted against the mission of the Son in his loving obedience to the request of his Father. Again, the 'decisive thing' is not simply a love of neighbour that would extend to all, but the surrender of a life to the One who will solely determine the measure of this life. *Obedience* is the key term that Balthasar will use here to describe this translation of the love which the Persons of the Trinity enjoy together into the conditions of fallen and finite creation; and this of course, first and foremost, through the mission of the Son which leads to the hypostatic union itself – God with man. Obedience is the creaturely analogue of the divine being-for-one-another; and *just so* does it become, paradoxically enough, the occasion for a discovery of our true personhood in Christ. Thus, just as the trinitarian persons are constituted through their mutual indwelling (*circuminsessio*) of love, and just as Jesus' humanity is to come to full existence as he enacts to the end the obedience of filial love, so too the saint is to discover his or her identity and fruitfulness only in an objectifying and deprivatizing obedience.

The connections here are fundamental to Balthasar's rigorous reductions. To put the point as bluntly as possible, if the first horizon of saintly existence remains the Trinity *an se*, the Trinity in itself, then the second (which of course always remains convoluted with the first) is established through the relationship between obedience and the economic Trinity. Indeed, as Balthasar claims, in this translation the Cross is precisely what

happens when the fallen and creaturely world is included in the Son's trinitarian love-become-missionary-obedience. It is a startling insight and thereby fundamentally dictates what we should expect to find in the lives of the saints of God, who stand at the point where the paths of the Creator and creature intersect in unconditional obedience. Indeed, as Balthasar briefly sketches out in his essay 'The Faith of the Simple Ones', this point will always be marked out as a place of death; whether this be described as the 'dark night' of John of the Cross, the 'dying in that one cannot die' of Teresa of Jesus, or the 'whylessness' of love in Eckhart (*ET3*, 57–83). All these states are but a participation in the Son's death in obedience, and more so, descent into hell.

For Balthasar, then, this second reduction does not so much 'focus' the first as it calls forth the very *difference* of Christian faith itself; for this faith demands a listening obedience to the call of God, who turns to his creatures *personally* in order to address them in and through his Son. Christ demands obedience to himself, for only in this way will those who would respond to his unequivocal call to love be allowed to participate in his redemptive work and suffering.[6] This is an obedience unto and beyond death.

It is this second reduction, then, that allows Balthasar to interpret the existential 'status of the saints'. So in his work on Thérèse of Lisieux he reflects on how Thérèse's true human stature and reality are only revealed in consequence of her disappearance into the hidden life of obedience and the rule of the Carmel. The general movement no doubt fulfils a fundamental law of the gospel: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (John 12:24). However, in the saints Balthasar suggests that we see this 'abstract' law exhibited, even personalized, through a life's dramatic co-ordination to the externalizing drama of the Passion of Christ. Christ's obedience to his Father is revealed in his momentous and perilous progress to the Cross – an ever greater exhausting of his inner binding to the Father. This journeying into the heart of the world – a heart now exposed in all its neediness and destructiveness – is precisely the manner in which, so Balthasar claims, Jesus exists as that human being that God created him to be. Moreover, because his journey does not terminate in death on the Cross but continues into a 'cadaver obedience' of sheer passivity in his descent into hell, so is set before us the final economical form of the absolute correspondence of Father to Son.

The missions of the saints imitate this paradoxical rhythm of personalization through death. Thus Balthasar describes the dynamic of Thérèse's entry into Carmel under the demand that her personality should die in order to be reborn at another level. And that it is only through the shedding of personal limitations that she would come to acquire that stature hidden for her in God. It is this rhythm that then allows Balthasar to describe the saints as those who are crucified between the world and the beyond. For just as they have tasted heaven in being shown what they are to become, so too the saints come to understand that this sharing in heaven will become theirs only as it is here and now painfully withdrawn from them. In this place stretched out 'between heaven and earth', their lives serve as 'a kind of pulpit' and 'a sermon'.

This introduces us to the final 'reduction' of this supernatural phenomenology, that of

fruitfulness; and introduces us further to another central dramatic persona in the drama of salvation: Mary. In the descending analogical hierarchy of dialogue (of address and answer, of I and Thou) which is first lodged in the Trinity of divine Persons and then in the filial response of the Son, it is in Mary's annunciatory Yes to God that the fruitfulness of sanctity most fully comes into view for Balthasar. Mary's is a total faith act, whose hearing and obedient response to the address of God is such that the 'seed Christ' comes to birth from her flesh. She is bearer of a Word which is fruitful: no idling particle of dialogue fallen from the divine, but the fullness of this dialogue itself now seeding itself in human fleshly language. As such, Mary and 'the Marian principle' determine the dimensions of the creature's most fitting response to the Word so that, in turn, the creature may become fruitful. Mary reveals that if we are truly to respond to the Word addressed to us, then this must become truly interior to us, but only in such a manner that the Word never becomes identified with us. For Balthasar it is the work of the Holy Spirit in particular who will propel the saints to maintain within their very being this distance of an interiority folding outwards, so to speak.

Because God is fruitful, so too is his Word. But God's Word is fruitful precisely in his obedience unto death; and just so is Mary's *Fiat* at the annunciation thereby more deeply to be understood as a consent to the death of her Son on the Cross. All fruitfulness in creation is irrevocably bound to the Cross. For in Christ on the Cross, we see this God as no miserly giver, but in fact as 'personified handing-over'; the handing over of himself into the flesh of a human being and then into the dark, grave soil of the world – precisely into those very places where his life will once again seed and fecundate!

For Balthasar fruitfulness in its divine determination operates in much the same manner as the transcendentals around which his great trilogy is structured. It is everywhere present in his *oeuvre*, and as such leads to his (by no means uncontestable) deployment of a full range of sexual-creaturely analogues. Mary's physical fruitfulness is bound to her spiritual fruitfulness; and if we are to understand with Balthasar that Mary is the primordial image (*Urbild*) of the Church, then this is because her response is in full the pattern for the creaturely response to the fruitfulness of God. In this sense, then, fruitfulness is the only measure of genuine sanctity; it is the one great discriminating mark of the saints. Enacted in very different times and situations, this common feature may always be most especially discerned in the lives of the saints: God disposes of these lives in such a manner that the divine relationality of his very life begins to form (to seed or fecundate) in the personalities of the saints a true image of Christ, the image of being-for-one-another. Thus, this supernatural phenomenology spirals back upon itself under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ to the source from which it has erupted.

TOWARDS A NEW UNITY

With aphoristic precision Balthasar remarks, 'The life of the saints is theology in practice' (*ET1*, 204). For some theologians, this claim will no doubt indicate the supreme anachronism of Balthasar's convictions; while for others they might siphon off this claim into the practice of the faithful and 'modes of experiencing God'. Nor can we afford to

neglect the fault-line of the Reformation, with its suspicions that a cult of the saints will usurp faith's rightful place. But the words of John Milbank at least should give us pause for thought when he writes: 'For all the current talk of a theology that would reflect on practice, the truth is that we remain uncertain as to where today to locate true Christian practice.'[7] I would suggest that what Milbank points to here, with no little insight, is a reality that Balthasar analysed with a rigour unlike any other theologian of the twentieth century. He did not treat the saints at such length merely to cruise down the esoteric tributaries of 'spirituality'. His fascination with the saints actually was his way of taking up the central task of dogmatic theology itself: the exegesis of revelation. And in their *practice* the saints stand as sign and signal to theology of its own mission. In other words, theology is not called to *stand in judgement*, serenely determining the relationship between reason and revelation, nature and supernature, and finally the world and God. To be sure, these are the perennial themes of theology, but theology can speak its mind on these matters only from within the standpoint of faith. And that the saints teach us to do.

In this essay I have offered only a highly abbreviated account of Balthasar's theology of the saints as centred upon the co-ordination of person and mission in Jesus Christ. However, what this suggests, and it is this to which Balthasar's theology repeatedly gestures, is that, beyond any individual choreography of holiness, stands a new land to be discovered by theology – that is to say, an entire theological programme, funded from the lives of the saints, seeking to present a new unity to the faith. As he once provocatively remarked, from the time of its consolidation at Chalcedon, christology has remained a practically static affair. But if Chalcedon's undoubted achievements have now become increasingly questionable, to where should we turn for fresh insight and new illumination?[8] Even more, if the gospel itself has now been recognized to have a history, how is such a history to be interpreted?

For Balthasar the key to understanding this history *as* the prolongation of revelation is precisely to be discovered in the lives of the saints. Such a redirection of the dogmatic task would indeed mark a real novelty for the tired practices of modern theology.

Notes

1 In this essay I do not have the space to follow the detailed exegeses that Balthasar offers of a number of the lives and missions of the saints, especially the select few who populate the second and third volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* . But for those who can concentrate only on his most salient monographs on the saints, perhaps his style of theological investigation can most easily be appreciated from his treatment of Thérèse of Lisieux in *2SS* .

2 Most substantially this is rehearsed in volume *GL5*. For an assessment of Balthasar's genealogical style, see also Cyril O'Regan's essay 'Balthasar's Valorization and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity', in *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity: the Thought of Louis Duprée* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

3 Here one thinks of the important and highly singular work of Michel de Certeau, whose paradoxical proximity to, and yet also dramatic distance from, the work of Balthasar suggests at least one point where Balthasar's approach could fruitfully be tested in a 'non-theological register'. See, for example, de Certeau's exploratory strategies in *The Mystic Fable*, volume I: *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, tr. Michael B. Smith (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1992).

4 While eschewing any overly and overtly technical use of the apparatus of phenomenology, I use the term 'reduction' here – as sanctioned by Balthasar's 'supernatural phenomenology' – in order to evoke that leading-back (*re-ducere*) beyond the 'natural attitude' in our dealings with holiness, the attitude that swings between either extreme altruism or suppressed suspicion. Or colloquially put: either 'I could never be that good!' or 'Nobody can really be that good!' The focus is not on the saints but on God.

5 Thus Balthasar writes: 'The center of the doctrinal mission of Thérèse of Lisieux was to relate human sinners to divine mercy in a new way, based on the interpenetration of justice and mercy within the Godhead, indeed, on the primacy of love over justice as a form of love' (*2SS*, 413). He would claim elsewhere that this apparently 'insignificant' little French Carmelite, who died at the age of twenty-four, has resolved Martin Luther's mishandling of these profound mystical truths.

6 The call of love and the Christian states of life that this call establishes are most fully treated by Balthasar in *CSL*.

7 John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 1.

8 Mark A. McIntosh in his fine monograph *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996) explores how such a project could be worked out from Balthasar's writings. McIntosh's sympathetic, although not uncritical, reading of Balthasar's 'Mystical Christology' is an invaluable resource for substantiating the claim with which this essay concludes.

8

CORINNE CRAMMER

One sex or two? Balthasar's theology of the sexes

EXPOSITION

For Hans Urs von Balthasar a fundamental truth about being human is the limit imposed on human nature by the polarity of sexual difference: one is born *either* male *or* female (*TD3*, 283). To be human is to be not simply *one* but *one of two*, a dyad, with one sex opposite to or over against the 'other'. 'Man only exists in the opposition of the sexes, in the dependence of both forms of humanity, the one on the other.'[1] There has never been a universal, sexually neutral person, no original 'androgynous primal being' or 'sexless first man' (*TD3*, 290):

> The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time *both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide neutral ground for mutual understanding*. Here there is no *universale ante rem* . . . The human being, in the completed creation, is a 'dual unity', two distinct but inseparable realities, each fulfilling the other, and both ordained to an ultimate unity that we cannot as yet envisage. (*TD2*, 364–5; emphasis added)

Because humans are sexually differentiated dyads, life involves an inescapable otherness: we are born and exist at one end or the other of this polarity, so that some significant part of being human is categorically excluded to everyone. The dichotomy of sexual difference, which cannot be 'overcome', creates a permanent otherness for humans. 'The impossibility of mastering the freedom of the thou is "enfleshed" in the diverse and complementary constitution of the sexes.' The human is always searching for the 'thou' and finds it in the other sex but 'without ever being able to take possession of it in its otherness' (*TD2*, 366). This otherness is critical, since for Balthasar, the starting point for theology is not the self-aware conscious subject but the individual aware of and in relationship with another, a process that begins with a child's gaze at its mother: 'Now man exists only in dialogue with his neighbor. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him' (*L&W*, 3).

For Balthasar, sexual difference, along with the polarities of body/mind and individual/community (*TD4*, 222), constitutes the three fundamental tensions of human existence (*TD2*, 355). In each of these tensions, the human is seeking completion, obliged to engage in reciprocity, and always seeking complementarity and rest in the

other sex. Because of these polarities, humans are always 'pointed beyond [their] whole polar structure' (*TD2*, 355), so that the polarities point humans towards transcendence. Together, the male–female and individual–community tensions form a unity to make humans the image and likeness of God (*TD2*, 206).

Among these three polarities, Balthasar focuses on sexual difference around which to formulate a distinctive theology: a theology of sexual difference. Raymond Gawronski places Balthasar's theology of the sexes within the larger context of a gendered view of reality: 'Things themselves have a sort of "gender" character for Balthasar: they are not merely "things" . . . Sexlessness, on the other hand, is identified with the Gnostic.'[2] Sexual difference, which permeates all creation, is derived analogously from something resembling sexual difference, 'suprasexuality', within the Trinity. Therefore, the significance of the difference between the sexes is a 'cosmic, creaturely reality that, in man, together with his whole being, extends right up to the level of the *theion* . . . in the Bible it was part of the context of God's image in man (*Mensch*)' (*TD3*, 283).

In his theology of sexual difference, Balthasar attempts not only to construct a richer theological anthropology with an ontologically distinct place for women, but also to affirm the dignity and worth of women, in contrast to theology that has either ignored women or elided them into a false universal of 'man', meant to include all humans but which on closer examination appears to be male. Balthasar argues against a 'one-sex/two genders' anthropology in favour of a 'two-sex' model, maintaining that sexual difference is so significant that it must be taken into account in doing theology.[3]

Balthasar argues that an adequate emphasis on sexual difference is necessary for the proper functioning of society. He is particularly concerned that in an overly technological society already dominated by 'masculine' characteristics and ways of being in the world, if 'feminists' (whom he appears to group together in an undifferentiated whole) are successful in their agenda, they will either masculinize women or elide sexual difference by demanding identical status with men (*Gleichstellung*), which will lead to imposed standardization with men (*Gleichschaltung*).[4] Anything that diminishes sexual difference by allowing incursions of one sex into the other's natural role damages a critical balance, with baleful consequences. Instead of trying to compete against men in typically masculine fields or engage in a counteraction using masculine means, women should serve as 'a counterpoise and spearhead against man's increasingly history-less world'.[5]

As David Moss and Lucy Gardner have pointed out, what apparently retrospectively establishes sexual difference for Balthasar – that is, the one who makes humans the sexual dyads they are rather than monads – is Woman. In the Garden of Eden, first there was Adam, 'Man' (*Mensch*), and then Eve, Wo-man (*Weib* or *Frau*), was created from the side of Adam, so that even the original *Mensch* appears to be male, since Balthasar rejects the concept of an androgynous human who preceded sexually differentiated humans. But only with the appearance of Woman (Eve) can it be established that Adam, the *Mensch*, is male (*Mann*). Just as there can be no *first* without the appearance of a *second*, so also there can be no Man without the appearance of Woman.[6]

Balthasar believes that notwithstanding very distinctive sexual differences, Woman is essentially equal (*wesensgleich*) to Man, although personally unlike him (*personal-ungleich*). Like Man, Woman is created by God, has equal rank with Man before God, and shares equally in human nature; both men and women are an image of God and have direct access to God (*TD3*, 286). Just as the equal dignity of the divine Persons despite difference safeguards the intratrinitarian distinctions, which create room for otherness and hence intratrinitarian relationships of love, so that God is subsistent love, so also the equal dignity of men and women, despite the extreme opposition of their functions, safeguards the spiritual and physical fruitfulness of human nature.[7]

The dyadic nature of being human does not mean that Man and Woman are two different fragments of a whole, incomplete and needing to be fitted together like a puzzle (*TD2*, 366). 'Every human being is a perfect member of the human species, whether male or female, embodying the whole concept of what it is to be human' (*TD2*, 388). Yet Man is somehow lacking and needs Woman: the primary is 'unfulfilled without the secondary' (*TD3*, 284), so Woman is created as the 'vessel of fulfilment specially designed for' the Man (*TD3*, 285).

Equality between the sexes is held in tension with a kind of hierarchy, which Balthasar speaks of as Man's 'priority' (*Überordnung)*. To illustrate that Man's priority is part of the created order, Balthasar turns to 1 Corinthians 11:3–12 ('But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband [man] is the head of his wife [woman], and God is the head of Christ', at verse 3) and Genesis 2:1–3:24, in which Man is alone with God before Woman is created. Although created by God, 'the woman is made from the man' (*TD3*, 340) and therefore the feminine is latent within Man:

> If Eve was taken out of Adam, then Adam had Eve within him without knowing it. Of course, God created her and breathed his breath into her; but God took the material for her out of Adam's living flesh infused with the Spirit. There was something feminine in him which he recognizes when God brings him the woman . . . But the woman is taken from the man; the substance from which she is made is masculine. (*TA*, 313)

Man bears Woman within him (*TD2*, 372–3), and Woman (Eve) is Man's (Adam's) *processio* (*TD3*, 284, 286). Despite the equality of the sexes before God, Man is also both *more* and *less* than Woman. Man is *more* in so far as he is 'head' of Woman and 'in the Christian context he is mediator of God's gifts', and *less* in so far as he depends on Woman for nurturing shelter and completion.[8]

The apparent paradox that men and women are equal but men have priority and headship may have its resolution in what has been described as the rule of 'subordination in the order of creation and equality in the order of redemption'.[9] In other words, men and women are equal before God, but this equality is limited in the creaturely realm because of Man's natural priority. Although Balthasar asserts the equality of the sexes before God, he appears to regard equality in the created order as a threat to sexual difference and as contributing to the excesses of an overly masculinized, overly technological, technocratic society.[10]

In addition to being second in priority, the number *two* characterizes Woman, who is a dyad, whereas Man is a monad, *one*. Woman represents a double principle: she is the *answer* and common fruit of both of them, whereas Man is a single principle, that is, *word* or *seed* (*TD5*, 91). Woman is a dyad in that she has two roles, Bride and Mother (*TD3*, 290). In relation to Man, Woman is Answer; in relation to the child, she is Source (*TD3*, 292–3). Being oriented in two ways 'both constitutes woman as a person through dialogue and makes her a principle of generation' (*TD3*, 292). As Gardner and Moss have observed, Balthasar reads the 1–2 of time in the Adam and Eve story as the 1–2 of number: Man is a unity whereas Woman is a duality.[11] Although Balthasar rejects the Greek subordination of the female dyad to the male monad (*TD3*, 290), he states that there is a 'priority' arising from man's monadic nature as opposed to woman's dyadic nature. The dyadic character of woman, as opposed to the monadic character of man, supports the 'definite priority of the man, maintained by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament' (*TD3*, 292). Balthasar apparently understands what a paradoxical and precarious position this would be, to be equal and yet second and subordinate to the headship of another, since he comments that occupying such a position results in an 'oscillation' within Woman that Man does not experience: 'she is oriented to the man yet has equal rank with him, sharing in the same free human nature. The man has no equivalent experience of this irreducible double focus' (*TD3*, 297).

Despite enjoying priority, Man is incomplete, so Woman has been created to be the help and security of man: she is the 'home man needs, the vessel of fulfillment specially designed for him' (*TD3*, 285). Woman's role involves creating reserves geared 'to being, to the background that gives meaning to things, to security, to making a home for man who is always on the run, exposed to the world – all of which is essentially the woman's role'.[12] Woman is created not from the earth, as Man was, but from Man himself, which seems paradoxical if she provides Man with what he lacks. Yet 'only in her can he be what he is, creating, procreating man'.[13]

One of the primary metaphors Balthasar employs to describe Woman in her relationship to Man is answer (*Antwort*). As scriptural source for this metaphor, he turns to Genesis 2:23, in which God forms woman from man: 'she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man' (*TD3*, 284). Balthasar finds theological significance (or at least usefulness) in a linguistic anomaly, that the German word for 'answer', *Antwort*, is feminine and not neuter. The general rule in German for nouns formed by combining two words (such as Ant-Wort) is that the new compound word takes the gender of the second morpheme, but this pattern is violated for *Antwort*: *Wort* (word) is neuter, yet *Antwort* (answer) is feminine. This linguistic quirk indicates that, at least in the psychology of German, there is something essentially feminine about answering. Balthasar also finds it significant that *Ant* (*ent*) means over-against (*gegen*) in all Indo-European languages (*TD3*, 284); this seems fitting, given that Woman is over-against the Man. The prefix *ant* implies direction as well as counterpart. Man calls out, and Woman responds with an answer. Man is the Word or Seed, and Woman answers through reproduction (*TD3*, 286), giving back to Man something new, 'something that integrates

his gift to her but that "faces" him in a totally new and unexpected form': their child (*TD3*, 286).

Similarly, Balthasar describes Woman as the answering gaze or face (*Antlitz*) (*TD3*, 292): she looks back at Man as he looks around (*TD3*, 284). These parallel metaphors overlap in what they are trying to convey: 'What *Antwort* (answer) denotes in the realm of speech, *Antlitz* (face) signifies in the visual realms' (*TD3*, 285). The *Antlitz* metaphor relies on Balthasar's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:7, in which Paul describes Woman as the reflection of Man, although the word that Balthasar translates as 'reflection', δόξα, is more usually translated as 'glory'.

Although Man needs Woman for completion, Woman also experiences a kind of lack in that she is incapacitated in certain ways that make her dependent on Man. As an answering gaze, woman depends on man's look (*-litz*), which searches for her: 'Since she is both "answer" and "face" (*Antwort* and *Antlitz*), she is *dependent on the man's "word"* (*Wort*), which calls to her, and his "look" [*-litz*], which searches for her; but at the same time, she is independent of him in virtue of her free equal rank' (*TD3*, 292; emphasis added). Although Man and Woman stand face to face, Woman can apparently see only *the Man*, her field of vision so narrowed that she is limited to providing Man with her answering gaze while he looks *around* (*TD3*, 284).

For Balthasar, the feminine is characterized by receptivity (*Empfänglichkeit*), obedience, disponibility, and willing consent to the action of another, or letting be (*Gelassenheit*). Although he regards these characteristics as appropriate for all people in relation to God, he describes these qualities as specifically *feminine*. Leadership, on the other hand, is identified as *masculine*. As the archetype of the feminine, Mary displays the paradigmatically feminine qualities as a model for all Christians in relation to God, although she also serves as a model for women in particular. Women, Mary, the Church, humanity as a whole, salvation itself, are all intimately connected in Balthasar's theology of sexual difference, specifically through his understanding of the *feminine* and its emblematic quality of receptivity (*Empfäanglichkeit*), which is the capacity to allow another to indwell.[14] In contrast to the masculine attributes of 'imageless conceptuality and thought technique' (*GL1*, 421), the receptivity and obedience required for Mary to give an adequate Yes on behalf of humanity for the Incarnation to take place are regarded as *feminine* virtues, as is the answering fruitfulness required to give birth to the Word. Mary's redemptive role is to be the 'passive' principle, receptive and fruitful, to bear the fruit of the seed which is the Word.

Humanity's appropriate relationship to God is *feminine*, characterized by receptivity for mission and obedience: we are to receive the Word of God and bear fruit, just as Mary has done. This stance should not be understood as 'mere passivity, but as the bestowal of a supremely active fruitfulness'.[15] The obedient disponibility exhibited paradigmatically by Mary in her Yes is an active passivity, arguably the opposite of passive, since consent (obedience) must be freely given and this consent-giving is active. Passivity is not achieved without a will to let something happen.[16]

Mary is both the Bride of Christ and the Mother of Christ; Christ is the Bridegroom,

the Word, the active principle. That it is a woman who provides the needed 'answer' or Yes to God is fitting; likewise, that the Christ is incarnate as a *man* – Jesus – is no accident. The complementarity between Christ's (necessarily) male role in redemption and Mary's female role is suitable and consistent with the natural order of sexual difference.[17] 'The Word of God appears in the world as a man (*Mann*), as the Last Adam. This cannot be a matter of indifference (*gleichgültig*)' (*TD3*, 283). Since as Origin the Father is male, Christ must also be incarnate male because he represents the Father in the world. Mary's mission 'in the feminine and creaturely mode, is to let things happen; as such it is perfectly congruent with the masculine and divine mission of the Son' (*TD3*, 352).

Woman is the vessel of Man's fruitfulness, but she also has her own fruitfulness. Hers, however, is not 'primary fruitfulness' but 'answering fruitfulness'. In fact, 'it is woman's essential vocation to receive man's fruitfulness into her own fruitfulness, thus uniting in herself the fruitfulness of both' (*TD3*, 286). 'In this way she is the "glory" of the man' (*TD3*, 285). Although primary fruitfulness is Man's, Balthasar regards childbearing and parenting as primarily a feminine activity, requiring infinitely more from the Woman than the Man. Indeed, Balthasar comments that Man's role in reproduction is so insignificant as to be humiliating.[18]

Although lacking primary fruitfulness, paradoxically Woman is 'the fruit-bearing principle in the creaturely realm' since it is woman's 'essential vocation to receive man's fruitfulness into her own fruitfulness, thus uniting in herself the fruitfulness of both' (*TD3*, 286).[19] Woman does 'all the work' in reproduction, while the husband only 'proposes and stimulates' (*TA*, 313). Man possesses primary fruitfulness because in all times and cultures, he argues, it is the man who initiates sexual activity, whereas the woman is receptive.[20]

For Balthasar, masculine characteristics involve activity (men are doers and makers), leadership, and incompleteness with all its consequences.[21] Men are driven to pursue goals and to achieve purposes, to make things happen, which is in part why primary fruitfulness is considered masculine. 'If anything is a male need, then it is this desire to subject everything to a purpose.' The masculine element 'pushes forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own'.[22]

Because of natural differences between the sexes, sacramental priesthood and church leadership are male vocations. Balthasar regards representation in general as a male characteristic, just as receptivity is feminine, which provides the basis for his argument against the priestly ordination of women. Balthasar argues that woman's role is 'not representation, but being', whereas the man is given the task of representing, 'making him more, and at the same time less than himself'.[23] 'The woman is not called upon to represent anything that she herself is not, while the man has to represent the very source of life, which he can never *be*' (*NE*, 221). Balthasar appears to be referring to his argument that in intercourse, the male imitates the Father's generation of the Son. Moreover, priests also embody Christ, and for Balthasar, Christ is necessarily male. The

institution of the Church 'guarantees the perpetual presence of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride. So it is entrusted to men who, though they belong to the overall feminine modality of the Church, are selected from her and remain in her to exercise their office; *their function is to embody Christ, who comes to the Church to make her fruitful*' (*TD3*, 354; emphasis added). Here again is an allusion to the nuptial metaphor so central to Balthasar's theology, with Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride. In ecclesial office, men represent Christ.[24] And they do so in a quasi-sexual capacity, in a role analogous to Christ the Bridegroom inseminating his Bride the Church and making her fruitful:

> The institution [of the priesthood] guarantees the perpetual presence of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride. So it is entrusted to men who, though they belong to the overall feminine modality of the Church, are selected from her and remain in her to exercise their office; their function is to embody Christ, who comes to the Church to make her fruitful. (*TD3*, 354)

Balthasar's use of an explicitly sexual metaphor (marriage and reproduction) to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church demonstrates how central sexual difference is to his ecclesiology. Christ's role as representative of humanity to the Father (a role that would be feminine given that Balthasar describes humanity as feminine in relation to God) is not a concern for Balthasar, who appears to prioritize Christ's role as representative of the Father to humanity.

Balthasar argues that sexual difference in creation reflects something resembling sexual difference in the Trinity – suprasexuality exists in the relations of the divine Persons. The otherness found in human sexual difference resembles the otherness between the Persons. 'The divine unity of action and consent – which, as we have seen, share equal dignity with love – is expressed in the world in the duality of the sexes' (*TD5*, 91). Balthasar associates disponibility and obedience with the feminine; when these qualities are discerned in the Trinity, he discerns suprafemininity within the Godhead. In the Trinity, 'doing' as opposed to 'letting things happen' is described as a 'masculine' versus 'feminine' attribute or activity.

The differences between the Persons in the Trinity originate in an eternal movement of self-giving and self-surrender, as the Father eternally generates the Son, just as the Son simultaneously gives himself to the Father eternally. As a result, the Son is always other than the Father. This infinite otherness creates something like a distance or place within the Trinity for creation, that is, for finite otherness, including otherness within creation.

Although the Trinity is eternal, the Father is the Origin and therefore, in Balthasar's theology, supra-male (*über-männlich*). The Son, who receives from and obeys the Father (*der Geschehenlassende*), is disponible, obedient, and receptive in relation to the Father, and therefore the Son is suprafeminine (*über-weiblich*) in relation to the Father. The Son characteristically 'lets be' (a distinctly feminine quality for Balthasar), co-operating in his begetting by *letting* himself be begotten. When the Son is handed over for crucifixion, he allows his death to happen in a way that involves his active consent, which is at the heart of obediently letting things happen (*TD4*, 241).

Just as there is a first/second ordering within humanity (male/female) that is not incompatible with equality, so also there is hierarchy within the Trinity not incompatible with equality between the Persons. Although Balthasar is at pains to reject sexuality or sexual difference as we know it in the Trinity, nevertheless, his description of divine activities at times sounds vividly reminiscent of sexual reproduction: the divine Persons penetrate each other. The Holy Spirit is the fruit of the love between the Father and the Son, who together generate the Spirit in an act of communal love. Christ's giving away of himself in the Eucharist is compared to a man having intercourse, and in the act of procreation, a man 'represents only a distant analogy to this trinitarian and christological event' of the generation of the Son (*NE*, 217). God's kenotic love empties itself out into Mary's womb as an infinitesimally small seed in order to let the God-bearer ripen it and bring it into the world.

CRITIQUE

David Moss and Lucy Gardner have asked, 'Is Balthasar's genius to have recognized that it has been decided that sexual difference is the question of our age?'[25] Sexual difference is certainly critical to Balthasar's theology.[26] In this respect, Balthasar has been compared to French psychoanalyst and philosopher (and feminist, although she would reject the label) Luce Irigaray, who on certain issues sounds like Balthasar: 'Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue of our time which could be our "salvation" if we thought it through.'[27] But all feminists, of whatever school, even among those who would reject the appellation, could agree with that. Even more Balthasarian, however, is the line from a more recent volume: 'The negative within sexual difference is acceptance of the limits of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome.'[28]

Balthasar's theology could also be compared to the theory of feminist Rosi Braidotti, who argues that to exist at all is to be sexed and that sexual difference is ontological. 'For me, "being in the world" means always already "being sexed", so that if "I" am not sexed, "I" am not at all.'[29] Braidotti believes that issues of sexual identity and the feminine are central problems of this century. 'The project of redefining "being-a-woman alongside other women in the world", so as to disengage the female "I" from the trappings of a "feminine" defined as the dark continent, or of "femininity" as the eternal masquerade, is the fundamental ethico-political question of our century.'[30] Unlike Balthasar's, however, Braidotti's ontological understanding of sexual difference centres on embodiment, and her concerns include the effacement of embodiment in the pursuit of justice.

Thus Balthasar and these two feminists share a belief that the rediscovery of the significance of sexual difference is critical to society's and women's well-being. These similarities conceal wide divergences, however. As Tina Beattie notes, Balthasar

> seems to think that he already knows what sexual difference looks like and what it amounts to, whereas Irigaray suggests we have only the vaguest of ideas. She argues that all present constructs of sexual difference are products of masculinity, so that what poses as the feminine in western culture is in fact the masculine imaginary – a projection onto women of the desires and fantasies that must be repressed in the acquisition of male subjectivity, in a way that denies women access to the symbolics of their own subjectivity.[31]

I believe that despite his attempt to construct a two-sex theological anthropology (in the terminology of Laqueur), ultimately Balthasar reproduces the one-sex model in which the normative human being is implicitly male and Woman's definition is based around Man, particularly around what Man is seen to need Woman to be.[32] The result of this methodology is that Woman in Balthasar's theology lacks substance, subjectivity, and a voice of her own.

Philosopher Marilyn Frye's use of Venn diagrams is helpful in visualizing the problem of Balthasar's construction of sexual difference.[33] Rather than constructing a model of human sexual difference as a truly dualistic schema of *A/B*, I believe that Balthasar constructs a fundamentally monistic *A/not A* model – which is particularly clear in the *Antlitz* metaphor. As Frye points out, to be an A (or B) is to be something or someone, whereas *not A* is not something anyone can be. Using the image of Venn circles, she describes *A/not-A* as a single circle: everything inside that circle is *A*, everything outside the circle is *not-A* – a category or space she describes as 'the infinitation of the negative'.[34] *A/not-A* splits the world, but not into two, since *not-A* is an infinite undifferentiated plenum, unstructured, formless, a chaos without internal boundaries. *A/not-A* is therefore not a dualism and cannot construct two things – there are no 'somethings' outside the circle drawn around *A*. Using this diagram, Woman provides the line that creates the circle defining Man. In this 'positive–negative mirror-logic', 'everything that man is, Woman is not; everything that Woman must be, man cannot have been'.[35]

Balthasar's Woman appears to mark and define Man's limits, thereby creating a place for Man; Man is not only incomplete but unbounded and lacking essential definition without Woman. Woman comes from Man, yet ironically Man stands in need of Woman (here Balthasar is referring to the second creation story in Genesis, which he regards as a 'profound legend', *TD3*, 288). Despite Balthasar's assertion that sexual difference does not result in two incomplete sexes, incompleteness is implied if Woman provides the answer needed by Man and what Man lacks. Woman/the feminine is defined in relation to Man/the masculine, with Man as the standard from which Woman varies. Woman is envisioned as providing what men lack – not least of which is boundary and definition – and never truly exists as a subject and actor.

Balthasar's assertion that Woman is made from Man (although created by God) creates a particular difficulty. If Woman comes from Man, is there really a Woman, or is she simply a Male in disguise or, even worse, nonexistent? Or made up of discarded or disavowed parts of Man? Tina Beattie concludes that if Woman comes forth from Man, far from being affirmed, genuine sexual difference is eradicated – the masculine is all

there is, and there cannot be a polarity.[36]

Yet even if Balthasar was successful in constructing a true dyad, underlying his theology is an implicit doctrine of essentialism, that is, the belief that women (and men) have a fixed essence that is shared by all women (and men) at all times.[37] Essentialism is regarded as anathema by many feminists because of its tendency to efface the real diversity that exists among women (and men)[38] and its close relationship to the stereotyping that has been used so often to restrict, discriminate against, and otherwise oppress women.[39] Moreover, any attempt to define the essential nature of men and women must face the difficulty of separating the effects of socialization from any natural traits that might exist – a problem that Balthasar does not appear to consider. Some argue that there is in fact no 'natural' woman before, beyond, or behind socially constructed women: sexual roles are imposed upon bodies by social forces and are not natural; others argue that bodies are not stones but are also impacted on by the social/cultural.

Moreover, recent scientific evidence supports the view that even 'biological' sex is more complicated than a dualistic model (male and female) allows. Many newborns are difficult to categorize sexually, for example apparent males with two X chromosomes as well as a Y chromosome. The number of newborns with ambiguous genitalia has been effaced in recent years by surreptitious surgical reassignment of intersexed babies. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling believes that based on the present state of scientific knowledge, a continuum may be a better model of sexual difference than a dichotomy.[40]

Despite Balthasar's argument that sexual difference does not result in inequality, sexual difference combined with hierarchy, which he speaks of as priority, is fundamentally incompatible with equality. Because of the priority of Man, the relationship between Man and Woman described by Balthasar is necessarily asymmetrical. It may be argued that asymmetry is the pitfall of any theory of male–female complementarity, since as a society we have difficulty imagining or putting into practice difference without inequality; but when male priority and headship are added, a claim of essential equality is particularly difficult to sustain.

Balthasar himself does not see any incompatibility between hierarchy and equality; he argues, for example, that freedom always occurs within a hierarchical ordering (*TD5*, 88). Even without the assertion of male priority and headship, Balthasar's understanding of the relationship of male and female is inevitably hierarchical because he associates masculinity with divinity, and femininity with creation.[41] This association continually undermines any assertion of the equality of men and women.

In Balthasar's argument that primary fruitfulness is male, we see an example of how his attempt to theorize the relationship between men and women as equal yet different is undermined, in this instance, by an unnecessary insistence on male priority. The supposed primary fruitfulness of Man is unsupported by biology, since neither Man nor Woman is able to procreate independently. Moreover, Balthasar himself acknowledges that Woman's reproductive role is considerably more demanding than Man's – indeed, his understanding of the importance of reproduction for Woman leads him to describe her

as a dyad with a dual focus as Mother and Bride. If Man's role in reproduction is so critical that his fruitfulness is primary, it would seem that Man should also be a dyad – Father and Bridegroom.

This dual orientation of Woman (to spouse and child) results in an 'oscillation', and from this Balthasar concludes that there is no fundamental principle of Woman. Aidan Nichols argues that this oscillation means that Woman escapes definition.[42] But what Nichols describes as 'escaping definition' might also be described as 'lacking subjectivity', that is, in Woman being defined only in terms of her fulfilling the needs of (what is lacking in) another (Man) and therefore being without a centre or personhood. Indeed, in two of the primary metaphors used by Balthasar for Woman, she is described as a kind of echo (answer) or reflection or mirror (gaze) needed to provide definition to the Man. As Moss and Gardner note, she seems barely to have a self to give!

With respect to sex in the Trinity, the relationship between Origin, primary fruitfulness, and masculinity seems arbitrary and never adequately explained.[43] This raises the question of whether the Father is considered (supra-)masculine because the Origin is necessarily masculine or simply because Balthasar implicitly assumes that whoever is hierarchically superior is masculine. Although Brendan Leahy argues that having the feminine in the Trinity 'precludes any predominance of one sex over another',[44] given the relatively negligible attention paid by Balthasar to the femininity of the Son and his understanding of the Father as masculine, the Son's femininity (which is only in relation to the Father) would not seem sufficient to counteract the symbolic power of identifying divinity with the masculine (the Bridegroom) and humanity with the feminine (the Bride) in the metaphor of nuptial encounter. This metaphor, so central to Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between infinite and finite freedom (God and humanity), resists any real equality between the sexes in Balthasar's theology. Likewise, since hierarchy is present in the Trinity, with the Father who is Origin and therefore masculine in relationship to the Son who is feminine in relation to the Father, the trinitarian relationships parallel and lend divine sanction to the human headship of Man in his relationship with Woman. The subordination of one person to another based on sex reflects trinitarian reality.

The metaphors that Balthasar uses to describe sexual difference are explicitly or implicitly hierarchical and incompatible with equality. Woman as answer (*Antwort*) and answering gaze (*Antlitz*) are particularly problematic. In his discussion of Woman as *Antwort*, Balthasar describes Man as *Wort* which Woman is *Ent* (over against); this serves to associate Man with divinity, since *Wort* is most commonly used for Christ (both *Antlitz* and *Antwort* suggest a reflectivity that calls to mind the metaphor of woman as speculum, as used by Irigaray). Moreover, answering must be secondary, because one who answers can only respond to something that another initiates, so that with this metaphor, Woman cannot really act but only react, whereas Man can act – and it is his nature to do so.[45] Rachel Muers observes that Balthasar does not simply define Woman as 'the one who answers' but as 'the answer itself'.[46] And although Balthasar speaks of

Eve answering Adam's call, 'Genesis preserves no memory of woman's having spoken'.[47]

The *Antlitz* metaphor is similarly disturbing, since a mirror image simply reflects another and has no independent reality or true existence. It is unclear why Woman's gaze is directed towards Man, and why, unlike Man, her gaze is fixed on a particular object (Man) rather than also looking around *as he does*. It is also unclear why, if Woman is the Man's answering gaze, he is not in turn *her* answering gaze. Moreover, Balthasar does not explain why Man is looking around, particularly since in the Genesis story, God provides Eve for Adam as a companion. Should not both Adam and Eve be gazing at each other if they are intended to be companions to each other?

The Woman that Balthasar speaks of is not only underdetermined but also overdetermined.[48] Balthasar reiterates the stereotypes of Western tradition, particularly the ancient Greek tradition of equating the feminine with receptivity (Beattie describes this as 'the same old story, the same old sameness').[49] David Schindler, however, argues that although Balthasar retains the classic link between receptivity and femininity, he 'transforms the meaning of this link' by finding receptivity in the Godhead, which makes it an 'essential ingredient' of act (*esse*), and thereby receptivity is linked to perfection and divinity for Balthasar.[50]

Balthasar's choice of texts – he emphasizes the second creation story (Genesis 2:4–3:24) and 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 – both reflects and informs his theology of the sexes. Is Balthasar beholden to a history of devotion that causes him to foreground some texts and suppress others? One wonders what theology of the sexes Balthasar might have developed if his choice of texts had instead been Luke 10:38–42 (Martha and Mary) and Galatians 3:28 (in Christ there is no male or female). James Heft asks whether Balthasar's idea of masculine–feminine polarity is truly scriptural in origin, or instead arises from German Idealism and modern psychoanalytic thought, particularly that of Carl Jung.[51]

Moreover, a problem arises in using Mary as the model for the feminine, particularly using her obedient response of Yes to the Incarnation (obedient receptivity) as paradigmatically feminine. Mary's (necessarily female) Yes to the Incarnation, however critical, is not of equal significance to (the necessarily male) Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Since Mary is archetype of the feminine, and since Christ must be male, the result is the subordination of the feminine to the masculine, however high a place Mary may hold.

Balthasar's theology of the sexes is likely to arouse a strong reaction from those concerned with issues of justice and equal rights for women. Social justice does not seem to be a central concern for Balthasar, who is critical of both feminists and liberation theologians.[52] Whatever his intentions may have been, Balthasar's theology does not serve the cause of justice for women well but rather provides theological justification for social inequality. It describes – and proscribes – as part of the divinely created natural order asymmetrical relationships in which Man has authority or headship over Woman,

and Woman is limited by what is regarded as natural for her. Even the asserted (although contradicted) equality of the sexes appears to be for the benefit of Man, to provide him with what he lacks, which is 'a partner of equal rank and dignity for [his] own fulfillment' (*TD3*, 284). Given the historical experience of women, a theology of the sexes that is so insistent on the priority of Man and that associates divinity with Man while associating creatureliness and subordination with Woman is inimical to social equality between the sexes and lends support to male–female relationships marked by dominance and subordination. Although this may not have been Balthasar's intent, his theology is, as Beattie notes, 'easily appropriated by those who seek to defend a traditional gender role' because Balthasar 'rooted it too deeply in a culture-specific understanding of the relationship between the sexes'.[53] Moreover, there are very real practical implications from the use of this theology of the sexes, specifically, the argument that men and women naturally have different roles, which has been used first by Balthasar and then by others to argue against the priestly ordination of women.

Notes

1 'The Marian Principle', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 15 (1988): 122–30; here 125.

2 Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter Between East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 128.

3 This terminology comes from Thomas Laqueur, not Balthasar, but I use it both because of its utility and for its independent confirmation of some of Balthasar's views. See Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Laqueur describes two competing paradigms for understanding human sexual difference: one sex/two genders and two sexes. In the one-sex/two-genders model, the man is implicitly or explicitly the standard, with women considered a variation, usually defective. Hierarchy between the perfect and imperfect form of being human (male and female) is implicit in this model. Gender essentially marks women, not men. The normative body in this model is male; for example, anatomical atlases influenced by this model show a male body, with the female body described and illustrated as a variation. Historically, female reproductive organs were regarded as defective versions of the male counterpart and given the male name with a feminine modifier appended, for example ovaries were called female testes. Around the eighteenth century a new model began to appear, of two distinct, incommensurable, and opposite sexes. 'No longer would those who think about such matters regard woman as a lesser version of man along a vertical axis of infinite gradations, but rather as an altogether different creature along a horizontal axis whose middle ground was largely empty' (p. 148). In the one-sex/two gender model, the relationship between men and women could in theory be regarded as one of either equality or inequality, although historically it has been marked by inequality. In the two-sex model, the relationship is always one of difference, and that difference must always be interpreted (p. 154).

4 Balthasar, 'Mary – Church – Office', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996): 188–97; here 193; and 'Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996): 701–9; here 705. Although the word *Gleichschaltung* is as common in German as 'standardization' is in English, it was also the word used by the Nazis for the co-optation of civil law by the will of the Führer. Whether Balthasar intended that connotation by claiming that an ideology of equality will soon lead not just to standardization but also to totalitarianism should, perhaps, be left to the judgement of each reader.

5 Balthasar, 'Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture', in *NE*, 187–98.

6 'Without woman there is neither sexual differentiation nor sexual identity in humanity, and that includes Adam. On the other hand, Adam, before woman, is still identified as a male, masculine, sexual being' (David Moss and Lucy Gardner, 'Difference – The Immaculate Concept? The Laws of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 377–402; here, 383).

7 Balthasar, 'Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women', 705.

8 Balthasar, 'How Weighty Is the Argument from "Uninterrupted Tradition" to Justify the Male Priesthood?', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996): 185–92; here, 191.
9 Karl Lehmann, 'The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 10 (1983): 219–39; here, 222. Lehmann was a professor when he wrote this article but is now the President of the Episcopal Conference of German Bishops.
10 '"Equality" of the sexes prevents the real interlocking of man and woman and levels out the organic and constructive unity to one that is abstract (the identity of human nature) and ineffectual. One sex is then unable to discover in the other, beyond the valuable difference, what is its own. For if there is this "equality", each already knows simultaneously itself and the other' (*TA*, 313–14).
11 Lucy Gardner and David Moss, 'Something Like Time; Something Like the Sexes: an Essay in Reception', in *BEM*, 89.
12 Balthasar, 'Women Priests?', in *NE*, 190.
13 Balthasar, 'The Marian Principle', 126.
14 Lucy Gardner and David Moss argue that the theme of reception is at the heart of Balthasar's theology (Gardner and Moss, 'Something Like Time', in *BEM*) and note that *empfangen* has three meanings – to receive, to conceive (a child), and to give welcome, an ambiguity of which Balthasar takes advantage.
15 Balthasar, 'Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women', 705.
16 Johann Roten notes that obedience in Balthasar's theology is Ignatian and related to a calling for a particular mission, and therefore not to be confused with passivity: 'in obedience we not only reinforce our disposition of receptiveness and self-giving, but obedience also connotes an eminently active orientation prompting implementation and realization' (Johann Roten, 'Marian Light on Our Human Mystery', in *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), p. 123).
17 The Son must represent the Father in the world by his Incarnation, and he can do this only as a man, although he does this as a man who comes from woman and is again fruitful in woman: 'However the One who comes forth from the Father is designated, as a human being he must be a man if his mission is to represent the Origin, the Father in the world. And just as, according to the second account of creation, Eve is fashioned from Adam (that is, he carried her within him, potentially), so the feminine, designed to complement the man Christ, must come forth from within him, as his "fullness" (Eph. 1:23)' (*TD3*, 284).
18 Balthasar, 'Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women', 708.
19 'In the natural relation, the woman enjoys the inward role of bearing, a role which is more perduring, while the man provides an external, episodic function: he merely *represents* a primal, creative principle which he himself can never *be* . . . In the sexual realm, woman is the full explication of the dignity bestowed on the creature of being a second causality alongside, in and through God' (Balthasar, 'Epilogue', in *Woman in the Church*, ed. Louis Bouyer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), p. 114).
20 Balthasar, 'A Word on *Humanae Vitae*', in *NE*, 216. Aidan Nichols argues that the fruitfulness that Balthasar infers from his exegesis of the Genesis creation story is not sexual or reproductive but a more spiritual kind of fruitfulness. 'Following Barth, Balthasar quite explicitly does not take "fruitfulness" in the theological anthropology of Genesis to be either (specifically) sexual or even (more generally) at all concerned with procreation' (Aidan Nichols, OP, *No Bloodless Myth: a Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), p. 110). Yet one could argue against Nichols's assertion, since when Balthasar argues that woman's 'essential vocation' is to receive the man's fruitfulness, he seems to be speaking of woman's sexual and procreative role rather than some general or spiritual kind of mission.
21 'It is the natural role of a man to command, but in profound dependence on the planning, careful woman. He symbolizes freedom, but now, how wound round he is by clinging ivy, which often threatens to choke him – by wife and children, home and profession, a knot of cares' (*TA*, 309).
22 Balthasar, 'The Marian Principle', 128; and 'Women Priests?', in *NE*, 189.
23 Balthasar, 'How Weighty?', 191.
24 Balthasar, 'Mary – Church – Office', 196.
25 Moss and Gardner, 'Difference – The Immaculate Concept?', 378.
26 Balthasar's emphasis on the nuptial metaphor to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church places Mary, who, along with the Church, is the Bride of Christ, at the heart of the Church. Since Mary is also

the archetype of femininity, Balthasar's concept of the feminine is central to his ecclesiology. Because ecclesiology is central to Balthasar's soteriology and because of the significance of Mary's Yes in the redemption of creation, his concept of the feminine is a central element of his soteriology.

27 Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 5.

28 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 32.

29 Rosi Braidotti, 'The Politics of Ontological Difference', in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan (New York and London: Routledge), p. 92.

30 Ibid., p. 103.

31 Tina Beattie, 'A Man and Three Women: Hans, Adrienne, Mary and Luce', *New Blackfriars* 79 (1998): 97–103; here, 98.

32 Gerald Loughlin arrives at a similar conclusion: 'Balthasar finally fails to think sexual difference, not because he stresses unity at the expense of difference, but because the unity he does stress is finally and only male: constituting a difference within the male. Needless to say, this failure is also present in his account of the Trinity' (Gerald Loughlin 'Sexing the Trinity', *New Blackfriars* 79 (1998):18–25; here, 20).

33 Marilyn Frye, 'The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women', *Signs* 21/4 (1996): 991–1010.

34 Ibid., 999.

35 Moss and Gardner, 'Difference – The Immaculate Concept?', 384.

36 Beattie, 'A Man and Three Women', 99.

37 For definition of this controverted term I rely on Elizabeth Grosz, 'Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism', in *The Essential Difference*, ed. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 84.

38 'The idea that men and women . . . are identified as such on the basis of transhistorical, eternal, immutable "essences" has been unequivocally rejected by many anti-essentialist post-structuralist feminists concerned with resisting any attempts to naturalize "human nature"' (Marilyn Fuss, 'Essentially Speaking: Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence', in *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture*, ed. Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 94).

39 Barbara Christian comments that 'Many of us [feminists] are particularly sensitive to monolithism because one major element of ideologies of dominance, such as sexism and racism, is to dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them their variousness and complexity' (Barbara Christian, 'The Race for Theory', *Feminist Studies* 14/1 (1988): 67–79; here, 75).

40 Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

41 Edward Oakes acknowledges the problems associated with 'symbolic ranking of masculine/feminine as an expression of the God–creature relationship'. However, he argues that Adam is feminine in relation to God and that for Balthasar, it would be 'theologically disastrous to equate Adam's role with that of the Creator (Adam and Eve really *are* equal!), and this perhaps more than anything shows how the *symbolic* role of the masculine–feminine dichotomy not only need not, but must not, affect the essential social equality of the sexes' (Edward T. Oakes, SJ, *Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, second edn, 1997), p. 255). However, Adam and Eve cannot be socially equal in Balthasar's theology because of the priority of Adam/Man.

42 Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p. 109.

43 'Needless to say, the Father's bearing of fruit out of himself without the need of fructifying, does not explain why he is named "Father". On the very same ground one might better name him "Mother". Balthasar's *non sequitur* is indicative of his failure to maintain the "greater unlikeness" between God and humankind . . . the addition of "supra" fails to measure the infinite distance between ourselves and the Trinity, whose relations Balthasar describes in resolutely sexual terms, parodying the ancient biology that informs Balthasar's Trinity. The man gives to the woman, who is but an extension of himself' (Loughlin, 'Sexing the Trinity', 24).

44 Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: New City Press, 2000), p. 57.

45 For Balthasar, initiative is always masculine, whereas the feminine characteristically 'lets be'. James Heft comments that one cannot speak of Mary collaborating with Christ in Balthasar's theology when one remembers

that her faith is 'acceptance and not properly initiative' (James Heft, 'Marian Themes in the Writing of Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 7 (1980): 127–39; here, 135).
46 Rachel Muers, 'A Question of Two Answers: Difference and Determination in Barth and von Balthasar', *Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 265–79; here, 266.
47 Moss and Gardner, 'Difference – The Immaculate Concept?', 383.
48 'For the most part, von Balthasar's theology accords men mobility between masculine and feminine whereas women are trapped within femininity by virtue of the biological determinism of being women' (Beattie, 'A Man and Three Women', 101).
49 Emily Martin discusses how preconceived ideas of masculine and feminine characteristics, including male activity versus female receptivity, have affected the way in which scientists have regarded and described the process of conception. Although scientific evidence suggests that the egg is not passively lying there waiting to receive the sperm, with the sperm taking the only active role, scientists have resisted describing the egg as actively involved in conception or the sperm as being weak and requiring the action of the egg in order for conception to occur, despite the evidence (see Emily Martin, 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male–Female Roles', in *Feminism and Science: Oxford Readings in Feminism*, ed. Evelyn Fox and Helen E. Longino (Oxford University Press, 1996)).
50 David L. Schindler, 'Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (1993): 200–39; here 204–5.
51 Heft, 'Marian Themes', 138. This verdict is seconded by Beattie: 'I think we need to recognise the extent to which this idea of Christian womanhood is a cultural construct of nineteenth-century romanticism and far removed from the Gospels – although indebted perhaps to some Pauline writings. As the foundation for a universal theology, it risks colonising the world with the sexual values of a bygone western era' (Beattie, 'A Man and Three Women', 100).
52 Gerard O'Hanlon comments that Balthasar's 'magnificent theological drama can easily be hijacked to support an unjust status quo . . . One has only to look at the question of the equal treatment of women within the Church to be aware that the rightful constraints of orthodoxy and fidelity to a long tradition can often mean that, despite its apparent advantage in being a free association of the faithful bound together by love, the Church in fact can arrive a little breathless and late at a point of justice long since attained by her secular cousins' (Gerard F. O'Hanlon, SJ, 'Theological Dramatics', in *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), pp. 109–10). Thomas G. Dalzell believes that Balthasar 'focuses on the individual's relationship with God to the neglect of issues related to social justice' because his understanding of the Trinity is 'more interpersonal than social' – interpersonal because the emphasis is on the relationship between the Father and the Son, to the neglect of the Trinity (Thomas G. Dalzell, 'Lack of Social Drama in Balthasar's Theological Dramatics', *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 457–75).
53 Beattie, 'A Man and Three Women', 103.

9

GEOFFREY WAINWRIGHT

Eschatology

The red thread of eschatology – thought and doctrine about ultimates – runs through Hans Urs von Balthasar's work from start to finish. He first took up this theme with his humanistic dissertation written at the University of Zurich on 'the history of the eschatological problem in modern German literature' (1930), a large study that was eventually incorporated into an even larger enterprise, a three-volume work on 'the apocalypse of the German soul' (1937–39). And in what may have been his last academic engagement before his death, Balthasar in April 1988 gave a lecture at the University of Trier on *apokatastasis* (the technical Greek term referring to 'the restoration of all things at the end of time'). But more than the sheer pervasiveness of the topic, his own version of eschatology has also been probably the most innovative – and therefore most controversial – theme in his theology. That was the case at least from the time when he published *Mysterium Paschale* in 1969, and he continued to radicalize his position in the last two decades of his life in the explicitly eschatological sections of the *Theo-Drama* and the *Theo-Logic*.

ESCHATOLOGY AS REVELATION

The thesis of Balthasar's earliest work, both the dissertation and its later three-volume expansion, was that the ways in which a people envisions the End 'reveal' its 'soul'. A people's eschatological myths *determine the character and destiny of a nation or culture*. The same might be said, more abstractly, about its *Letzthaltungen*, its 'attitude towards things of ultimate moment' (ultimate in the sense of both time and importance). The whole of German intellectual history between the Enlightenment and the Weimar Republic – in all its philosophical, artistic, and religious forms – is interpreted by Balthasar as a confrontation between, on the one hand, the *tragic* eschatologies of Dialectical Idealism and Nietzschean defiance and, on the other, the *redemptive* eschatology of Christianity. In the former eschatologies, the drama is self-constituting, so that when the human condition refutes the presuppositions of that drama, as it is bound to do, the only option is either the presumption of 'Prometheus bound' (Idealism) or the self-apotheosis of 'Dionysius crucified' (Nietzsche). In Christian eschatology, however, the human person is offered a resolution that is already being played out in the universal drama of Christ's Incarnation, Cross, exaltation, and expected parousia (Ephesians 1:10).[1]

When it comes to theology proper, an analogous question can be put: if the

eschatological myths of a culture reveal something about a nation, does not the eschatological imagery, doctrine, and thought of the Christian religion reveal, in a focused way, the faith of the Church – and of the theologian? Christians believe that history is coming to an 'end', in the sense of both conclusion and purpose. Christ will return to conduct a universal judgement spanning all the generations; and the outcome of the entire story of humankind and of each individual will have God's seal permanently set upon it. Thus in the Nicene Creed the Church confesses faith in Christ, who 'will come in glory to judge the quick and the dead', 'whose kingdom will have no end'; and the Church looks for 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'. How then does Balthasar hold this faith, and how does he interpret it theologically?[2]

Given the controversy surrounding his eschatology, it should perhaps first be stressed that as a Catholic Balthasar declares no intention to call into question 'the established doctrines of the faith', its 'defined contents', meaning above all 'the universality of death as the consequence of sin; the particular judgement; the immediate entrance of the soul to the beatific vision after expiating venial sin or the discharge of temporal punishment in purgatory, or else its entrance to the state of eternal perdition in hell; the Lord's parousia at the end of time; the bodily resurrection of all at the last judgement' (*ET1*, 257–8). However, at the limits of theology there are still questions about 'what happens to man at death, the dissolution of the world into its elements, the passing away of heaven and earth, the termination of history and the gathering of its fruits into the barns of eternity, the judgement on creation and its final state in God'; and these matters 'need to be constantly examined afresh, in case any physical images, or even learned scientific hypotheses, creep in unobserved, which, though they may help to elucidate a part of the truth, soon reveal themselves as merely provisional' (*ET1*, 258).

In the tradition of Western Christianity, both theological and popular, the 'last things' have been numbered at four: death, judgement, heaven, hell; and they are traditionally held together by being focused on the coming of Christ as Judge and Saviour. Balthasar certainly agrees, for he headlines the 'last act' of his *Theo-Drama* with the declaration that Christ is the 'governing center' of a trinitarian eschatology into which the anthropological themes of death, judgement, and final destiny must be integrated (*TD5*, 19, 56). But beyond that traditional and entirely non-controversial principle, Balthasar's eschatology is constantly attracted by the gravitational pull of *apokatastasis*, the possible 'final restoration of all things' – which doctrine is itself inseparable, in his case, from his speculations on Christ's 'descent into hell'.

Now the question of the traditional four last things and the question of a possible *apokatastasis* are obviously connected. One might perhaps reflect first on death and judgement and on that basis then come to a conclusion whether some, all, or none will finally be saved, so that the first two of the four last things (death and judgement) determine the answer to the last two (heaven and hell). Contrariwise, one might work back from the meaning of heaven (God's abode) and hell (the reprobation and absence of God) and from the hope that God will be 'all in all' at the end of time, and then let *that* determine one's views on death and judgement. In Balthasar's case, my sense is that

the movement of thought follows this latter option. Moreover, I shall argue that Balthasar's attraction to a doctrine of *apokatastasis* springs directly from his initial *intuitive and comprehensive* perception of the 'shape' or 'pattern' (*Gestalt*) of the Christian faith. In other words, his first glimpse of the total vision of the Christ event governs his position on individual doctrines, not the reverse.

Hence I shall look first at this overall *Gestalt* of the faith according to Balthasar as this affects his eschatology generally. Then I shall concentrate on Balthasar's treatment of the four last things in particular. Only then shall I examine the way he deals with objections to his position on universal restoration, so that, according to him, a final redemption not only can, but may – and therefore should, indeed practically *must* – remain a hope.

THE PATTERN OF REDEMPTION

The key to the *Gestalt* of redemption in Christ as Balthasar understands it is that the eternal Son, in dying as Jesus on the Cross, in utter separation from the Father on account of his utter solidarity with sinners, reached the furthest depths of hell, so that now no one is finally denied the possibility of a saving encounter with Christ, himself now raised from hell to God's right hand. That thumbnail summary, I fear, is already to give away the 'last act' of the plot; but in any case, Balthasar's readers will quickly find him ready to 'bare his soul' – or at least to put forward his *Letzthaltungen*. But, for us, the interesting questions concern how Balthasar arrived at these positions, how he defends them, and what their consequences are.

Balthasar's theology, and therewith his eschatology, is Christ-centred from beginning to end. In a nutshell, 'eschatology as a whole has its center in the decision of God to nestle the created world, with man at its center, in his own endless inner life at the world's "end"' (*ET4*, 457). Moreover, this has not just been *realized* in Christ but also *made known* in him as well: 'God is the "last thing" of the creature. This he is, however, as he presents himself to the world, that is, in his Son, *Jesus Christ*, who is the revelation of God and, therefore, the whole essence of the last things' (*ET1*, 260–1). And this 'end' belongs to the divine purpose from the 'beginning':

> The coming of Christ means only the historical conclusion of a supernatural order within creation that was already planned from the very beginning and thus had actually already been initiated. And if this order prevails at the end – at the end of history in general and at the end of each individual human life – then what will finally be revealed in this Omega will only be that Alpha for whose sake, according to the unambiguous view of the Letter to the Ephesians (1:1–10), the world was created in the first place. So Omega is only understandable on the basis of Alpha; both are one in the saving decision of God. Eschatology is the estuary into which protology flows, and it cannot be envisaged apart from its source. (*ET4*, 423)

Balthasar's christology, as we know from other essays in this volume, is trinitarian, and the Cross and Resurrection constitute its decisive instantiation. 'The submission of Jesus Christ's human will to his Father's will reveals the Son's relationship of unstinting love for the Father within the Godhead, which of course can take place only because of the Father's prior surrender to the Son, and because of the Spirit's being this giving between the two' (*ET4*, 440). It is the Holy Spirit, as the 'bond of charity' (Balthasar's

trinitarianism is very Augustinian in this regard), who holds Father and Son together when, as Christ bears the sin of the whole world, they are at their furthest separation (*ET4*, 436). It is 'in the power of the Spirit' – the Spirit as instrument and medium, not as agent (Romans 1:4; 8:11) – that the Father raises Christ from the dead (*MP*, 203–17). Upon Christ's exaltation, the Spirit 'imbues us with the inner disposition of the triune God and so enables us both to answer God's address and gift to us in a way worthy of God and also to bring God's own disposition to bear within our common humanity', so that 'the very essence of eternal life is already being accomplished in mortal life' (*ET4*, 440). Thus, we are not surprised to learn, the *eschata* must be 'interpreted christologically throughout, which means, at the deepest level, in trinitarian terms' (*ET1*, 270).

So far, so good – and so traditional. For Balthasar, however, the paschal mystery comprises much more than the death and Resurrection of Jesus understood as mere bipolarity. For between the first and the third day of the Triduum, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, stands Holy Saturday: 'The descent into hell between Christ's death and resurrection is a necessary expression of the event of redemption . . . The mystery of Holy Saturday is two things simultaneously: the utmost extremity of the *exinanitio* [self-emptying] and the beginning of the *gloria* even before the resurrection' (*ET1*, 263–4).

Published in 1969, Balthasar's monograph *Mysterium Paschale* was written quickly, as a stop-gap, for a multi-volume encyclopaedic reference work of dogmatics, *Mysterium Salutis*. The notion of Christ's 'solidarity with the dead' as set forth in this work, a solidarity understood as already going beyond the traditional understanding of Christ as bearing the world's sin on the Cross, was, as we now know in retrospect, a compromise that would eventually give way to the even more radical idea that in his descent into hell Jesus underwent – vicariously of course – *the full fate of the damned*. In his later writings, Balthasar begins to lean ever more heavily for his eschatology on the mystical experiences of his collaborator Adrienne von Speyr, whose meditations on this theme were privately published as *Kreuz und Hölle* (two volumes, 1966 and 1972) and *Erde und Himmel* (three volumes, 1975–76).

A short, resumptive article of Balthasar's on 'The Descent into Hell' dates from 1970, and already a shift in emphasis from *Mysterium Paschale* of a year earlier can be detected. First he draws on the classical Old Testament texts to characterize the condition from which man needs redemption:

> In Sheol, in the Pit, all that reigns is the darkness of perfect loneliness . . . If Jesus has suffered on the cross the sin of the world to the very last truth of this sin, namely godforsakenness, then he *must* experience, in solidarity with the sinners who have gone to the underworld, their – ultimately hopeless – separation from God; otherwise he would not have known all the phases and conditions of what it means for man to be unredeemed yet awaiting redemption. (*ET4*, 408; emphasis added)

Christologically,

> the experience of the abyss that Christ undergoes is both entirely *in* him (for he comes to know in himself the full measure of the dead sinner's distance from God) as well as entirely *outside* of him, because what he

> experiences is utterly foreign to him (as the eternal Son of the Father): in other words, on Holy Saturday *he is entirely alienated from himself*. (*ET4*, 409; emphasis added)

But precisely because Christ is in his very person the redemptive action and revelation of God, the function of his descent into hell is itself both redemptive and revelatory. In a passage heavily indebted to von Speyr, Balthasar takes this insight to its fullest logical conclusion:

> In Christ's being dead with the dead, the mind of the Logos has been stripped bare, as it were. For it was in the extremities of this death that the Logos found the adequate expression of his divine disposition: letting himself remain available for the Father in everything, even in the ultimate alienation. The nakedness of the man Jesus is an exposure not only of Sheol but also of the trinitarian relationship in which the Son draws his entire existence from the Father. Holy Saturday, one might say, is a kind of 'suspension' of the Incarnation, whose result is given back into the hands of the Father and which the Father will renew and definitively confirm by the Easter Resurrection. (*ET4*, 411–12)

But how does this affect eschatology in the strict sense? What, more precisely, is gained towards human salvation and the achievement of God's purpose by saving us in just this way? Balthasar addresses that question, among numerous other places, in an article originally written for a work of Japanese dogmatics:

> The boundary of death set by our (guilty and corrupt) creatureliness has already taken on, from within, a grace-filled, trinitarian quality because of the death of Christ, to which ours is configured. His death was precisely one of love that went all the way 'to the end' (John 13:1), and had no limits to it. As such, however, Christ's death – glorified and transfigured and made eternal in the wounds of the Risen One – remains an inextinguishable moment within his eternal life from the beginning. Now that he has returned to the Father, Omega can no longer be distinguished from Alpha, for the living Lamb has been 'slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). (*ET4*, 438)

DEATH AND JUDGEMENT

Death, according to Shakespeare's Hamlet, is 'the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns'. Balthasar obviously agrees: 'Concerning the whereabouts and circumstances of the dead', he says, 'we know nothing' (*ET4*, 401). But given his solidarity with the human condition 'to the end', this must also hold true of Jesus as well. Or so Balthasar would insist: for after he had been raised by the Father from the dead, Jesus did not report to his disciples in the forty days before the Ascension what he 'saw' or 'did' while 'there' – precisely because he was really dead!

Death, then, always remains a caesura. Judgement, too, is an aspect of that caesura, for no one enters into either heaven or hell without first passing through the purifying fire of God's judgement (1 Cor. 3:13). Judgement, in other words, completes what has begun in death, and in this way: for humankind there is always a 'hiatus between the way and the goal: . . . for the individual, it is death; for history, the end-times; for both, the purifying and decisive judgement' (*ET4*, 423–4). According to the Bible, says Balthasar, 'there are not two judgements or judgement days, only one; and therefore we must see the particular judgement after death in some kind of dynamic connection – thinkable but hardly describable – with the last judgement' (*ET1*, 265). He even concedes the

possibility that 'within the earthly existence of an individual, such a definitive confrontation can already take place through the grace of God, so that the individual might already have passed through the judgement' (*ET4*, 446; relying on John 3:20–1).

To the question of the 'timing' of the judgement, there is in fact no simple chronological answer, because judgement always takes place not just at the caesura between life and death but more crucially at the threshold between the Old Aeon and the New – which itself takes place only as a vertical intersection from above into the line of world-time. 'The turning point [of the Aeons] lies in Christ, or, more exactly, in the drama of the Paschal transition from Good Friday to Easter Sunday' (*ET4*, 463). But this has to be entered into, both by individuals (dying and rising daily) and, because of human solidarity, by the entire race (*ET4*, 464–5). And in both cases, there is a kind of waiting, again because of the solidarity of the human race. Even for the 'perfect', who have entered the New Aeon as fully redeemed saints united with God in the beatific vision, there remains a period of perseverance and expectation, even of suffering and sighing with the world until the final redemption at the end of time (*ET4*, 458–60).

All this is possible, because in Christian belief Christ the incarnate Son was able

> completely to encompass the history of the world within the scope of his mortal life. His finite span of life hid within itself the life-span of all who had died in the past and of all who would die in the future; here, in one single instance, primary, personal time has become identified with all the time that belongs to the course of history. (*2SW*, 39–40)

And now 'man, as an individual and as a social animal, is seized at the core of his being by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is an event which completely re-values the whole of individual human life, as it does the whole of human history' (*2SW*, 50).

HEAVEN AND HELL

I suggested above that Balthasar has restructured traditional eschatology by not taking the four last things in the usual order of death, judgement, heaven, and hell. Rather, as we saw, he treated first Christ's own personal presence before the Father in heaven and his willing descent into hell, and then constructed his view of the hiatus of death and judgement on that basis. But by working on that basis, can he say anything more specifically of heaven and hell as 'places' or 'states' or 'conditions'? Yes: 'God is the "last thing" of the creature: gained, he is heaven; lost, he is hell' (*ET1*, 260). While admitting the fascination it has held for popular Christian imagination, Balthasar himself proffers no description of hell. For Jesus Holy Saturday was 'an empty, wordless pause' (*ET4*, 401). Therefore, hell is not so much a 'place' as a 'state' (*DWH*, 127). It consists simply and only in separation from God. It is at once solitude and self-alienation. 'God did not create hell; only man can be blamed for its existence' (*DWH*, 53–8). On the other hand, on the basis of her mystical experiences, Adrienne von Speyr is willing to speak more elaborately about hell, and Balthasar is equally willing to quote her words in ample measure, as in the section on 'Hell and Trinity' in *TL* II.

As we shall see when we take up the question of *apokatastasis*, Balthasar's hope,

famously, is that hell will prove to be empty, or rather unpopulated by humans. Even while refusing to construct a systematic demonology, Balthasar holds that 'theological hope' cannot be applied to the mysterious power of evil, the satanic 'un-person': 'The sphere to which redemption by the Son who became man applies is unequivocally that of mankind' (*DWH*, 143–7).

What does Balthasar say about heaven? Very little, directly; as we might expect. For we have already seen that death is the hiatus, the caesura, beyond which it is not given us to see: 'It goes without saying that a preview into the mode of being of the "new heaven and new earth" has been closed off by the wall of death; so we can speak only "prophetically", parabolically, as Paul does, or by resorting to analogies, as Jesus does' (*ET4*, 457). But this much at least we can say: human participation in the life of the triune God 'is already beginning within the sphere of temporality in the life of faith, hope, and love, so much so that the transformation of this temporal mode of participating in God into the eternal mode is more the unveiling of something already existing than it is the creation of something new and external to the creature' (*ET4*, 439). This is because 'what Christian theology calls the "theological virtues" of faith, hope, and love are ways of handing over one's freedom to God's freedom' (*ET4*, 440). In this sense, heaven is begun below, for God's eternal handing himself over in trinitarian love *is* heaven. And the theological virtues are God's ways of enacting, or rather re-enacting, that life in the human soul on earth: 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Thus faith becomes the human way of entering into God's truth, hope into God's fidelity to his promises, and love into his own self-surrender to us (*ET4*, 440).

As to the eternal heaven, Balthasar holds up a kaleidoscope of biblical images. So strong in the tradition is the biblical notion of heaven as the vision of God that Balthasar cannot neglect it. But because of the inevitable 'over-againstness' implied in the opposition between viewer and object, one 'cannot stop there', he says, if one is to 'express the interiority of participation' (*ET4*, 441). Balthasar's own preferred image of eternal life – which also nicely allows for continuity between now and future – draws instead from the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well: 'Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4:14). For Balthasar the fulfilment of those promises entails 'a most powerful experience of God, an awareness that is much more than vision: it is a participation in the very surging life of God himself' (*ET4*, 442). Moreover, this living water does not just 'well up' – it 'overflows': 'In its recipients it transforms itself into the gift that is to be given to others; only by being handed on can it be a true gift worthy of God' (*ET4*, 441). This is why Christians are given the Holy Spirit not only as a treasure, but even more crucially as a fiduciary trust: Christians do not just possess but must also *exhale* the Spirit. And that stretches the soul, for the Spirit bestows on the Christian 'depths and breadths, insights, ideas and initiatives that he would never have presumed for himself and yet are truly his own' (*ET4*, 443).

Eternal life, according to the New Testament, consists in a trinitarian indwelling: 'that they may all be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they too may be in us .

. . that they may be one as we are one, I in them and thou in me, so that they may be perfected into one' (John 17:21, 23). This trinitarian indwelling not only settles the question of the 'location' of heaven but also its 'timelessness', which is better understood, with Oscar Cullmann, as the 'endlessness of God's time' (*DWH*, 132). Substantially, it is the 'eternal vitality of God' which allows Gregory of Nyssa to 'equate everlasting rest in God with everlasting motion through him and toward him' (*DWH*, 131).

THE QUESTION OF *APOKATASTASIS*

The gravity and sensitivity of the question of *apokatastasis* resides in the fact that what is usually called 'universalism' – namely, the belief that all intelligent and moral creatures (angels, men, devils) will certainly, even necessarily, be 'saved' in the end – is, when held as a doctrine, a heresy, condemned by the Councils of Constantinople in 543 and 553.

Time and again, Balthasar juxtaposes two sets of New Testament texts concerning the scope of final salvation, which he says are mutually irreconcilable and not to be synthesized by the theologian. One series 'speaks of being lost for all eternity'; the other 'of God's will, and ability, to save all men' (*DWH*, 29). The first series consists of solemn words of judgement addressed to the sinner: Jesus pictures a future judgement with a 'double outcome', where salvation is contrasted with an 'outer darkness' in which 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' will be heard, and 'an everlasting fire is prepared for the devil and his angels'. He speaks of a sin against the Holy Spirit that will not be pardoned even in the life to come, and of God 'who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell'. On the other hand, a second series of texts envisages a universal scope for redemption.[3]

Balthasar hints at a possible significance in the fact that the 'dual outcome' texts are characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels, referring to a stage when Jesus was using 'language and images familiar to the Jews of that time', whereas 'certain reflections by Paul and John' that go in the 'universal' direction 'clearly look back on all that happened with Jesus – that is, to the total pattern of his life, death and resurrection – and, in doing so, consider and formulate this totality from a post-Easter perspective' (*DWH*, 29). But he is aware that he cannot build too much on such a 'progression' (if such there be), not only because of historical-critical issues concerning the post-Easter perspectives even of the Synoptic Evangelists, but also because the epistles and the Fourth Gospel, too, contain 'double outcome' passages, where the divine judgement very much includes God's wrath.[4] So Balthasar can hardly do otherwise than abide by his own advice against synthesizing. But he can also hardly leave the matter at mere juxtaposition, otherwise a theologian might as well close up shop, since it is the special task of the theologian to bring the disparate materials of the Christian religion into a coherent vision of the whole. The problem with that challenge, however, at least as Balthasar works on this problem, is that he will offer an account that handles 'universalist' interpretations of the complex data *gently* while drawing the *sting* out from the 'double outcome' verses, so that he at least risks what in principle he denies as legitimate, namely, the 'possibility of subordinating

one [series of scriptural texts] to the other' (*ET1*, 267).

Ironically, both Origen and Augustine are accused of just such a subordination in their own respective ways: 'Origen attempted this from one standpoint, reducing hell to a kind of purgatory, and thus weakening what scripture says of the judgement. Augustine, and the theologians who followed him [in the matter of double predestination], did so from the opposite standpoint, depriving the hope of universal salvation of all foundation' (*ET1*, 267). Origen and Augustine may have failed in their respective and conflicting ways, but there is no mistaking where Balthasar's sympathies lie. In one heavily sarcastic passage in particular, he castigates the 'infernalists' for 'making distinctions that, while retaining the notion of God's benevolent will, nevertheless allow it to be frustrated by man's wickedness' (*DWH*, 183–6). For his part, Balthasar admits that the 'double outcome' passages 'weaken the force' of the 'universal' ones, but he denies that they invalidate them (*DWH*, 186–7).[5] He consistently questions taking the New Testament's 'extreme warnings as implying the factual existence of a populated hell' (*DWH*, 179).

It is important to note Balthasar's long-standing fascination – beginning well before his acquaintance with Adrienne von Speyr and seemingly amounting to an elective affinity – with theologians suspected or accused of universalism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, Karl Barth, on all of whom he wrote significant and path-breaking monographs. In his final lecture on *apokatastasis* he shows how these and other theologians with a tendency to universalism have responded to the two strands in the New Testament witness. While observing the 'deep reverence due a mystery', they hold that 'God's purpose must be fulfilled even against all opposing obstacles' (*DWH*, 237). From the survey of his favourite thinkers, Balthasar's conclusion, going back (he claims) to Origen but also looking forward to the salutary advice of St Ignatius of Loyola about taking the negative possibility personally, is that the last things are and remain hidden:

> One cannot build neutral theories upon them. The Gospel proclaims an open situation, in which Jesus is Judge and Saviour; [New Testament eschatology] is not an 'objectifying description of a final drama', is not a 'prediction' but a 'promise'. . . The *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius remain exemplary for a Christian way of dealing with the threat of possible perdition. The meditation on hell stands at the conclusion of the *first* week, that is, when the individual, with eyes on the Crucified, reflects on his own guilt and finally perceives that grace alone preserves him from the eternal loss that he deserves. What remains for us is not knowledge, but Christian hope. (*DWH*, 251)

It seems fair to say that in Balthasar there is a presumption – though without presumptiveness – in favour of God's universal salvific will, which is revealed, or confirmed, by his sending the Son as redeemer. Put in Johannine terms, 'there is no equilibrium' between Christ and 'the world' but 'only predominance of Christ's power' (*DWH*, 43). While Balthasar stops (just) short of a universalist belief, we may still be permitted to follow his reasoned and imaginative justification for a universal *hope*. In addition to what he has drawn from Adrienne von Speyr concerning Christ's descent into hell, Balthasar cites the 'testimonies' of several earlier women mystics in favour of the unconquerable love and infinite mercy of God: Mechtild of Hackerborn, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Angelo of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila,

Marie des Vallées (the advisor to St John Eudes), Thérèse of Lisieux (*DWH*, 97–113; 214–18; 252). Frequently these women ground their belief in the infinite divine mercy in their own sense of the intolerability of anyone's being finally lost, a sentiment they express in their avowed willingness to forfeit their own salvation for the sake of others (in the manner of St Paul in Romans 9:3), while Balthasar's approach tries more to recall the Lord's command to love even our enemies.

The crunch comes with the question of freedom. Balthasar rejects double predestination outright, since he cannot believe that any part of creation was created *in order* to be lost. Has God, then, predestined *all* to beatitude? Such could seem to override the freedom of the creature (at least the human creature). A universalist outlook has to face the problem of a 'forced' salvation in its most extensive and stubborn form. Balthasar is grappling with the apparent contrast between God's sovereign will to save all versus the freedom of humankind to accept or reject that salvation, a freedom which cannot be overridden, precisely because human beings are created in the divine image (which entails freedom). True, but they are created in freedom not just to be free for any goal that might happen to suggest itself, but *for the sake of* participation in the divine life. So God will not overpower or do violence to the creature's own precious freedom, for that would undo his own act of creation. But then the question becomes: how can finite freedom be 'contained' within, or 'held' by, infinite freedom – without being overwhelmed?

Balthasar's argument against reincarnation comes into play here. He insists that 'man becomes himself only in his unique decisions . . . and he has only a limited time on earth in which to place his bet: *les jeux sont faits*' (*ET4*, 462). But then he qualifies this casino image in a curious way:

> The decision made in time is and remains the basis of [the individual decider's] eternity, *however much the grace and justice of the eternal judge may transform it* and however great the change of condition may be from the Eon of mortality to the Eon of eternal life. No one can exhaust the depths of the temporal situation in which a person makes his decision, but in the resurrection from the dead these depths are now revealed *as they already were implicit in the counsels of God*. (*ET4*, 462–3; emphasis added)

Or as he puts it even more explicitly, lest the point be overlooked: 'God gives man the capacity to make a (negative) choice against God that seems *for man* to be definitive, but which need not be taken *by God* as definitive' (*ET4*, 421). Or as Edith Stein puts it, 'Human freedom can be neither short-circuited nor tuned out by divine freedom; but it may well be, so to speak, outwitted' (quoted favourably in *DWH*, 221). Balthasar refuses to say whether God can really 'lose the game of creation through the creature's free choice to be lost' (*2SW*, 51). But if Edith Stein is right, God is a pretty resourceful player; he may even, in Stein's account, bend the rules – which are, in any case, his own.

So after all this gambling, what does God *stand to gain*? That is the very question with which Balthasar – in his usual highly speculative manner and displaying once more a heavy indebtedness to Adrienne von Speyr – closes the curtain on the 'last act' of his *Theo-Drama*. When God brings the world back home to himself, that homecoming is to be seen as an 'additional gift' in the eternal and ever-new mutual self-giving of the

Father, Son, and Spirit. In other words, it is an 'enrichment' (*Bereicherung*) or 'enhancement' (*Steigerung*) of the divine life through its inclusion of the redeemed creature to whom God grants participation in himself (*TD5*, 506–21).

CONCLUSION

Obviously, no conclusion is possible here except God's own. I am discussing, after all, God's own concluding decision, and that as yet remains opaque. So on my own responsibility, and in lieu of an ordinary conclusion, but in line with Balthasar's predilection for drama, I will try to recast his argument as a dialogue – one that perforce must be broken off before the final curtain drops and God's verdict is rendered:[6]

Balthasar: 'God desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for *all*' (1 Timothy 2:4–5).

Infernalist (quoting Aquinas): Permit us, Lord, to make a small distinction in your will: 'God wills in advance (*voluntate antecedente*) that all men achieve salvation, but subsequently (*consequenter*) he wills that certain men be damned in accordance with the requirements of his justice' (*Summa theologiae* I, 19, 6, ad 1; *De veritate* 23, 2). One can speak of God's having an 'absolute' and a 'conditional' will (*Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book I, 46, 1.1 ad 2).

Balthasar: Further, Christ is referred to as 'the Saviour of *all* men, especially of those who believe' (1 Timothy 4:10).

Infernalist: Can we not see a qualification in this formulation?

Balthasar: But what about Jesus' triumphant words when he looks forward to the effect of his Passion: 'Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men to myself' (John 12:31–2)?

Infernalist: Oh, perhaps he will attempt to draw them but will not succeed in holding them.

Balthasar: 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome *the world*' (John 16:33).

Infernalist: Unfortunately, only half of it, despite your efforts, Lord.

Balthasar: 'The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of *all* men' (Titus 2:11).

Infernalist: Well, let us say, more precisely, to *offer* salvation, since how many *accept* it is questionable.

Balthasar: God 'does not wish that any should perish, but that *all* should reach repentance' (2 Peter 3:9).

Infernalist: He may well wish it; unfortunately he will not achieve it.

Balthasar: The prison letters appear to speak in a sweeping manner when they say that God was pleased through Christ 'to reconcile to himself *all* things in him, whether on earth or in heaven' (Colossians 1:20).

Infernalist: Note that Paul does not say 'or in hell'. Hymn-like and doxological talk of this kind need not be taken literally. When Jesus prays to the Father, 'Thou hast given him power over *all* flesh, to give eternal life to *all* whom *thou hast given him*' (John 17:2), would it not be better to distinguish the first 'all', which can be universal (and in any event refers only to *flesh*, not to souls in hell), from the second 'all', which refers only to a certain number of the chosen?

Balthasar: But can this overpowering passage be in any way interpreted as restrictive: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:20)? And is it not all but embarrassing for you when the same Paul hammers home to us that in Adam (the principle of the natural man) '*all* died', but 'God's gift of grace, thanks to the one man Jesus Christ, abounded for *all* in *much greater measure*' (Romans 5:15)?

Infernalist: Actually, you are misquoting here. Paul says: 'But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the *many* die by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the *many*?'

Balthasar: Are you saying, then, that only 'the many' sinned, but not all? that only 'many' died, but not all? Paul himself corrects your interpretation a few verses down: 'Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was

condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.' No mistranslations here! The repeatedly stressed words 'how much more' (repeated seven times in Romans 5) and participles like 'abounding', 'overflowing', and so forth, cannot be ignored. All just pious exaggeration?

Wainwright: Thank you very much for this illuminating discussion, but I'm afraid the time allotted for our seminar has come to an end. And thank you both, as well, for baring your souls.

Notes

1 The nearest thing to a summary of the 1,350 pages of the three-volume *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* can be found in volume III, pp. 392–449, or even just pp. 434–49, which also set the lines for much of Balthasar's later, directly theological work. The crucial reference to Ephesians 1:10 occurs on p. 441.

2 Several of Balthasar's shorter writings provide the best initial access to his eschatology. For the abbreviations used here see the List of abbreviations at the front of this volume. Occasionally I have modified the published translations to bring out a nuance in the original that matches the point being made.

3 Texts in the first series on the double outcome of final judgement: Matt. 8:11–12; 11:20–4; 13:36–43, 47–50; 24:45–51; 25:14–46. On the sin against the Holy Spirit: Mark 3:29; Matt. 12:32; Luke 12:8–10. On God's ability to destroy both body and soul in hell: Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:5. Texts in the second series on universal redemption: John 3:16; 5:24; 6:37–40; 12:32; 17:23; Romans 5:12–21; 11:32; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:4–6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9.

4 Romans 1:17–2:11; 1 Corinthians 3:11–15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10; Hebrews 6:4–8; 10:26–31; John 3:18–21, 36; 5:29; 12:48; 1 John 2:18–25.

5 The English translator here wrongly uses the word 'universalist' for Balthasar's 'universal' (if he had meant 'universalist' he would have used the word *universalistisch*, not *universell*). Depending on the context, in the discussion of this question the distinction between 'universality' and 'universal*ism*' can sometimes be quite vital!

6 The dialogue is inspired by, and largely based on, 'Short Discourse on Hell' (*DWH*, 183–6).

Part II

The trilogy

10

OLIVER DAVIES

The theological aesthetics

It is entirely understandable that English-speaking readers with theological interests who pick up the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord* should feel that they are about to enter a somewhat inhospitable land. It may be discomforting for them to think that this is followed by six more, equally generous, volumes in the same series, or by fourteen further volumes if we are to include the *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*, which together make up Balthasar's project as a whole. Use of a tape measure or weighing scales will confirm that this is a very Germanic way of 'doing theology'. Readers will also quickly note that multi-volume works of this kind have to be read in their own particular way. Much of what is included is intended to exemplify the key ideas and does not need to be scrutinized with the same attentiveness as those passages or sections which set out the governing ideas of the entire project. The skill of reading a multi-volume work of this kind, then, is to identify as quickly as possible the guideline passages which are decisive for reading the whole. Many of these can be found in the first volume, *Seeing the Form*, and in the fifth volume (of the English edition) on modern metaphysics, although it is part of Balthasar's method to scatter highly judicious and insightful theoretical passages in the interstices of lengthy historical discussions.

But if the form appears more than a little alien to the English-speaking reader, then the same can be said of the content of the work. Our reader may note, for instance, that the three substantial quotations which form a frontispiece to the first volume are respectively in Spanish, French, and German (thoughtfully left in the original languages by the English translators). The first quotation is from St John of the Cross and speaks of a reciprocity between divine glory and the beauty of the soul formed within that beauty; the second is from Pascal and speaks of twilight and analogy, and the third is from Johann Georg Hamann and speaks of the Spirit (and inspiration). The first is a mystical writer, the second a Port-Royal rationalist concerned with the experience of faith, and the third is the first and perhaps most penetratingly critical reader of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The first quotation sets out Balthasar's claim to be thinking theologically in such a way as to include the mystical or existential knowledge of God. Indeed, a number of his early studies are of mystical figures and he is the author of a seminal article on Christian mysticism. The second not only reflects his long engagement with French thinking, specifically with the *nouvelle théologie* and Henri de Lubac, for whom Pascal was a significant figure, but also points in its content to the principle of analogy, and the *analogia entis*, which is of enormous importance for his conception of the alignment of

beauty and divine grace, hinted at in the preceding quotation from St John of the Cross. Finally, Hamann is a telling choice from the German tradition, who articulates for Balthasar two important and interconnected themes. The first is the identification of kenosis, or the creative self-emptying of God, with divine beauty, and the second is the interpenetration of reason and the senses. Hamann belonged to the same Königsberg milieu as Kant, with whom he had extensive contacts, but whose rationalism he decisively rejected, preferring a philosophy shaped by powerfully poetic and scriptural currents in its place. The anti-Kantian theme signalled here (and in all three quotations) is to play a crucial role in the project that is to follow.

It is in Kant's First Critique, for instance, that we find the classic refutation of the same theory of the transcendentals which is so foundational to the shape of Balthasar's thinking. By the time Kant wrote that passage, however, the transcendentals had in fact already passed from historical view. They are bound up with a period in medieval theology-philosophy which was particularly concerned with the createdness of the world and the place of humanity within it. The discussion began with Philip the Chancellor and ended effectively with Thomas Aquinas and late medieval Thomism; Duns Scotus already redefined the transcendental properties in terms of logical operators intrinsic to every act of perception. For Thomas, however, the transcendentals (generally, though not exclusively, being, good, the true, and the beautiful) were properties which were present in every category of existence: their transcendental character flowed not from their transcendence of the categories as such but rather from their commonality within every single category (thus everything that exists is at once 'being', 'truth', 'goodness', and 'beauty', as well as whatever else it may be). The problem for the scholastics was to discern why the transcendentals were not tautologous (as Kant later said they were), and Thomas's answer was that they do not add to being in terms of content (*ad rem*), but only conceptually (*ad rationem*), that is, as refracted through human will and consciousness. The transcendentals therefore played throughout the created order and were the sign that the world, in which the human creature was central, was indeed made in the image of God and in its theophanic character made manifest something of the character of its Creator. Balthasar's use of what he called the 'circuminsession' of the transcendentals as the organizing principle of his theological method therefore offered a double advantage. In the first place, it allowed him to stress the role of the beautiful, which – as he rightly claimed – had been sorely neglected in the modern tradition, but it also allowed him to treat it not as an adjunct to reasoning and ethics but as integral to them. The transcendentals, as Balthasar appropriated them, served as a platform for his realignment of theology in a critique of Kantianism, modernism, and liberalism. Fundamental to this critique was the inversion of the order of Kant's three great works, in which he first reflected upon reason, then ethics, and finally aesthetics. When Balthasar comments that beauty, the word which 'the philosophical person . . . concludes shall be our first' (*GL1*, 17–18), we can see his determination to invert the Kantian epistemological order and thus pave the way for the articulation of a new structure of faith as knowing.

The perception of a work of art has to do with taste and enjoyment, but it is also in fact a form of cognition (a point less emphasized in Anglo-American tradition). Balthasar's claim that aesthetics is intimately connected with truth, goodness, and the depths of Christian revelation – thus with knowledge in its most radical and transforming sense – is intrinsic to his project. He is therefore particularly keen to distinguish between what he is advocating, which goes by the name of 'theological aesthetics', from 'aesthetic theology'. The latter occurs where beauty is disassociated from the other transcendentals, rendering aesthetics a secular and separated discipline: 'at this point the *pulchrum* is lifted from the unreflected position within a totality which it had enjoyed from the days of the Greeks and is made into a separate "object" with a separate science of its own' (*GL1*, 79). One of the primary consequences of this secularizing process (which is contested, but only briefly, and as later history would prove, vainly, by the Romantics) is the rupture of an analogical relation between 'theological beauty and the beauty of the world'. In an important section, entitled 'The Task and the Structure of a Theological Aesthetics', Balthasar sets out the distinctions between 'theological beauty' and 'worldly beauty', establishes the analogical continuities between them, and reflects upon the internal characteristics of a faith which is understood to be a perceiving of the beautiful (*GL1*, 117–27). Balthasar follows Thomas Aquinas in delineating the dual structure of the beautiful in terms of the principle of form (the root of the Latin *formosa*, meaning 'beautiful', is *forma*) and of glory, radiance, or splendour. This distinction between 'form' and 'expression' is fundamental to Balthasar's theology. It also plays a key role, for instance, in his understanding of language and epistemology, whereby the polarity between these two elements constitutes the domain within which being as the disclosure of truth can emerge. Peter Casarella has termed this principle 'a metaphysics of expressive transcendentality' and has traced the way in which it grounds Balthasar's account of human language within a world created by the divine Word.[1]

The former category, that of 'form' itself, underpins Balthasar's christology and shapes his view of Christian faith as being irreducibly incarnational. Indeed, he expresses considerable scepticism concerning the (nonenfleshed) beauty of God in Godself, describing this as a Platonic rather than Christian perspective. Form is always material and particular. Here also Balthasar's purposes are served by the resonance of the German word for form, *Gestalt*, which can in certain contexts also be translated into English as 'figure' or 'human form'. Form, in Balthasar's view, is also always both a sign and an appearance. It is a sign of 'a depth and a fullness that, in themselves and in an abstract sense, remain both beyond our reach and our vision' (*GL1*, 118), and it is an appearance by virtue of its connectedness with the other transcendentals. As Balthasar remarks: 'the form as it appears to us is beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating' (*GL1*, 118). It is the second element in the dual structure of the beautiful which Balthasar takes to accompany the manifestation of Being (or the real) in the form, so that form

becomes the 'splendour' or 'glory of Being'. The introduction at this point of a metaphysic may take the English-speaking reader by surprise. Here Balthasar takes leave of a Kantian and post-Kantian context and locates his thought securely within the classical tradition, as it stretches from the Greeks to scholasticism and the Romantic revival. This tradition asserts that Being (which it would prefer to capitalize) has a certain luminosity and intrinsic attractiveness or splendour, and that it is linked in particular with the theme of *eros*, as the active principle of longing or attraction. This offers Balthasar an entirely new analysis of the ground of faith which is now removed from the propositional realm and is refigured as a 'movement' of the soul which is akin to the response we feel before the immense complexity of meaning, expression, and 'form' of a major work of art.

Perhaps more than any other feature of his work, Balthasar's restructuring of faith opens up significant and hitherto unseen perspectives on the nature of the Christian life. At a single stroke, he breaks the link between faith and reason which has so dominated modern theological apologetics, while retaining faith's cognitive character. He also grounds faith firmly in the divine initiative, since *its* eros is fundamentally ordered to the divine self-manifestation in the specific and beautiful form of Jesus Christ. In a key passage, Balthasar gives an account of the responding structure of 'Christian eros', the eros of faith, as 'a movement of the entire person, leading away from himself through the vision to the invisible God, a movement furthermore, which the word "faith" describes only imperfectly' (*GL1*, 121). Intellectual cognition is part of this response but it has a holistic character which gives powerful expression to the existential or even experiential claim laid upon us by our encounter with the incarnate Word. We are drawn 'under the spell' of the incarnate Word much as a particular work of art can compellingly absorb our senses, mind, and imagination. The response of eros is also depicted in terms of 'a movement', giving emphasis to faith as dynamic and as a kind of journeying with and into the divine. This is the language of opening rather than closure; and it accords with Balthasar's view that form reveals – and conceals – depths that only emerge gradually into the field of understanding and vision. This same passage contains an intensely christological formulation of faith, since 'it must be understood not as a merely psychological response to something beautiful in a worldly sense which has been encountered through vision, but as the movement of man's whole being away from himself and towards God through Christ, a movement founded on the divine light of grace in the mystery of Christ' (*GL1*, 121). The emphasis upon beauty as form constantly brings to the fore the Incarnation as the divine taking on of a particular and material existence. But it does so in a way that simultaneously allows for a certain human response, not contrary or external to the divine initiative, but a response nevertheless which is identifiably human and which has something of the character of a divine exegesis or exegesis of the divine:

> But the whole truth of this mystery is that the movement which God (who is the object that is seen in Christ and who enraptures man) effects in man (even in his unwillingness and recalcitrance, due to sin) is co-effected willingly by man through his Christian Eros and, indeed, on account of the fact that the divine Spirit

> en-thuses and in-spires man to collaboration. (*GL1*, 121)

Balthasar's realignment of contemporary theological tradition sought to reverse the order of the Kantian critiques which laid the ground, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, for a radical reshaping of theology on the basis of Kant's separation of faith as cognition from reason as understanding. What for Kant had been a marginal engagement with the beautiful becomes a central theme in Balthasar for preserving faith as cognition by structuring it anew as aesthetic cognition.[2] This entailed drawing upon and in many ways reanimating the classical theme of the transcendentals, which asserted their ultimate convertibility, so that Beauty is simultaneously Truth and Goodness, and all three are also Being, the 'first of the Transcendentals'. If Kant argued that 'being is not a predicate', then Balthasar reasserts the transcendental value of Being, in its transcendental expressions (as the True, Good, and Beautiful), its luminosity and createdness. This marked a return to a pre-Kantian position, therefore, while also allowing a development in terms of analogy and philosophy which are the perennial points of orientation for the Catholic theological tradition. In his reflection upon the similarity and dissimilarity that obtain between divine and worldly beauty, Balthasar emphasizes that the former, which is glory, differs from natural or worldly beauty in that it includes within it dimensions that flatly contradict the presuppositions of natural beauty. Glory embraces the Cross and the disfigurement of Christ as paradoxical manifestations of divine beauty, for instance. But he is keen also to stress the continuities between worldly and divine beauty. Thus he will say:

> The splendour of the mystery which offers itself cannot be equated with the other kinds of aesthetic radiance which we encounter in the world. This does not mean, however, that that mysterious splendour and this aesthetic radiance are beyond any and every comparison. That we are at all able to speak here of 'seeing' (and not exclusively and categorically of 'hearing') shows that, in spite of all concealment, there is nonetheless something to be seen and grasped (*cognoscimus*). It shows, therefore, that man is not merely addressed in a total mystery, as if he were compelled to accept obediently in blind and naked faith something hidden from him, but that something is 'offered' to man by God, indeed offered in such a way that man can see it, understand it, make it his own, and live from it in keeping with his human nature. (*GL1*, 121)

This principle of analogy which obtains between divine and worldly beauty allows Balthasar to apply the science of aesthetics as a philosophical point of mediation and as the conceptual framework of his theology. It is this which grounds the two-part structure of the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, which begins with 'a theory of vision' as an exercise in aesthetic perception in the Kantian sense ('fundamental theology'), and ends with 'a theory of rapture', which concerns incarnation, glory, and human participation in that glory ('dogmatic theology').

The former, aesthetic perception, appears in *Seeing the Form* as an investigation of the subjective element in faith, while the latter, that which concerns 'rapture', engages with faith in its objective aspect. It is in his discussion of the subjectivity of faith that Balthasar's theology most contrasts with that of his contemporary Karl Rahner. Whereas, for Rahner, the one who 'hears the Word' is at the centre of God's design, grounding a rich and intensely creative theological anthropology with deep consequences for

fundamental theology and christology alike, Balthasar seems to share something of Karl Barth's dialectical instincts, both of them stressing the impossibility of any final accommodation of God's self-communication with our own human nature. Balthasar speaks at this point of a 'light' within humanity which is 'God's witness within us'. This 'self-witnessing of God' is the light by which we 'know the Son', but it is also the light which itself shines in the Son, since 'in his triune intimacy, God is known only by God' (*GL1*, 156–7). With a certain cultural adroitness, this language of the 'interior light' of faith is accompanied also by the more philosophical vocabulary of *Geist*, or spirit, which sets up a kind of continuity between the theological category of a Spirit-filled participation in the divine light which is God's witness in us and the orientation to the transcendental which is an innate property of our own powers. The latter, which is 'the spiritual nature of the creature . . . means participation in the unveiled-ness of all reality which in one way or another must also include the divine reality' (*GL1*, 157).

When he moves from 'the unveiled-ness of all reality' to speak of an 'intuitive knowledge of being', Balthasar again strikes a note which may be unfamiliar to many of his English-speaking readers. If Thomas Aquinas is one of his principal interlocutors at this point, then it is to a great extent in the form which metaphysical analogy took in the Thomist thinkers Erich Przywara and Gustav Siewerth. Their work is associated with a rejection of the modern turn to theological anthropology (as the place in which divine and human meet) in favour of a new articulation of 'cosmic being', as the site of God's disclosure. As such, this modern exploration of the *analogia entis* is in certain respects close to the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, which focuses upon being as a totality and centres in a particular way on the question of why there is something rather than nothing. Heidegger sets the question of being against the background of nothingness, and thereby gives robust expression to what has been one important element in the Christian metaphysical tradition over the centuries. The positing of being, as a unity, against the background of nothingness, establishes a 'strong' reading of being which, in Judaeo-Christian tradition, is linked with the act of creation by a personal Creator (though not for Heidegger).

In this section, in which Balthasar is setting out an intrinsic relation of theology (grace) to philosophy (nature) within the context of his theo-logical aesthetics, he seems implicitly to take Heideggerian existentialism as his model of philosophy as such. Human thought takes place within the space of the unveiled-ness of what is, which is to say that it is grounded in the intrinsic orientation of the human to the 'question of being' which, for Heidegger, is the defining character of human existence. Balthasar's simultaneous recognition of the power of this model and his determination to offer a Christian – and in some ways distinctively Thomist – corrective or supplement to it, is evident, however, in his affirmation that

> whenever the spirit attains to real Being it necessarily touches God, the source and ground of all Being . . . The spirit's horizon is not confined to worldly being (*ens univocum*), but extends to absolute Being (*ens analogum*), and only in this light can it think, will and love; only in this light of Being does it possess language as the power to know and to name existents. (*GL1*, 158)

For Heidegger, 'Being' as 'the locus where all that is existent can become luminous object' always resists being turned into 'something given or brought to a standstill', and remains infinite. Accordingly, it offers to the individual 'existent, thinking man' the possibility of 'a boundless felicity, a final grounding', though one which is accompanied by 'a threat to his whole existence', which springs precisely from its infinity (*GL1*, 158). Balthasar's point here is that a Heideggerian view of Being leaves no place for the individual self, since it stresses throughout the unity and infinity of existence, which we gaze upon vertiginously, as into a groundless abyss. He therefore rejects the Heideggerian accusation that a Christian metaphysics necessarily contracts Being and misses its grandeur by focusing not upon Being as such but rather upon an individual object that exists (notably the incarnate Christ). His point rather is that a Christian metaphysic is the display of the presence of God the Creator within Being itself: 'Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty' (*GL1*, 158). By his appeal to a trinitarian love as the ground of Being, Balthasar contests the Heideggerian principle that the self loses itself in the contemplation of infinite existence, since now 'when Being is confronted as love the threat which infinity poses to finitude vanishes' (*GL1*, 159). God himself has taken this threat upon himself through the Incarnation so that 'the finite spirit's giving of itself into the abyss of this love, because it lives from this same love, is indeed a renunciation of all finite securities – even spiritual ones – but it occurs within that handing over of the self which is free from anxiety regarding its destiny in God' (*GL1*, 159).

Balthasar understands Jesus himself to be the one in whom absolute Being makes its appearance, and in whom, through an act of perception, which is simultaneously theological and aesthetic, the Christian faithful come to the realization that existence is in truth the self-communication of the trinitarian Creator God. Heidegger, or 'philosophy', can only go so far, and a Christian metaphysic is required in order to complete our participation in existence through the realization that we are ourselves redeemed creatures who stand within the transformational beauty of God as it is shown to us in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only that realization secures the true luminosity, or 'glory', of the act of existence. In a way that may be contrary to our expectation, therefore, the themes of aesthetics and metaphysics are intimately intertwined in Balthasar's thinking, and lay the ground both for his account of the self and the world, and for his theology of faith and incarnation.

Balthasar's 'theological aesthetics' stands as an immense work, filled with arresting insights in diverse fields, and yet sustained by a single, powerfully original vision of what he terms 'the focal point', by which we may understand the central, indefinable but nevertheless determinate centre of God's loving self-communication to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The strengths of that system are visible in its comprehensive character, which sets out a new rapprochement between philosophy and faith, art and religion. But it is also its very comprehensiveness which, paradoxically, most serves to locate this

magnum opus within a particular cultural and intellectual domain. In *Seeing the Form* the *Glory of the Lord* begins with a ground-breaking and intoxicating discussion of the principles of theological aesthetics as a new, though also ancient, impulse in Catholic theology. The purpose of the second and third volumes, which set out a discussion of 'clerical' and 'lay' 'theological styles' respectively, is 'to lend to these abstract propositions historical fullness and colour'. Balthasar's motivation at this point has much to do with his prioritization of the Church in its responsive (or what he often calls 'feminine' or 'Marian') aspect. He is concerned to consider doctrines and teaching in terms of their reception; transcendental beauty must be mapped not from above so much as from below. But the discussion of art here is also predicated on the view that art is revelatory or disclosive. In Louis Roberts's phrase, 'all art is religious, and Balthasar sees it as an act of adoration of the doxa of being'.[3] Many might feel today, however, that the Hellenic tradition of art as pleasing and harmonious form has been at least in part superseded by a new canon of artwork which specifically disrupts the conventions of pleasing artistry: Francis Bacon's sketches of the crucifixion are an example of this, or Paul Celan's Holocaust poems written in 'a strangled language' which has passed through 'the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech'.[4] Such works are not tragic in the classical sense, nor are they conventionally beautiful, but they are expressive of immediacy and truth. There is no reason why we should not think of such works of art as having a privileged relation to 'being' (the Hellenic perspective), but the nature of being that would come into view would be very different from that of the classical tradition.

The fourth volume of the *Glory of the Lord* (*In the Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, which is volume III.1 in the German edition) introduces the third section of the work as a whole. Here Balthasar undertakes to examine the metaphysical dimensions of the project with a twofold purpose. The first is that

> if Christian proclamation and theology is not to be restricted to statements about something that occurred historically once and still exists in its after-effects, one thing existing among millions of others, but is in all seriousness to make a claim of absoluteness on everything that is, then Christian proclamation must have its roots both in the historical sphere (only things which exist are real) and also in the metaphysical sphere (only as being is that which exists universal). (*GL4*, 14)

The second is apparent in his inclusion of metaphysics at a point prior to the final section of the work, in which the notion of glory in its full particularity as being at the heart of the divine self-disclosure of biblical revelation is presented. The discussion of beauty in its metaphysical dimensions thus sets up an analogical resonance. This is required since 'if a concept that is fundamental to the Bible [had] no kind of analogy in the general intellectual sphere, and awoke no familiar echo in the heart of man, it would remain absolutely incomprehensible and therefore a matter of indifference' (*GL4*, 14). Balthasar's intention, then, is to establish points of intellectual access to the divine glory which he believes to be beyond definition and to stand 'in its lonely isolation over against all human systems of thought' (*GL4*, 11, 13). But here too there appears a commitment

to a distinctively Hellenic conception of metaphysics. Balthasar strongly links the understanding, or vision, of the true nature of existence with the witness of the Christian life. Indeed, there is a sense in his work that only the Christian community can authentically testify to the nature of existence as such and that mindfulness of the 'unveiledness of being' is intrinsic to the Christian calling. In some degree, Balthasar appears to be using theology in order to establish philosophical positions. Such positions are not universal in their validity, however, but are culturally and historically situated. It may be that for all his brilliant overcoming of Heideggerian metaphysics, Balthasar retained from Heidegger something of the conviction that a certain way of thinking about being is itself redemptive. It is this again that locates him within a particular current of thought which places metaphysics at the centre of human life (the contrast, for instance, with Jewish anti-metaphysical traditions, themselves motivated by scriptural reading, is instructive on this point).

This tendency to emphasize the contemplative dimension within the metaphysical has led to further questions as to how Balthasar's metaphysics relates to theology of action, and to political or social theology in particular. He has been accused of failing to offer a theological ground for political action in the world. Whether political action is an underdeveloped aspect of his thought, as Kevin Mongrain has argued, or whether it is actually fundamentally at odds with the contemplative emphases of his metaphysics, the conclusion we are drawn to here is that the Thomist-Heideggerian metaphysics of the earlier volumes in a sense 'lag behind' the more dynamic and kenotic themes of his later thinking.[5] The rich kenoticism of the *Theo-Drama* shows that Balthasar in no sense lacks a feeling for the dynamic, radically decentred foundation of Christian ethical life, shaped by the Cross; but while the metaphysical tradition which he inhabits finds a place for such radicalism, it does not seem to find its centre in it.

The reader of *The Glory of the Lord* will find in Balthasar's work a fascinating synthesis of philosophy, theology, and holiness of life, in a brilliantly original and fertile appropriation of the traditions of aesthetics. It is a synthesis which both challenges and provokes, and it will richly reward the reader of his voluminous works at every return.

Notes

1 See Peter Casarella, 'The Expression and Form of the Word: Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Sacramentality of Language in Hans Urs Balthasar's Theology', *Renascence* 48.2 (winter, 1996): 111–35. The relevant texts can be found in *TL1*, especially 131–225, and 'Die Sprache Gottes.' *Hans Urs Balthasar Premio Inter-nazionale Paolo VI* (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1984); reprinted in *Skizzen zur Theologie V: Homo Creatus Est* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990).

2 The prioritization of aesthetics as a mode of authentic knowing aligns Balthasar's thought closely with that of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who likewise contested the Kantian marginalization of aesthetics on the grounds that art reveals the truth of the world (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), especially pp. 29–150).

3 Louis Roberts, *The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), p. 28.

4 'Ansprache anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Literaturpreises der freien Hansestadt Bremen', in *Paul Celan. Gesammelte Werke*, volume III (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 186.

5 For this critique of Balthasar, see, for instance, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, 'Theo-Drama and Political Theology', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 25/3 (fall, 1998): 532–52. See also Kevin Mongrain's comments on this article and on the work of Craig Arnold Phillips and Gerard O'Hanlon in his *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002). Thomas Dalzell also offers an interesting assessment of resources for social theology, intersubjectivity, and freedom in his monograph, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), especially pp. 227–92.

11

BEN QUASH

The theo-drama

INTRODUCTION: MOTIVATIONS AND SOURCES

If Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics treats Christian theology under the rubric of *contemplation* (which entails 'seeing the form' of God's self-disclosure), then his theodramatics deals with *action*, both God's and ours. For Balthasar, this transition from contemplation to action in the context of his trilogy has an inherent necessity. But the 'logic' here is not the logic of formal argumentation, rather the logic of Christian existence, as perceived by Balthasar in its most basic patterns.

Motivations

As others have shown in this volume, Balthasar is aiming to write a deeply scholarly theology yet at the same time one fully in touch with lived Christian life – an aim unusual in the modern period. Whilst theology shares with other branches of learning a demand for academic discipline and the full use of the powers of the mind, Balthasar is clear that the subject matter of theology remains, first and last, the God who calls human beings into a more than merely intellectual relationship with him; the God who shapes people for his work; a *personal* God; the living God of the Bible and of faith. Theology cannot claim to need a calm neutrality in treating such subject matter. The theologian stands where apostles and saints have stood; where all Christians stand when they acknowledge themselves to be creatures addressed by the God who made them for himself. To listen to this God is to come to a realization that he has work for each person to do.

In Balthasar's theological world, therefore, contemplation of God is not a final, enrapturing arrival point, in which the created order is left behind, and a blissful *stasis* prevails.[1] On the contrary, Christian contemplation is a stimulus to something further. The value of a person's contemplation of God's self-revealing approach in love is always measured by whether it bears fruit in an existence that is an appropriately active response to that revelation. Such responses are characterized by obedient service of God in lives lived (and often also deaths undergone) for the sake of truth, goodness, love; for the sake of the Church, and thus for the sake of the whole created order (the seeds of whose salvation the Church contains). Contemplation flows into action. In Balthasar's great trilogy, the seven volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* give way to the five volumes of *Theo-Drama* (published between 1973 and 1983) in a way that is intended to correspond to this basic feature of the existential character of Christian life.

The sequence is just what one might expect of a theologian trained as a Jesuit and

steeped in the spirituality of the Ignatian S*piritual Exercises*. This is because the *Exercises* are structured around the movement from contemplation to action. The 'practical purpose' of long and unhurried contemplative immersion in the *Exercises* is the purpose of helping a person 'to find his place in the divine plan'[2] – in other words, helping a person to live in a new way that is conformed to Christ. It was immensely important to Balthasar that Ignatius' spiritual teachings were so geared to practice. The 'immersion' in revelation encouraged by his own theology (*ET1*, 205), like the spirituality of the Ignatian *Exercises*, is fundamentally 'mission'-orientated – 'mission' being, in Balthasar's own words, 'the mystery of the home-coming of one's own freedom to the freedom of God' (*ET4*, 439 translation emended).

So the theodramatics makes a claim about the overwhelmingly dramatic character of the Christian revelation, and the overwhelmingly dramatic response that it demands. It summons academic theology back from desiccated rationalism to a form and a register that are vibrant and forceful (and in touch with lived Christian life). It also represents Balthasar's attempt to recall such Christian life from the self-preoccupied interiority that too often passes itself off as 'spirituality', to a corporate and wholehearted common task. Balthasar writes that a 'too-individualistic idea of contemplation', wherever it is found, will not be fruitful for the Church. Perfection, to be Christian, must 'radiate out' into the active apostolate. Thus the 'theo-drama' is *live performance* in solidarity with others of Christ's all-encompassing mission to the world. It has a fundamentally ecclesial character.

Moreover, to Balthasar's way of thinking it is not only on the human side of the God–creature relationship that dramatic metaphors seem appropriate. The claim that the Christian revelation is dramatic to its very core points in turn to what will be one of his most ambitious claims of all: that God's life itself, as revealed to us, is somehow dramatic. According to Balthasar, it is supremely this that warrants his writing of a 'theological dramatic theory'. He is convinced of the deep suitability of dramatic categories for giving expression to the ways of God. I will return to the theme later, but here remain with Balthasar's own words:

> If by 'aesthetics' we are thinking more of the act of perception or of its 'beautiful' or 'splendid' object, we are succumbing to a static view which cannot do justice to the phenomenon. Aesthetics must abandon itself and go in search of new categories . . . [Thus] it is incumbent on us to create a network of related concepts and images that may serve to make secure, to some extent, the singular divine action in our understanding and speech. (*TD1*, 16–17)

It is in this spirit that the five volumes of *Theo-Drama* undertake to treat virtually all the classic themes of traditional Christian theology. These are the volumes of the trilogy in which his most substantial work on the great Christian doctrines is done. In *Theo-Drama* we find Balthasar's decisive treatments of anthropology (volume II), christology and mariology (volume III), eschatology/soteriology (volume IV), and eschatology/Trinity (volume V). These, taken together, are the matter of the 'theo-drama'.

We have looked at the motivations behind the writing of a 'theological dramatic theory'; what of the sources?

Sources

The patristic sources are dealt with elsewhere in this volume. In the patristic writers Balthasar found 'mystical warmth' and 'rhetorical power',[3] and also no fear of paradox. He found a genuinely prayerful theology, reverent in its attitude. He found an interest in the whole cosmos as it related to Christ. He did not find anything like a historical-critical reductionism where the Bible was concerned. He found an openness to the full dimensions of God's revelation. He found passion in the doing of theology. Above all, he found a sense of God's dynamism and freedom – especially in the work of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. In all this, he was inspired by the theologians of the patristic *ressourcement* (sometimes described as the *nouvelle théologie*), Henri de Lubac in particular.

But there were other sources too, and each in its way had something dramatic to contribute to the project, acting as a decisive reinforcement of Balthasar's choice of dramatic categories and metaphors. Karl Barth's great appeal for Balthasar can in large part be ascribed to the dramatic character of his theology. According to Barth, God acts in radical freedom, and is known in his acts. The extent to which Barth's theology tried to let the Bible speak in its own terms is a mark of his concern to show that God is known better in narrated interaction than in abstraction from such narratives. His theology is a theology of divine–human encounter. Adrienne von Speyr, though she seems often to inhabit a different theological universe from Barth, nonetheless shares with him this same sense of the strange, transformative, and all-demanding impact of God's self-disclosure on the believer. The vividness of the biblical witness informing Barth's theology at every turn has an analogy in the vividness of Adrienne's visions (these too, in many cases, scripturally inspired).

Then there are two sources which stand in an interesting relationship to one another. One is (not surprisingly) the literary inheritance of Europe – especially, perhaps, that of Germany, but incorporating the drama of the ancient Greeks, the literature of England, France, Spain, and Russia, and much else besides, right into the twentieth century. Then, as I have already noted, there is the spiritual or devotional tradition of the Christian West – and in particular, as we have seen, the training that Balthasar received in the Ignatian tradition.

How do these two sources – the literary and the devotional – interrelate? It is in volume I that the literary material gets its most substantial treatment. In particular, in that volume, Balthasar gives time to the playwrights Franz Grillparzer and Friedrich Hebbel, to the modernists of the twentieth century, Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Thornton Wilder, and Luigi Pirandello in the modern period (tracing a story in which dramatists struggle increasingly with the loss of belief in any ultimate meaning for the immanent action they portray), and to his beloved Pedro Calderón de la Barca in an earlier time. He readily acknowledges the Greeks and Shakespeare as high points of dramatic art, and devotes attention to them too. But one of the surprises that awaits a first-time reader of *Theo-Drama* is how, once the introductory volume is out of the way, Balthasar makes very little reference indeed to actual playwrights or plays. This prompts

the question of how integral they are in actual fact to his 'dramatic' conception of divine revelation and the Christian life. The answer is: not very. While Balthasar does seem to intend to draw on theatrical patterns of encounter as a means of interpreting Christianity, the actual details of his exposition do not pay much attention to literary dramatic form *per se*. For example, his central christological tract (volume III) scarcely ever refers back to the dramatic theory adumbrated in the first volume. Volume I begins to seem more like a warm-up exercise – apologetic in intent and offering fresh perspectives from which to understand what is going on in the Christian revelation, while not integrating these perspectives very deeply with the subject matter of the doctrines themselves. But if the details of the exposition do not seem to draw on dramatic theory very much, they certainly *are* informed by a whole succession of themes that arise in the practice of Christian life in the Church (the devotional tradition): profound meditation on the enactment of God's love in Christ, and the enactment of the Church's response as archetype of the human calling to free and loving relationship with God.[4] These are the sorts of insights more often associated with the spiritual life. It is these insights, rather than anything one would be likely to encounter in a theatre, that take on a shaping role in Balthasar's portrayal of the goodness of the divine loving in terms of acts and events rather than static states of being – acts and events requiring a responsive self-giving on the part of the creature.

To recognize the indebtedness of Balthasar's theology to the cadences and themes of classical traditions of prayer and devotion (and especially Ignatian ones) is a means to a fuller appreciation of what is actually going on in *Theo-Drama*. The interpenetration of spirituality and thought is real and fruitful in his case – perhaps more fruitful than his exegesis of literary texts.[5]

THEODRAMATIC DOCTRINES

Having established the importance of understanding Balthasar's 'dramatics' against the background of spiritual as well as literary and theatrical traditions, in the next section of this chapter I will identify some of the key effects that his choice of dramatic categories has on various traditional *loci* of Christian doctrine. Though all to varying degrees receive a distinctive recasting when expressed in Balthasar's theodramatic framework, some particularly stand out for the way that unusual possibilities are opened up in them when they are 'theodramatized'. Because this chapter cannot examine all the doctrines that *Theo-Drama* deals with in its five volumes, it will highlight briefly what may be amongst the most significant: the treatment of created freedom, the theology of the Incarnation (the 'hypostatic union'), and Balthasar's treatment of the descent into hell. Each of these opens onto Balthasar's doctrine of the Trinity, and we will look at his trinitarianism in each case, and especially in relation to the hypostatic union.

Creaturely freedom

It may seem odd to begin this section with an examination of creaturely freedom.

Traditional dogmatics tends to begin with the doctrine of God. But in beginning here, we mirror the sequence of *Theo-Drama*, which moves from mystical or existential knowledge of God to reflections on God's being. Balthasar's doctrine of God owes a large debt to 'those women and men who have mystically entered *within* the life of Christ'[6] and there come to know their true freedom. In any case, for Balthasar, discussion of creaturely freedom is always already witness to God's prior initiative in making such freedom possible, so too rigid a division of the areas of discussion makes no sense to him.

I stated earlier that, generally speaking, Balthasar's work on the 'phenomena' of literary drama drops away after the Prolegomena to *Theo-Drama* has been left behind. The treatment Balthasar gives to the question of creaturely freedom is the main exception to this general point; for central to Balthasar's take on literary drama is his belief that it consistently displays a tension between finitude and transcendence – a tension that is fundamental to human existence in the world, and especially to the issue of how contingent human creatures can be said to act in freedom. The finitude of human life has different aspects (all of which drama conveys): the physical constraints of space and time that human lives inhabit; the specificity of relationships that a person is able to form; the horizons that circumscribe a human being's capacity to make sense of the world. *Theo-Drama*'s first volume is especially good at developing these themes through reflections on death, on the play of 'roles' in human social interaction (particularly the way that roles never fully express a person's being), on the way that the interpretations and initiatives of particular individuals are always tempered and changed by their encounter with the interpretations and initiatives of others (see Balthasar's fruitful discussion of the interaction of Author, Actor, and Director in *TD1*, 268–305, which he will later use, with a considerable amount of careful hedging, as analogues to Father, Son, and Spirit). All drama, for Balthasar, brings these themes to light; all drama is situated within specific and finite 'horizons', and prompts reflections and judgements against the background of such horizons; no drama can pretend it does not set up *some* sort of horizon of meaning or interpretation against which particular actions can be judged, and this context of judgement will always also have to take account of other people's activities and perceptions. When Balthasar comes to his treatment of freedom in volume II, these considerations remain very much to the fore. There is nothing absolute about human freedom *per se*; it is finite.

But what is distinctive about the divine drama unveiled in the Christian revelation? Here a horizon of transcendent or 'absolute' meaning is set up beyond all horizons of relative meaning, and an action of transcendent or 'absolute' significance is made distinct from all actions of relative significance, and a form of transcendent or 'absolute' relationship is made possible by contrast with all transitory or imperfect or incidental relationships. Finally, and in a way that unites the literary material with the Ignatian, transcendent or 'absolute' *missions* are offered to human beings in contrast to their various partial *roles*. The absoluteness of such missions consists in the fact that they contain the real meaning of each person's personhood without residue; they represent

who each person really is for God.

Balthasar asserts that the world's drama has divine as well as creaturely aspects to it and that the two aspects need not be in competition with one another. He insists that the tension between finitude and transcendence will be disclosed as unreal for human 'actors' when their actions are transfigured by Christian obedience. The finitude of creaturely freedom need not be obliterated in the face of God's transcendent freedom; on the contrary, it can find its place in relationship with it, and so take on its own non-arbitrary significance whilst still remaining finite. In Balthasar's vision, 'infinite freedom *accompanies* man . . . in God's plan for the world', rather than bypassing his particularity and existence-in-time (*TD2*, 282). The trinitarian freedom of God, who is personal and, above all, *loving*, constitutes creatures who are precious to him, and with whom he can interrelate. This gives them their own freedom, which can be sacramental of God's freedom. The perfectly abundant divine life, being the condition of the extended, temporal, interaction of creatures, will not negate but can (in a way one cannot fully get the measure of) 'contain' and even enhance their freedom. Creaturely freedom will best respond to this by making itself available for a God-given mission, thereby acting in a way that is appropriately orientated to that greatest horizon of meaning, the eschatological. Missions accomplish a 'participation' in God (which is to say, in the 'movement' of God's being) in which personhood is not swallowed up but enhanced and honoured.

The dramatic choice of one's mission properly arises from a deep contemplation of the life of the Lord (and those conformed to him: the saints), and making such a choice does, of course, require training. For Balthasar it is once again the Ignatian *Exercises* that show the one thing needful in this respect – they show it so well, in fact, that he regards the *Exercises* as 'the practical school of holiness for all the orders', and not just the Jesuits. What they offer a schooling in is '*indiferencia*': indifference, which is to say, that disponibility which is humbly ready to serve the Lord as his 'handmaid'. This is the highest example of an attitude which modulates through every period of history, from the *apatheia* of the Hellenistic world and the early Church Fathers, to Benedictine and Franciscan humility, to the purgation and abandonment of the Rhineland mystics, and then, in the modern guises of the Schillerian 'middle state', of the artist, and in the indifference of Hegel's 'first class' (who exemplify the way that individual freedoms in the context of the State can become the medium of a far greater collective possibility in the drama of the Spirit: uniting subjective wills and objective structures in a life lived freely and corporately). Every age has had its insights about how the human creature is to find its true value. But the place where these insights receive their clear and archetypal expression is in the attitude of Mary – for Balthasar, the holder of the most significant mission of all in the theodrama. (Note how he works out so much of his theological anthropology in Marian categories, especially in *TD3*, *passim*.) Hers was a perfect 'disponibility', a perfect receptivity through which she was made available for God's purposes, and the true Church (which Balthasar likes to describe as 'Mary-Ecclesia' because of its conformity to Mary's attitude) is the place where her disposition remains

alive and fruitful.

The hypostatic union and the trinitarian life

In relation to some of the classical doctrines of the Christian faith, Balthasar's emphasis on event, or dramatic action, enables remarkable new approaches. This is true of that christological doctrine normally so laden with the language of 'natures' or 'essences': the doctrine of the hypostatic union. Balthasar's fruitful move, here, is not to play with pictures of a union of two diverse substances, in which the problem (crudely speaking) is how to understand what sort of glue can stick such different sorts of stuff together. Rather, he *dramatizes* the hypostatic union.

Balthasar's point, in relation to the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, is that there is an unbroken unity between the internal *processio* of the Son within the Trinity and the economic *missio* of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no 'break' between them. They are a single movement. This is because the humanity of Jesus is made wholly and unresistingly available to the will of the Father, so can wholly 'lend itself' to the movement of the Word/Son. This movement becomes legible in the creaturely realm as obedience (but also as praise, love, etc.). It is fundamentally the 'eucharistic' self-offering of the Son to the Father, having first received all things from him.

Jesus Christ's mission is the economic revelation of a decision freely made in concert by the whole Trinity. Balthasar believes that in his incarnate state Jesus knows (though initially only in a latent way) of his identity as the Son of God, but holds that he does not know the details of what the Father through the Spirit will set before him from moment to moment for the fulfilment of his mission. Jesus is aware of the formal scope of his mission, but uncertain of its content. Instead, he utterly abandons himself to the Father who guides him by the Spirit and in whom he has complete trust. He acts in a certain 'economic ignorance'. Balthasar writes that 'in not anticipating the hour . . . he formally embraces the totality of the world that is to be reconciled, whereas the changing details of the Passion render this formal embrace concrete in the most diverse ways' (*TD4*, 234). But for just this reason we can ascribe obedience and faith to him, and the perfection of his obedience (dependent as it is to some extent upon 'not-knowing') is, paradoxically, one of the best demonstrations of his divine character as the 'One Sent' – receiving himself wholly from the Father through the Spirit. Jesus' apparently passive 'letting-things-happen' is in fact the 'superaction' of his obedience, 'in which he is at one with a demand that goes beyond all limits, a demand that could only be made of *him*' (*TD5*, 237).

In Jesus Christ's attitude of total, free availability, we also glimpse the utter perichoretic self-donation (and simultaneous mutual constitution) of the trinitarian Persons in the perfection of their love. The analogy between human obedience and trinitarian self-donation must be disciplined by the principle of immeasurable dissimilarity between creature and Creator, human and divine; but there is nevertheless a correspondence between the two things when viewed in Christ. Acknowledging the risks of undisciplined trinitarian speculation, Balthasar holds fast to what for him is the only

legitimate 'order of knowing' – namely one that roots itself in the events and actions of Jesus' life, and thinks outwards from those. But what he extrapolates from those is a radically dramatic picture of the complete mutual outpouring of the Persons of the Trinity, without reserve. Even the Father surrenders himself without remainder, imparting to the Son all that is his, yet *because* this handing over is complete and mutual (*because* the Son offers everything back to the Father), the whole divine life remains in complete, dynamic perfection. The self-bestowal of the Persons one to another is simultaneously their self-constitution in an eternal triune event of love.

Thus Balthasar has taken a theological model with a long pedigree – a kenotic interpretation of the second Person of the Trinity in the economy of salvation – and has extended it to apply to all three Persons of the Trinity in the differentiated unity of their immanent life. The total 'kenosis' of each and the thankful ('eucharistic') return to each of himself by the others becomes the ground of trinitarian unity, being, and love. Here again we see Balthasar's characteristic transposition of ontology into more dramatic or existential terms. God's 'nature' is something like (that is, analogous to) thanksgiving, something like generosity, something like obedience, something like sacrifice, something like never-ending surprised receipt of self from others, but only as exceeding all that we know as creaturely thanksgiving, generosity, obedience, sacrifice, and surprise. Indeed we only know of these moments in our biological, ethical, and interpersonal lives because they come from God and testify to his creative reality.

As noted before, patristic inspiration is at work in the background here. Maximus the Confessor had prepared the ground for Balthasar's elevation of existence to the level of a special mode of being (perhaps even the most divine mode), in order to overcome the difficulties with the language of essence (see *CL*, 56–73). Gregory of Nyssa had argued for the suitability of dynamic categories for description of the immanent life of God (*TD5*, 77).

His galvanized ontology of the divine life can lead him to suggest that it is not only love which has a heavenly form that can tentatively (analogically) be attributed to the trinitarian Persons, but that faith and hope have such a heavenly form too. Human experiences of faith and hope have their ana-logical counterparts in the way that the Persons of the Trinity are eternally oriented to one another in anticipation while eternally having this mutual anticipation met, rewarded, and exceeded in the response of the others. So, for example, Balthasar writes:

> If . . . we consider faith from God's perspective, faith as it exists in God, it is in harmony with 'irrefragable knowledge' but is not swallowed up by it, because the love that grants freedom to the other always offers him something 'that transcends the capacities of knowing', something that has an utterly unique origin, springing from the 'hidden depths of the one and communicated to the hidden depths of the other'. (*TD5*, 97)

Joining in with the life of the Trinity (its 'essence' as super-love, super-hope, super-faith) is a real possibility for the creature who is open to self-donation and self-receipt. The possibility that the trinitarian life establishes in the creature is the possibility of living in the 'space' that is made for oneself by others (principally, of course, by Christ), and of

making space for others in oneself. The effect of such a mode of life is to take the human person in his defensiveness and self-enclosure, and to set him in motion towards God and others: such a person 'feels himself breaking out of his own private world' (*P*, 104).

Because Balthasar establishes this radical mutual exchange as an *eternal and constitutive part of God's being*, he distances himself from the idea that God is entangled in world process. But, on the other hand, for the very reason that God's eternal being consists of such *radical exchange*, he distances himself from the danger of a 'calmly philosophical' presentation of God's impassibility as a kind of lofty immobility.

The *descensus*

Along with the Cross and Resurrection, it is Christ's descent into hell that is the heart of the drama as Balthasar sees it. If the scope or horizon of the drama is the largest possible, its innermost core is manifest in this intense event.

Part of what Balthasar achieves by his theology of the *descensus* is a dramatic display of what might on the surface seem a rather abstract conceptual affirmation in Christian doctrine: the oneness of God. Christian monotheism asserts that everything has its origin and end in God, and that nothing is, so to speak, 'outside' God. There are not two (or more) worldconstituting principles as in dualist philosophies, and no existing thing is without a relation to its single source.

In St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, an evocation of this 'oneness' flows into what might superficially seem to be a digression on Jesus' 'ascent' and 'descent' to the furthest reaches of the creation:

> There is . . . one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' Now when it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things. (Ephesians 4:6–10)

In fact this can be read as being far from a digression – rather, it is a dramatic presentation of just the 'oneness' referred to immediately beforehand in Ephesians 4:1–5. The one God from whom nothing is ultimately alien or separable is the same God who, fully present in Christ, can ascend and descend to the furthest reaches of the created order. Nothing is outside his reach; nothing is 'beyond' him. Balthasar's theology of the descent into hell is, in a sense, an extended meditation on this idea of Christ's divine journey to the outer limit of all that constitutes the creaturely realm. Even the very furthest outmarker of human experience is bounded by Christ, who is the one Son of the one Father in the one Spirit. In this God, all things are made and held.

By means of his astonishing revival and exploration of a doctrine almost wholly ignored in modern theology, Balthasar also demonstrates the sheer costliness of Christ's salvific work, and the potential consequences of human sinfulness. He wants the extremity of the descent to highlight the fact that 'infinite and eternal matters [are] truly

at stake' in Christ's Passion.[7] One of the ways he does this is by departing very markedly from traditional representations of hell in his adaptation of the doctrine. The keynote is not a triumphal flurry of activity: tearing down the gates, beating up the devil, hauling out the captives. Christ enters the very state of deadness – *sinking, not striding*, to the place of the dead. Balthasar intends here an appropriately radical account of the degree of Christ's identification with sinful humanity – in this respect, it has parallels with Barth's treatment of 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country'.[8] He also pursues, with relentless determination, the logic of his theology of the trinitarian relations to its conclusion. In the passivity of his entry into the state of being dead, Christ is carried into a terrible abyss by the momentum of his perfect obedience, his complete self-abandonment to the Father in love. It is here above all that we see how he has genuinely handed *everything* over to the Father. This is both the highest point of fulfilment of his mission, and his deepest entry into darkness.

How is this salvific? Balthasar's introduction to his main discussion of soteriology in volume IV deliberately eschews any facile reduction of Christ's saving work to one explanatory theory or metaphoric image. Here, in this pursuit of the meaning of the Cross into the dark space of Holy Saturday, we see him articulating a doctrine of salvation that has both substitutionary (or representative), and participatory aspects. Christ's obedience has to lead him on this particular path (into hell) because of the condition of sin that prevails after the Fall, a negative condition of distance-as-alienation which has overtaken and vitiated the positive condition of distance-as-difference that properly holds between Creator and creature. No one other than Christ can traverse the abyss that sin has opened up. Christ does it *for us*, thus demonstrating the limitless reach of the divine love ('because otherwise there would always have been some matter that would not let itself be used for the exposition of God'; *ET3*, 122).

But having done this, a possibility is opened up for the human creature to enter *into* the movement of Christ's mission (the 'acting area'). The believer can be brought right into the heart of the drama that Christ acts out in history; the 'filial dynamic' of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection becomes shareable. This is what traditional theological language calls becoming united with Christ, or being part of his body, and it offers the possibility of participating in something of the relational character of the divine Persons. By handing oneself over, one can be drawn into God's own mutuality, exchange, and love: a wholly new and liberating possibility for the human creature.

The mystery of hell thus opens, again, onto the inner reality of God. We see in his treatment of this mystery a quintessential example of Balthasar's conviction that a theodramatic approach could only be good for Christian doctrine. Balthasar's approach enables him to bring suitable vividness not only to his Christian monotheism, but to the assertion that God's entire world drama is concentrated in Christ's action on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day: 'this is the theo-drama into which the world *and* God have their ultimate input; here absolute freedom enters into created freedom, interacts with created freedom and acts *as* created freedom . . . This is the climax and the turning point of the theo-drama' (*TD4*, 318).

CONCLUSION

Theo-Drama is the heart of Balthasar's huge theological trilogy; the central panel of the triptych. It displays a number of impressive features. To an important extent it continues *The Glory of the Lord*'s sustained argument for the importance of attending to concrete reality and resisting the abstractions of universalizing philosophical theories. Balthasar lamented the fact that sightless concepts have taken the place of vision-inducing and contemplation-worthy images (*GL1*, 390, citing Romano Guardini). He thought that much philosophical thought in the post-Enlightenment period had been inattentive to the revelatory power of the particular in its haste to achieve clear and distinct ideas with a universal application. This universalizing bent for him could not be Christian: it was not 'the metaphysics of the saints'.

But *Theo-Drama* also goes a good deal beyond *The Glory of the Lord*. For Balthasar, that which is revealed to us about God in Christ is not 'a luminous icon, crystallised into immobile perfection. It is the beauty of an action. It shows the dramatic movement within the Trinity to us.'[9] It is only because the trinitarian life has such inescapably dramatic features that our relationship to that life is so singularly well-expressed in the terms which drama offers. Our active relation to God comes to be by *God's* action; that action is the 'good' in which we, too, are permitted to share by our actions. As Balthasar puts it:

> The divine ground actually approaches us . . . and it challenges us to respond. And although this unique phenomenon was described [in *The Glory of the Lord*] in terms of 'glory', it was increasingly clear from the outset that it withdrew farther and farther away from any merely contemplative gaze and hence could not be translated into any neutral truth or wisdom that can be 'taught'. (*TD1*, 16; translation emended)

This is a vital statement of what Balthasar understands his concern with dramatic theory to be aiming at: not a concern with the static, with formal or timeless coherences or relations. Not for him a treatise on the divine perfections which suppresses the fact that God's life is a 'super-action'. God's is the divine dynamism of a love utterly possessed because utterly donated, and most manifestly so on the Cross.

What issues from this contemplative encounter with the awesome God? A dynamism at the heart of creation is generated (a dynamism played out in history). In arguing as he does that the dynamism is only adequately construed as a divine–human *drama*, Balthasar borrows crucial categories from Hegel's *Aesthetics* ('drama' as a genre distinct from 'epic' and 'lyric', though incorporating aspects of both).[10] These categories serve to illustrate what he intends: drama is not merely the perspective of immediate feeling and individual association (that is, the 'lyric' world, which in art results in 'a romanticism remote from reality' and in the Church produces a pious but emptily 'affective' theology); nor is it an unruffled perspective on the objectively given (that is, the 'epic' world, which in art results in a 'modern realism devoid of awe and reverence', and in the Church produces 'scientific' theology which is increasingly divorced from prayer and so loses 'the accent and tone with which one should speak of what is holy', *ET1*, 208). Drama breaks out when the *subject matter* of theology (the epic component) reaches out

and claims the self-involved (lyric) person. All of a sudden, revelation is demonstrated not to be a mere set of past events, but a present ferment. All of a sudden, it becomes apparent that one can have no real idea of the 'truth' of this revelation until one is caught up in it, relinquishing one's claim to neutrality. 'The saints', as Balthasar observes, 'have always been on guard against such an attitude [of pseudo-neutrality], and immersed themselves in the actual events of revelation' (*ET1*, 205).

Any reader of Balthasar's book on Barth, of his *A Theology of History*, of *Mysterium Paschale*, or of his treatment of the New Testament in the final volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, will realize that his attraction to a dramatic presentation of Christian themes does not come suddenly out of nowhere. A nascent theodramatics is easy to discern in these works. Nonetheless, *Theo-Drama* is the most elaborated and mature staging, as it were, of Balthasar's dogmatics, and the most rewarding locus for an examination of what animates his theological work. It is undertaken with powerful conviction. Like the *Spiritual Exercises* of his beloved Ignatius, Balthasar has attempted in *Theo-Drama* to create something distinctive and challenging. The *Exercises* were, in their time, a genre of their own: neither a scholastic text nor straightforwardly a spiritual treatise. The work was 'a manual with the practical purpose of helping a man to save his soul and find his place in the divine plan'.[11] In *Theo-Drama*, where Balthasar's legacy is at its richest, his own theology comes closest to doing the same.[12]

Notes

1 This is a point well made in Mark McIntosh's book *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, second edn, 2000).

2 Philip Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola* (London: Collins, 1990), p. 41.

3 Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: a Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), p. xv.

4 This case for the rootedness of Balthasar's work in the traditions and practices of a certain sort of spirituality is made very effectively by Mark McIntosh in *Christology from Within*, and I am indebted to him in this section of the chapter, particularly with regard to the relation of volume I of *Theo-Drama* to the volumes that succeed it.

5 But for a treatment of Balthasar's literary criticism on its own terms – an assessment that differs considerably from that taken here – see chapter 15 in this volume, which is devoted to this aspect of Balthasar's work.

6 McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, p. 2.

7 Ibid., p. 47.

8 For more on this see Ben Quash, 'Karl Barth und Hans Urs von Balthasar im Exil ihres Herkunftslandes', in *Theologen im Exil – Theologie des Exils*, ed. Wolf-Friedrich Schïufele and Markus Vinzent (Texts and Studies in the History of Theology; Mandelbachtal: Cicero, 2001).

9 Francesca Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: a Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), p. 146.

10 For more on this distinction between the genres, see Ben Quash, 'Drama and the Ends of Modernity', in *BEM*, 139–71, especially 141–54.

11 Caraman, *Ignatius Loyola*, p. 41.

12 I am indebted to Nick Adams for his constructive comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

12

AIDAN NICHOLS

The theo-logic

INTRODUCTION

When Hans Urs von Balthasar set out in 1947 to write what would later become in 1985 the first volume of the *Theologik*, he was already convinced that Jesus Christ was the heart of the world. Historically, the Jesuit order (Society of Jesus), to which he belonged at the time, had often been linked with devotion to Jesus' Sacred Heart. But long before the Second Vatican Council this devotion had come under attack for its lachrymose sentimentality. So in *Heart of the World* (first published in German in 1945), Balthasar had tried to give more tough-minded consideration than was usual to that spiritual theme. Moreover, he realized that one could not flesh out the claim that Jesus Christ was the midpoint of being without a thoroughgoing investigation into the relations of christology with *ontology*, the study of being, the exploration of reality in its fundamental pith, shape, direction.

Normally speaking, an 'ontological christology' is simply an investigation of the reality of Christ as one personal being inhabiting two natures, divine and human, and accepting their union in himself. It is a christology that takes with full metaphysical seriousness the affirmation of the Council of Chalcedon about Christ's two-in-one make-up, and tries to do it philosophical justice. But theologians who wanted to show how Christ was the world's heart could not be content with an ontological christology of that restricted, though necessary, kind. They would need to show how Jesus Christ relates to the whole range of being in its total cosmic sweep, in all its dimensions and depth.

This enterprise had patristic and medieval precedent. One thinks especially of the seventh-century Greek theologian Maximus the Confessor, on whom Balthasar had produced a study with precisely this message (*CL*). But in the modern period it was amazingly bold. Balthasar was, however, well placed to achieve it. In addition to his Jesuit formation in scholastic philosophy, he had behind him the years of study of the German philosophical tradition attested in what he wryly called his 'giant-child', *Apocalypse of the German Soul*. Along with the other representatives of the *nouvelle théologie*, he had long been convinced that the Christian practice of philosophy works best when revelation is allowed to fructify rational thinking (for, after all, the world is not pure nature, but nature acted on by grace).[1] He had thoroughly absorbed the thought of the one contemporary figure likely to be of most help with his project: this was his fellow-Jesuit Erich Przywara (pronounced Sh'vara), whose creative transformation of scholastic metaphysics was intended, among other things, to make it more useful to

doctrinal theology.[2]

The eventual title for his overall project would come from G. W. F. Hegel's thought, considered as a synthesis of Realism and Idealism ('Thing must become think'), an enquiry into the real as found in knowing. Just as Hegel's *Logic* is the Swabian philosopher's ontology, so Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* will be the Swiss theologian's, and with good reason, for it is through the Logos and his Spirit that all things are made and re-made. Meanwhile, each individual volume would include in its title the word 'truth'. Being, when known, *is* truth, and the ultimate condition of possibility for this lies in the fact that the truth of God is its measure.

VOLUME I: TRUTH OF THE WORLD

The first volume of the eventual *Theologik* saw the light of day in 1947, under the title *Wahrheit: Wahrheit der Welt*. Offering the reading public an overview of his work in 1955, Balthasar gave as its purpose 'to open philosophical access to the specifically Christian understanding of truth' (*MW*, 24). For once, he did not approach the matter in a historical frame of mind. (Aquinas is the only thinker who is personally named.) Launched on an adventure of constructive philosophizing, Balthasar wanted to present truth in two interrelated guises. He will consider truth *both* in its appearance to subjects (in this perspective *Wahrheit* is a phenomenological account of reality) *and* in its undergirding of all such appearing (thus the book also goes beyond phenomenological description to become ontology in the proper sense of that word).[3] We know things as they *appear* to us, but in this appearing it is *really they* that make themselves known.

And yet the work's aim is not fully grasped until its ultimately *theological* purpose is apprehended. The aspects of truth it covers converge on the covenant of shared knowledge and love made in the Incarnation, when an infinite truth took on finite form, and on the consequent participation of human beings in the mystery of the trinitarian life, where the truth sets them finally free. The second and third volumes of *Theologik*, 'Truth of the Son' and 'Truth of the Spirit', will, in their respective ways, bring this out, drawing as they do so on the resources which by then Balthasar had already taken up in *Herrlichkeit* and *Theodramatik*. The humble conceptual building blocks put in place in *Wahrheit* were also necessary for the finished edifice.

Theologik I (for that is how *Wahrheit* would be retitled on its reissue in 1985) has, therefore, its own irreplaceable role to play in the trilogy of theological logic, aesthetics, dramatics. It must show how it is not unthinkable for divine truth to come to expression in its creaturely counterpart. That is the main burden of the new introduction Balthasar wrote for its republishing as an integral member of this tripartite project (*TL1*, 7–22).

Turning to the main body of the work,[4] we are speedily introduced to the 'transcendental' properties of being: qualities which inform the natures of things without ever being coterminous with them. Among these properties must be accounted first and foremost *the true*, since, in the absence of that primary engagement with reality which the language of truth denotes, nothing further can usefully be said. Hot on the heels of

truth, though, come the beautiful and the good – the key concepts of, respectively, the aesthetics and the dramatics; for, as Balthasar aims to show, the transcendental properties of being are never found alone. No reality capable of fructifying the human mind in its entry there will turn out to be a stranger to beauty and goodness (the question of evil is one, precisely, of the *absence* of being, evil is ontological *falseness*). In a metaphor taken from the classical theologies of the Holy Trinity, this trio of properties is engaged in a perpetual circuminsession, just as Father, Son, and Spirit mutually inhabit each other in the endless communion of the divine life. Among other things, the metaphor stakes out Balthasar's claim that the trilogy, his literary masterpiece, makes up a complex whole. It is a differentiated unity in which the truth of divine agency (the logic) emerges as endlessly enchanting (the aesthetics), thus signalling that it will be the way through to the supreme good (the dramatics).

Of course, the theme of the reciprocal indwelling of the transcendentals speaks of more than a book (or, rather, a series). As Balthasar will aim to show, all finite being is 'measured' being. That is, as an effect of a creative act, finite being is dependent on, and participates in, a being that is 'unmeasured', sovereign, and self-bestowing. The transcendentals point to the divine Source of being where truth, beauty, and goodness coincide.

Granted that real theology is always of the *triune* God, one can still write a christology, even though it is only the second Person who is Christ – so long, that is, as one recalls the way each Person co-involves the others. (Christ is always, for Balthasar, the '*trinitarian* Son'.) So likewise in metaphysics one can write a treatise on truth, a single transcendental, so long as one recalls how each of these three properties (truth, beauty, goodness) implies the other two. In so doing, Balthasar focuses on four aspects of truth. Schematically these are: truth as nature, truth as freedom, truth as mystery, and truth as participation. Under these four headings Balthasar will outline an entire metaphysic, marrying scholastic thought to classical German philosophy and throwing light on everything – from the way a plant inhabits its environment to human truth's openness to the truth of God – as it does so.

Balthasar discusses his basic concept of truth under the heading of *truth as nature*. It turns out to combine the Hellenic notion of truth as unveiled-ness or disclosure: in Greek, *aletheia* (hence, truth as – in the widest possible sense – revelation) with the Hebraic concept of truth as fidelity: in Hebrew, *emeth* (in this context, faithfulness to what may be disclosed). Both features of the concept, especially when taken in tandem, ensure that central to Balthasar's treatment of truth as nature will be the relation between subject and object. That is a perennial *topos* in philosophy, of course, but one that acquires a fresh look in these pages from the way it is introduced. Balthasar is enough of a Latin scholastic to want to insist that our knowledge is always measured by the sheer independent reality of things. But he is also enough of a classical Germanist to maintain with equal vigour that subjectivity is selfdetermining and creative. His resolution of the resultant *aporia* (impasse) follows from the foundational idea of truth with which he began: authentic knowledge is as receptive to unveiling as it is spontaneous in its engaging

fidelity. It is hospitality to the strange truth that, once welcomed, expands in finding itself at home.

What this comes down to is that *things, when understood, become more fully themselves*. Balthasar argues that the final explanation of this lies in their constitution as intelligible by the divine mind, and he holds that in our awareness of their primordial 'measuring' a basic communication between God and ourselves is already established.

The issue of *truth as freedom* was inescapable against both the German philosophical and the biblical background. The power of self-manifestation is an echo of the divine freedom, even when, as with sub-spiritual beings, the 'intimacy' a thing has is limited, or even minimal. Still, to become an object of knowledge to others, to whatever degree, is a sharing of self, and something of a service. Throughout the universe of being, Balthasar hears echoes, faint or otherwise, of the *Hingabe* (self-surrender) that is the crux of the triune life. He may seem to over-moralize the life of insect or beast. But for Balthasar the contrast of such creatures with man lies not in any lack of self-communication on the part of the former but in the absence among them of the power to *witness*. Witness is self-communication taken onto a new level.

But the will to self-communication on the part of the object would be fruitless without a corresponding will to self-opening on the part of the subject. It is only through the subject's freedom that the object can achieve its potential there. True knowledge is never without an element of love. Love is generous enough to admit every truth whatever its provenance. It is also clear-sighted enough to establish a hierarchy among the truths it knows. Above all, it can distinguish between a more comprehensive truth and one that is only included within a wider whole. All that is highly pertinent to a divine revelation (in Israel, Christ, the Church, and in their perspective, history and the cosmos) than which no greater truth can be conceived.

What of *truth as mystery*? Actually, Balthasar has touched on it already. In expounding aspects of truth, he has been advancing a general ontology of the real. Thus, for example, in illustrating the object–subject relation, he considered how the world is a sign system with a meaning beyond itself (in particular respects; but why not, then, as a whole?). Again, in discussing freedom, he pondered the way in which essence and existence, those twin terms of all fundamental ontology, *what* something is and *that* it is, point to their 'common mystery', which is *being*. Something's essence, seen as its proper way of being, is more than what, at any given point, it actually is. (A thing strives for fullness of its own kind of life.) And something's existence is not just brute fact, but depends on the victory, in its inmost constitution, of being over non-being. Now, however, Balthasar will be dealing with truth as mystery in so many words.

In a world of images, being comes to be interpreted by us. Its approach is delicate, as such errors as phenomenalism warn us. There is a 'kenotic', self-emptying side to its appearance, a distant reflection, Balthasar thinks, of the self-emptying of the divine Logos, in the manger at Bethlehem, his growth to maturity in Nazareth, his ministry in Galilee, and on the Cross. This often happens beautifully, for beauty is the power of expressive truth to radiate out and captivate. Balthasar employs the Aristotelian-Thomist

philosophy of mind as 'abstractive' in order to show how our concepts are formed on this basis.

But his analysis is in the service of a claim more distinctively his own. Through images, by way of concepts, the essences of things, which are indeed *manners* of being, stand revealed. But by the same token – how impossible an *immediate* grasp of the real is! – this mediation brings home to us the range and depth of what is denominated by 'being' at large. In human language, the environing world of images takes on a new role as a repertoire of forms that can be drawn on for the purposes of communication between human beings. By maximizing the possibilities not only of faithful but also of deceitful presentation of the world, language hardly eliminates mystery. What it does do is make us attend to the importance of intersubjectivity, of dialogue. Personal perspectives are enriching – but each must be co-ordinated with the rest in the interests of gaining the largest view. Not, however, that this will ever, after the style of Hegelianism, abolish the point of the personal. If anything, it shows the need for a communion of saints.

The way in which, along these lines, the personal resists reductive analysis indicates, once again, the mystery of being. Notably, it insinuates the 'giftedness' of existence, its 'groundlessness' when seen purely in terms of the finite order. And this cries out for a response of gratitude from us. Ontology thus calls out for something like – shall we term it? – *faith*.

Judging by its trace in the contingent order, the ground of things is a loving communication, marked by disinterestedness, gratuity. The ground (God in his gift of being) differs from the grounded (the finite in its reception of the gift) through not being determined by any factors beyond itself (not even giftedness). Like the world, God is groundless, but for an utterly different reason, for the world is grounded in God.

This is why God and the world can only be spoken of *by analogy*. It is also why what is disclosure of hidden mystery from God's side can only be participation in that act, never possession of it, from ours. And that in turn explains why the most important cognitive attitude we can ever adopt is one which awaits from God alone the measure of the truth we would know. Listening to the Word of God in Jesus Christ depends on this.

VOLUME II: TRUTH OF THE WORD

Here the logic must become *christo*logic by focusing on the Logos – and him incarnate – whereby a revelation inviting man's fullest possible participation in being (everlasting life) actually occurred. At the same time, the reader should beware. The second and third volumes of the logic, though they presuppose the first, do not follow on from it in direct or exclusive fashion. In between – both chronologically and argumentatively – there intervene the aesthetics and dramatics. Thus, when Balthasar opens his christologic with a sustained meditation on the saying of the Christ of St John's Gospel 'I am the Truth', the intellectual shock, for readers moving straight to this point from 'Truth of the World', is barely tolerable. The picture looks very different, however, if our mind has been prepared by *Herrlichkeit* and *Theodramatik* in the meanwhile. We will be more willing to

consider the central question of *Theologik* II – how could the eternal Logos express himself within the bounds of a creature, the humanity of Jesus? – if we have previously done two things: contemplate the self-disclosure of the divine glory in Jesus Christ, as found in the aesthetics; and, with the dramatics, confront the divine philanthropy where the same figure is the central protagonist of the divine action, transforming fallen finite freedom by joining it to all-holy infinite freedom in the sacrifice of the Cross. The aesthetics had already discovered, in the unfolding of the Word of the Cross through the scenes of Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection, how God clarifies his own truth as gracious, self-giving love. The dramatics spelled that out in terms of the action of Christ, in tears and blood.

Here, within a theological logic dedicated to the Son, one can take a step further. The splendid goodness of truth is uttered not only in the fateful career, up to Easter, of the Word made flesh, but also in the gift at Pentecost of the entire relation between Father and Son, a gift communicated through the Holy Spirit. Balthasar signals clearly enough, as *Theologik* II opens, that the trilogy will not be able to end without a final volume, beyond christology, on the truth of the Holy Spirit. As the Interpreter of the Son – who is himself Interpreter of the invisible Father – the Spirit transmits to the world the gracious Truth of Father and Son not only exteriorly, as the Advocate defending the truth of Christian claims, but also interiorly, as the 'Anointing' spoken of in the Johannine letters. The Spirit it is who gives believers a share in this relation between Father and Son in such wise that they may know that relation for themselves.

Despite such appeal to spiritual experience, Balthasar would deny he has left the realm of logic far behind. Volume I had already argued that love plays an indispensable role in thought. Volume II will argue that there is a human logic that is in the image and likeness of the triune God, the God of love. The two ends can, after all, meet.

'Ana-logic' is Balthasar's term for enquiry into reflection of the Trinity in the truth and being of the world. This is reflection intended to throw light on the self-expression of the Logos (who is always, we recall, the *trinitarian* Son) in his creation, from the side of the world. With the French poetmetaphysician Paul Claudel, Balthasar maintains that all logic has a triadic structure. No 'A' can be determined except by reference to an indefinite series of delimiting co-determinants, as also to an undelimited determinant without which there would be infinite regress. With a nod to a medieval Augustinian theologian, Richard of St Victor, he finds a triadic pattern also in personhood: no one can be a genuine person (as distinct from a mere individual) without intersubjectivity, and in intersubjective relations persons find each other in some common 'fruit'. With help from twentieth-century 'dialogical' thinkers, he finds the same triadic structure in language, where the truth that occurs in authentic speaking between some 'I' and some 'thou' requires its ultimate ground beyond the human two. These are ana-logical projection lines. But their point of intersection is unknown to us until the Logos takes flesh as Jesus Christ.

It is in Jesus Christ that the Word has expressed himself, by his visibility unveiling the actual substance of the divine life. In Balthasar's general ontology, the more fully the mystery of being is disclosed in some striking appearance, the more we are aware of the

unfathomable depths beneath. It may seem surprising, then, that he is so opposed to that distinction between divine energies (revealed) and divine essence (hidden) associated with the fourteenth-century Byzantine theologian St Gregory Palamas. However, he has other ways of inculcating due reserve about the claim that heaven itself was opened in the Incarnation, notably in the way he treats the divine self-expression in the man Jesus and in his emphasis (a novel form of apophatic theology, this) on the silence of Christ.

As the parables and other sayings indicate, Jesus has at his disposal the 'grammar' of creation – that logic whose language is furnished by creaturely being as such – and the 'grammar' of Israel – the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament: two sets of linguistic resources, then, for speaking of the Father. But in his manner of using these resources, and his entire deportment, Jesus is marked by an extraordinary otherness, even in his humble service of his fellows. Also, he speaks by silences. The silence of the prisoner before Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate makes eloquent another, all-environing, silence, from the Incarnation itself to his return to the Father's side. Even – or especially – when making himself comprehensible, Jesus retains his mystery and his initiative. (Here we see why Balthasar regards the Palamite distinction as misguided: it locates the mystery in the wrong place.)

But speaking of places, what in any case is the place of the Logos in God? In a Christian theological account of the truth of God, Balthasar can hardly avoid offering a constructive dogmatics of the Holy Trinity. Nothing less is feasible if the aim is to exhibit the truth of one who is always the 'trinitarian Son'. Balthasar steers a course between radical essentialism for which the Fatherly origin of Son and Spirit virtually coincides with the divine Essence common to the hypostases, and radical personalism for which it is not out of his substance, the unique divine being, that the Father is fecund but only out of his personhood, as he generates the Son and spirates the Spirit. For Balthasar, the divine Essence exists in a way that is never other than 'Fatherly, Sonly, Ghostly'. The Essence is co-extensive with the event of the eternal processions of these Persons. And it is co-determinative of that event by way of the – in each case, unique – participation in that Essence of Father, Son, and Spirit. The self-giving of the Persons corresponds, then, to the singularity of the Essence, which in turn indicates that the intimate reality of the Essence can only be *the being of love*. Whereas some theologies of the Trinity want to replace the language of being with the language of love, Balthasar proposes that the gift of love shall illuminate being from within. In his account of the divine nature, all the divine properties will take their coloration from 'the primordial mystery of abyssal love'.

If, within the divine life, the Son expresses the truth of the Father, he must manifest the Father's 'groundless' love, and so he does, innertrinitarianly, by his role in the coming forth of the Holy Spirit. (On that disputed question between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Balthasar is an unrepentant Filioquist.) In reading the Gospels, then, the logic of the Word incarnate cannot be reduced to 'Jesus-ism'. It must include Jesus' 'whence', the Father, and his 'whither', the Holy Spirit. It will not be possible to grasp the Son's work except in relation to the Father who sends him and whose reign he inaugurates, and to the Spirit in whom he is sent and whose gift he releases into the world.

In so saying, Balthasar anticipates the closing chapters of *Theologik* II, concentrating as these do on the career of Jesus. But meanwhile he must treat of the role of the Logos in the world's making (rather than redeeming), the emergence of the world through the Word. A theology of the creative agency of the Word in the world's making will follow from an account of his particular way of sharing the divine Essence as a Person. Greek Christian thought always had difficulty showing the difference between Word and Spirit in their procession from the Father. It was, in part, to differentiate their processive origins that Augustine launched the enormously successful analogy of the Word as intellectual movement, the Spirit as movement of love. Balthasar prefers to take his cue here not from Augustine (and Thomas after him) but from Thomas's Franciscan contemporary, Bonaventure. Both Word and Spirit proceed from the Father's love, but the Word proceeds 'expressively', the Spirit 'liberally'. Hence the readiness of the Spirit to be sent into the world as the boundless overflow of the Father's generosity. Hence also, and more pertinently for present purposes, the readiness of the Word to serve as exemplar for the world's being in its complex unity (its expression of the divine ideas of things). And hence, finally, the Word's willingness to take on the nature of that creature who, made in God's image, enjoys the closest relationship of being with the Logos that creation affords. Namely, ourselves.

Natural philosophy, like the human sciences, shows us a diverse creation blessed with difference yet cursed by conflict. For Balthasar, recapitulating here not only the early discussion of the distinction between essence and existence in *Theologik* I but the far fuller account in the metaphysics volume of *Herrlichkeit*, this distinction sets creatures off as finite, at the other pole from the God who is infinite. It thus signals not only their poverty but also their glory, for in their multiform contingency (in all their variety, none of them *had to* be), we see how being reflects the kenotic divine Trinity by gloriously throwing itself away. The Bonaventurian theology of the trinitarian processions in *Theologik* II confirms the intimate belonging to God of so highly differentiated a world by the way the creaturely version of the transcendentals – the true, the beautiful, the good – appears in its light. Finite as is their manner in creation, they nonetheless signal a share in the trinitarian expressivity and liberality. Even otherness (from God or from each other) is no stranger to the triune being where the Persons are defined by their relations of – fruitful and responsive – opposition. There is nothing preordained about the link *we* see between difference and conflict, otherness and competition.

'Cata-logic' is Balthasar's term for the study of how, in its descent into the world, the Word resolves discord into harmony and brings about a *reconciled* creation. Christ comes as Word incarnate to fulfil the work the Trinity enterprised from the beginning of the world. He unifies tensions in cosmic being, creating equilibrium between what in us is ultra-particular or hyperuniversal. He unifies the arts and sciences, being as he is a principle that can order the intellectual space they inhabit. He unifies history, furnishing the key to the significance of its process. He unifies the world with God, acting as a medium between the two.

For classical Christianity the last has always been central. Balthasar's emphasis lies on

the happening of 'at-one-ment' *in the flesh*. For theological aesthetics, the flesh – the sensuous realm – had been the pivot. For theological dramatics, though the flesh was *in itself* no sinful principle, *in history* it had turned away from the life of God that is the light of men. To restore its integrity was why the Word assumed it. Now in the theological logic, the stress will lie on the potential for redemptive expression found in the union of finite flesh and infinite Word.

The 'language' of flesh is the language of man as a spiritual-corporeal unity. It has, accordingly, many registers. The language of words and phonemes is itself but the highest instance of natural revelatory and communicative expressiveness. So prior to dealing with exclusively linguistic modes, Balthasar treats of the expression of the Word made flesh in terms of myth and icon. In the Incarnation, myth became fact (shades of C. S. Lewis on the same topic); an 'icon' of divine Personhood was fashioned in the human face of Christ. In Jesus we have an objective symbol of God, and one who, in his own speech, uses parables that take us beyond their inevitable finitude towards inexhaustible transcendence. But all the many words Jesus spoke, and the many states through which he passed in life, are so many modulations of his being the eternal Word, that is, the Father's self-expression, the embodiment of charity.

In the end, however, Jesus is rejected, and the Word is contradicted – theologically extraordinary, for then a lie must assert its truth in the presence of Truth itself. But this truth is the disclosure of absolute love: he is rejected not only through error but also by sin. The dialectic in the ministry involves not only Jesus' argumentative opponents but also, and more profoundly, the contrary forces of evil. It is overcome by the persevering obedience to the Father of the Logos made human, an obedience that finds its climax on the Cross and in the descent into hell. The outcome of the theo-logical clash is the victory of Christ when, serenely entrusting to God the collapse of his earthly work, Jesus allows that work to develop beyond himself, in the sphere of the Resurrection administered by the Holy Spirit.

VOLUME III: TRUTH OF THE SPIRIT

The Spirit interprets the Son as Son of the Father: hence his 'entry into logic'. Balthasar makes approving reference to Hegel's comment in the lectures on the philosophy of religion that whereas, before Pentecost, the disciples had already known Christ, they had not yet known him *as infinite truth*. This is the difference the Spirit makes.

To know Christ according to the Spirit is impossible without receiving the Spirit. And as the Fathers of the fourth century saw, this makes no sense unless the Spirit is himself God. Balthasar's version of their classic argument for the divinity of the Spirit is: how can One who expounds the truth of the Son's revelation of the Father not himself be divine?

In the first instance, then, the Holy Spirit enters a theological logic in that guise in which the Jesus of the High Priestly Prayer in St John's Gospel presents him, as one who will 'lead the disciples into all truth'. Balthasar emphasizes the holistic nature of the task

this allots the third Person. The Spirit is to bring to light and life particular aspects of revelation not so much for their own sake but, rather, for the way they give access to revelation as a totality. As Balthasar puts it, severely, a theology that loses itself in particulars, or a 'praxis' (a form of practice of the Christian faith) that brings unilaterally into prominence some one aspect of Christianity, cannot lay claim to animation by the Spirit. To make available all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that lie hidden in Christ Jesus: this is the heart of the 'economy' of the Holy Spirit, his contribution to the Christian dispensation. Without the 'qualitative catholicity' of that holistic grasp of revelation, the Church will be poorly equipped for the pursuit of 'quantitative catholicity' – carrying the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. Here Balthasar signals that much of the third volume of *Theologik* devoted to the Spirit will be given over to ecclesiology, the investigation of the *Church* of the Spirit.

Though Balthasar by no means neglects the causal agency of the Spirit in the mission of Christ, his emphasis, in the context of theological logic, lies with the Spirit as Interpreter, or, as he often writes, 'Exegete', in the Church. True, it is the Spirit who, from the first moment of Jesus' conception, has rendered his humanity obedient to the mission the Son received from the Father. Contrary to what Filioquist doctrine might lead one to conjecture, in the special circumstances of the economy, the Son allows the Spirit to carry him forward on the Father's project of redemption. Still, so far as the disciples are concerned, the Spirit is a kind of second gift bestowed for the more effective appreciation of the first gift made us by the Father in sending his Son. That 'more effective appreciation' is made possible by the love he sheds abroad in our hearts. Thus the role of the Spirit in the post-Pentecost economy reflects his place in the inner-trinitarian life, where he is from all eternity the living, personal gift of Father and Son rounding off the being of the Trinity as love.

A theological logic is concerned with salvation's intelligible structure – not its attractive radiance, which belongs to theological aesthetics, nor its power to resolve life's conflicts in favour of the good, the subject matter of theological dramatics. In this perspective, Balthasar speaks of the Spirit as 'expounding' a twofold movement – from Father to Son in the Incarnation and from Son to Father in the Resurrection of the Crucified. What the Spirit lays out in so doing is the definitive revelation of the Father in the former, the endless glory of the Son in the latter, and in both the perfection of their mutual love. The share of disciples in this movement and disclosure is what the Greeks call 'divinization' and the Latins 'incorporation in Christ'. These are for Balthasar complementary schemes which exhibit the Spirit and the Son working together as (in a favoured metaphor from Irenaeus) the 'two hands' of the Father. Under this rubric, by way of exploration, then, of the mutually defining character of the economies of the Son and Spirit, Balthasar will illuminate a variety of theological topics: the relation of theory to 'praxis'; the nature of Christian experience; the historically concrete yet universally valid claims of revelation.

The Spirit (this is the upshot of these discussions) never renders the Word discarnate. On the contrary, it is when the Son undergoes Incarnation to the uttermost, in the final sufferings on the Tree of the Cross, that the Spirit most completely penetrates his

manhood. From this Balthasar draws a law of Christian living: *'Pneumaticization' always increases in direct proportion to 'Incarnation.'* It is an axiom highly pertinent to the account of the Church that follows. No Church that would be exclusively spiritual and subjective and not at all corporeal and objective in its manner of proceeding could possibly be the continuing Spirit-borne presence of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit, Balthasar argues, is not only the personal love of Father and Son, the expression of their intersubjectivity. He is also supremely objective, the fruit of their love. This duality has ecclesiological consequences. He is not only the Spirit who inspires sanctity in human subjects, initiating prayer and pardon, granting mystical and charismatic gifts, and the capacity of individuals to bear witness to Christ. All of that – 'subjective Spirit' Balthasar calls it, in a play of words (and concepts) drawn from Hegel's phenomenology – he most certainly is. But the Spirit also inspires such outer forms and institutional mediations of the saving revelation as Tradition, Scripture, Church office, preaching, the liturgy and sacraments, and even canon law and theology. All of this – 'objective Spirit' – is also he. What, on the basis of Christ's founding activity, the Spirit constructs in the Church's institution is as much the expression of the divine love as is the holiness that the pattern of the Church's life makes possible. Balthasar writes a pro-mystical ecclesiology which is also, and equally, an anti-Gnostic one.

The goal of both subjective and objective Spirit is return to the Father's house, and this is so not for individuals only but for the story of the world. All portrayals of the Source and Goal in world religion are but 'schematisms', unsatisfying philosophical abstractions, if they fail to realize that God's being is love, both absolutely in itself, and economically, in its outpouring in the free gift of the Son for our fetching home. The trilogy will not end in baffled cessation of thought before Truth's final mystery. Divine love has opened itself to knowledge, but knowledge must stay open to the marvel of a love issuing eternally from itself, without other ground, without further reason.[5]

Notes

1 This consistently held view finds its earliest adumbration in his essay 'Von den Aufgaben der katholischen Philosophie in der Zeit', *Annalen der Philosophischen Gesellschaft der Innerschweiz* 3 (1946–47): 353–71.

2 Przywara's influence on Balthasar came quite early in his career, as witnessed in 'Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras', *Schweizerische Rundschau* 6 (1933): 489–99, one of the earliest of Balthasar's writings.

3 For an overview of Balthasar's philosophical work and especially the place of *Wahrheit* within it, see P. Henrici, SJ, 'The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. D. L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), pp. 149–68.

4 For a fuller interpretative summary of this and the remaining volumes of *Theologik*, see A. Nichols, OP, *Say It Is Pentecost: a Guide through Balthasar's Logic* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001).

5 See further: E. F. Bauer, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988): Sein philosophisches Werk', in *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. E. Coreth, W. M. Neidl, and G. Pfligersdirffer (Graz: Styria, 1990), pp. 285–304; P. Ide, *Etre et mystère: la philosophie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1995); W. Löser, 'Being Interpreted as Love: Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 16 (1989): 475–90.

Part III

Disciplines

13

W. T. DICKENS

Balthasar's biblical hermeneutics

Hans Urs von Balthasar believed that all theology is hermeneutics: theologians should devote their energies to interpreting God's self-revelation in nature, history, and the Bible (*TD2*, 91). His principal theoretical remarks about scriptural interpretation are found in the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, the second volume of the *Theo-Drama*, the third volume of the *Theo-Logic*, and in a handful of essays.[1] Although he sometimes emphasized different aspects of biblical hermeneutics in these discussions, several salient points, summarized briefly here, will be elaborated in this chapter. Balthasar argued that the atrophied aesthetic sensibilities of most modern theologians and biblical scholars have undermined the Church's biblical interpretation in various ways. Appropriating the lessons of premodern theological aesthetics would help to revive a set of ancient and medieval hermeneutical conventions that are not incompatible with certain features of contemporary biblical scholarship. These conventions include viewing the Bible as a self-glossing, christologically focused story, the proper interpretation of which is enabled by the Holy Spirit and nourished by regular liturgical worship. The range of ecclesially fruitful interpretation is constrained both by the intentions of its human and divine authors and by the rule of faith.

Balthasar contended that modern theology's relative disregard for beauty, and its theological analogue, divine glory, has had two distinguishable though equally harmful consequences for biblical interpretation (*GL1*, 150). Those theologians who conceive of revelation primarily in terms of its truth tend to view the Bible as a set of events and instructions signifying divine mysteries that the faithful must affirm. This proclivity risks rendering superfluous the *biblical* mediation of revelation. Once the mysteries themselves have been believed, their signs, which the Bible provides, are logically dispensable. On Balthasar's telling, neo-scholastics and, more recently, integralists and fundamentalists read the Bible this way. Many theologians who have (rightly, according to Balthasar) rejected this exclusively propositional view of revelation then proceed to an error of their own: they reduce revelation to the personal and/or social good that it provides. At its Modernist extreme, this approach evaluates the credibility of the Bible's contents by assessing the degree to which they reflect either humanity's need for grace or its graced capacity to know and love God. Balthasar saw in transcendental Thomism and in political and liberation theologies a more or less covert inclination to err in this direction. In their hands, he said, the biblical witness is treated less as a sign pointing past itself than as one through which one may glimpse the interaction of God and humanity.

To the extent that they allow the Bible's historical signs to be dissolved into the believing subject's or community's spiritual movement towards God, these theologians also risk making the Bible superfluous.

Despite their differences, these two ways of reading the Bible both rely on a problematic dualism of sign and referent. This could be overcome, Balthasar maintained, by appropriating the lessons of premodern theological aesthetics. Doing so would allow contemporary theologians to affirm the truth, goodness, and beauty of revelation, while recognizing the Bible's continuing significance for Christian thought and practice.

Balthasar argued that most modern theologians have trivialized beauty, reducing it to an alluring but dangerous distraction from devotion to God. They no longer endorse the ancient and medieval view, in which beauty, truth, goodness, and oneness are seen as interdependent aspects of created being. The dissolution of being's transcendental determinations, and their consequent debilitation, reflects modern theology's general reluctance to embrace another widely held premodern conviction, namely, that in redeeming creation, God does not destroy it in order to create it anew, but surpassingly fulfils it. From this perspective, creation's unity, truth, goodness, and beauty are seen to be perfected in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Created being's determinations are not identified with God; they are believed to participate in the divine beauty, truth, goodness, and unity.

When beauty is conceived as a transcendental attribute of being that participates in the glory of God, then the natural and historic forms it takes are regarded in significantly different ways from those followed by most modern theologians. Rather than merely pointing to or dissolving in a transcendent ground or depth, Balthasar claimed that beautiful forms embody and reveal this transcendence, while simultaneously veiling it (*GL1*, 151). This is because they are indissolubly united with the transcendence they mediate. Although a form's content transcends its mediation, it is available only in and through the form. It does not lie behind, above, or in front of it – regardless of whether those spatial metaphors are construed historically, morally, spiritually, or otherwise. Form and content, therefore, can be distinguished only provisionally. Breaking the bonds that unite a beautiful, radiant form with its transcendent content destroys the one and renders the other inaccessible.

The failure to abide by these two premodern conventions (the perfection of creation by God and the ultimate indissolubility of form and transcendent content) is not limited to proponents of the sorts of theological methods already mentioned. It is apparent in what Balthasar believed to be a virtually universal tendency among biblical scholars to interpret the Bible solely in terms of its antecedent conditions. He frequently excoriated biblical scholars for assuming that reconstructing what lies 'behind' a given biblical text – that is, the socio-political, religious, psychological, or other factors influencing its creation – is the same as understanding it. Balthasar contended that the meaning of the Bible, or any other created form, is shaped, but not exhausted by, the context of its genesis.

The now widespread acknowledgement by biblical scholars of the cogency of this hermeneutical principle diminishes the contemporary relevance of this aspect of

Balthasar's critique of biblical studies. Since at least the 1970s scholars in the field have recognized the distinction between aetiology and interpretation.[2] In addition, Balthasar's acknowledgement of the importance for theology of identifying the pre-literary forms, authorial strands, and redactional layers of the Bible undermines the coherence of his critique. He held that the Bible is persuasive because of the divine transcendence it mediates *and* the fittingness with which its parts are integrated. Exegetes are thus obliged, on his view, to study the various elements constituting the biblical texts in order better to grasp the theological aesthetic necessity of their dynamic interaction. For this reason, it is regrettable that Balthasar occasionally suggested that diachronic readings are inherently flawed (*GL1*, 31). To be sure, if exegetes rely exclusively on diachronic readings, the Bible will be left in tatters. That would be tragic, according to Balthasar, since the whole garment, not its various threads, mediates divine revelation. His criticisms of diachronic readings are also problematic because he sometimes acknowledged the ways in which they have helped Christians better appreciate the literary complexity of the Bible (*GL7*, 112, note 5). To be consistent with such comments and with his own and premodernity's theological aesthetics, he should have argued more forcefully than he did that when supplemented by synchronic readings, diachronic ones can play an essential role in the Church's ongoing efforts faithfully to interpret the Bible.[3]

Notwithstanding the anachronism and occasional incoherence of Balthasar's polemics against reductively contextualizing and fragmenting the Bible, his polemic provides important clues about what he meant when he claimed that the Bible is self-interpreting. One implication is that the intelligibility of a given biblical passage does not hinge on establishing its similarities to non-biblical world-views. Although Balthasar welcomed, and sometimes depended upon, such comparative analyses, he was keen to highlight the ways in which a given biblical author reconfigured what he had borrowed to suit his own and God's purposes. Nor, on Balthasar's view, should biblical scholars and theologians assume that all biblical concepts and images are so time- and culture-bound as to be unintelligible to the modern reader. He recognized that interpretation requires transposing horizons, but refused to countenance any comprehensive, programmatic summary thereof. There are simply too many different kinds of transposition required for them to be conveyed adequately by a single term, like 'demythologization' or 'fusion of horizons'. For instance, the Virgin Birth and the miracles of Jesus are, he believed, examples of historically or culturally specific actions, events, and images that God has invested with universal theological significance. Each is a 'supertemporal expression of the living revelation' (*TD2*, 98). In such cases, it is not the biblical author's view of creation, or of God's identity and will, that must be transformed, but the interpreter's. To cite another of his examples, the sense of puzzlement or scandal readers may feel when confronted with some of Jesus' parables is not necessarily best addressed by redescribing these parables' points in terms congenial to a North Atlantic cultural interpretative framework.

The Bible, Balthasar argued, issues a summons to leave everything and follow Jesus Christ, to take him as the measure of all things, as the point of reference for

understanding oneself and one's world. The Holy Spirit enables such dying and rising in Christ by shattering the interpreter's anthropological and cosmological horizons of interpretation (*TD2*, 91). Hence another implication of Balthasar's claim that the Bible is self-interpreting is that the Spirit leads the faithful to understand the Bible as God would have them do. The hermeneutics that constitutes theology's task is therefore sustained by God's own hermeneutics. Wanting to be known and loved by creation, God provides the conditions that make this possible. The most important of these are the incarnation, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This proves to the eyes of faith both that God is freely self-emptying, trinitarian love, and that, as such, God communicates through creaturely forms without destroying them. Part of the Son's self-emptying involves handing over to the Spirit the responsibility of interpreting the mutual love of Father and Son, which, according to Balthasar, the Spirit both is and exhibits (*GL7*, 255). The Spirit interprets the Son in numerous ways. The two most important, at least when the focus is on Balthasar's hermeneutics, are enabling the biblical authors to fashion a salvifically adequate image of the Spirit's own vision of the event of Jesus Christ – and through him of the Father – and initiating the faithful into the triune love of God (*GL1*, 31; *TD2*, 106). These two actions of the Holy Spirit imply each other. On Balthasar's view, interpreting the Bible as God intends requires an in-spiration in the interpreter that analogously corresponds to the inspiration of the biblical authors.

Several features of Balthasar's conviction that proper biblical interpretation requires a living faith should be elucidated. First, such faith is not a passive receptivity, but a dynamic yearning and an open readiness to be conformed, by the Spirit, noetically and existentially to Christ. Owing to Balthasar's concern in *The Glory of the Lord* to describe the perception of God's glory by the faithful, he sometimes used terms in these volumes that suggest sheer passivity. But these passages are balanced by others indicating that he believed God established the glorious forms of revelation in order to elicit a Spirit-led response of active glorification (*GL7*, 389). The need for believers to discern and be conformed to God's will is made still clearer in the *Theo-Drama*, where Balthasar explored at length his conviction that God wants covenant partners who involve themselves in the unfolding theological drama between infinite and finite freedoms (*TD2*, 91). The hermeneutical implications of this conviction include the necessity to co-operate with the Spirit in order better to discern God's identity and will, as both are borne witness to by the Scriptures. This co-operation could entail using the methods and findings of biblical studies. Ideally, from Balthasar's perspective, the biblical scholar would operate within the circle of faith, so that his or her research would be animated by the same Spirit that animates the authors whose work is being interpreted (*TL* III, 297, 'Exegese und Dogmatik', 389). He acknowledged that there is no reason why the faithful could not also rely on the work of others outside the Church to illumine their sense of how God might once have used and may now be using the Bible to shape new lives in Christ. But he insisted that such 'non-Christian research' had to be submitted to rigorous scrutiny by those schooled in the faith for it to be of service to the Church (*GL1*, 78).

Second, Balthasar argued that the living faith required of interpreters involves a radical

Yes to the offer of grace made through the Bible. He believed that Scripture demands of its interpreters a decision for or against the God whose word it is. If they hear no such demand, they are not interpreting it correctly. On these grounds, he criticized biblical scholars for delaying their own devotional commitment by practising their craft.[4] Such indiscriminate charges are ill-advised. Although there are some biblical scholars seemingly bent on discrediting Christianity, there are others who clearly see their work as part of their Christian vocation.[5] But despite these exaggerations, Balthasar nevertheless was affirming an important hermeneutical insight, namely, that any purportedly neutral study of these texts – or any text, for that matter – is impossible. An interpreter's purposes when reading the Bible will inevitably shape the meanings that he or she derives from it. To the extent that biblical scholars study the Bible as a source of information about the ancient Near East, they will assign different meanings to it from those assigned by interpreters who read the Bible as a divine word of address. But that does not render the former findings useless. As I indicated, Balthasar occasionally acknowledged that the work of 'non-Christian' biblical scholars and archaeologists can be appropriated by those in the Church. His principal concern in this regard, then, can be plausibly construed as a warning that Christians should not delude themselves about the interpretative consequences of the purposes they adopt when reading the Bible.

Balthasar maintained, third, that the living faith required of biblical interpreters needs to be nourished by regular participation in the liturgical life of the Church. This has important hermeneutical consequences, on his view. In the liturgy of the Word they hear Christ made present by the power of the Spirit. They thereby come to understand more deeply the identity of the one whose story is being told in the Scriptures. When praying the Psalms, they participate in the Spirit's announcement and enactment of the Son's love for the Father and the Father's for the Son. As they listen to a prophetic denunciation of ancient Israelites or Judaeans, they hear God's word to the contemporary Church, as well. In the liturgy of the Eucharist the faithful encounter the living Christ broken open for them and the world. They are drawn into what Balthasar held to be the central act of thanksgiving and self-sacrifice by which the Church glorifies God. In addition, he believed that here they come face to face with the 'whole incarnational concreteness' of their Lord: they taste, touch, and smell the one to whom they are being conformed (*GL1*, 421). By thinking and acting within the context of this primal mystery, they will be better able to approach the biblical texts with the wonder and worship appropriate to the God whose creative and redemptive dealings with the world are narrated therein.

Balthasar's model for this ecclesially appropriate hermeneutics is that of the great saints, particularly Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Ignatius. They demonstrated, Balthasar argued, that understanding the Bible as God wants it understood is not just a noetic, or as we might say, merely academic, undertaking. It also entails developing a set of dispositions and acting in accord with them. Properly interpreting the Bible, then, is self-involving. It should transform lives because interpreters cannot know the Bible's truths without actually doing them. On this basis, he

lamented the chasm that now divides the several theological disciplines, principally spirituality, theology, and scriptural studies.

When Balthasar declared that the Bible is self-interpreting, he also alluded to what is now referred to as its intratextuality. To use an older terminology, the Bible is self-glossing: its various parts can be read as commenting on one another. What an interpreter takes to be a relatively clear passage can be used to illuminate an obscure one. Balthasar frequently used verses from the Gospel or epistles of John to solve interpretative riddles that he believed were evident in other texts. Sometimes the intratextual melodies that Balthasar heard were more complex, involving several different texts, from both Testaments. For instance, when discussing the identity of the Church, he used the Deutero-Pauline imagery of Christ being the Head of his Body, the Church, to interpret the ecclesiology of the Letter to the Hebrews, which itself, he maintained, provided a theological corrective to the Old Testament image of Israel as the people of God (*GL7*, 92). By listening for such melodies, Balthasar did not mean necessarily to imply that a given biblical author or editor had read the texts with which Balthasar put him in conversation. Rather than making a historical claim about the likely reading list of various biblical authors, Balthasar was contending that contemporary interpreters are more likely to avoid interpretative pitfalls and dead ends if they are alert to the *theological* interaction among texts that the canon brings together. Otherwise, a certain note will be allowed to sound too loudly, distorting the symphony that he believed the Spirit performs by means of the whole Bible.

Treating the Bible as self-glossing presupposes that its various parts constitute some sort of whole. Interpreters should, Balthasar believed, take the Bible's canonical integrity seriously. Without minimizing the theological significance of the Bible's centuries-long gestation, Balthasar declared that its final or received form sets the norm for Christian life and thought (*GL1*, 31, 554; *TD2*, 106). Analogous to the way in which a drama critic's judgements depend on his or her familiarity with the whole play, an exegete must keep the entirety of the Bible in mind when interpreting any of its parts. Notwithstanding the clarity of his pronouncements in this regard, Balthasar frequently failed to follow his own counsel. There are numerous passages in the volume on the Old Covenant in *The Glory of the Lord* in which he based his exegesis on a reconstructed *Urtext*. His treatment of the book of Isaiah provides a striking example. He discussed 1–3 Isaiah as discrete units, nowhere giving serious consideration to the theological significance of their editorial conjoining. This diachronic approach remains a significant, though much less common feature of his volume in *The Glory of the Lord* on the New Covenant.[6]

In addition to an affirmation of the importance, in theory at any rate, of taking one's interpretative cues from the final form of the biblical text, another feature of Balthasar's contention that interpreters should respect the canonical integrity of the Bible concerns what he held to be its christological focus. As I have indicated, Balthasar regarded the Bible as telling the story of the triune God's dealings with creation, a story whose climax is Jesus Christ. On his view, not only should interpreters derive the significance of the Bible's considerable non-narrative portions in relation to the narrative ones, they should

also read the Old Testament as directed to the Incarnation, and read the New Testament in light of that Incarnation (*TD2*, 114). Such 'pneumatic' readings, which are enabled by the Spirit of Christ, are described by Balthasar as 'the only truly Christian' form of biblical interpretation (*TD2*, 114). The entire Bible, therefore, speaks of Christ. This should not be conceived in a flat-footed way, as if the Hebrew prophets literally predicted the birth of Jesus in first-century Nazareth. While applauding ancient and medieval biblical interpreters for having seen the christological coherence of the Testaments, Balthasar accepted the demolition of the old *argumentum ex prophetia* on historical and philological grounds. Balthasar's assessment of the ancient and medieval practice of discerning a fourfold set of senses should likewise be understood in terms of the interpretative centrality of Christ. He argued that the literal sense, by which he meant the grammaticohistorical sense intended by the author, constitutes the fundamental basis for the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses. But the literal sense is not a verbal shell above or behind which lie the so-called spiritual senses. Reading the Bible as though the literal and spiritual senses were thus related would, of course, sever the indissoluble bonds uniting its form and content. Indeed, his view of the relations of literal to spiritual senses is not well conveyed with spatial metaphors, although Balthasar sometimes did so, as when speaking of various 'layers' of meaning in a single utterance. It is more consistent to think of the relation, as he also did, in terms of different applications or uses of a given text by the Spirit, who seeks thereby to bring humanity through Christ into the divine life.

It is readily apparent from the foregoing that Balthasar conceived of the Bible as having multiple meanings. He used a vivid image for this in the *Theo-Drama*, likening the text to a wayfarer, participating, along with the faithful, in the dramatic interaction of infinite and finite freedoms (*TD2*, 102–6). The Bible is not a script, which the faithful must slavishly follow in order to secure their heavenly reward. Nor does it contain a fixed set of propositions or 'fundamentals' to be believed. And it is not the historical record of events now long past whose impact gradually attenuates with the passage of time. From Balthasar's perspective, the christological or spiritual sense of the Bible is neither static, nor time-bound. It mediates the resurrected Christ, who did not ascend into a timeless eternity, but is present in every time as a living event that is '*always taking place in an ever-new "now"* ' (*TD2*, 102; Balthasar's emphasis).

Accordingly, Balthasar was critical of those biblical scholars and systematic theologians who believe that interpreting the Bible is a matter of discovering a fixed, original meaning, which then is contrasted to a contemporary perspective that, depending on the interpreter, fares well or ill by comparison (*TD2*, 103). It is not the transposition of one horizon of understanding into another that bothered him about this standard approach, for as we have seen, he believed such transpositions are necessary, but rather the presumption that the Bible is an inert object whose meaning can be laid hold of once and for all. This is not to dismiss the importance of discerning the intent of the original authors, but to affirm that the meaning of a given text, even to its original audience, is not exhausted by human authorial intent. Balthasar believed that at the time of a given

biblical text's composition and first reception, the Spirit was already at work opening up the text's superabundant range of meanings.

A related problem with the standard approach, on Balthasar's view, is the presumption that interpreters can adequately summarize a text's meaning in brief formulas. However useful such paraphrases might be as pointers, they do not encapsulate the meaning of the text. The danger lies in our tendency to assume that these summaries articulate the meaning of the interpreted text with greater clarity, sophistication, and universality than the text itself. Once we step into that boat, however, we inevitably cut the mooring lines to the text and are sure to drift wherever our own culture's winds happen to blow us. The standard approach, therefore, fails to appreciate the Bible's surplus of meaning as it participates in the theodrama. And it fails to provide grounds for the Christian claim that the Bible is not just the starting point for theological reflection, but a constant source of comfort and correction.

On Balthasar's view, to affirm the superabundance of biblical meanings is not tantamount to endorsing radical hermeneutical relativism. In interpreting the Bible he was guided by two related constraints that limit the range of possible, ecclesially apt meanings. The first is *authorial intent*, which, as I noted, provided the terms in which Balthasar defined the literal sense, and the second is the *regula fidei*, or rule of faith. With respect to the former, he often spoke as though the intentions of the human and divine authors of Scripture were identical. But on occasion, in both his theoretical remarks and his actual exegesis, he distinguished the two, indicating that to identify the likely intent of the human author or redactor is a necessary but not sufficient condition for proper interpretation. For Balthasar, trying to discern the human author's intent is, in part, a straightforwardly historical-critical undertaking, involving the identification of the various conditions attending the creation and reception of the original text. Such investigations do not yield meanings, however, since, to repeat, tracing the genesis of a text is not the same as understanding it. But this research does limit the number of plausible authorial intentions. Trying to discern the human author's intent also entailed, for Balthasar, developing a fellow-feeling with the author. This is done not in order to reproduce the experience by which the text came to be, but to get a better sense for what the author probably wanted to say. Balthasar's sort of authorial intention-seeking is not an endlessly speculative, and thus fallacious, attempt to determine why an author said what he or she did. It is a matter of trying to determine what the author's intended meaning is. To that end, since the purpose of sharing a fellow-feeling with the author is to apprehend more accurately the text's subject matter, interpreters trying to cultivate this feeling must take their cues from the texts themselves. Putting the point differently, a reader must not allow his or her pre-understanding of love to control the way he or she interprets, say, John's claims about God's love for the world. Rather, the interpreter must let the evangelist's (and redactor's) uses of this term and its philological relatives guide the inquiry.

Although Balthasar often indicated that he saw himself, when exegeting the Bible, as trying to discern God's intention, he rarely addressed, at least directly, how to go about

doing so. And yet, since he believed that the point of exegesis, indeed of all theology, was to interpret God's self-communication, the whole of the foregoing can be understood as summarizing all but one aspect of Balthasar's answer to this question. What remains to be addressed is the *regula fidei*, which he conceived as a sense for the radiant integrity of the whole form of revelation as that is mediated by the Scriptures. This is a theological aesthetic sensibility, a capacity to hear when a proposed interpretation distorts the harmonies that Balthasar believed resonate throughout the Bible. He heard them, to mention but a few examples, when examining the relationships between innocence and guilt; mercy and judgement; the exaltation of the servant and the humiliation of the Lord; promise and fulfilment; the distance of the Father and the nearness of the Son, and their unity in the Spirit; faithfulness and transgression; and the human and divine united without mixture or separation in the one person, Jesus Christ.

For Balthasar, the theological aesthetic fittingness of these relationships, and the beauty of the whole to which they belong, is objectively demonstrable to the eyes of faith. These demonstrations, however, are not based on a comprehensive overview of revelation in its finished totality, for such a vision would undermine the theodramatic quality of God's dealings with creation. Rather, the rule of faith is a graced capacity to detect when one aspect of revelation's dynamic relationships has been thrown out of balance, perhaps by exaggerating or unduly minimizing its significance, or by omitting it altogether.

Balthasar held that this theological aesthetic capacity is embodied by the Roman Catholic Church's teaching office, the magisterium. 'Its task', he said, 'is to preserve, for believers, the totality of God's self-interpretation in Christ, through the Spirit, in and for the Church' (*TD2*, 101). In his hermeneutical reflections in the *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar asserted that while theologians strive to see the organic totality of revelation's forms, the magisterium defines new dogmas and offers correctives on the basis of it. The magisterium, that is to say, stands within the sphere of God's self-interpretation to a degree that he denied was true of theologians. This would imply that on Balthasar's view, the magisterium is above critique, an impression only partly mitigated by his contention in *The Glory of the Lord* that the magisterium should act as servants to the whole people of God. In actual practice, however, even in the *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar was not reluctant to criticize the magisterium's dogmatic pronouncements when he believed they distorted revelation's inner proportions and integrity. Thus his biblical hermeneutics, relying on the graced apprehension of revelation's glorious form – with its christological centrepiece – provides grounds for those outside the magisterium to offer biblically warranted critiques of ecclesial teachings and practices.[7]

Notes

1 The more important essays include the following: 'Exegese und Dogmatik', *Communio: Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift* 5 (1976): 385–92; 'From the Theology of God to Theology in the Church', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 9/3 (fall, 1982): 195–223; 'God Is His Own Exegete', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13/4 (winter, 1986): 280–7; 'The Multiplicity of Biblical Theologies and the Spirit of Unity in the Church' and 'The Unity of the Theological Sciences', both in *Convergences: to the Source of Christian Mystery*

(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983); 'Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 10/2 (summer, 1983): 106–16; 'Why I Am Still a Christian', in *Two Say Why: 'Why I Am Still a Christian' by Hans Urs von Balthasar and 'Why I Am Still in the Church' by Joseph Ratzinger* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971); 'The Word, Scripture and Tradition', 'The Place of Theology', and 'Revelation and the Beautiful', in *Explorations in Theology*, volume I: *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

2 Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 36.

3 The terms 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' first arose in the science of linguistics, with the former referring to historical studies of linguistic change (etymology, etc.) and the latter referring to contrasts within and across contemporary languages. Applied to biblical hermeneutics these terms thus refer, broadly, to the historical study of antecedents ('diachronic') and to a holistic study of the totality and canon of the Bible as given ('synchronic'). In the case of the Synoptic Gospels, for example, *Formgeschichte* (the study of how various genres like parables and miracle stories began in the oral tradition and were gradually shaped in early Christian preaching before being embedded in the Gospels) would be a 'diachronic' study; and *Redaktionsgeschichte* (the study of why the evangelists made use of these genres in their respective Gospels) would use the 'synchronic' method. But of course such a synchronic approach would itself have to be broadened further, to show how each Gospel is affected in its interpretation by its place within the canon ('canon criticism', as it is known). And then further, the Bible itself must be contextualized as the Church's own book, whose interpretation must be enriched by bringing in all the factors of cultural and scientific history that are relevant for interpretation. In that sense, one might well call Balthasar the most synchronic theologian of the twentieth century.

4 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 97.

5 N. T. Wright discusses both sorts of biblical scholars in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 13–124.

6 In one telling passage Balthasar seems to indicate that he holds the diachronic method more suitable to the Old Testament than to the New: 'Exegesis of the New Testament practiced in an ecclesial spirit can be just as fruitful and illuminating for the fullness hidden in it as is the exegesis of the Old Testament according to universal opinion. For more than a century, the latter has enriched our understanding of the theological depths of Israel's history in an unexpected fashion. What appeared earlier as flat and two-dimensional received a hitherto unknown three-dimensionality through the distinction of sources, through chronology (for example, the chronology of parts in a prophetic book such as Isaiah or Jeremiah) and through the contributions of archaeology and the comparative history of religions in the Near East . . . [But] while the formation of the Old Testament canon occupied many centuries, New Testament exegesis is confronted with a few decades – indeed, more precisely, with only a few years – between the death of Jesus and the faith of the Church that was suddenly present and complete . . .' (Balthasar, *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), pp. 51–4).

7 This chapter is gratefully dedicated to the benefactors of the Catholic Studies Program at Cornell University.

14

BRIAN E. DALEY

Balthasar's reading of the Church Fathers

Anyone who is even casually familiar with the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar must know of his lifelong engagement with those towering figures of early Christian theology known collectively as 'the Church Fathers'. So extensive are his works on these theologians of antiquity that, had he bequeathed to the theological world only his patristic scholarship, his reputation would, by that legacy alone, already be assured. Of course he is known for much more than his writings on early theologians. Indeed, so large and comprehensive is his total output – to say nothing of the wide-angled vision that animates the whole – that his patristic studies must be seen as really just one component, one partial, if essential, contribution to the total picture.

Precisely because a single vision animates the totality of Balthasar's theology, his studies of the Fathers cannot be judged in isolation from his other works. In fact, so thoroughly has he exploited his patristic scholarship to advance his overall concerns that he often puzzles those whose interests are primarily directed towards understanding early Christian theology in its own context. One expert in the field, Dom Polycarp Sherwood, put it this way:

> My single studies on Maximus [a Church Father who lived in the seventh century] have had as their immediate scope the understanding of Maximus from within his own tradition. This is as it should be . . . On the other hand, Balthasar began his work in a quite different way . . . [He] sees the task of the theologian [to be] audaciously creative, as that of one who would bring into coherent overall view the objective values of our post-Cartesian world that bears so deep an imprint from both German Idealism and from modern science. For this, he sees magnificent exemplars in Origen, in Gregory of Nyssa, and particularly in Maximus . . . Thus are explained his frequent references to Hegel and to other German Idealists, as he leaps directly from the historical context of Maximus to a contemporary situation of the mid-twentieth century. More than any lack of detailed investigations, more than any want of confidence in his interpretations of Maximus on the basis of texts, is such a procedure disconcerting to many competent students of Byzantine theology, as transgressing the bounds which are habitually set to their studies.[1]

Whether this charge will hold up remains to be seen; but even the possibility of the accusation's plausibility places interpreters of Balthasar's patristic scholarship in a certain bind, for they must both judge his treatment of patristic authors for its accuracy as interpretation, and still come to terms with his use of patristic themes within his project as a whole. Obviously the latter task would exceed the charter of commission set for this chapter (the rest of this *Companion* will give the reader a fair sampling of how at least some theologians regard the totality of Balthasar's theology). The focus here will be rather on the former task: describing and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the

way Balthasar heard and understood the theological voices of the early Church.

BALTHASAR' S PATRISTIC WORKS: AN OVERVIEW

Balthasar's deep engagement with the Fathers began during his years of theological study in preparation for ordination to the priesthood at the Jesuit faculty of Lyon-Fourvière, between 1933 and 1937. His doctoral dissertation – completed much earlier at the University of Zurich in 1928, just a year before his entrance into the Society of Jesus – had plunged him into the turbulent world of German Romanticism, where he made an intensive study of the 'apocalyptic' self-understanding of a broad range of literary and philosophical figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[2] Subsequent philosophical studies at Berchmannskolleg, the Jesuit seminary just outside Munich, between 1931 and 1933 had given him a direct experience of the neo-Thomism then dominant in Catholic clerical thought. But besides the manual theology of the day he also got to know both the attempts of Joseph Maréchal to bring Thomism into fruitful dialogue with the critical philosophy of the Enlightenment, and the struggles of Erich Przywara to accomplish a similar dialogue between Thomism and modern culture.

At Fourvière, however, a deep reading of a number of influential early Christian authors, under the guidance and example of the Jesuit priest Henri de Lubac (then a young professor at the faculty), became for Balthasar and a number of his Jesuit contemporaries an initiation into what was for him up to this point an *entirely new* style of theological thinking, one that stood in sharp contrast to the highly rational, methodologically uniform approach of twentieth-century Catholic scholasticism. Here he met a thinking that expressed itself in symbols more than in conceptual analysis; that is, he met a way of doing theology that drew its inspiration more from a typological reading of Scripture and a broad awareness of the Christ-centred unity of salvation history than from the distinctions inspired by Aristotelian logic – a theology more keyed to the liturgy than to the classroom.

In other words, in the writers of the first eight centuries of the Church's life, Balthasar found not simply the sources that formed the intellectual matrix of the medieval Christian synthesis, but he saw in them *models for carrying on the work of theology in his own world*. As he would write a few years later, in the introduction to his study of Gregory of Nyssa:

> Being faithful to tradition most definitely does not consist . . . [in] a literal repetition and transmission of the philosophical and theological theses that one imagines lie hidden in time and in the contingencies of history. Rather, being faithful to tradition consists much more in imitating our Fathers in the faith with respect to their attitude of intimate reflection and their effort of audacious creation, which are the necessary preludes to true spiritual fidelity. If we study the past, it is not in the hope of drawing from it formulas doomed in advance to sterility or with the intention of readapting out-of-date solutions. (*PT*, 12)

For reasons that this paragraph itself makes clear, Balthasar never became a specialist in patristics, as his Jesuit contemporaries Jean Daniélou, Claude Mondésert, or Hugo Rahner were to do. A reader of eclectic tastes, passionate engagement, and an astounding

breadth of interest, he devoted extraordinary energy and focus to reading those works of the Fathers that attracted him, and he even did primary textual and literary research on some of them. But when all is said and done, he still treated them essentially as sources to support his own theological engagement with modern European culture and thought. As a result, his discussions of the Fathers, extensive as they are, remain in some ways an *accompaniment* to his very personal intellectual agenda. Or at least we can say that he usually (but not always) presents patristic thought in terms of the categories and issues that mattered most to him: the tensions between modern Catholic theology/spirituality and the German Romantic/post-Romantic intellectual tradition. In this brief overview I propose to consider, first, two of Balthasar's early *programmatic essays* on the importance of the Fathers for contemporary theology, then second, to see how his *translations and anthologies* influenced his view of the Fathers, and then third, to survey his *major monographs* interpreting particular patristic authors. Finally I will reflect briefly on his theological use of the Fathers, and his strengths and weaknesses as a learned but idiosyncratic patristic connoisseur.

Programmatic essays

After completing theological studies at Fourvière, Balthasar worked for two years (1937–39) in Munich, as a newly ordained priest, on the staff of the German Jesuit periodical *Stimmen der Zeit*. Here he seems to have continued to study a number of patristic authors for whom he had developed a deep interest under de Lubac's tuition – study that was to issue in a number of substantial publications over the next few years. He also wrote two 'programmatic essays', meaning essays developing a vision of the distinctive value of early Christian theology as a whole, especially in its Greek Platonist strain, and pointing out what he saw as its inherent dangers.[3]

In the first of these pieces he remarks on the lively interest in Eastern Christian art and thought then fashionable in the German-speaking world of his day, an interest he identifies with the growth of the liturgical movement in the West and a corresponding discomfort with prevailing aesthetic and spiritual emphases of post-Tridentine Catholicism. For Balthasar Eastern Christianity undoubtedly finds its 'centre and crossroads' in ancient Alexandria, especially in the tradition of Christian Platonism first given extensive form in the works of Origen. Seeking a label to characterize Origen's style of thought in general, he writes:

> Perhaps the essential features [of Origen's style] could best be expressed with the word *transparency*: the fundamental experience of the sensible world's complete openness so as to point to a spiritual world beyond it, and thus to the experience of the world as radically symbolic. Everything sensible is 'only' an image, a parable, a riddle, an indication; it is understood only at that point when its interior, spiritual meaning is decoded . . . but everything sensible precisely *is* an image, and is thus also a revelation, an unveiling, an apocalypse of the mind. (WO, 33)

This understanding of the symbolic character of the material world, Balthasar argues, can be taken either as an invitation to press relentlessly *through* worldly images and to reach for what is purely spiritual and intellectual, and therefore towards what continually

eludes us (a 'Gnostic' form of the Alexandrian spirit that he identifies with Origen and the tradition he inspired); or else it can be taken in a more liturgical, 'iconic' sense that recognizes the presence of transcendent holiness *in* sensible things: 'The wise man . . . will come to a reverent halt before the image, fully aware that the Spiritual reveals itself here below only in this mirror, and vanishes before those who are rash enough to grope beyond its surface' (WO, 33).

This second, more sacramental understanding of the world – a sense of the world as engaged in a 'cosmic liturgy' (WO, 43)[4] – Balthasar identifies with Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Orthodox theo-logical traditions surrounding the liturgy and the veneration of icons (38–43). He also sees here, especially in John of Damascus' theological polemic against iconoclasm, 'the underlying philosophical principle of the analogy of being, in contrast to the Gnostic-idealistic mysticism of identity' (40).

In the second essay from 1939 Balthasar elaborates these same intuitions at considerably greater length. Pointing to a general sense of the decay of Western culture among contemporary Europeans, and of the decline in vitality of scholastic theology among many Catholics, he notes that the attraction felt towards the Church Fathers had sparked a patristic revival in the 1930s, giving new popularity and favour to the mystical-liturgical character of the early Christian community and to the 'pneumatic', existential tone of early Christian theology (FSO, 349–50). Balthasar cautions, however, against allowing this new interest in Christian antiquity to become a romantic flight from answering the real needs of the present world (351–2). Theology is constantly adapting itself and learning from past mistakes; the Church's doctrine develops; the 'perennial' philosophy and theology lauded by scholasticism is a living organism (369–70).

Under this constant growth it is possible to identify 'a general concept' or 'law' that sums up the essence of Christianity (352). All human beings, he suggests, desire to reach beyond the limits of our present existence, 'to ascend to God, to become like God, indeed to become equal to God' (353). When distorted by sin, this longing is transformed into the Promethean drive embodied by Greek tragedy and the self-promotion of the German romantic hero. But in its purer, freer form – the form of the Christian gospel – it is expressed in religious obedience: the recognition that as creatures we are *not God*, that we find our well-being in growing in likeness to him, which is rooted in an ever-greater awareness of our radical otherness, our unlikeness (354–5). This very otherness, in fact, is the basic condition for love: 'only where there is non-identity is love possible' (355). So, in the Incarnation, the full reality of God's love for humanity is revealed precisely in what is wholly other: 'the weakness of the flesh . . . is chosen as the crucial place of redemption' (357). And that same 'law' of God's self-emptying presence in what is wholly finite, wholly human, is realized in Christ's continuing presence in the Church, which 'herself is not identical with Christ the Redeemer, but stands over against him in the distance of worship and obedience' (363).

Balthasar then goes on to reflect on how theology, in the different epochs of the Church's life, has grasped and expressed this basic structure of creation and redemption. The writings of the Church Fathers, he concedes, show the unparalleled freshness and

vitality of Christian thought in its beginnings (371); but because its basic ontological categories came from Platonism, its temptation was to conceive of God's relationship to the world simply in terms of a graduated descent of God's powers and qualities towards the world, and of the world's growth towards God, in terms of an escape from sensible reality, a growth towards participation in the inner life of God that leaves created finitude behind (372–4). It was the achievement of medieval scholasticism, he argues, with its reliance on Aristotle's more empirical approach to ontology, to recognize more clearly both the radical otherness of God and the autonomy of the created order (381); and it has been the achievement of the modern, post-Reformation epoch to recognize the reality of the individual person as the centre of created meaning, and so to see in greater clarity both the historical character of created freedom and the personal relationship to which God invites us, as the fulfilment of our creaturely vocation (386–9).

At the end of this quite breathtaking schematization of the history of Christian thought, Balthasar's conclusion is essentially that *none* of these three modes of thought is sufficient by itself to grasp the fullness of the central Christian message. The strength of the patristic view of things was its sense of the all-sufficiency of God, and its 'deep ontological piety', according to which existence itself is a prayer (391). Its weakness was its oversimplification of the relationship of God to the world, which had failed to see the enduring importance of the 'otherness', the particularity and concreteness, of creation. Scholastic and modern thought, in different ways, have remedied this, 'because now *the sovereignty and totality of God no longer comes into view at the cost of the world's being but precisely as its fulfillment*' (391, italics Balthasar's). Today, he argues, the ascetic value of mortification, so emphasized in the spiritual teaching of the Fathers, must be understood in terms of *mission*: dying to ourselves by being sent out into the world, into the realm of what is not God, in order to proclaim to it God's love as incarnate in Jesus, and in order to 'find God', as Other, 'in all things' (392, 395).

In this essay the thought of the Fathers is treated sweepingly, as a wellrounded whole, and in rather critical terms to boot. This is because, for him, 'Alexandrian' Platonism always hovers on the brink of Gnosis ('Gnosis' in his terminology generally means the quest for a cognitive union of the creature with God achieved by asceticism and renunciation, rather than by a union of love consummated in the midst of the finite world). Now Balthasar's understanding of the Fathers was presented in much more nuanced terms in the essays which were to follow; yet his concern with what Werner Löser has tellingly called 'the positive value of the finite',[5] as well as his opposition to the 'Gnostic' drive – at any period of history – to seek to break out of or to ignore the ontological limits of creaturehood, will remain central themes throughout his work, themes that his reading of selected Church Fathers will enable him to identify with increasing clarity and fullness.

Anthologies and translations

One of the fruits of the patristic revival of the 1930s, particularly in France and Germany, was the concern of a number of scholars and publishing houses to make early

Christian theological and spiritual texts available to ordinary modern readers, especially to lay people. In France, under the leadership of the Jesuits de Lubac, Daniélou, and Mondésert, this led in 1941 to the formation of the collection *Sources chrétiennes*, a series of editions and annotated translations of complete patristic texts that today numbers over four hundred volumes, ironically becoming increasingly more technical in the process.[6] But the project of popular patristic translations had in fact begun more than a decade earlier, in books such as Erich Przywara's monumental collection of excerpts from Augustine, translated into German and arranged under broad concepts drawn from Przywara's own sweeping view of the theology of history.[7]

Balthasar too took an abiding interest in this same kind of interpretative translation, presumably as a way of offering the contemporary Church new access to the theological voices of an earlier age. His first effort, apparently modelled on Przywara's Augustine anthology, was an ample collection of texts translated from the works of Origen (*c*. AD 185–254) and published, with a substantial introduction on Origen's theology, in 1938.[8] In his introduction, Balthasar vouches his support for the view on Origen that was already gaining ground among French Catholic scholars, in contrast to earlier interpretations of his thought as indebted more to late Platonism than to the gospel. Opposing this Platonist interpretation, he vigorously insisted that Origen had always intended to be 'a man of the Church',[9] and that the central focus of all his work was his engagement with the Word of God, present in the words of Scripture and incarnate in the person of Jesus.

Balthasar suggests here that three distinct strata can be observed in Origen's thought: (1) a mythic, narrative stratum, which includes his more controversial speculations about the pre-existence of souls and the future spiritual state of the risen body; (2) a more Platonic stratum, which presents the life of grace as a gradual ascent in mind and spirit to transformative union with God; and (3) an intensely affective and mystical stratum focused on the 'passionate and tender love of the Word' (*OSF*, 10; the three 'strata', 6–12). Balthasar concedes here that Origen echoes some of the excessively spiritualizing tendencies in the Platonism of his time, but denies that he is pantheistic or Gnostic in his attitude to created reality: 'The way from body to spirit, from material image to ideational truth is a way not to the destruction of body and image, but to its transfiguration, eclipse and "subsumption" (*Aufhebung*) only in the Hegelian sense' (*OSF*, 16).[10] Unlike some of those who would later draw inspiration from his 'system', Origen preserves that sense of 'the positive value of the finite' that Balthasar considers essential to the biblical understanding of creation.

In the following year Balthasar published a second anthology of patristic translations: this time a collection of texts from Gregory of Nyssa's (*c*. AD 335–*c*. 395) fifteen homilies on the Song of Songs,[11] a second edition of which appeared in his own series with the Johannes Verlag in 1954.[12] Other translations of patristic texts followed quickly. A translation of Maximus the Confessor's (*c*. 580–662) *Centuries on Knowledge*, 198 carefully arranged aphorisms on the soul's progress towards unitive knowledge of God,

appeared in 1941,[13] the same year as the first edition of Balthasar's own major study of Maximus, *Cosmic Liturgy*. Unlike his other works of translation, this included not only an introduction situating the text theologically, but a careful listing and discussion of parallels to each saying in Maximus' other works, and in earlier Greek theology. In 1943 he published a short collection of excerpts from the works of Irenaeus (late second century),[14] emphasizing the contrast between Irenaeus and his Gnostic opponents in their understanding of history and the material world.

In 1947 he brought out a rearranged selection and translation of Basil of Caesaraea's (*c*. 330–79) monastic 'Rules', as part of a collection of the major rules of religious orders.[15] In his introduction he perceptively points out that Basil's rules seem aimed at any serious Christians who feel called to a deeper life of discipleship, rather than at defining an institution or describing a separate religious 'state'.[16] In 1958 he published a small collection of excerpts from the second-century Greek apologists;[17] and in 1961 the heavily revised second edition of his monograph on Maximus the Confessor also included new translations of two of Maximus' major works: the *Mystagogy*, an allegorical interpretation of the Byzantine liturgy and its physical surroundings, and the ascetical collection *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*.[18]

Alongside all these publications, he seems to have made translating Augustine (AD 354–420) a kind of hobby, and over a period of twenty-five years published and republished a series of translated excerpts from some of the bishop of Hippo's major theological and pastoral writings: selections from the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (1936);[19] selections from other sermons in 1942;[20] the twelfth book of Augustine's *Commentary on the Literal Sense of Genesis*, under the curiously vague title *Psychologie und Mystik* (= 'Psychology and Mysticism') (1960);[21] and selections from the *City of God*, in the translation of W. Thimme (1961).[22]

All of these publications attest to Balthasar's continuing engagement with a broad swath of patristic literature, not simply by reading scholarly works about them, but by involving himself in the exacting, supremely informative close-work of translating and arranging their texts. The fact that most of these translations appeared in an attractive, inexpensive format, with brief and thoughtful introductions, suggests also that Balthasar remained sensitive to the pastoral need of making a wide sampling of the sources of the Christian tradition available to non-specialist readers, as a means of keeping the spirit of a contemplative, expressly symbolic and liturgical theology alive in the Church.

Treatment of particular patristic authors

Gregory of Nyssa

In the foreword to his early monograph on the 'religious philosophy' of Gregory of Nyssa, Balthasar indicated that he intended to follow this volume with two other ambitious studies of major patristic authors: one on Origen and another on Maximus the Confessor (*PT*, 12). He wanted to do this, he told his readers, not in the hope that these

Fathers might hold the answer to the Church's present theological needs, but for the same reason that a mature adult might read the journal he kept at the age of seventeen:

> Let us read history, our history, as a living account of what we once were, with the double-edged consciousness that all of this has passed us forever and yet that, in spite of everything, our period of youth – and indeed every moment of our lives – remain mysteriously present at the wellsprings of our soul in a kind of delectable eternity. (*PT*, 12)

The full-scale systematic study of Origen never appeared, although the two works on Origen mentioned before (see endnote 10) were probably undertaken as the preliminary steps in that project.[23] In any case, the three figures of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor seem to have formed for the young Balthasar an arc through Greek patristic thought, which moved from a somewhat uneasy fusion of Platonism and Scripture towards an ever-clearer vision of what is essential to Christian faith.

Balthasar's study of Gregory of Nyssa was probably complete before 1939, when its final section appeared as an article,[24] although it was not published as a whole until 1942 – in other words, *after* the monograph on Maximus announced in the foreword! In this work, Balthasar attempts the formidable, perhaps ill-advised, task of shaping Gregory of Nyssa's thought on the ontological and soteriological relationship of creatures to God into a systematic whole. Stressing both Gregory's brilliance of insight and his relative originality and independence of thought, Balthasar develops his analysis in three steps, each of which, he suggests, deals with the same problem – the relation of finite creatures to the infinite God – on a successively higher plane, a method which, like Hegel's 'subsumptions' or 'sublimations' (*Aufhebungen*), 'transcends the lower plane even while it safeguards the essential solution' (*PT*, 23).

In the first section of the book Balthasar discusses the dynamism springing from an insatiable desire for God that underlies much of Gregory's discussion of human existence – a desire which results in the continuing growth both of a graced experience of God and a continuing expansion of the desire itself, ending in a mystical relationship beyond cognition (*PT*, 37–108). A briefer, second section reflects on the real, if limited, reality that Gregory assigns to created intellects, determined by their ability to participate by knowledge in God's unlimited being: a relationship Gregory refers to by the biblical term 'the image of God' (*PT*, 111–29). In the third section he argues that Gregory overcomes the obvious difficulty of imagining how an image, at such remove from its archetype, may still discover God's presence, by grounding his ontology in the person of Christ:

> Christianity brings to religious philosophy a complete reversal of its point of departure. It is no longer a question of knowing how the soul can approach God but of learning how, indeed, God has approached us. Through a historical fact that is exterior, Christianity teaches us a historical fact that is interior. For metaphysics, it substitutes metahistory. (*PT*, 133)[25]

So, in Balthasar's reading, Gregory overcomes the difficulty of 'thought' about God, represented in scholastic language as the understanding of *essences*, with a recognition that God is known only *existentially*, in his 'presence' in history.

> Since the fundamental problem of this philosophy is that of Presence, or, what amounts to exactly the same thing, that of Existence, the methodology of thought that alone can respond to this formal 'object' of his inquiry can only be an existential method: life is above desire, presence (*parousia*) is above image, and the miracle of continual arrival (*epidemia*) is above even presence. (*PT*, 171)

Put in christological terms, it is only the fact that God has become fully and personally present to us in the concreteness of history that allows us to participate efficaciously in the share of his life we naturally long for, by refashioning in all of us the image that reflects his being in a finite yet authentic way (*PT*, 135–45).

For all its abundant attempts to drop anchor in the text of Gregory of Nyssa, Balthasar's monograph tends to float away from its subject, and suffers from the conceptual structure – an uneasy mixture of Hegel and neo-Thomism – in which he examines Gregory's work. In a remarkable echo of Dom Polycarp Sherwood's criticism of Balthasar's scholarship on Maximus, his Gregory book has been criticized by a number of scholars for being forced and overly systematic.[26] Nevertheless, it represents a bold attempt to read with new appreciation an author who had hitherto been largely dismissed as a somewhat confused and derivative Origenist. Together with a longer study published by Jean Daniélou in 1944,[27] Balthasar's book helped to raise strong new interest in Gregory of Nyssa among Catholic theologians in the years after World War II.

Maximus the Confessor

This same boldness, expressed in an even more ambitious attempt to analyse the thought of a difficult and hitherto neglected author, is evident in Balthasar's other major patristic monograph from the early 1940s: his book on Maximus the Confessor, *Cosmic Liturgy*. Against the reigning view of Maximus as little more than a laborious compiler of earlier traditions, a well-read monk who wallowed in the world-escaping mystical ideals of Evagrian Origenism, Balthasar argues powerfully here both for Maximus' originality and for the grounding of his thought in the balanced christology of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

In contrast to the received wisdom of earlier treatments, Balthasar depicts Maximus as quintessentially an architect of synthesis, a man capable of holding together the ancient polarity (celebrated by Goethe) of East and West on a number of levels: the tension between the Eastern and Western branches of the Roman Empire, and the Greek and Latin churches housed in them; but also the 'Eastern' brand of religious thought that yearns to be dissolved in God by fleeing a deceptive world, in contrast to the more dialogical 'Western' conception of the relationship of God and the world assumed by the narrative of the Bible (*CL*, 44–7). In Balthasar's view, Maximus' metaphysics, his understanding of grace and spiritual perfection, and his hope for the ultimate salvation of the fallen world through Christ, all find their centre in Chalcedon's clear-eyed affirmation of the paradoxical mystery of Christ's person, as the unconfused and inseparable union of two utterly different realms of being – God and the human – in the mutually conditioning modality of a single, unrepeatable, historically concrete individual person, both humanly and divinely free, living out in human choices and acts what it is to be the

eternal Son of God.

> This 'indwelling' is perceived at once as the most interior and intimate relationship possible, in which [God] is tenderly concerned to preserve all that is human and natural and to heal it. Thus it is this 'new manner [of being]', this 'divine mode', this 'way of existing thus and in no other way', this new quality that has no effect on quantity, that promises to show us the way to the unity we are looking for. (*CL*, 215)

Here again we encounter themes that he had emphasized in his earlier studies in patristic theology. Here, too, Maximus is read through the oddly juxtaposed lenses of Thomist ontology and Hegelian logic, with Balthasar insisting that the so-called 'real distinction' of the scholastics implicitly governs Maximus' thought (*CL*, 246–8), and even claiming he can detect in Maximus the operation of Hegel's historicizing logic (*CL*, 268; although he is more careful here than elsewhere to acknowledge the anachronism[28]). But anachronistic as all this might sound, one must recall that here, as elsewhere, for Balthasar, the central message of Maximus is the 'positive value of the finite' before a creating and redeeming God, a paradox now seen as determining the very structure of salvation.[29]

Irenaeus

Balthasar's other major monographs on theological figures from the early Church are the first three chapters in the second volume of his 'theo-logical aesthetics' (*GL2*, 31–210) in which he studies the 'styles' of Irenaeus, Augustine, and the Pseudo-Dionysius. These long chapters represent a more mature stage of his own theological development, coming some twenty years after most of the works that I have been describing.

His discussion of Irenaeus marks a new focus in his patristic interests. Aside from a brief, perceptive introduction to his earlier anthology of Irenaean texts (see endnote 14), he had not previously written on this first truly synthetic Christian thinker. He sees in Irenaeus' struggle against Valentinian Gnosticism the first appearance of a centrally important theo-logical sensitivity: the recognition that the ordinary world – the world of concrete things, of religious institutions, of daily moral responsibilities, of the vulnerable human body – is the place in which the Creator God has revealed himself as the God of salvation. In other words, God reveals himself as the God who is other than the world, yet is its author and provident guide, working in the world to allow humanity ultimately to share his own life. Valentinian thought, for all its attractiveness, ends in the 'aesthetic illusion' of mere myth: 'Valentinus fails to distinguish adequately between God and creature' (*GL2*, 38). In contrast, Irenaeus insists on the ability of the Church's apostolic faith to 'see what is' (*GL2*, 45; see too 55). In recognizing Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, who in continuity with God's previous self-revelations to Israel reveals to us God's essentially invisible but life-giving glory,[30] one discovers the transcendent God by earthly senses, in an earthly setting.

It is important for Irenaeus, too, as Balthasar rightly notes, that this vision of God's glory in the world is acquired by creatures gradually in time; *growth* is the underlying pattern of redemption, 'an essentially gentle, easy, quiet, patient order' (*GL2*, 77). Seen

from the perspective of salvation history, this growth depends on God's pedagogy, beginning with his successive covenants with Israel, and coming nearer to its goal now in the preaching and sacraments of the Church. 'The economy of salvation is the training of man by God to encounter the God-man' (*GL2*, 81), and this means that humanity's road towards fulfilment can only be a patient and attentive journey through the things of earth, in the open company of other travellers.[31]

Augustine

The next chapter in *GL2* is a discussion of the 'theological aesthetic' of Augustine, based largely on an examination of two of the bishop's early works: *On True Religion* (AD 391) and the three books *On the Free Choice of the Will* (AD 388–95) – both part of the dialogue with pagan religion and philosophy that dominated Augustine's writing before his ordination to priestly and episcopal ministry. Balthasar here discusses Augustine's treatment of our human quest for unity, truth, and beauty, which ancient philosophy recognized as the fundamental characteristics of all that is real; and he is somewhat critical of Augustine's Platonic tendency, in these early works, to mistrust the senses in this quest (*GL2*, 121). He recognizes, however, that the Christian character of Augustine's vision is preserved by his growing focus on Christ as the centre of creation's ability to reflect the truth and goodness of God: Christ is primordial image of the Father, and also 'the figure of the incarnate, humble and humiliated Christ, disfigured to the point where no image is left' (*GL2*, 122). So, in increasing measure as he becomes an interpreter of Scripture, Augustine 'sees Christ's *kenosis* as the revelation of the beauty and the fullness of God: "the path itself is beauty"' (*GL2*, 123).

Perhaps because Augustine's thought and literary production are vastly more complex and comprehensive than those of Irenaeus, Balthasar's treatment of Augustine here seems unusually thin. He is looking in Augustine's earlier works for a Christian ontology underlying his Platonist aesthetics, an ontology based on a relationship of grace and nature, taking both seriously without reducing one to the other. In other words, Balthasar is looking for a Christian theory of analogy, which he sees as beginning in Augustine's theology of participation (*GL2*, 139–43). In turning his gaze here, however, he tends to leave out of consideration a great deal of Augustine's more expressly theological thought, which also shapes his aesthetic: his understanding of Church and sacraments, of the priority of God's initiative in the interplay of grace and created freedom, of the word of Scripture, of the interwoven narratives of sacred and secular history, of Christ as embodying the 'humility of God'.

The Areopagite

Balthasar's third patristic chapter in *GL2*, on the Pseudo-Dionysius (or Denys) is at once more comprehensive and more satisfying – an appreciative and detailed summary of Dionysius' whole theological undertaking. Following the approach of René Roques[32] and earlier French interpreters, Balthasar emphatically rejects the tendency of many scholars, particularly in Germany, to dismiss Dionysius as a neo-Platonist with only a thin

Christian veneer. For Balthasar, Dionysius is 'the most aesthetic of all Christian theologians' (*GL2*, 168), deeply rooted in the monastic spiritual tradition and solidly, if unobtrusively, anchored in 'the mystery of the God-man, his humiliation, his suffering, death and descent' (*GL2*, 208). Denys is also able to bring to Christianity the beauty and energy of a pre-Christian mystical longing for the divine, 'and remains perhaps the most important evidence of the presence of Asia in the heart of Western theology' (*GL2*, 148; why Balthasar continued to stereotype early Christian mysticism as 'Asian' remains unclear, as he never defined what he meant by it).

What he finds attractive in the thought of Dionysius is first of all its strongly sacramental character: despite his reputation as the most ethereal of theologians, the Areopagite's mysticism is rigorously earthly, and his God, who is supremely transcendent, is also the God who 'descends' to allow us to encounter him in earthly rituals and signs: 'the Church is the heart of the world and the earthly representation of the heavenly court; and any flight from the world is unthinkable, even for the most exalted mysticism' (*GL2*, 166). In keeping with this sacramental focus, he sees Dionysius' style of thought and expression as 'hymnic' and celebratory, assuming 'on occasion the tone of great poetry' (*GL2*, 177). Unfortunately, such a relentlessly liturgical character deprives the Church's teaching of its historical character, he concedes,

> for the Church has no longer any proper history, or, if one prefers, its history forms a kind of heavenly concert, like the great polyphony of Josquin or Palestrina . . . The whole earthly life of the Lord appears, as it were, as if swallowed up in the timeless contemplation of the sacrament of the Eucharist. (*GL2*, 176)

Despite this distortion, Balthasar presents Dionysius as 'expressing the final form of all Christian Platonism' (*CL*, 94), with the distortion finally being corrected by Maximus, who gives Denys's mystical vision a needed further grounding in the christological confession of Chalcedon. In *GL2*, however – where Maximus is not discussed among the 'clerical styles' – Balthasar's presentation of Dionysius is a chapter of striking and unalloyed enthusiasm, at once an enraptured apologia and a detailed theological analysis. The reason, perhaps, is that Dionysius' symbolic thinking exemplifies so clearly the sacramental, self-transcending qualities of the Christ-centred and Church-centred theological aesthetic that he too hopes to construct. For want of a better term, one might call it an aesthetic of eucharistic adoration.

CONCLUSION

Balthasar's was a mind liberated and energized by his reading. Clearly, studying the Church Fathers offered him, as a young Jesuit preparing for ordination, a new style for thinking about the deep implications of Christian faith, free of what he perceived as the frozen rationalism of nineteenthand twentieth-century scholastic dogmatics, yet turned towards the world and human reality *with an objectivity missing from Gnosticism and German idealism*. In the classical christology of the Fathers – especially as it was formulated in the balanced paradoxes of Chalcedon – he found the paradigm for a Christian ontology, in which an utterly transcendent God is understood to be personally

present, as Other, in creation, just as he was present to save us in the human concreteness of a Galilean carpenter, 'without confusion, without change, without division, without separation'.

Balthasar read the Fathers as he read a stunningly broad range of literature, from ancient Greece to modern Europe: avidly, intelligently, selectively, with deep intuition, and with his own distinctive sense of what was significant. Some of his earlier work in the field – his articles on the Scripture commentaries of Evagrius or the *scholia* of John of Skythopolis – shows his ability to do original textual and historical research on little-known figures. And some of his interpretative work – notably his great book on Maximus the Confessor and his brilliant synthesis of Dionysius the Areopagite in *GL2* – remain classic presentations of the theological contributions of these writers. Equally important for scholarship, his studies of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus were catalysts for a new appreciation of the originality and significance of these figures, an interest which remains strong sixty years later.

Yet Balthasar's treatment of the Church Fathers remains unsatisfactory from a number of points of view. Some of his interpretations and assumptions are based – understandably enough – on scholarly opinions that were widely held in the 1940s and 1950s, but are dated now: his view of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa as systematic thinkers, for instance, or his tendency to see the main concern of the Antiochene theologians of the fifth century as supporting the undiminished humanity of Christ. His reading of the Fathers, too, is puzzlingly eclectic; and he seems to have no interest in several major figures whose theological emphases, in fact, were remarkably compatible with his own: Clement of Alexandria, for example, the first fully competent Christian humanist and philosopher; or Athanasius, whose sense of both the ontological distance of God from all creatures and his presence to creation in grace has made him especially dear to Barthians; or Gregory Nazianzen, a poet and rhetor, a pastor and a philosopher of the Incarnation, whose theological 'style' comes close to Balthasar's own; or Cyril of Alexandria, whose *Commentary on John* has strong resonances with many aspects of Balthasar's thought; or, finally, Augustine, whose mature theology surely deserves a deeper and broader consideration than Balthasar ever managed to give it.

The most serious criticism to be made of his treatment of the Fathers, however, seems to me to be its lack of a sense of historical context: a curious failing in someone who lays such theoretical emphasis on the positive value of the finite, on inner-worldly reality, and on the need for theologians to recognize the need for growth and change, both in the human community and in its conceptions of God! With the exceptions of his book on Maximus and his chapter on Dionysius, Balthasar's treatments of patristic authors are generally not essays one would recommend to those who seek a deeper acquaintance *with the authors themselves*. Often brilliant commentaries on these authors within the specialized context of Balthasar's theological project, they are usually less than successful in allowing ancient authors to speak clearly to us in their own voices.[33]

It seems to be no accident that much of Balthasar's engagement with the Fathers took the form of thoughtfully arranged anthologies of excerpts. Following the example of

earlier anthologies of ancient texts arranged according to the dogmatic outlines of the scholastic 'tracts',[34] as well as that of Przywara and others, Balthasar has gathered passages that represent what he regards as the great theological ideas of an earlier age, arranged in a sequence that mirrors his own sense of the march of intellectual history. But the narrative in this scheme is imposed from without, so leaves the authors themselves as largely two-dimensional figures, patches in a modern quilt. Like a collector of paintings from every period, he has assembled an extraordinary gallery of theological positions, arguments, influences, and connections; but because the collection is such an eclectic one, and the arrangement so carefully controlled by a larger intellectual programme, it tells us, in the end, more about the taste and understanding of the collector than it does about the artists and their work.

Notes

1 Dom Polycarp Sherwood, 'A Survey of Recent Work on St Maximus the Confessor', *Traditio* 24 (1964): 428–37; here 433–4.

2 This was to be published later in three volumes, as *Die Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1937–39).

3 'Wendung nach Osten', *Stimmen der Zeit* 136 (April, 1939): 32–46 (abbreviated as WO, translations of which will be my own); and 'Patristik, Scholastik und Wir', *Theologie der Zeit* (= Beiheft zu *Seelsorge*) 3 (1939): 65–104, English translation, Edward T. Oakes, SJ, 'The Fathers, the Scholastics and Ourselves', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 24 (1997): 347–96 (abbreviated as FSO).

4 This seems to be Balthasar's first published use of the phrase that would become the title of his book on Maximus the Confessor, whom he considered to be the classic representative of this second form of 'Alexandrian' thought.

5 Werner Löser, 'Die Positivität des Endlichen' in his own *Im Geiste des Origenes: Hans Urs von Balthasar als Interpret der Theologie der Kirchenväter* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1976), p. 13. Löser's masterly treatment of Balthasar's treatment of the Church Fathers remains the fullest and most balanced resource on the subject.

6 For a lively history of this collection, richly documenting its origins and development from the theological project of the *équipe* that de Lubac had gathered around him at Fourvière in the late 1930s, see Etienne Fouilloux, *La collection 'Sources chréetiennes': Editer les Pères de l'Eglise au XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1995).

7 *Augustinus: Die Gestalt als Gefüge* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1934), English translation, *An Augustine Synthesis* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1936). Przywara had published a similar collection of excerpts from John Henry Newman, *J. H. Kardinal Newman: Ein Aufbau* (Freiburg: Herder, 1922), which first appeared in English as *A Newman Synthesis* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1931) and has been republished as *The Heart of Newman* (Springfield: Templegate, 1963; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

8 *Origenes. Geist und Feuer: Ein Aufbau aus seinen Schriften* (Salzburg: Müller, 1938; second edn, 1952), English translation, Robert J. Daly, SJ, *Origen. Spirit and Fire. A Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984; abbreviated as *OSF*). In calling the collection 'ein Aufbau' – literally, 'a construction' – Balthasar (borrowing a term from Przywara's anthology of Newman) emphasizes that the systematic arrangement of the excerpts in this collection is itself a central dimension of his interpretation of Origen, just as the rather mysterious subtitle of Przywara's Augustine anthology, 'die Gestalt als Gefüge' – literally, 'the form as structure' – seems to suggest that Przywara's arrangement of the excerpts is intended to reveal the inner 'form' of Augustine's thought. In all three anthologies, systematic, interpretative arrangement is clearly a central purpose of the collection.

9 As the epigraph of the volume Balthasar uses two texts from Origen – one from his sixteenth homily on Luke, the other from the seventh homily on Joshua – which will appear in the collection as texts Nos. 389 and 390, powerfully affirming Origen's desire to be and to be recognized as 'a man of the Church'.

10 In his separate essay on Origen, Balthasar likens Origen's overall approach to theology still more explicitly to that of Hegel: 'If one must pass a critical judgment on the whole of his theological synthesis . . . we are tempted

to compare it to that of Hegel, whose advantages as well as whose dangers it seems to share. The idea of superseding, *Aufhebung*, seems to us to be the nerve-center of the two systems. With both authors, an obscurity is refracted, which is not accidental: the restoration of the world in God, of what is material in what is spiritual, of symbol in truth, is the restitution of the original state. Origen gives this cyclic movement an expression which is wholly mythical and metaphorical; Hegel gives it a construction which is wholly intellectual. But the basic idea has not changed'; *Parole et mystère chez Origène*, ed. Pie Duployé (Paris: Cerf, 1957), p. 113 (translation mine). This little monograph on Origen is the second edition of a two-part article that Balthasar wrote while a student of theology at Fourvière: 'Le Mystérion d'Origène', *Recherches de science religieuse* 26 (1936): 514–62; and 27 (1937): 38–64.

11 *Gregor von Nyssa. Der versiegelte Quell: Auslegung des hohen Liedes* (Salzburg: Müller, 1939).

12 Jean Daniélou, Balthasar's contemporary at Fourvière, assembled a somewhat larger collection of texts from Gregory of Nyssa's mystical writings, including many from the homilies on the Song of Songs, which was eventually published in an English translation by Herbert Musurillo, SJ, under the title *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (New York: Scribner's, 1961). As far as I know, this collection was never published by Daniélou in French; Musurillo translated the passages for the American edition directly from the Greek originals.

13 *Die Gnostischen Centurien des Maximus Confessor* (Freiburger Theologische Studien 61; Freiburg: Herder, 1941).

14 *Irenäus. Geduld des Reifens: Die christliche Antwort auf den Mythus des 2. Jahrhunderts* (Basle: Schwabe, 1943). A second edition appeared with Johannes Verlag in 1956.

15 *Die grossen Ordensregeln* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1947; revised edn, 1961). Balthasar was the general editor of the whole collection, but the other texts included in the volume were translated by others.

16 For a recent argument in favour of this same interpretation of Basil's rules, see Augustine Holmes, *A Life Pleasing to God: the Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2000).

17 *Griechische Apologeten des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1958).

18 *Kosmische Liturgie* (second edn; Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), pp. 366–407 and 408–81.

19 *Aurelius Augustinus. Über die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1936).

20 *Aurelius Augustinus. Das Antlitz der Kirche* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1942; second edn, 1955).

21 *Aurelius Augustinus. Psychologie und Mystik* (De genesi ad litteram Liber 12) (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960), with M. E. Korger.

22 *Augustinus. Die Gottesbürgerschaft* (De Civitate Dei) (Frankfurt/Hamburg: Fischer, 1961).

23 Many years later Balthasar confided in an interview that 'Origen remains for me the most inspired, the most wide-ranging interpreter and lover of the Word of God. I never feel so at home elsewhere as I do with him' ('Geist und Feuer: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Herder Korrespondenz* 30 (1976): 72–82). It is strange, then, that after the early 1940s he never returned to Origen in a serious way in his writing.

24 'La philosophie religieuse de Saint Grégoire de Nysse', *Recherches de science religieuse* 29 (1939): 513–49.

25 Balthasar's language here seems deliberately to recall the title of the massive and influential work by the Jesuit neo-Thomist Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique* (Leuven: Museum Lessianum, 1926). Like Karl Rahner and other Catholic theologians of the mid twentieth century, Balthasar's understanding of scholastic philosophy was heavily influenced by Maréchal's dynamic perspective.

26 For references to these criticisms, see Löser, *Im Geiste des Origenes*, p. 102, n. 11.

27 *Platonisme et théologie mystique: essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944; revised edn, 1953). This work, originally Daniélou's doctoral dissertation, marked the beginning of his own role as a major force in the Catholic patristic revival leading up to the Second Vatican Council. For an appreciation of the importance of both monographs in awaking interest in Gregory's theology, see Marguérite Harl, *Ecriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), pp. ix–x.

28 Ironically, in acknowledging the anachronism Balthasar also frees the reader to see the basic justice of his approach, a point I tried to make in the translator's foreword to *CL*: 'It is, as I have said, a risky business to approach the works of a thinker from another age and culture with such a clear-cut intellectual and theological agenda. *Cosmic Liturgy*, in my opinion, succeeds as historical interpretation more than Balthasar's other works on the Church Fathers simply because Maximus does, in fact, lend himself to this kind of reading much more readily than do Origen or Gregory of Nyssa' (*CL*, 18).

29 At the same time as he was writing these two major patristic monographs, Balthasar published three smaller studies displaying the same combination of close textual study and wide-angled theological interpretation that seems to have engaged him throughout his first years out of Fourvière. In 1939, he published two articles on Evagrius Ponticus (AD 346–99), the ascetical theologian and systematizer of Origen's most speculative conjectures. The first article characterized the thought of Evagrius as close to Buddhism in its stress on the emerging unity of all things in God ('Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Ponticus', *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik* 14 (1939): 31–47); the other painstakingly attempted to identify fragments of his biblical commentaries within the larger tradition of passages ascribed to Origen ('Die Hiera des Evagrius', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63 (1939): 86–106, 181–206). The following year, he published a densely detailed article on the authorship of the earliest commentary on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*c.* AD 500), establishing by careful philological and theological analysis that the author of most of the commentary is not Maximus but the little-known sixth-century writer John of Skythopolis ('Das Scholienwerk des Johannes von Scythopolis', *Scholastik* 15 (1940): 16–38). This article was reprinted, in revised form, in the 1961 edition of *Kosmische Liturgie*; a translation is also included in the English version (2003). Unlike much of Balthasar's other more sweeping 'Hegelian' work on the Fathers, this last-named article was in its time a ground-breaking study, with keen historical insight and close textual analysis, and laid the foundation for continuing modern attention to this important ancient commentary.

30 See, for instance, Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.6, 4.20.

31 Kevin Mongrain has recently argued, in *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), that the underlying shape of Balthasar's whole theology is Irenaean, even though he wrote relatively little about Irenaeus directly. Mongrain sees Irenaean influence in Balthasar's affirmation of the active presence of God within created history, in his central focus on the paradox of Christ's person, in his opposition to Gnostic flight from the world, and in his emphasis on the gradual pedagogy of divine revelation in history. That these features are directly *inspired* by Irenaeus rather than by, say, Dionysius or Maximus, or even by Ignatius of Loyola, seems hard to prove; but Mongrain is surely right in seeing a strong *affinity* between Irenaeus' second-century synthesis and Balthasar's project of theological reconstruction.

32 *L'univers Dionysien: structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Aubier, 1954); see also Balthasar's other references: *GL2*, 145, n. 8.

33 See, for example, the modest but telling criticism of Dom Polycarp Sherwood, which has already been quoted in the opening paragraph (see endnote 1), and which – I can now conclude – carries much justice in its verdict. Sherwood generously acknowledges Balthasar's deep learning and profound acquaintance with Maximus' works, but finds his methodology 'disconcerting' precisely because it approaches Maximus not so much as 'a *locus classicus* within the Byzantine tradition' but as a dialogue partner with the theological and cultural issues of post-Enlightenment Europe. Such a method certainly makes Balthasar's patristics startlingly unique, but it should also alert historically attuned scholars to approach his portraits of the intellectual intentions of the Fathers with a certain due caution.

34 For example, Maurice Rouet de Journel, *Enchiridion Patristicum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1911), and its English adaptation, John R. Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002); or Francisco Morione, *Enchiridion theologicum Sancti Augustini* (Madrid: BAC, 1961).

15

ED BLOCK, JR

Balthasar's literary criticism

ART AS RELATIVE SINGULARITY

Hans Urs von Balthasar liked to claim from time to time that he was really a Germanist rather than a theologian. As peculiar as that claim might sound to those who know him from his great theological trilogy, his patristic monographs, or even his work in the 1980s on the Vatican's International Theological Commission, his assertion certainly holds true of his professional training before he entered the Society of Jesus in 1929, when he was awarded a doctorate in *Germanistik* at the University of Zurich. But it is not as if his entrance in the Jesuit Order then meant he had abandoned literary studies for 'pure' theology. Indeed, it will be the burden of this chapter to show that his later work as a theologian is thoroughly intertwined with his earlier work in literary appreciation, criticism, and theory. Some might even argue that Balthasar's theology is so enmeshed with his literary sensibility that it undermines, confuses, or even vitiates that theology. The astute scholar, however, will find that the richness of Balthasar's theology is due, at least in part, to his literary training and sensibility, and that, conversely, his theology only lends weight and substance to his literary-critical insights, making those insights genuinely interdisciplinary, and in that way all the more original.

Moreover, Balthasar's literary-critical perspectives also dominate his work precisely because the experience of beauty is so central to his theology, and because – next to music – the form of beauty to which he was first drawn and to which he invariably returned was the beauty of literature, be it poetry, drama, or forms of narrative art.[1] Balthasar's literary criticism may appear unfashionable just now, but its value will endure, precisely because he is so uncompromising in his assertion of beauty's relation to the Being which gives all things their inherent beauty. Thus, for theologians and those interested in Balthasar's religious thought, knowing that his work arises out of a complex and nuanced response to a wide range of cultural texts and experiences can only enrich the appreciation of – and critical engagement with – his theological work.

In a tradition of textual interpretation that includes Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Balthasar attends to the unique *claim* that a work of art makes upon the reader, audience, or perceiver. It is no accident that both Gadamer and Balthasar frequently advert to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem 'Archaischer Torso Apollos', a poem about aesthetic experience, and whose final line, 'You must change your life', recurs in both Gadamer and Balthasar.[2] This line expresses the challenge that Balthasar finds in

the experience of beauty, and which partly for that reason represents an analogy with religious experience.

Yet Balthasar's literary sensibility always manifests a tension between this sensitivity to the uniqueness of the work (or author), whence its claim comes, and an inclination to see the work (or author) as illustrative of, or better, as participating in, the higher, 'transcendent' drama of salvation. As a young scholar, we feel that he is learning much more *from* those he is studying and engaging, while, as might be expected, we find that later in life he is trying more to assimilate the *significance* of these works, so that they become something more like examples, illustrations of the cosmic, christological world he is envisaging.

So what, then, characterizes Balthasar's literary-critical approach in *its* uniqueness? Some of the answer lies, as already suggested, in the extent to which Balthasar's literary-critical perspective permeates his theological triptych. Although this is most evident in his biblical exegesis, it is also evident in his sensitive, occasionally painstaking interpretations of those authors whose work he individually engaged most deeply as his theology develops. Indeed, when discussing the philosophical foundations of Balthasar's work, Peter Henrici observes that 'Balthasar's philosophical method cannot be called systematic – let alone conceptual-analytic or conceptualconstructive – nor really historical. It is closest, as he himself pointed out, to phenomenology – with a good measure of literary criticism.'[3] Moreover, his literary criticism takes in an astonishing range of authors, not only the canonical authors of German literature (Goethe, Rilke, etc.) but also classical authors like Homer, Sophocles, and Virgil, and modern French poets and novelists (Valéry, Bernanos) and twentieth-century dramatists (G. B. Shaw, Thorton Wilder).

But besides the sheer range of his criticism, or his habitual literary approach to texts not usually treated by most literary critics, is there something distinctive about his approach? Yes. Balthasar's distinctive approach can be brought out by attending to his discussion in 'Why I Am Still a Christian', where he speaks of the analogy between unique claims of Jesus in comparison with the claims arising from other relatively singular events in history. Among these so-called 'relative singularities' he names three crucial examples: great works of *art*, the experience of genuine *love* between persons, and the individual's relation to his own *death*. Even the latter two examples, as we shall see, are suffused with an aesthetic sensibility and draw from literature for their explication. So let us first see how great works of art exemplify what Balthasar means by a 'relative singularity', the definition of which so obviously stresses their theological relevance:

> Great works of art appear like inexplicable miracles and spontaneous eruptions on the stage of history. Sociologists are as unable to calculate the precise day of their origin as they are to explain in retrospect why they appeared when they did. Of course, works of art are subject to certain preconditions without which they cannot come into being: such conditions may be effective stimuli but do not provide a full explanation of the work itself. Shakespeare had his predecessors, contemporaries and models; he was surrounded by the atmosphere of the theater of his time. He could only have emerged within that context. Yet who would dare to offer to prove that his emergence was on that account inevitable? (*2SW*, 20)

This passage highlights central features of Balthasar's literary criticism, which may be enumerated as follows: (1) his polemic against the *genetic fallacy* (which at least implies, when it does not outright assert, that an investigation of the presuppositions and prior requirements for the emergence of a work of art – or biblical text! – thereby *accounts* for the work); (2) his stress on *astonishment* as the first moment of aesthetic appreciation; and, as the implication of that astonishment and perhaps most important of all, (3) the stress on *objective standards* of appreciation over the subjective readiness of the viewer/reader to 'get' the work. Needless to say, in all of this one may note an implied critique of the presuppositions that governed the philosophical aesthetics of G. W. F. Hegel.[4] At any rate, awe before the miracle of art takes precedence over the analysis of the cultural background of the work of art, as we see in this passage that makes these implications clear:

> A great work of art has a certain universal comprehensibility but discloses itself more profoundly and more truly to an individual, the more attuned and practiced his powers of perception are. Not everyone picks up the unique inflection of the Greek in a chorus of Sophocles, or of the German of Goethe's *Faust, Part II*, or of the French in a poem of Valéry. Subjective adaptation can add something of its own, but that objective adequacy which is able to distinguish the noble from the commonplace is far more important. (*2SW*, 21–2)

The experience of human love is also a singular event, one that Balthasar says may be as rare as the experience of great art – which of course art itself so often shows. Here he contrasts Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (whose lovers immolated themselves, like Romeo and Juliet, on the altar of their own shipwrecked passion) with the positive examples of transcending love found in Euripides' *Alcestis*, or the love between Dante and Beatrice, or Hölderlin and Diotima. The first kind of 'love' is nihilistic and idolatrous, for it 'relates the whole world to this one absolutely fixed point, and with it gives itself up to disaster'. The second kind of love is real, for it allows Eros 'to be purified into transfigurations beyond itself' (*2SW*, 22, 23). But if Alcestis sacrifices herself for her husband Admetus, how does that differ from Isolde's brand of self-immolation? Here is the distinction: 'in the midst of time this [second kind of] love discovers not only a "moment" of eternity, but a lasting experience of faithfulness that rises forever above all immanence'.

Building on this idea of the uniqueness, the utter singularity, that this kind of transcendent love gives to each of those (truly) in love, Balthasar now turns to the individual's personal experience of death as another case 'when one comes to understand oneself not merely as a transitory individual in the ever-flowing stream of life' (*2SW*, 23–4) but as an utterly unique and irreplaceable individual. Great works of art might be rare, but *this* experience is, potentially at least, universal. With significant debts to Heidegger and Max Scheler and alluding to a passage in Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) – which contains a powerful scene in which the narrator's grandfather's death is seen as just such a 'relatively singular' encounter – Balthasar defines death this way:

> That which is seldom achieved by love is offered as a possibility to every human being in the moment of death, when he comes to understand himself not merely as a transitory individual in the ever-flowing stream

> of life but as a unique person who has to carry out his own unique mandate against a finite, and not merely a limited, horizon . . . When one leaves the society of men and walks toward the judgment of God who predestines; when one enters that refining fire through which the individual must pass and in which the worth of his deeds upon earth will be revealed – empty straw or solid metal (1 Cor. 3:12–15) – one walks completely alone . . . Death and judgment are primarily an interruption of every horizontal, dialogic situation; all such situations derive their meaning only from a non-dialogic situation, from one that answers to God alone. From this we must conclude logically that true time is primarily the one each individual counts from his death and judgement, whereas common 'world-historical' time, made into a chronological continuum by bracketing off personal death, is a secondary phenomenon, because in it the whole motive that constitutes the seriousness of temporality is suspended. (*2SW*, 23–5)

Balthasar's literary criticism thus gains at least part of its uniqueness from the way it chooses to emphasize those features of great works of art (their 'relative singularity' against the commonplace) that most resemble the 'relative singularity' of each individual existent. Art, love, death: they are all time-bound and yet in a certain way 'timeless', universal. Like human beings (their progenitors after all), works of art arise at a particular time, in a particular culture, but show their timeless, universal dimension precisely in their inexhaustibility (speaking of the arias of *The Magic Flute*, Balthasar says they 'remain inexhaustible mystery . . . even a really fastidious ear never tires of hearing them' (*2SW*, 21)). Moreover, the 'realization' of great works of art, just as with love and death, requires a proper subjective disposition, but more crucially an essential objective 'attunedness'. Or, as he puts it in *Truth is Symphonic*, '[The moment of rapture] is not possession, but being possessed, one that lends wings to Christian hope. It vibrates with the thought that the earth should reply to heaven in the way that heaven has already addressed earth' (*TS*, 191). The first volume of *The Glory of the Lord* is even more explicit:

> Before the beautiful – no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it. The more complete this experience is, the less does a person seek to enjoy only the delight that comes through the senses or even through any act of his own; the less also does he reflect on his own acts and states. Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it. (*GL1*, 247)

Balthasar reads texts alert to the experiences of beauty – understood in relation to the light of being shining in and through them – that he believes all great works of art, philosophy, and theology seek to mediate. The rest of this chapter will suggest the continuity and durability of Balthasar's early literary education and its impact throughout his long career as theologian and cultural critic. Certain images, *topoi*, and central themes remain of signal importance because they express the theological insights he will develop over a scholarly and publishing career that spanned more than fifty years. Thumbnail sketches of some of Balthasar's longer specifically literary-critical works in the next section are not meant to summarize those works or even to suggest their main theses, but rather to provide points of contact, or contextual bearings, for understanding their literary-critical references.

BALTHASAR'S LITERARY CRITICISM: SOME EXAMPLES

So how does Balthasar's literary criticism work in practice? Because there are separate chapters in this volume on the trilogy, where much of his literary approach comes to fruition, this chapter will concentrate on his separate monographs and essays, where the focus is specifically on certain poets, novelists, and dramatists taken on their own terms. But even here, space prevents a full overview of every essay or monograph; so I shall concentrate on select examples from each genre: poetry, the novel, and drama. Specifically, I shall discuss Balthasar's exegesis of a poem by Joseph Eichendorff, the narrative fiction of Georges Bernanos, and the dramas of the Greek tragedians (together with certain important changes that occurred in tragic dramaturgy in the wake of the impact of the Christian drama of salvation, especially in the plays of William Shakespeare and Bertolt Brecht).

'On a poem by Eichendorff'

One of Balthasar's earliest literary-critical efforts (after the publication of his revised doctoral dissertation *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* and his translations into German of the poems of Paul Claudel) appeared in a Festschrift for a friend, which was published in 1945.[5] Because it concentrates entirely on only one poem, composed by the Catholic Romantic poet Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff (1788–1857), and because the poem, in typical Romantic manner, connects the season of spring with the victory of life over death, this essay provides the reader with an excellent example of Balthasar's literary criticism at work.[6] Illustrating Balthasar's appropriation of Erich Przywara's understanding of the analogy of being, the essay is itself poetic, allusive, and filled with wordplay, such as Balthasar's stress on Eichendorff's use of the word *endlich*, which as an adverb means 'at last' but as an adjective means 'finite' (in the poem the word is used adverbially, but Balthasar's essay draws out its theological connotations).

Eichendorff's poem depicts a child asleep beneath blue waves and a deep green night. Awakened by an 'eternal word', the child hears the call of love and feels 'the delight and pain' of love (*ET3*, 520). The culmination of this movement also recalls the theme of kenosis (self-emptying) that runs throughout Balthasar's theology. Contrasting the experience of the boy's awakening to the landscape with the adult poet's realization of what the boy will awaken to as he grows into manhood, Balthasar sees the whole process as kenotic:

> Everything becomes mature, everything is experienced in truth, everything takes on the weight of real being. And only now, after long delay, is the heart awakened at last. It is awakened to true finitude, which is yet more than ever the true, incomprehensible thing. It was fitting for the youth to imagine that he would dispose of the mystery of life in the green and in the appearance. Only the [adult] man knows that he will never master this mystery. The more he lingers in dark lamentations, the more does he begin to understand what it means to live in fullness. The more he dominates life, the more unattainably does the synthesis elude his grasp. (*ET3*, 520)

So intently does Balthasar focus on all aspects of this poem that he even sees in the

shape of the vowel *u* a kenotic movement. In treating the three lines

> *Schlummernd unter blauen Wellen*
> *Ruht der Knabe unbewusst,*
> *Engel ziehen durch die Brust.*
>
> Slumbering under blue waves,
> The boy rests unaware,
> Angels pass through his breast.

Balthasar sees the youngster's life

> beginning in the lowest vowel, *u*: sl*u*mbering, *u*nder, he rests (r*u*ht) *u*naware. This resting in the depths of existence is far from being only a preliminary stage to the later awakening. It is no dull, animal sleep; for angels pass through the breast of the one who slumbers. Thus it is a sleep of paradise, a resting in God, an unconscious life in grace. (*ET3*, 515–16)

Such attention to the implicit music in vowels (for language gets its musicality almost entirely from its vowels and hardly at all from its consonants, except the voiced ones) naturally leads Balthasar to hear the music of the whole poem and to recognize its beauty, indeed its essential *theological* beauty, in the music of the poem:

> One of the best known and least mysterious forms in the realm of music – developing the inner contents of a theme in a free space of variations – shows itself here, transposed into the realm of the word, as if cloaked in impenetrable mysteries . . . [But] how can a theme be contracted out of words in such a way that it would not risk either blurting out its potential contents in advance through the conceptual clarity of the language or else degenerating into an occasion for playful arabesques of thought with a diagram that would follow the theme only externally? . . . However, Eichendorff has succeeded in finding the solution, and that in a perfect manner. (*ET3*, 511)

Little wonder, then, that Balthasar concludes his essay with a musical note of his own, showing how the melodic form of the poem perfectly matches the material of its theme: 'At the point where the vessel of the heart seemed to have run dry, because it does not wish to hold anything more in itself, it has become full without noticing it, full of grace; and the last thing to appear is what was always the first: love, the eternal dream of the far distances' (*ET3*, 522).

Bernanos

After Paul Claudel, the French author who had the earliest and strongest impact on Balthasar was Georges Bernanos. Written with boldness and flair, Balthasar's monograph *Bernanos: an Ecclesial Existence* identifies a childlike love as the source of the French writer's 'feel for the truth, including the truth of his times' (*B*, 18). The book also shows Balthasar's growing familiarity with a number of other major figures in modern French literature; but it was Bernanos whom he extolled above all for his simplicity, honesty, and suffering. Like Charles Péguy – the third French writer with whose work Balthasar became so deeply acquainted during his years studying theology outside Lyons in the mid-thirties – Bernanos sought to show the 'depth of evil' in the world (*B*, 197). The

image of Christ on the Cross, used to explain the anguish endured by a character in Bernanos's novel *Under Satan's Sun*, anticipates the theme of Jesus' total dispossession and godforsakenness (*B*, 486), a theme that will come to animate so much of Balthasar's work after his encounter with Adrienne von Speyr.

But what has most drawn Balthasar to the person and work of Bernanos is, paradoxically, the fact that Bernanos was *not* a theologian ('he would be the first to respond to such an idea with a loud laugh', Balthasar notes with a certain sardonic tone). For novelists, poets, and dramatists have something to offer the Church precisely by being who they are, as Balthasar explains in this telling passage:

> Some also hold it against theological authors that nowadays they are too concerned with writers of literary works instead of plying their own trade. But I would not have written this book [on Bernanos] if someone else had done it; and, at the same time, it could just be that in the great Catholic literary figures we find more originality and vibrancy of thought – an intellectual life thriving superbly in a free and open landscape – than we do in the somewhat panting, long-winded theology of our time, which is satisfied with quite slender fare. (*B*, 17)

In Bernanos's most famous novel, *Diary of a Country Priest*, the protagonist, a curate assigned to a rural parish, muses about news from abroad and the deaths of his compatriots: 'A sentence I read I don't know where has been haunting me for two days', says the priest-narrator. 'My heart is with those in the vanguard, my heart is with those who get themselves killed . . . Soldiers, missionaries.'[7] The same, of course, holds true of Bernanos himself, whose plays and novels deal so often with martyrs (Joan of Arc, the Carmelite nuns killed in the French Revolution) and sacrificial priests (the country curate in the *Diary* and the priest in *Under Satan's Sun*). But unlike the soldiers and martyrs of the curate's thoughts, Bernanos concentrated on those who suffer martyrdom inside Christian Europe, often at the hands of their fellow-Christians. From which Balthasar draws this conclusion:

> We can therefore affirm that, for Bernanos, *the ecclesial drama is played out between the priest and the saint*, as representatives of the two equally strong and equally important poles of objective holiness (ordination, authority, sacrament) and subjective holiness, the latter of which continually adheres to and depends on the first and cannot distance itself from it for a single instant. (*B*, 263)

But this tension between the two poles can only be resolved inside a deeper polarity, that between Cross and Resurrection, resolved in the kenosis of the Incarnation: 'What looks from the outside like an incomprehensible cruelty – the work of Golgotha for the unbeliever – appears from within as a deed of love done in simple joy. This is the law of all Catholic mysticism, that the spiritual night of the soul . . . has no other point of access than the brightest light of the love of God' (*ET3*, 467).

Tragedy and Christian faith

Given the dominant place that the *Theo-Drama* holds as the central panel of Balthasar's theological triptych, we already know how the art of drama has shaped and determined Balthasar's theology. Prior theology often ignored how much its development

was shaped, however unconsciously, by images and analogies drawn from the world of the theatre: script/Scripture, persona/person, role/mission, and so forth. Because the *Theo-Drama* has its own chapter devoted to these themes, this chapter will seek only to draw out some of Balthasar's more specifically literary analysis of certain periods of Western drama, specifically the Greek tragedians, the works of Shakespeare, and the pedagogical dramas of the Marxist playwright, Bertolt Brecht.

For all the debt Christian theology owes to the art of drama, Balthasar fully concedes that tragedy represents a challenge to the faith of Christians:

> The encounter of these two words, 'tragedy' and 'faith', is deeply significant, for that which is shattered in the tragic presupposes a faith in the unbroken *totality*. If, however, the state of brokenness is a fact of our experience, something we know, then the totality now shattering into fragments (or that has already been shattered) can be only the object of a *faith*, perhaps a faith that flies in the face of all reason. (*ET3*, 391)

Accordingly, Balthasar refuses to define tragedy by the word, or by the genre, or by an initial survey of the different styles of tragedy in the history of drama. Rather (and this is a key to his literary criticism across all fields), he insists that we 'leave the word untouched for the moment and look to the thing itself, to the place where it encounters us directly'. And that direct encounter, because it is so universal in human experience, can be easily described:

> As human beings, we already have a preliminary grasp of what drama is; we are acquainted with it from the complications, tensions, catastrophes and reconciliations which characterize our lives as individuals and in interaction with others; and we also know it in a different way from the phenomenon of the stage (which is both related to life and yet at a remove from it). (*TD1*, 17)

Especially in Greek tragedy, but also largely in Shakespearean and to a lesser extent in modern tragedy as well, this relation of the stage to life 'at one remove' manifests itself above all in three ways: (1) tragedy shows man reaching to infinite value but never attaining it; (2) it shows the lines of human interaction constantly being thwarted by other human actors; and (3) it sees this as largely due to a vaguely intuited guilt. And then having gathered all of this together, Greek tragedy[8] gathers up these negatives in order to say Yes to human being:

> This is the incomprehensible power of the Greek heart: that it says Yes to this existence both in the light and in the darkness of the Absolute: true, it is a pacified, chastened Yes, but one that has collected together with care all the reasons to say No, in order despite everything to transcend these reasons. The unity of all the tragedies lies in this Yes, which almost takes delight in gathering so much that is questionable and, indeed, inexplicable together, as much as it can, and in showing this to the audience, who share in the experience and in the celebration, so as to make known the greater power of the affirmation. (*ET3*, 397)

However, this affirmation can be made only because Greek tragedy grew up in the mythic space between gods and men so radiantly illumined by Homer ('the great tragedians . . . come from Homer's light', *ET3*, 393). Unfortunately, modern tragedy holds that affirmation in abeyance, which raises 'the difficult question of what form of the tragic can still exist in humanity *after* Christ' (*ET3*, 403), whose tragedy 'surpasses

the Greek and the Jewish tragedies by simultaneously fulfilling them in himself' (*ET3*, 401). And yes, there is Jewish tragedy as well, an insight that goes far to illuminate Balthasar's treatment of the Old Covenant in *GL6*. Drawing on the insights of the French tragedian Racine, he shows how remarkably similar are the dramas of the two peoples, Hebrew and Hellenic:

> The most certain approach to Christ leads through the Old Covenant. In this, too, there is an immense quantity of tragic material and scenes, so that Racine can alternate between taking up Greek and Jewish material; indeed, external parallels force themselves upon our attention, such as those between Iphigenia in Aulis and the daughter of Jephthah, Hercules and Samson, Cassandra and Jeremiah, Hecuba and Job, Andromache and Hagar – we could continue this list at great length. But what we should emphasize is not the similarity in motifs but the parallel situation of man, who is fully affirmed even in his whole finitude, mortality and questionable character. Still less do we have here the possibility of escaping into a philosophy that would devaluate earthly existence in favor of a heavenly existence on the far side of death. The outline and figure of man are deciphered just as radically on the basis of his exposure before God, indeed God demands of him that he may no longer understand himself in any other way at all than in just such a transcendence into fate (from *fari* = to speak), that is, into the divine oracle, the oracle of the Lord that is both threat and assurance of salvation at one and the same time. (*ET3*, 398–9)

So the caesura remains Christ. The tragedy of Greek and Israelite remains formally similar, but the possibility of the kind of affirmation available to those two peoples changes after Christ: something is both closed off and opened up. And this is because Jesus is not just a man like Oedipus or Jeremiah but bears the opacity of guilt in his persona as the incarnate divine-human person of the Son made flesh, that is, made sin:

> And this [tragic action of Jesus] is done in the same subjective opaqueness of guilt and innocence [that all other tragic heroes know], because the one who suffers 'is made into sin' for us, that is, he bears the guilt of all persons in truth and in reality and thus in the subjective nondistinction between himself and his guilty brethren. To go to the end means – over and above the conclusion of *The Trojan Women* – not only entering into total defeat, the total bankruptcy of all earthly power and of every project of salvation, but to go to the end of the night of sin, in that descent into hell where the one who dies and the one who is dead come into an atemporal state of being lost, in which no more hope of an end is possible, not even the possibility of looking back to a beginning . . . This event becomes the universal sacrament in the center of the history of the world, recapitulating all the quasi-sacramental events of the Greek stage and the prophetic-symbolic dramas of the Old Covenant. (*ET3*, 401–2)

This now enables us to see how tragedy changes, *must* change, after Christ. In one sense the tragedy is heightened, especially for the Christian, who remains (to use Karl Barth's term) the 'impossible possibility', the redeemed sinner, 'who cannot stop knowing that he is a sinner and a failure and feeling this to his very bones', and who has thus 'become even much more opaque and puzzling than [the tragic hero] was for Greeks and Jews, so opaque that he must totally abandon the idea of untangling this knot' (*ET3*, 403).

The same holds true, at least in one sense, for the form of tragedy itself as well: 'Where it succeeds in its highest forms, *stage tragedy* can contain a remarkable transparency to the tragedy of the Cross' (*ET3*, 404). But not all tragedies seek to do this, not even in Shakespeare. In a crucial passage in his literary criticism, Balthasar

makes an important distinction in Shakespeare's tragedies, one that surprisingly highlights and 'valorizes' many plays that are less well regarded by critics, and which correlatively downplays some of Shakespeare's most famous and beloved plays. Here is his assessment, one that bears citing in full for its remarkable set of judgements:

> Shakespeare touches on this zone [of transparency to the Cross]. Not in the so-called character tragedies, however, like *Othello* or *Timon of Athens* or *Hamlet*, nor in the portrayal of deep moral guilt and of its historical resolution, as in *Macbeth* or *Richard III*, nor in the great political dramas like *Coriolanus, Julius Caesar* (or in the figure of Marc Antony in the same play). But, for example, in *King Lear*, where the abandoned and betrayed eponymous father stands powerless in confrontation with naked unrighteousness and lovelessness and thereby becomes an implicit metaphor of the divine Father, whose heart is exposed in the tragedy of the Cross. Or in *Richard II*, whose protagonist must take upon himself an excessive penalty for his obvious guilt, a penalty that humbles him ever more deeply and strips him more and more until he is bereft of every royal power and external human dignity and has become a pure image and metaphor of the totally humbled Son of Man. Or in *Measure for Measure*, where the Duke, who has gone down in disguise among the people and who looks on for a long time at the conduct of the unrighteous viceroy whom he has installed in office (a figure who seems to emerge directly from one of the parables in the Gospels), ultimately returns for judgement and now plays out the judicial scene as if he were the Son of Man appearing again at the Last Assizes. He crosses over in royal freedom from the most extreme, stifling threat – which brings completely justified anxiety on all the people of Vienna – only to reprieve them all ('I am inclined to forgive all') – perhaps the greatest parable in all of Christian literature, a true *divina commedia*, a drama that casts light into the dirtiest corners of sin and that can succeed in doing this because it sheds the light of the highest love on everything. (*ET3*, 404)[9]

No wonder, then, that so many modern critics like George Steiner hold that tragedy is not really possible in modern drama, for the mythic background of heaven and hell are so frequently missing. In a shrewd remark on why George Bernard Shaw had to attach prefaces to his plays that were at least as long as the plays themselves, Balthasar points out that, under the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy of a defiant Superman arising from within the dynamics of history, the dramas of Shaw demonstrate the impossibility of Christian tragedy when composed in post-idealist terms:

> The theater of the world can no longer produce a meaningful play, for what apportions the roles – the blind life-force – does not know what it is doing. And the playwright, situated on a level above the dramatic action, pulling the strings and imparting a meaning to the play, can only do this insofar as he denies any meaning to the immanent action itself. (*TD1*, 244)

This pathos becomes even more pathetic in the dramas of Bertolt Brecht, whose fate it was 'to rescue himself and his characters from all cultural addictions, but without having anywhere to go. Violently he tears himself loose from a decaying bourgeoisie to commit himself to a socialism that . . . in later years he never totally identified himself with. It is a negative freedom, resistant to all modern fascinations: the freedom of being at home nowhere' (*TD1*, 328). Out of this estrangement comes Brecht's famous 'alienation effect', whereby the actor is prohibited from genuinely taking over his role, and the stage manager is instructed to keep the house lights up during the performance, to prevent the bourgeois audience from indulging in escapist illusions.

To be sure, judgements about good and evil saturate Brecht's plays, so much so that

Balthasar can even go to such extremes as to say that 'there is surely no writer of the modern period who has conducted a more beautiful dialogue with Christianity than Brecht' (*ET3*, 458). But the essential pathos of Brecht's plays and life never leaves Balthasar's sight, for 'again and again, it is the *usefulness* of a man that is decisive in his final judgment' (*ET3*, 439). For that reason, Brecht represents not just the *reductio ad absurdum* of contemporary dramaturgy but also of contemporary man himself:

> Despite all of Brecht's thought-provoking, foreground teaching on the new theater, the ultimate ideological purpose of the [alienation effect] begins to totter; for, *pace* Brecht, the human person is neither a chance all-or-nothing freak nor a sick schizophrenic, but a person with genuine freedom who can take responsibility for himself and, without surrendering his self, accept a mission of service. (*TD1*, 331–2)

CONCLUSION

Even this brief overview of Balthasar's literary criticism – describing both his method of stressing the 'relative singularity' of art and giving a few examples of that criticism in action – should be enough to show the immense richness that can be mined when theology is invited to draw on the great works of poetry, narrative, and drama for its own purposes. Those who are already familiar with his biblical hermeneutics know how much Balthasar brought over from his literary studies: his anti-Hegelian polemic against the genetic fallacy, his insistence that texts be taken holistically, his placement of texts (and their enactments in plays) inside the wider theodramatic context of the drama between heaven and earth, his alertness to the implicit theological themes embodied in narrative styles,[10] and his own powerful style. Surely we can see his own defence of himself and his approach to theology in his defence of Bernanos's Christian witness, in a passage that I have already had reason to cite but which now bears repeating, for it serves as such eloquent testimony to Balthasar's own literature-saturated theology:

> Some also hold it against theological authors that nowadays they are too concerned with writers of literary works instead of plying their own trade. But . . . it could just be that in the great Catholic literary figures we find more originality and vibrancy of thought – an intellectual life thriving superbly in a free and open landscape – than we do in the somewhat panting, long-winded theology of our time, which is satisfied with quite slender fare. (*B*, 17)

One can at least say this about Balthasar's theology: it is not slender fare.

Notes

1 Take, for example, Balthasar's own contrast between himself and Karl Rahner: 'Rahner has chosen Kant, or if your prefer, Fichte: the transcendental starting point. Whereas I – as a Germanist – have chosen Goethe' ('Geist und Feuer: Ein Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar', *Herder Korrespondenz* 30 (1976): 72–82; here 76). Balthasar mostly had in mind here a deep *philosophical* disagreement with Rahner and Kant; but it also cannot be accidental that Goethe excelled in precisely those literary forms of 'poetry, drama, or forms of narrative art' that proved to be such important *theological* resources for Balthasar's own work.

2 Tellingly, the literary critic Denis Donoghue notices that this is the most obvious implication of Balthasar's aesthetics: 'If we took him as seriously as he deserves, we would have to change our lives' (Denis Donoghue, *Speaking of Beauty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 56).

3 Peter Henrici, SJ, 'The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*,

ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p. 154.

4 Of course, Hegel's aesthetics were just as theologically determined as Balthasar's, albeit in a reverse way, for his entire view of God was determined by the very genetic fallacy that Balthasar resisted. As James Collins explains: 'It was Hegel, indeed, rather than the later atheistic materialists, who took the two decisive steps of relating the concept of God to certain social circumstances and of emphasizing the historical connection between philosophical theism and Christianity. Although there were some anticipations of this approach, Hegel's early writings first gave it a broad basis in social history and related it to the philosophical theory of estrangement . . . [For example] as a young man, Hegel shared the philhellenic enthusiasm of his classmate, Hölderlin, and of such leading literary figures as Herder, Goethe, and Schiller . . . How a transition could be made from this fortunate condition [in ancient Hellas] to Christianity posed a grave dialectical problem. Instead of locating the reason in the new Christian message as such, Hegel sought it primarily in the social changes leading from the city-state to the Roman Empire' (James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy* (Chicago: Henry Regnery 1959), p. 204). The contrast with Balthasar's starting point and presuppositions could not be more obvious, and surely explains why Hegel remained one of his lifelong opponents, from his dissertation *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* to *TD5*.

5 'Über ein Gedicht von Eichendorff', *Freundesgabe für Eduard Korrodi* (Zurich: Fretz & Wasmuth and Eugen Rentsch), reprinted in *ET3*, from which all quotations will be drawn.

6 When one sees Eichendorff's work as a whole, the reason for Balthasar's attention to the man becomes even clearer. The entry on this man in an award-winning reference work bears citing: 'The two fundamental experiences underlying Eichendorff's work are the intimate association with landscape deriving from his early years and the religious faith which strengthened as his life progressed. His poetry has an apparent simplicity, which is belied by great subtlety of rhythm and mood. Much of it is a poetry of joy, confidence, or resolution, but Eichendorff is constantly aware of dark forces, and the victory is not easily won' (Henry Garland and Mary Garland, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 196).

7 Georges Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Paris: Plon, 1936), p. 272.

8 Whether this holds true of Shakespeare or modern tragedies can be disputed and will in any case be discussed further below.

9 These judgements are somewhat modified, but also extended, in *TD1*, 465–78, in an excursus called 'Shakespeare and Forgiveness'. Here again, Balthasar's concentration on exclusively Christian themes in Shakespeare leads to what in most English departments would be regarded as eccentric judgements: 'The real dramatist of forgiveness is and remains Shakespeare. The transition from equalizing justice to mercy is one of the innermost motive forces of his art . . . If we wanted to divide Shakespeare's work into periods with regard to the theme of forgiveness (pardon, mercy, indulgence, grace), the following scheme would emerge. In the first period the emphasis is on the mercy and grace that comes from human beings, as in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, through the history plays treating the War of the Roses, and finishing up with *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* [!]. In the second period of the great tragedies the theme recedes, even though it is still there in *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*; in fact, none of the tragedies is without some conciliatory prospect. In the final period, that of the so-called "romances", it completely dominates; here human forgiveness becomes completely transparent, revealing the underlying quality of grace in being as such, so much so that occasionally (as in *Pericles*) thanksgiving completely takes over: there is nothing more left to forgive. At the same time the poet is aware of the cost of forgiveness, which is a kind of miracle in our life; indeed, it *must* be a rarity if it is to have its full effect. This is expressed in *Measure for Measure*, which has the Old Testament concept of justice in its very title: death for death, love for love, hatred for hatred, like for like, measure for measure; but its whole thrust lies in the fact that it goes beyond this level. Everything depends on this costliness; it is this that imparts weight to the theme, rather than the poet's frequent references to the transient, dreamlike, stage-quality of existence, which would seem to imply that justice is, as it were, not worthwhile' (*TD1*, 406–7). Here again we notice a certain devaluation of the middle tragedies, an elevation of the 'problem plays' but also a more nuanced view of *Measure for Measure* (a problem play if there ever was one), and a high appreciation of the late romances. But perhaps the remark of Escalus to Angelo in *Measure for Measure* justifies Balthasar's schema:

> Mercy is not itself that oft looks so;
> Pardon is still the nurse of second woe

10 David as tragic hero, for example, in *GL6*, 109–14, where Balthasar gets at the heart of the issue: ‘Can a king be wholly royal and wholly doing the will of God?’

16

FERGUS KERR

Balthasar and metaphysics

INTRODUCTION

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'the Christian is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time' (*GL5*, 656).

Obviously, this tocsin represents a distinctive, even idiosyncratic, conception of metaphysics, one thoroughly incompatible with any of the standard conceptions of metaphysics in Anglo-American philosophy. For Balthasar, metaphysics and Christian theology are distinct activities, each with its own sources and rules; but neither, he believes, can be properly conducted in ignorance of the other. Christian theologians cannot develop an account of biblical revelation which would pretend to be completely unconnected with pre-Christian and non-Christian traditions of metaphysical thinking. On the other hand, the experience of wonder which is central, in his view, in all philosophical traditions, is now almost completely invisible to philosophers who are not themselves practising Christians. In virtue of the biblically grounded awe at the divine glory which is made available to Christians, liturgically and in ascetical practice, it becomes possible to retrieve the 'experience of being' which, historically, philosophers from the beginning have sought to articulate, and with which any serious philosopher today should wish to engage.

In short, the true guardians of the experience of being are those philosophers who have the faith to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

VERSIONS OF THOMISM

Hans Urs von Balthasar studied philosophy from 1931 to 1933 in the Jesuit philosophy faculty at Pullach, near Munich. But unlike most of his fellow Jesuit students, most of whom were in their mid-twenties and encountering philosophy for the first time, he came to the study of metaphysics with a doctorate in hand, and having already intensively wrestled with a philosophical culture much wider than the Thomism of the day: he had read Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; he was more interested in Fichte, Novalis, Hölderlin, and especially Goethe, than in Descartes, Hume, and Kant, the standard targets in seminary philosophy. Despite all this, and although he hated the 'sawdust Thomism' then being served up as standard fare by his professors, the metaphysics he was to practise in his maturity was decisively affected by his study of Thomas Aquinas.

Only three of the many conflicting schools of Thomism at the time need concern us: 'Suarezian' Thomism; transcendental Thomism; and Gilsonian Thomism.

Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), usually considered to be the greatest Jesuit theologian of the Baroque era, held that, for Aquinas, the distinction in creatures between their essence and their existence is conceptual, not real. For Balthasar, however, Aquinas's decisive insight as a metaphysician/theologian is that this distinction is 'real'. Whether he ever studied them in detail, Balthasar must have been aware of the acrimonious controversies which divided Thomists at the time. In effect, he was taking sides with such then famous Dominican Thomists as Norberto del Prado (1853–1918) over against the equally famous 'Suarezian' Jesuit Thomist, Pedro Descoqs (1877–1946). Only specialists are likely even to dip into the literature now, but it is the matrix of Balthasar's work.

Balthasar was well aware of what would (much later) be labelled 'transcendental Thomism': initiated by the Belgian Jesuit *Joseph Maréchal* (1882–1973), this version of Thomism sought to reread Aquinas in the light of Kant, laying bare the transcendental conditions of human cognition which are for the most part (so it is claimed) only implicit in Aquinas's philosophy.

This version of Thomism never attracted Balthasar. Fairly or otherwise, he regarded it as unduly anthropocentric, focusing on the knowing and willing human person, rather than on the mystery of being. From the beginning, he was suspicious of the background of Karl Rahner's theology in this version of Thomism. Unlike Rahner, Balthasar never attended lectures by Heidegger. Ironically, however, as we shall see, his conception of metaphysics, as well as his massive reinterpretation of the history of Western philosophy in the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, are deeply indebted to his reading of Heidegger. Balthasar is far more radically 'Heideggerian' than Rahner ever was.

Balthasar owed a great deal to *Erich Przywara* (1889–1972; pronounced Sh'vara), then teaching at Pullach. (His name would become familiar in British theological circles through his appearance as an adversary in Karl Barth's work, in connection with the doctrine of analogy.) It may even be the case that Przywara helped to cure Balthasar of the much-hated 'Suarezian' Thomism. However that may be, they would agree that Aquinas's notion of analogy is not a semantic theory, just about the use of words, as many interpreters would say. On the contrary, the 'analogy of being' (not that Aquinas ever used the phrase) refers to the creature's real participation in the divine life, anticipated here and now by faith. The 'resemblance' between creature and Creator is, of course, heavily qualified by a greater difference: Przywara liked to cite the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): 'For between Creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.' For Balthasar, anyway, Przywara's insistence on this real ontological relationship between created beings and God remained a key insight.

In effect, this is to say that the Christian doctrine of creation plays a decisive part in what Balthasar would regard as the right way of practising metaphysics. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was another great controversy (also acrimonious) about the idea of 'Christian philosophy', in which the young Balthasar evidently felt called to take sides.

For many Thomists, then as now, Aquinas is a great philosopher, whose metaphysics stands free of his theology. In effect, his philosophy is intelligible to any philosopher, whatever his or her religious beliefs. For the French scholar *Etienne Gilson* (1884–1978), on the other hand, with his famous reference to the 'metaphysics of Exodus', we should have been able to work out, by purely metaphysical reasoning, that God is describable as 'the One who is'; yet, in practice, this was divinely revealed at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14).

The central insight, that there is no distinction in the Creator of the world between existence and essence – a metaphysical conclusion *de jure*, as it were – is, as it happens, *de facto* the result of biblical revelation. In effect, as with Przywara, for Gilson the tradition of metaphysical thinking has been decisively affected by the Christian doctrine of creation.

PHILOSOPHY, THOMISM, AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Balthasar published papers on the metaphysics of Przywara (1933), and on Heidegger's philosophy 'from the standpoint of Catholicism' (1940): somewhat inaccessible in both style and venue,[1] they still retain their value, however, as documenting the origins of Balthasar's metaphysics.

In a much lengthier and, because recently translated, more accessible, essay we find the best evidence of how Balthasar understood the relationship between philosophy and theology, together with the earliest sketch of the grand narrative of Christian tradition which finally comes to fruition in the seven-volume theological aesthetics.[2] The essay opens with a brief survey of the 'crisis of the West': the spiritual and cultural traditions of vast regions are being 'liquidated', 'quickly and relatively painlessly' (in 1939!). To salvage something of Catholic culture, Balthasar proposes to outline the 'structural law' of what is 'essentially Christian' in each of the three historical forms that Christianity has taken: patristic, medieval-scholastic, and modern. Very much following Przywara, though not naming him, Balthasar contends that the more we know God, which means the more we are 'in' God (since we can know God only through God), the more we know that we are not God. In other words, the more we recognize that all our being is in God's image and likeness, then the more is God known as 'the One ever beyond all similarity, the ever more improbable, the ever ungraspable One' (FSO, 355).

Interestingly, Balthasar does not stop to consider what many would regard as a separately identifiable 'New Testament Christianity'. He never regarded that as a uniquely cordoned-off historical phenomenon, independently of what happened next, so to speak. For him, the task of today's Church is identical with the nascent Church of New Testament times: the 'young Church emerged into the pagan world, including its intellectual traditions, in order to assert herself over against that world and to win it over for Christ' (371). Whatever the necessary reserves and criticisms, and Balthasar has many, finally asserting that 'nothing would be more perilous than to demand from our completely different situation a pure return to patristic Platonism' (379), he nevertheless insists on the unavoidability for Christian theologians of serious engagement with the

patristic and therefore 'Christian Platonist' legacy.

By turning to Aristotle, he claims, medieval scholasticism began to eliminate the residual tendency in patristic theology towards pantheistic emanationism. Aquinas knew nothing of a human nature, natural reason, natural desire for God, or natural goal of human life, independent of the *de facto* supernaturally revealed dispensation of salvation, or so Balthasar contends (controversially, of course: another acrimonious intra-Thomist debate, as he obviously knew). Yet, particularly in the ideal of the organic unity and mutual permeation of State and Church in the Middle Ages, so he maintains, there is a failure to ensure the necessary distinction between God and the world. It is not accidental, he thinks, that the doctrine of natural desire for the vision of God is linked with a tendency to picture a step-by-step ascent to the absolute, 'reaching finally (and sometimes almost counting on) the inner structure of supernatural being' (384). Similarly, it is not accidental, he thinks, that the objection to the doctrine of the real distinction comes from those who suspect it of 'latent pantheism'. They fear, in effect, that, far from protecting the radical difference between Creator and creature (a real distinction between essence and existence in creatures, but no such distinction in God), the difference ultimately rests on a comparison between Creator and creature that pictures the creature as a *fractured* being over against the Creator as *perfect* being – but that operates with a univocal conception of *being*. (Balthasar's sensitivity to this risk would soon develop as he began to come to grips with Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.)

Finally, with comparative brevity, Balthasar outlines the distinctive character of Christianity in the modern epoch, as he sees it. Here he is very positive. The principle that 'God is all in all' is now translatable into reality, more fully and consistently than ever before, since the sovereignty of God 'no longer comes into view at the cost of the world's being but precisely as its fulfilment' (391): from a world-condemning 'dying to the world' we can move to a world-affirming 'dying for the world'.

Balthasar hits out at certain theological deviations, in a not untypical barrage of irritation: a 'pure actualism that equates being and action', a 'personalism that pursues a kind of spiritual libertinage under the cover of the "religious personality"', or by invoking '*humanisme chrétien*' (Jacques Maritain?); a 'theology of crisis'; and so on (390). Yet, on the whole, for all this splatter of criticisms, it turns out that we need not think of modernity as inherently under the sway of subjectivism and anthropocentrism. Indeed, on the contrary, 'at least when every "subjectivity" of ecstatic ascent to God remains encompassed by the meaning and consciousness of Christian mission' (392), we may be positive and optimistic about the understanding of the relationship between God and the world, in the era of modernity. So long, that is to say, as the modern sense of the autonomous self is embraced within a Christian understanding of vocation, we may be happy about the outcome. Here, Balthasar's outline history of the epochs of Christian thought is finally placed under the light of the concept of mission (*Sendung*), which would become so important for Balthasar's theology (and so decisive in his life).

Much later in his career, in 1960, in one of a cluster of articles written about the time that he was composing the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar published an

even more important essay on his understanding of the place and nature of philosophy.[3] Here, no doubt aware of intra-Thomist squabbles about the possibility of 'Christian philosophy', no doubt also of Heidegger's famous dismissal of the very idea of 'Christian philosophy' as a 'round square', Balthasar documents the patristic use of the expression 'philosophy'.

For the Fathers, beginning already with Justin, Christianity is the only true 'philosophy'. Indeed, even before Christianity arose as a religion (although contemporaneous with Jesus), Philo of Alexandria sought to reconcile what the Law calls the 'word of God' with 'the royal road to God' that the Greeks call 'philosophy'. In the same mode, Balthasar adopts roughly the same position and buttresses his position by supplying quotations from Clement of Alexandria and beyond, into the Middle Ages. In the end, he is out to explain and defend the importance of ascetic contemplation in the setting of a monastic form of life as the most fruitful context for metaphysical speculation.

On the other hand, Balthasar insists on the fact that just because some Christians dedicate their lives to contemplation, this does not thereby absolve the others. Rather, every Christian is called to 'philosophize', which means, Balthasar contends, to engage in contemplating the 'mystery of being'. Citing Hegel and Heidegger, Balthasar insists that, though much in the cosmology of classical antiquity is outmoded, and the sciences now offer unprecedented understanding of the world, 'the Greek question about the being of what exists is as new today as it was in the age of Heraclitus and Parmenides, of Plato and Aristotle' (*ET2*, 342). Moreover, 'the question of being' is not going to be solved simply by appealing to Christian revelation. True, the Logos has begun to speak personally, in the Incarnation, but this does not mean, Balthasar insists, that the question that being poses is superseded. On the contrary, the question is only revealed all the more nakedly – as the Fathers and the scholastics have shown, 'from the Cappadocians' teaching about God to the teaching of Dionysius, Victorinus and Augustine, through Maximus and Boethius to the great speculative scholastic theologians, up to Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa' (*ET2*, 343).

In other words, there is no escape from the metaphysical tradition. We have to remain concerned with the mystery of being. 'The only thing worthwhile is to hold oneself open to this mystery, and the mystery does not loosen its grip on the one who has once dedicated himself to it with all his love; he must yield up his eros to the ascent that purifies by passing through all the renunciations, for the one love of wisdom demands everything' (*ET2*, 343).

Furthermore, for Balthasar, this is the difference between Catholic and Reformed Christianity: 'Protestantism does not tire of discrediting the eros of antiquity which presses forward into the mystery of being, by setting it in contradiction to the divine agape that descends to men.' The question of being is not interesting for Protestantism, he claims, because it seems just a concept. Indeed, not only Protestants but now most people, for one reason or another, 'live half-smothered under the surface of the water, rising above it scarcely ever for a breath of air by entering reality and its unbearable

splendour' (*ET2*, 344).

HEIDEGGER AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

Clearly, Balthasar is contending against Heidegger's famous claim that the question of being is closed for Christian believers. Unsurprisingly, then, when Balthasar eventually recounts the history of Western thought, starting with Homer, the Greek tragedians, Plato, and Plotinus, in *The Glory of the Lord*, his focus is on epochs and authors noted for their contributions in the history of the 'contemplation of being'. His purpose is to explore the elective affinities between the metaphysical vision of being and the Christian vision of the divine glory of the triune God: the longing for such vision variously and repeatedly articulated in the metaphysical tradition and the fulfilment unexpectedly granted in God's self-communication in the Christian dispensation. Far from Christian revelation's bringing closure to the question, as Heidegger thought, it is precisely Christian revelation that preserves and respects the mystery of being.

Balthasar's deeper purpose is, no doubt, not just to trace the history, so to speak, but to retrieve, even to re-create, the pre-Christian vision of being in all its awesomeness as the cultural environment within which alone the specifically Christian vision, rooted in God's self-revelation in the biblical tradition, came to expression historically and remains accessible today. In particular, Balthasar seeks to bring out the theological *a priori* of the metaphysical vision of goodness, truth, and beauty – of being as such. 'Greek metaphysics was orientated towards the *theion* and the Christian view of reality took possession of this "natural" aesthetics in order to complete and transcend it on the basis of revelation' (*GL4*, 393).

Balthasar's insistence on how the question of being remains in the Christian tradition is clearly a polemic against Heidegger's equally dogmatic assertion that those for whom the biblical revelation is the truth cannot really ask this question without ceasing to be Christian believers.[4] They have the answer to the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' even before it is asked: everything is divinely created. For Heidegger, there is, and should be, a thinking and questioning within Christian faith – that, indeed, is why there is such a thing as theology. But to ask 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' is 'a daring attempt to fathom this unfathomable question by disclosing what summons us to ask it' – which, on the other hand, is philosophy. For Heidegger, to ask this question from inside Christian faith, really and seriously, must simply undermine faith. Here Heidegger, for all his Roman Catholic upbringing, shows that he accepts Adolf von Harnack's famous thesis, or at least his own variation of it: that the original New Testament experience can only be subverted by the ancient Greek question of being (Harnack's own accusation was more general: that New Testament Christianity has been corrupted by Hellenization *tout court*). For Balthasar, on the contrary, as noted above, there never was any New Testament Christian experience independent of Hellenic thought. More to the point, beyond this reading of the history, Balthasar finds something missing in any Christian theology which does not engage with the question of the mystery of being. Far from undermining Christian faith, on

Balthasar's view, taking the question of being seriously, inside Christian faith, is a good way of deepening the appropriate wonder at there being something rather than nothing. Instead of foreclosing the question, as Heidegger thinks, the Greek question of being only deepens the Christian doctrine of creation as the 'miracle of being'.

Thus, Balthasar's idea of metaphysics makes good sense to philosophers familiar with Heidegger. They may agree with Heidegger in wanting to keep metaphysics and Christian doctrine as far apart as possible. Or they may agree with Balthasar's view that there is no conflict between metaphysics and Christian doctrine – on the contrary, the entire tradition of Western philosophy comes to fulfilment in true Christian theology, properly understood. Either way, at least what Balthasar means by metaphysics is intelligible. For philosophers in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, however, Balthasar's constant reference to the Heideggerian *oeuvre* can prove to be a stumbling block.

For theologians, too, this is a problem, if they have been trained in, or in the neighbourhood of, departments in which analytic philosophy sets the agenda. Even if they think there is more to theology than thinking simply in terms of biblical revelation, they will be much more likely to appeal to analytic philosophy than to venture into any 'philosophy of being'.

In the central philosophical volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* (*GL4* and *5*) Balthasar traces the significant moments and figures in the history of the metaphysical tradition, understood then as a history of the contemplation of being. In the first volume, starting with Homer, the Greek tragedians, Plato, Virgil, and Plotinus, moving into the Fathers and the medieval schoolmen, he concludes with an important exposition of Thomas Aquinas's metaphysics of being. In the second volume he starts from the 'catastrophe' of late-medieval nominalism (Scotus, Ockham, Suarez), as he sees it, taking us through the three currents of metaphysics in modern times: the way of self-abandonment to the divine glory (Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales), the attempt to relocate theology in a retrieval of antiquity (Nicholas of Cusa, Hölderlin, Goethe, Heidegger), and the metaphysics of spirit (Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel). This volume culminates in what is surely the centrepiece of Balthasar's metaphysics: 'The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Distinction'.

In short, the history of ancient metaphysics culminates in Balthasar's exposition of Aquinas, specifically his doctrine of the real distinction (*GL4*, 393–412). The history of metaphysics in the modern age reaches its climax with Heidegger, or, rather, with Balthasar's post-Heideggerian version of the specifically Christian way of practising metaphysics (*GL5*, 613–56).

AQUINAS AND THE REAL DISTINCTION

For Balthasar what is remarkable about Aquinas, indeed his 'major creative achievement', is his understanding of being (*esse*) as 'the non-subsistent fullness and perfection of all reality', and as 'the supreme likeness of divine goodness' (*GL4*, 393). This means that God is in no sense designatable as the being of things except in the sense

of being the efficient, exemplary, and final cause of everything – which 'in a new and much more radical way' places God 'over and above all cosmic being, above everything that can be calculated or attained within the structures, real or ideal, of the cosmos', God is indeed 'the Wholly Other'.

Here Balthasar develops his interpretation almost entirely on the basis of Aquinas's short and unfinished exposition of Boethius's *De Trinitate*: Aquinas's most elaborate reflection on theological epistemology – that is, questions to do with human knowledge of God. Paraphrasing and recapitulating Aquinas, Balthasar writes: 'We can know that God is but not what God is, or rather, since there is no knowledge of existence without at least some indistinct apprehension of essence, we have a knowledge which is surpassed and negated in a greater and definitive unknowing: a knowledge based solely on the argument from effects to cause and from essences on their various ascendant levels to God' (*GL4*, 394).

This is precisely what brings home the reality of God's transcendence: quoting Aquinas, God 'is known the more he is recognised to be remote from everything that emerges from effects', 'he is known through negation'. This brings Balthasar to a longer quotation, 'this remarkable statement':

> In this progress of knowledge the human mind is usually most helped if its natural intelligence is strengthened by a new light: the light of faith and the gift of wisdom and understanding, by which the mind is elevated above itself in contemplation, insofar as it recognises that God lies above and beyond everything that it can know by nature. And since it cannot press forward to the vision of his essence, one may say that it is reflected back on itself through the superior light, and so Gregory's gloss on Jacob's saying, 'I have seen God face to face' (Genesis 32:31), can run: 'When the eye of the soul turns towards God, it is thrown back by the lightning flash of the Infinite.' (*GL4*, 394)

For Balthasar, clearly, Aquinas's conception of human knowledge of God is radically apophatic; it is envisaged on the model of a Platonic ascent, which is simultaneously the refraction of grace-given illumination. In effect, the practice of Christian faith is understood as deepening contemplation of the mystery of being. Only Aquinas's philosophy of the analogy of being, Balthasar now says, saves the negative theology that he inherited from Proclus and the Areopagite from understanding the relationship between 'God in himself' and 'God for us' in such purely conceptual terms that it would collapse into pantheism, as it threatened to do historically, he says, in John Scotus Eriugena and subsequently in Hegel's metaphysics of identity.

However all that may be, the only point that I need make here is that, for Balthasar, the role of philosophy in theology is as follows: Aquinas's doctrine of the real distinction between existence and essence in creatures 'is a philosophical thesis' – 'but it enables us once again to make a clear differentiation between the "glory" of God and the beauty of the world' (*GL4*, 395). This is important, Balthasar adds, 'as much for the ordinary believer as for the theologian'. There are many other attractive conceptions of 'God': 'the God who is found within, on the journey through selfhood'; 'the God of absolute subjectivity (Eckhart) and of absolute free will (Ockham)'; 'the God who is the point of intersection where all the lines of the universe meet (Nicholas of Cusa)' – 'the God who

will soon turn into the cosmic deity of the Renaissance'.

Over against all such images of 'God' Aquinas is a 'kairos', an absolutely unprecedented and irreversible turning point, 'insofar as ontology here shows itself to be genuine philosophy' – 'and thus consciously disengages itself from the theology of revelation'.

Directing us again to Aquinas on Boethius, Balthasar cites the distinction between the theology which is 'that of the philosophers, which by another name is called metaphysics', and the other theology, revealed theology, 'which is transmitted in Holy Scripture'. He spells this out: Aquinas's epoch-making achievement is to build on the 'theological' ontology of the Greeks and early medievals; they understood being, together with its properties, 'as dynamically transparent to divinity'. They saw philosophy and theology as a unity, however, which exposed them to the threat of 'the old monistic world of thought'. What Aquinas achieved, Balthasar thinks, is that he separated philosophy from theology without, however, forgetting 'the way in which being points critically to the eternal, hidden God', thus without forgetting 'the way in which reason points noetically to the possible revelation of that God'. Which means, consequently, that Thomas 'wants all metaphysics to be seen as orientated towards "theology"' (*GL4*, 396).

The transcendence of God over the world, Balthasar contends, is really only properly secured by Aquinas, over against all forms of pantheism (see *GL4*, 375). The Greeks had a presentiment of the mystery within being, indeed they constantly contemplated it, without, however, being able to grasp it adequately in its distinction from God (*GL4*, 406). What Aquinas achieved, Balthasar claims, 'is an extension within philosophy of the illumination by biblical revelation of the idea of God as creative principle'. That is to say, it took biblical revelation to disclose God as 'freely choosing to create', which then enabled theologians, Aquinas in particular, to rethink the contemplation of the mystery of being as inherited from antiquity and practised in the patristic and early medieval periods. Under the impact of the Christian doctrine of creation, so to speak, the mystery of being could now be approached with appropriate respect for divine transcendence and immanence. The metaphysics of Thomas is thus the philosophical reflection of the free glory of the living God of the Bible and in this way the interior completion of ancient (and thus human) thought (*GL4*, 406–7). More lushly stated still, Aquinas's metaphysics

> is the celebration of the reality of the real, of that all-embracing mystery of being which surpasses the powers of human thought, a mystery pregnant with the very mystery of God, a mystery in which creatures have access to participation in the reality of God, a mystery which in its nothingness and non-subsistence is shot through with the light of the freedom of the creative principle, of unfathomable love. (*GL4*, 407)

The crucial move, in Balthasar's interpretation, is Aquinas's conception of the real distinction, the ontological difference, in every and all created being, between existence and essence; this is what allows us to see the radical difference between creatures and God, and thus to respect each, letting creatures have their own reality and letting God be God, collapsing neither into the other. Balthasar cites Gilson's book on Bonaventure (*GL4*, 377) but develops his reflections on Aquinas without mentioning him. For Gilson,

God's self-identification as 'I am who am' (Exodus 3:14) is at work seminally in the tradition of Greek and Latin theology, achieving fulfilment in the thought of Aquinas: God as the One who is, being itself, *ipsum esse subsistens*. This emphasis on the primacy in Aquinas's thought of God as *actus purus essendi*, the pure act of existing, Gilson's 'discovery', seems very much the emphasis that Balthasar takes for granted.

THE FOURFOLD DIFFERENCE

When we turn to Balthasar's own discussion of the question, 'Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?' we find an attempt to articulate an appropriate sense of wonder.

The section entitled 'The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference', towards the end of *GL5*, is the centrepiece of Balthasar's metaphysics. Essentially, Balthasar expands Aquinas's doctrine of the real distinction between existence and essence in created beings in the light of Heidegger's mythopoetic account of the difference between be-*ing* (*Sein*, a verbal infinitive referring to the act of 'to-be') and being*s* (*Seiendes*, an adjectival noun referring to the things that exist)[5] in terms of the Fourfold (*das Geviert*: earth, sky, death, the sacred).

We need not go into Heidegger's conception of the Fourfold: it is enough to see that, here again, Balthasar turns the Heideggerian doctrine on its head. The most conspicuous feature of Heidegger's picture of the human person as held within the interplay of the four suprahuman elements or dimensions, namely earth, sky, death, and the sacred, is that it excludes all reference to the Christian God and equally any reference to human intersubjectivity.

Balthasar rewrites Heidegger's story as follows, briefly. The phenomenal world exhibits an objective order, which we *disclose* but upon which we do not *project*. The sciences all recognize this. Indeed, we have so much knowledge of how the world is that we cannot but admire how everything appears so beautifully ordered within the necessity of being. It is not surprising, indeed, that we are inclined to look no further than the world. Wonder at the world, we may allow, is how philosophy and science began. What we forget, Balthasar thinks – here agreeing with Heidegger – is that wonder is the element in which thought is always moving, whether we realize this or not. Yet, disagreeing with Heidegger, Balthasar contends that the wonder is not just that beings – that is, beings such as we are – are able to wonder at be-ing, the act of 'to be', in its distinction from what there is. Wonder is much more a wonder that 'being as such by itself to the very end . . . behaves as something to be wondered at, something striking and worthy of wonder'. (Whether this is a perspicuous claim, or entirely due just to Heidegger's idiosyncratic lucubrations we may leave aside.)

The aim of metaphysical reflection, Balthasar now says, is to maintain this 'primal wonder', which we can only do, he seems to think, by repeatedly articulating it in the following four stages (his own innovatory contribution). We need a much richer, more specific and more complex configuration than either Aquinas's existence/essence distinction or (even) Heidegger's Being/beings difference.

It should be noted, however, that Heidegger's 'philosophy of being', 'permeated with Christian theological motifs in changed form', is enormously important for Balthasar (see *GL4*, 429–50). Indeed, for Christian theology, and particularly for the theology of God's glory – so Balthasar contends – Heidegger's project is by far the most fertile in modern philosophy. Heidegger is the one who keeps the focus on 'the main issue' (for philosophy), which is 'the mystery of the immanent distinction between the to-be of being and the beings that are existent'. Moreover, he continues to challenge the Christian theologian with his question, 'How does God enter philosophy?' (*GL4*, 449). This is important because Christian theology, Balthasar thinks, runs into the sand if it tries to think out the implications of God's self revelation in Scripture while bypassing the mystery of this distinction. Without philosophical mediation, in the sense of contemplation of the ontological difference, theology 'sinks to the status of being a science of existent things amongst others'. Worse still, it enters into dialogue with the sciences, 'a dialogue in which it is clearly fated to draw the shorter straw'. Heidegger's warnings against technocracy and nihilism should direct us to contemplate 'the true wonder at the fact that something exists rather than nothing' (*GL4*, 448).

Balthasar's fourfold difference is a single reality, so he claims, but constituted out of these four irreducible (and real) differences: (1) the intersubjective difference of the awakening child's 'I' from its mother (and implicitly from every other human and from all else in the world); (2) the difference of the to-be of beings from the beings themselves; (3) the converse difference of beings from being; and (4) the difference between all of these and God.

The first is often regarded as the most fundamental insight in Balthasar's philosophy. He expresses surprise that no philosopher has previously ever discussed the moment of birth, or one's being borne in the womb. Prompted, perhaps, by Heidegger's picture of how the self becomes aware of being 'thrown' into life, Balthasar invites us to consider the original event of any human life: 'There is no encounter – with a friend or an enemy or with myriad passers-by – which could add anything to the encounter with the first-comprehended smile of the mother' (*GL5*, 616–17). The difference between self and other in which one finds one's identity is ultimately the experience of responding to a mother's smile, the experience in which we learn that we are 'contained, affirmed and loved in a relationship which is incomprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering and nourishing' (*GL5*, 616).

Next, we might have thought that the difference between being and beings suffices. For Balthasar, certainly, we must notice the difference of being from beings: no matter how many beings there may be, have been, or will be, no matter how wonderful any being may be, the superabundance of be-*ing* itself would not thereby be exhausted in all its instances. This sounds quite Heideggerian. The other side of this difference, however, Balthasar's third difference, emphasizes that it is not just that all beings depend on be-*ing*, since they have nothing or are nothing other than subsisting in the act of to-be – the reverse is also true: Being does not subsist in itself, on its own, in isolation, it needs particular beings in which to become actual, so to speak. As Balthasar puts it: 'not only

are "concepts without intuition empty"' – (alluding to the well-known Kantian remark); but also 'the "light" or the "abundance" of being remains so too' (*GL5*, 619). Being without beings would be nothing; likewise, beings without the act of to-be: Being.

Fourthly and finally, in a step that we make 'gingerly, almost against our will' (*GL5*, 636), still remaining within philosophy (so Balthasar thinks, and here distancing himself from Heidegger), we have to acknowledge that the Being/being difference cannot come about by its own 'will', spontaneously. Being and beings instantiate one another, so to speak; but the difference between Being and beings, or between beings and Being, Balthasar thinks, originates in the free gift of the One we must call 'God'.

Perhaps there is more assertion here than supporting argument. For students accustomed to modern Anglo-American styles of metaphysical discourse, much more seems to be claimed than is ever actually demonstrated. Balthasar's signalling of the importance of the mother–child relationship is certainly illuminating and deserves further reflection (it obviously bears on his mariology). Whether the twofold difference between Being and beings/beings and Being achieves very much, or is even intelligible, would require much more discussion, the first step no doubt being to return to Heidegger's conception of the ontological difference. Finally, where Heidegger would think that invoking the doctrine of creation only demeans the reality of the world, Balthasar's claim is, on the contrary, that it allows us to see the world as sheer gift and is thus the only way of respecting it. But this is only one more way in which he rewrites Heidegger's project of eliminating the last residue of Christian doctrine from philosophical thinking.

In a culture in which philosophers have 'forgotten Being' – something 'with which the Christians too have collaborated, not without incurring blame' – Christians now have the responsibility of developing 'a comprehensive and contemporary metaphysics' (*GL5*, 652). Whether the unique version of Heideggerian Thomism which Balthasar offers is a warning or a challenge remains to be seen.

Notes

1 'Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras', *Schweizerische Rundschau* 6 (1933): 489–99; reprinted in *Erich Przywara, Sein Schriftum*, ed. Leo Zimmy (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963), pp. 5–18. 'Heideggers Philosophie vom Standpunkt des Katholizismus', *Stimmen der Zeit* 137 (1940): 1–8.

2 Originally published in 1939 as 'Patristik, Scholastik, und Wir', the essay is now available as 'The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves', *Communio*: *International Catholic Review* 24 (1997): 347–96.

3 Translated as 'Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism', in *ET2*, 333–72.

4 Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, chapter 1; original German 1953, but lectures in 1935).

5 Translating these two terms, *Sein* and *Seiendes*, results in notorious difficulties, including orthography. The practice is usually to translate *Sein* with uppercase 'Being', and *Seiendes* with 'things that exist', 'beings', 'existents', and the like. Unfortunately, to capitalize nouns in English obscures the verbal act intended in the German infinitive; but not to capitalize can also make it seem that one is merely speaking of one of the entities existing in the world – which is just what *Seiendes* means. Thus on occasion this chapter will draw out the verbal act of being by italicizing the '-ing' of the participle; but lest that get too tedious, the uppercase 'Being' will also be used, with both usages referring to *Sein*.

Part IV

Contemporary encounters

17

JOHN WEBSTER

Balthasar and Karl Barth

INTRODUCTION

Hans Urs von Balthasar and the great Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) enjoyed a long and mutually but asymmetrically important relationship. On Barth's side, Balthasar was – with the possible exception of the Jesuit Erich Przywara, whom Barth got to know when he taught in Münster – his most significant Roman Catholic interlocutor. From the mid-1920s, Barth took Roman Catholic theology very seriously (the decisive early text is a searching lecture from 1928 on 'Roman Catholicism: a Question to the Protestant Church'[1]), enjoying cordial relations with Catholic thinkers, studying Catholic texts in his seminar, and observing the changing life of Roman Catholicism: his last major trip was to Rome in 1966 to talk to those involved with the Second Vatican Council. But though Balthasar was Barth's most enduring contact with the Catholic world, he did not shape Barth's theology in any decisive way. Partly this was because when the two first came into contact early on in the Second World War, Barth was already the commanding figure of European Protestantism; he was Balthasar's senior by almost twenty years, and the direction of his *magnum opus* was already well set. Moreover, for all Barth's intense curiosity about all sorts of expressions of Christian faith, he was a good deal less receptive than Balthasar, and in the *Church Dogmatics* he is more explicitly in discussion with the classical thinkers of the Christian past than he is with his contemporaries. What cannot be doubted is that Barth thought very highly of Balthasar, both as a leading figure in a promising 'christological renaissance' in modern Catholic theology, and as an interpreter of his own work, one in whom he found 'an understanding of the concentration on Jesus Christ attempted in the *Church Dogmatics*, and the implied Christian concept of reality, which is incomparably more powerful than that of most of the books [on my theology] which have clustered around me'.[2]

Barth's importance for Balthasar, by contrast, was immense. Balthasar read Barth avidly from his student days, and began to map out a Catholic response to Barth in publications from the late 1930s onwards.[3] A move to Basle in 1940 as Roman Catholic chaplain to the university afforded opportunities for frequent contact; Balthasar became an established figure in the circle around Barth, and eagerly participated in Barth's 1941 seminar on the Council of Trent. In late 1948 and early 1949 Balthasar gave lectures on Barth in Basle; out of the lectures came his 1951 study *The Theology of Karl Barth. Exposition and Interpretation*; the book must form the centrepiece of any account of

their theological relations.[4] Though the two continued to be in regular contact in subsequent years (indeed they spoke at a conference together shortly before Barth's death),[5] Balthasar's later published work does not contain detailed or lengthy discussion of Barth. It is certainly true that Barth may well have offered a decisive impulse to Balthasar's *Herrlichkeit*, which Balthasar himself described as 'Barthian' (*KB*, 400). There Balthasar praises Barth's account of the divine perfections in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 for restoring 'to God the attribute of "beauty" for the first time in the history of Protestant theology' (*GL1*, 56). In this, Barth's dogmatics 'represents a decisive breakthrough',[6] and a crucial counter-example to the subjective, formless theologies of Christian existence clustered around Bultmann – though it should not be forgotten that Balthasar is by no means uncritical of Barth in *GL1*. Neither the *Theo-Drama* nor the *Theo-Logic* engages Barth at any depth. Though there are occasional comments, and critical remarks on Barth's treatment of nothingness and the demonic in *TD3* and *5*, Barth's doctrine of reconciliation from *Church Dogmatics* IV is rarely referred to. In part, this reflects the fact that Balthasar found Barth's later material less problematic (he was, for example, deeply impressed by Barth's original treatment of the three offices of Christ); in part, it indicates that for Balthasar Barth's most important convictions, as well as those aspects of his theology which evoke Catholic counter-questioning, emerge in the earlier volumes of the *Dogmatics*.

The theology of Karl Barth

Balthasar's book on Barth is neither a comprehensive study nor a full response. Rather, it is a penetrating intervention in Roman Catholic conversation with Barth, made at a point at which Barth was (as Balthasar is fully aware) 'still at work shaping his thought' (41),[7] yet extraordinarily alert both to Barth's deepest intentions and to the way in which they presented themselves to creative and ecumenically minded Catholic thought of the time. It is a testimony to the astuteness of the book that even now it articulates central questions about Barth, even though it was written midstream, without Barth's corpus to hand in its entirety. Over the course of the 1950s, there appeared a number of enduringly significant responses to Barth. Barth scholarship had not yet become a dissertation and monograph industry, and Barth himself was producing what many regard as his most magisterial writing, with the result that at its best, discussion of Barth was real theological interchange with a contemporary. From the Reformed side came G. C. Berkouwer's study *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*;[8] from Roman Catholics, such detailed treatments as those by Henri Bouillard[9] and Hans Küng,[10] both in 1957. Of these Roman Catholic responses, Balthasar's study is the first and easily the best. Balthasar's interpretative efforts did much to lay to rest a conventional and ill-informed Catholic presentation of Barth which, on the basis of a very partial knowledge of his *Romans* commentary and few other early writings, dismissed him as an 'occasionalist' (the interpretation is found in Jerome Hâmer, for example, or the ex-Lutheran Louis Bouyer).[11] For Balthasar, by contrast, informed

Catholic response requires 'a more than superficial acquaintance with the works of Karl Barth, above all with his *Church Dogmatics*' (xviii) which is the 'definitive and mature expression' (xvii) of his theology. Balthasar is sharply aware that in 1951 he is swimming against the stream, remarking that 'one could count on two hands – perhaps even one – the Catholic theologians who regard Barth's *Dogmatics* as required reading' (11), and at one point speaking of himself and his sympathetic readers in embattled terms as those 'who see – often in complete obscurity – the very question that occupied Barth . . . These are the thinkers who abjure religious journalism for the sake of hard theological work' (42).

Much of the cogency of Balthasar's book derives from its high seriousness as a 'confessional dialogue' (xvii) – a charitable encounter between two deep and divergent readings of the Christian faith which seeks to get beyond slogans to 'mutual conversation' (xix–xx), driven by the question: 'Will we who see in Protestants our baptized brothers and sisters in Christ and members of his Body, that is, his one visible Body, will we then find another language for dialogue?' (8). Nowadays Balthasar's approach seems scarcely controversial; but its courage can be seen when set against the background of the profound suspicion of Protestant theology on the part of Balthasar's contemporaries, and of Barth's brisk anti-Catholic remarks at the 1948 Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches. For Balthasar, conversation across the Christian traditions entails much more than bourgeois tolerance or personal empathy; above all, it has to lay aside the complacent superiority of both stubborn revanchists and nimble controversialists, for the simple reason that there are things to be *learned* from Barth. For Balthasar Catholicism is not an achieved universe expressed in a comprehensive and unchanging dogmatic system; 'the Catholic Church can see herself as the embodiment of wholeness and totality only when she has done all in her power actively to incorporate the riches of all partial points of view' (12). This is almost (but not quite) a statement that the Church *becomes* catholic through time as it perceives 'the form of truth in vital development' (251); but it is most certainly an affirmation that 'Catholic thinking . . . remains open' (253). Thus

> Catholics with any sense of flexibility – those, that is, who appreciate the infinity of revelation, the vibrancy of both Scripture and tradition and the development of dogma – should have no trouble in realizing how partial is their own position and even how imperfect is the contemporary Church's interpretation of the faith. Such Catholics will keep an alert ear for all those who are searching for an authentic faith. (16)

The rule, then, for theological interchange is enunciated thus: 'What could be more Christian than to hear out what one's fellow Christian has to say?' (16).

What draws Balthasar to Barth in particular is that he found in him a quintessential Protestant. 'We must choose Karl Barth for our partner because in him Protestantism has found its most completely consistent representative. He embodies a Protestantism that can only be reached by going back to its roots, its deepest sources' (22). Not only this: Barth also 'purifies and radicalizes' (22) his Protestant inheritance in such a way that he is 'liquidating the historical Reformation and placing it within the precincts of the Church

universal' (22). As with his work on Origen, so here: Balthasar seeks to incorporate an apparently deviant figure within the ambit of Christianity, catholically conceived. As we shall see, the attempt is not without its difficulties, in that it assumes that 'Protestantism' is a consistent phenomenon, and so tends to underplay its internal differentiation, notably in eliding the differences between its Lutheran and Reformed strands which were so important for Barth's own theological self-articulation. What is clear is Balthasar's sense both that Barth articulates the essence of Protestantism and that as such he is not a mere object of polemic but an enrichment to the traditions of Catholic Christianity: 'This book will proceed . . . on the presupposition that something is really being said to us, and that we can answer only after we have really listened' (17).

Balthasar's conversation with Barth is inseparable from a certain account of the latter's development. This account, one which until recently dominated genetic presentations of Barth's theology, and to which Barth himself often gave at least partial credence, is in some crucial respects quite seriously misleading. But though Balthasar's history of Barth's opinions no longer commands assent, and though the evaluation of Barth to which it gives rise is thereby less secure, Balthasar's reading of Barth endures simply by virtue of the delicacy with which it exposes and works through some persistent questions concerning Barth's legacy.

Balthasar's commendation of Barth to Catholic consideration depends upon presenting a different Barth from the object of Catholic polemic, namely the so-called 'dialectic' theologian of the Romans commentary. Explaining Barth's mature dogmatics in terms of *The Epistle to the Romans* is 'an outright absurdity' and 'an insult to the author' (60) because, on Balthasar's account, Barth has 'given up the whole conceptuality determining the early work' (60). The overarching theme of that early work is 'dynamic eschatology, the irreversible movement from a fatally doomed temporal order to a new living order filled with the life of God' (64). Whilst such a theology may issue valuable warnings against easy familiarity between Creator and creature and a reminder of the 'sharp blade of the absolute' which 'cuts through everything' (81), Balthasar finds it a deeply unsatisfactory rendering of Christianity. By absolutizing dialectic it issues, oddly enough, in 'a very unbiblical philosophical pantheism' (84): God and creation are so radically contrasted that the latter is evacuated of substance. In effect Barth's protection of the divine freedom and aseity imperils certain cardinal Christian doctrines, above all the Word's assumption of human flesh, and thereby also the doctrine of creation. Having characterized Barth's early theology, then, in terms of 'the philosophical ideology and schematism of *The Epistle to the Romans*', as 'dynamic and actualist theophanism' (94), Balthasar goes on to trace how Barth shook himself free by a 'conversion to analogy'. Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, Barth's shift to an analogical conception of the relation of God to the world enabled an affirmation that their twofoldness is positive rather than problematic, resisting abstract monism and admitting 'that creation *vis-à-vis* God is thoroughly good and positive in itself, that is, in its very being as not-God' (110). As Barth put in place a doctrine of createdness, he came to see that 'there really is such a thing as mutuality' (113). And the shift from dialectic to analogy is christologically driven:

'Word of God' (abstract, interruptive, atemporal) is replaced by 'Jesus Christ, God and man' (114) such that Barth affirms an incarnationally grounded 'compatibility between God and creatures' (114).

What is to be made of this account of Barth's development? That Balthasar identifies an important feature of his great Protestant conversation partner was affirmed by Barth himself. Reflecting on the course of his theological work in 1956, Barth noted that in his early work 'there was . . . the bold assurance that there is in the Bible only *one* theological interest, namely, that in God; that only *one* way appears, namely, that from above downwards'.[12] And he went on: 'Where did we really go astray? Where was and is the starting point for the new change of direction? The shrewd friend from another shore has, as is well known, laid his finger on the fact that at that time we worked almost exclusively with the concept of diastasis, only seldom and incidentally with the complementary concept of analogy.'[13] The friend, of course, is Balthasar, and Barth's remark is sometimes taken as support for the 'dialectic to analogy' scheme. However, there are two crucial qualifications in what Barth goes on to say in that lecture.

A first qualification is found in Barth's statement that the 'essential infirmity' in his early thinking was not the formal problem that dialectic dominated analogy. Rather, 'it consisted in the fact that we were wrong exactly where we were right, that at first sight we did not know how to carry through with sufficient care and thoroughness the new knowledge of the *deity* of God which was so exciting both to us and to others'.[14] What that remark points to is that beneath the apparent discontinuity between 'dialectic' and 'analogy' there is a fundamental continuity of intention, at whose heart is the doctrine of God. Certainly the second *Romans* commentary does not give sufficient weight to the fact that 'the deity of the living God . . . found its meaning and its power only in the context of His history and of His dialogue with man, and thus in His *togetherness* with man'.[15] To this extent, Balthasar is properly worried about the anthropological effects of an overweighted doctrine of divine transcendence. But the self-correction which Barth undertakes does not involve a fresh doctrine of God but a deepened and enriched account of divine sovereignty, through a fuller depiction of '*God's* sovereign togetherness with man',[16] in which 'God's *deity* . . . includes His *humanity*'.[17]

Balthasar located this correction in the *Church Dogmatics*. In this he was largely mistaken, on at least two grounds. First, the positions associated with Barth's later christological humanism entail no serious departure from his early theology; they are, rather, a consistent outworking of its fundamental affirmation: 'God is God.' They specify, but by no means overthrow, the theocentric character of the early writings. Second, a great deal of what was taken by Balthasar to be innovatory in the volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* from the 1930s and 1940s can be found substantially earlier, notably in Barth's first dogmatics lecture cycle in Göttingen.[18] Thus the pattern of thinking which Balthasar believed to stem from a rejection of Barth's dialectical theology in fact emerged in the 1920s when dialectic was supposed to dominate Barth's views. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to assign the terms 'dialectic' and 'analogy' (which are

themselves very multivalent) with any confidence to different phases of Barth's thought. Barth never abandoned dialectical thinking; to the end, he was concerned to specify as clearly as possible the unbridgeable differences between divine and human action (as even a cursory glance at the ecclesiology and sacramental theology of his doctrine of reconciliation will show). Nor, as we shall see, was there ever a phase of Barth's work – even in the period around the second *Romans* commentary – in which he was not preoccupied with the fellowship between God and humankind which Balthasar considered was only introduced into Barth's theology with the discovery of analogy.

A second qualification is found in Barth's allusion in his 1956 lecture to the importance of 'Master Calvin' for his work in the early 1920s. 'The allegation that we were teaching that God is everything and man nothing, was bad. As a matter of fact, certain hymns of praise to humanism were at that time occasionally raised – the Platonic in particular, in which Calvin was nurtured.'[19] Here Barth hints at a feature of his early work which Balthasar did not appreciate but which is crucial to its proper interpretation, namely the importance of Reformed theology in the all-important period of Barth's first professorship at Göttingen in 1921–25. During those years Barth consolidated, rearticulated, and refined his instinctive judgements about the content of the Christian faith by an intense rediscovery of Calvin, Zwingli, and the Reformed confessional writings. As he lectured on these topics at the beginning of his theological career, Barth very early came to an account of the magisterial Reformation according to which Luther emphasizes the 'vertical', soteriological axis in God's relation to the world, whereas Calvin complements this by stronger humane, moral concerns, a concern with the 'horizontal'. Thus in his 1923 lectures on the Reformed confessions, Barth speaks of 'the humanist-ethical approach of Reformed theology, which, without diminishing its strict understanding of the absolute character of the wonder of God, still soberly and straightforwardly finds in it the answer to the problem of *man*'.[20] It is a point which Barth reiterated frequently in the 1920s, both in published material and in his classroom lectures. The centre of gravity of Barth's early years as theological professor was thus not – as Balthasar believed – Luther and Kierkegaard, but the tradition which stemmed from Calvin. In that tradition he found a means of addressing the moral concerns of the dominant streams of later nineteenth-century Protestant theology – concerns which the early Barth continued to share even as he dismantled them and rebuilt them from the ground up – and yet to do so without contradiction of the aseity of God. Though the later christological grounding is fairly rudimentary at this stage, the emphasis which Balthasar believed to have emerged out of Barth's discovery of the doctrine of creation is already present.

For these reasons, then, Balthasar's schematization of Barth's development is not easy to support; mischaracterizing Barth's early work, it pushes his anthropological interest too late. Balthasar himself was not completely at ease with his own account: he conceded that 'there can be no doubt that Barth's latest works are, in a very real if hidden sense, his earliest works as well: the intense explosion into the *Romans* commentary is ultimately but the unleashing of the intellectual power that was there from the very

beginning' (61); and he examined a number of Barth's writings from the 1920s on culture, ethics, and ecclesiology, all of which tell against his putative 'monism of the Word of God' (61). But these are minor details and do not unsettle the overall picture. Why did Balthasar – in other respects such an acute reader of Barth's intentions – misread Barth on this question of his development? Partly, no doubt, because of the unavailability until recently of the texts of Barth's Göttingen lecture cycles, which never saw publication in his lifetime – though it should be noted that Barth's views on the distinctive Christian humanism of the Reformed tradition were expressed in a good many published writings from the mid-1920s onwards. But there is a deeper reason, bound up with Balthasar's manner of reading Barth. The strength of his interpretation (its 'sense of the whole') is also its weakness, in that it leads Balthasar to read Barth too schematically, searching for his 'deepest intuitions' (24), on the basis of this hermeneutical principle: 'before attending to a particular theological object, we will have to use great care to bring to light the unity underlying inner intention and outer language' (189). As a means of resisting the well-worn paths of Catholic polemic, and as an attempt to see Barth whole, the point is well taken. But when deployed in constructing a genetic account, it is at certain key points an insufficiently complex presentation, and one which sustains its interpretation only at cost to the full scope of Barth's concerns.

A lesser book would be disabled by these features; it is a testimony to Balthasar's study that even though his account of Barth's development may need qualification, his critical engagement remains highly perceptive. Three central issues emerge in that engagement: the analogical relation between God and creatures; Barth's actualism; and his christological constriction.

(a) Already in the 1940s Balthasar identified analogy as an important debating point in Catholic reception of Barth, for it raises not only questions of the possibilities and limits of language about God but, more generally, the relation of nature and grace, out of which emerge such issues as natural knowledge of God, the extent of human fallenness, or the role of philosophy in theology. The stakes in this debate were pretty high: Balthasar had somehow to mediate between, on the one hand, Vatican I's anathema on those who hold that 'the one, true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason',[21] and, on the other hand, Barth's famous inflammatory remark that 'the *analogia entis* [is] the invention of the Antichrist'.[22] Where most Catholic appraisal of Barth before Balthasar simply viewed the difference as irreconcilable and ended the discussion at that point, Balthasar keeps probing. Barth's objection to Catholicism is that it possesses

> an overarching systematic principle that is merely an abstract statement about the analogy of being and not a frank assertion about Christ the Lord. This principle presupposes that the relationship between God and creature can already be recognized in our philosophical foreunderstanding (of natural theology). This means that God's revelation in Jesus Christ seems to be but the fulfilment of an already existing knowledge and reality. Perhaps this need not imply a metaphysics that sets itself above faith, but Christ's place as the fulfilment of salvation history is still reserved 'in advance', in an ontology that exists prior to the order of revelation and cannot be shattered by it. (37)

Balthasar is instinctively sympathetic to what underlies the objection, namely a profound sense of the gratuity of the creature's relation to God. Schooled by the Fourth Lateran Council and Przywara to appreciate the 'ever greater dissimilarity' between Creator and creature even in their similarity, already hesitant about (and later trenchantly opposed to) what he took to be a defective theology of grace in the transcendental anthropology of Joseph Maréchal and Karl Rahner, Balthasar was drawn to the affirmation tucked within Barth's denial, namely its emphasis on the sheer christological particularity of God's relation to the world. But what troubled Balthasar about Barth's objection was that it seemed to be snared by the same dualisms as the version of Catholic theology which it opposed. Balthasar himself owed his freedom from those dualisms largely to Henri de Lubac. De Lubac resisted neo-Thomist assertions of a purely natural destiny for human beings (what Barth called 'secular misery'[23]) and sought to return to a patristic view of the unity of the orders of nature and grace within the economy of salvation. Balthasar's account in *KB* of 'The Concept of Nature in Catholic Theology' (267–325) closely follows de Lubac's presentation in *Surnaturel*, especially its roots in soteriology and its insistence that grace and nature are directly, not inversely, proportional. From this point of view, Barth's objection to the *analogia entis* is an attack on a straw man (with the straw helpfully provided by textbook neo-Thomism); Barth's 'version of this concept', Balthasar writes, 'was extremely simplistic – in fact, it was downright fraudulent' (382) – though, once again, Barth was not the originator of the fraud. However, once the straw man is seen for what it is, much of the force of Barth's objection falls away. Barth responds to an immanentized and secularized account of natural human capacity for God by a fierce assertion of divine grace, failing to appreciate that any such natural capacity cannot be conceived apart from divine grace. Balthasar's counter-suggestion is that Barth's objection to a degraded natural theology is better met by reaffirming the unity of nature and grace on the basis of this rule: 'Theologians must not separate the immanent historicity of man from the transcendent historicity of God's revelation that has entered the stage of world history' (336).

Once Barth is read out of his deepest intentions, rather than out of the polemics of the occasion, and once Catholic theology is set free from the reactive and polarizing metaphysics of nature and grace, the possibility of rapprochement opens up. The analogy of being (properly rescued from neo-Thomism and stripped of the concept of 'pure nature') and Barth's 'analogy of faith' (that is, a relation between God and creation grounded and sustained solely in the event of saving grace) are 'two ways of understanding the one revelation of God' (382). Thus 'we are . . . permitted to unite and harmonise the inalienable demands of the Church as promulgated above all by Vatican I with the essential insights of Karl Barth without artificial or forced syncretism' (382) by affirming both 'the absolute priority of grace and revelation and the relative priority of nature and its faculties' (383). The key is christology, in particular the entailments of incarnational doctrine for the continuity between God and creatures. Once its fundamental principles are extended, Barth's christology not only coheres with but *requires* a doctrine of the analogy of being. As Balthasar put it near the end of his life:

theology has to affirm 'that the Word made flesh "came to his own", and so not merely (as Karl Barth says) goes into the far country but into a land whose language he knows . . . The logic of the creature is not alien to the logic of God' (*TL* III, 78–9).

What drew their differing accounts into proximity was a conjunction of instincts about the structure of Christianity. Both considered that the central theme of Christian truth is the covenantal relation of God and humankind; both insisted that the metaphysics of that relation must be thoroughly informed by salvation-historical considerations. Barth himself was not sanguine that the doctrine of the analogy of being was simply 'the way and manner in which in Catholicism space has been opened up inside the all-comprehensive Yes to revelation, for everything in creaturely thought that can be and has been redeemed' (257). Balthasar, on the other hand, spoke in the foreword to the second edition of *KB* as if the rapprochement was all but complete. But even he had lingering doubts, particularly, as we shall now see, concerning the residue of transcendentalism in Barth's thinking.

(b) One of Balthasar's persistent objections to the Protestant tradition is its excessive fondness for conceiving of salvation as an interruptive event, and its corresponding under-appreciation of the shapeliness of salvation history, that is, of the way God's revealing and saving work takes form in and extends through time. Bultmann, in particular, Balthasar regards as 'a real dead-end for Protestantism', because in his theology the event of encounter with Christ is marred by a 'total lack of imagery and form' (*GL1*, 52). There is, Balthasar writes in the opening volume of the *Theo-Drama*, 'something timeless and context-less in this concentration on the pure event, which does not do justice to the genuinely historical nature of biblical revelation'; there is a lack of 'horizontal time' (*TD1*, 27). Balthasar traces this purely vertical understanding of saving revelation back to Luther's actualism, in which God's presence has no worldly breadth or permanence and so is not a matter either for contemplative vision (*Herrlichkeit*) or dramatic representation (*Theodramatik*). Balthasar considered the later work of Barth a considerable counter-witness. Barth recognized that the formless soteriology of Luther and Bultmann lacked objective substance; his 'decisive breakthrough' was to reincorporate the divine beauty into his theology and therefore make room 'for the concept of authentic objective form' (*GL1*, 56). To effect this, however, he had to turn from his earlier dialectical account of the gospel, but elements of the actualism remain, in that the christological shapeliness of the salvation event is not matched by a similar ecclesial form: 'Barth always remained opposed to all institutional aspects of Christianity; for this reason, the form given by him to dogmatics has never been able to take root undialectically in the visible reality of the Church. This form remains actualistic and energetic' (*GL1*, 53).

Balthasar's criticism of Barth on this score is evidently tied to his larger picture of Barth, especially the 'dialectic to analogy' model and the underestimation of the significance of Calvin's moral theology for his thinking. The latter is particularly problematic here, because it leads Balthasar to pass too quickly over Barth's interest in depicting the human, public, and practical shape of the reality of reconciliation. What

Balthasar sought to achieve by a dramatics of ecclesial mission, Barth undertook through his ethics. Like a great many critics of Barth who fear that his theocentric actualism lacks sufficient human historical substance or extension, Balthasar pays very little attention to Barth's ethics. Yet it is precisely in his ethical writings that Barth explores the correlation of the human horizontal and the divine vertical – a correlation first learned in the early 1920s from Calvin, and coming to fullest expression in the ethical material in each volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. Once this material is seen as integral to Barth's dogmatic portrayal of the history of the covenant, then the twofold structure of the whole of Barth's project – its inclusion of both God and the active human covenant partner in its rendering of the Christian faith – appears in much sharper profile, and the double danger of actualism and divine monergism is considerably less pressing.[24]

(c) Both of Balthasar's lines of criticism – concerning Barth's repudiation of the analogy of being and his residual actualism – converge on a single point, namely, christology. Balthasar speaks of a certain narrowing or constriction (*Engführung*) into which Barth's christology leads him, and which sits ill with his universalist tendency (242). The context of Balthasar's comment is his wholehearted agreement with Barth that a christological starting point is 'absolutely essential' (242). Indeed, on key christological issues Balthasar and Barth are scarcely divergent. Both place considerable emphasis on the irreducible 'is-ness' of Jesus; both identify Jesus as, by virtue of the hypostatic union, that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Both therefore refuse 'to subsume Christ within some more overarching category' (37), finding in him the *concretissimum* to which theological reflection must constantly return. Both offer accounts of the Christian faith that attempt to be explications of the economy of salvation in Christ, and in doing so both explore how God's saving works and God's immanent being are mutually interpretative, particularly through reflecting on the obedience of the Son as the form of the intratrinitarian relations. In both, this issues in a doctrine of God which registers the effects on trinitarian teaching of the Son's act of self-emptying, though without imperilling the aseity of God. Though Balthasar presses the logic of kenosis further than Barth, his core claim ('that the God-man can surrender himself to God-abandonment, without resigning his own reality as God'; *MP*, 81) is explicitly derived from Barth. For both, in short, Jesus Christ is the 'concrete universal'.

Yet Balthasar remained worried, especially in 1951, before the publication of Barth's christology in the doctrine of reconciliation, that concretion overwhelms universality – that Barth's Jesus might be not so much an integrative figure as one who threatens to absorb other realities. He asked 'whether there is an inner compulsion in Barth's theology to become a system' (220); not a destructive compulsion, certainly, but nevertheless 'a distortion of nuance, an inappropriate colouration to the whole. In Catholic terms, we may call it an exaggeration, an overstatement, a failure of balance' (242). Its signs are evident in Barth's theology of universal predestination and his understanding of sin, which on Balthasar's account are too abstract, and foreclose on possibilities which ought to be left open: 'Are we not trying to sneak a look at the hand of cards God holds?' (244). But it is the ecclesiological ramifications that particularly trouble Balthasar. 'The

greatest doubts surround what Barth means by Church . . . Does this space, considered as a concrete reality in the world, suffice to bear witness to the presence of faith and revelation in the world?' (245). When he asked that, Balthasar regarded Barth's ecclesiology as an open question, recommending that as *Church Dogmatics* IV proceeded Barth should work through the shift to analogy seen in the doctrine of creation and 'construct a consistent ecclesiology that contains and reflects the results of his christocentric theological anthropology' (386). It is doubtful if Balthasar would have been reassured by what Barth went on to do: where many ecumenically minded Protestant theologians moved in the 1950s to an appreciation of the Catholic theology of *totus Christus*, Barth took a very different tack. He became disenchanted with his earlier modest theology of sacramental mediation, and in his late doctrine of baptism drew a clear distinction between the divine act of Spirit baptism and baptism with water as a purely human response. He did so, not – as Balthasar might have feared – because he was slipping back into christomonism, but in order to continue his insistence on the properly twofold character of the covenant, in which Christian action is not an extension of God's action but a free and wholly human echo and witness. Barth, in other words, resists christomonism by elaborating an ethics of testimony; Balthasar, by a christology which sees the Church and her Head as an integrated reality. 'Grace, like the vine, is the exclusive principle of fruitfulness, but nature, like the branches, can bring forth much fruit when united to the vine' (387). This coinherence of christology and ecclesiology troubled Barth a good deal. Writing in response to Balthasar's various studies of human sainthood from the early 1950s, he commented that

> it seems plain to me that he sees from that centre which he has grasped so clearly and finely a whole field of possible and actual representations of the history of Jesus Christ, the repetitions or re-enactments of His being and activity by the saints . . . And as the author sees and represents them these have taken place and do take place in history *post Christum* and in our own time with such significance, such positive and stimulating force, that the One whose being and activity is supposedly being reproduced obviously fades into the background as compared with His saints.[25]

What Balthasar explicated in terms of the Johannine imagery of vine and branches, Barth viewed as transgression of the boundaries, as trespass on the perfection of Christ who cannot be represented because through the Spirit he represents himself. For Balthasar, Christ's perfection is inclusive of the lives of ecclesial sanctity which it evokes; for Barth, Christ's perfection has its correspondences, but they are not so much a participation in Christ as a testimony to that which he alone is.

CONCLUSION

Balthasar and Barth were both self-consciously church theologians; neither had much time for theology as disinterested inquiry; both considered the intellectual activity of theology to be enclosed within the realities of revelation, church, and faith. As Balthasar put it, 'The believing theologian (and there is no other kind) ventures his logic only on the basis of what the Logos takes responsibility for affirming of himself, when the *Theos*

legôn [the speaking, addressing God] in the moment of his self-interpretation becomes the *Theos legomenos* [expressed God] and, thereby, when he can be re-spoken by men' (*MP*, 79). This conviction about the 'speaking God' gave both men remarkable confidence that the co-ordination of Christianity and the culture of criticism need no longer be attempted. Both, accordingly, felt free to produce unconventional theologies of remarkable imaginative power, in which they sought to trace the universal reach of the christological particular. Where Balthasar considered that the universal scope of the Christian faith could best be described by a theology of union with Christ, undergirded by a teleology of the natural towards perfection through grace, Barth spoke of the history of differentiated fellowship between God and creatures at whose centre lies the singular event of Christ of which all other histories are witnesses. Both are examples of what Balthasar, in his contribution to the 1956 *Festschrift* for Barth, called 'universalism from above'.[26] Whether the associated charge of totalitarianism, frequently raised against both, can be sustained is a question which can only be settled by careful interpretation of their texts. Like Barth, Balthasar considered Christianity 'a radiantly triumphal opportunity' (26), and without the example of Barth – his sheer objectivity, his breathless fascination with the subject matter of the gospel, his capacity to edify by description – Balthasar's theology would be less than it is.

Notes

1 K. Barth, 'Roman Catholicism: a Question to the Protestant Church', in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 307–33.
2 K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 768.
3 H. U. von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, volume III (Salzburg: Pustet, 1939), pp. 316–91; 'Analogie und Dialektik', *Divus Thomas* 22 (1944): 171–216; 'Analogie und Natur', *Divus Thomas* 23 (1945): 3–56.
4 The highly abridged translation by John Drury published by Holt, Reinhart, and Winston in 1971 has been superseded by an unabridged translation published by Ignatius Press in 1992. All quotations in this chapter come from the latter translation.
5 See K. Barth, H. U. von Balthasar, *Dialogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1968).
6 Ibid., p. 56. See here Fergus Kerr, 'Foreword: Assessing This "Giddy Synthesis"', in *BEM*, 1–13.
7 All page references in this chapter without preceding initials are to *KB*.
8 ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956.
9 H. Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, 3 volumes (Paris: Aubier, 1957).
10 H. Küng, *Justification: the Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (London: Burns and Oates, 1981).
11 J. Hâmer, *Karl Barth* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949); see also G. Foley, 'The Catholic Critics of Karl Barth', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 136–55.
12 K. Barth, 'The Humanity of God', in *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 42–3.
13 Ibid., p. 44.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 45.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 46.
18 K. Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, volume I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991); see here B. L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

19 Barth, 'The Humanity of God', p. 44.
20 K. Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* (Louisville: WJKP, 2002), p. 92.
21 N. P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume II, Trent to Vatican II (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), pp. 804–11.
22 K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 (Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. xiii.
23 Ibid.
24 See here C. W. Steck, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Crossroads, 2001). If Steck is correct in claiming that ethics is ingredient in Balthasar's work and that his theology shares its voluntarist and covenantal structure with other modern theologies, then Balthasar's silence on Barth's ethics is all the more surprising. Steck also has little to say of Barth in his account of Balthasar's ethics.
25 *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 768.
26 H. U. von Balthasar, 'Christlicher Universalismus', in *Antwort*, ed. E. Wolf (Zurich: EVZ, 1956), p. 238.

18

KAREN KILBY

Balthasar and Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar are the two most significant figures of twentieth-century Roman Catholic theology. They were, roughly speaking, contemporaries.[1] Both joined the Jesuits, and at one time they were collaborators, but they followed different paths, working in different contexts (Rahner had a much more traditional life as a Jesuit and an academic theologian than did Balthasar), and, as we shall see, doing theology in rather different ways. It has become customary to see Rahner and Balthasar as representing two roads down which Roman Catholic theology can go.[2] Each had periods in the ascendancy and periods when they were, one might say, in the doghouse, and it is probably still too soon to say which will be taken as the more important thinker in the long run.[3]

An interesting question to ask is whether Rahner and Balthasar ought to be construed as fundamentally opposed – whether the two roads go in genuinely different directions – or whether instead they can be seen as developing complementary kinds of theology. The answer, it seems, depends very much on whom one asks: Balthasar scholars usually, but not necessarily always, think there is a clear and important opposition; Rahner scholars are more likely than not to opt for complementarity.

An obvious place to look in a consideration of the relationship between these two men is Balthasar's own rather fierce criticisms of Rahner, and this is where I shall begin. On its own, however, this is not enough. An examination of these criticisms, on its own, might lead to a classic Rahnerian conclusion – that Balthasar is not fair to Rahner, that he exaggerates, that he in some degree misconstrues the nature of what Rahner is doing, that his own position is not always so very different from the one he attacks, and that ultimately many of the substantive differences between the two thinkers are more apparent than real. But if one steps back from the question of Balthasar's fairness, or otherwise, to Rahner, and asks what each is trying to *do* with his theology, what each sees as the leading problems of his period and the kinds of solutions needed, then some real and significant differences emerge.

BALTHASAR'S CRITICISM OF RAHNER

Criticism of Rahner's theology became a significant theme in Balthasar's writings of the 1960s and after, most notoriously in the satirical attack on Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian in *The Moment of Christian Witness*.[4] As Rowan Williams has

suggested, however, and Eamon Conway thoroughly documented, what emerged in the 1960s was not something completely new.[5] There had been a critical element in Balthasar's discussions of Rahner's work more or less from the beginning – as early as his 1939 review of Rahner's *Spirit in the World*, for instance – though admittedly, before the 1960s, this element had not been polemically developed, and had typically occurred in the context of an overall admiration and appreciation of Rahner's work. The shift can probably best be explained by changes in Rahner's standing within the Church, and by a movement of the Roman Catholic Church itself that had begun to worry Balthasar. When Rahner was not yet established, or under threat of censure, Balthasar was largely supportive and appreciative; but when at the Second Vatican Council and in the years that followed Rahner's influence was 'flavour of the day', and furthermore was associated in Balthasar's mind with disturbing developments in the Catholic Church, then the element of disagreement and criticism that had always been present came to the fore, and fiercely.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Rahner played in Balthasar's work the role that Schleiermacher played in Barth's, but the comparison is worth considering.[6] If Barth saw Schleiermacher as the epitome of modern Protestant theology gone wrong, then Balthasar presented Rahner as a leading light in the going-wrong of contemporary Roman Catholic theology. And more concretely, just as Barth saw Schleiermacher as adapting to modernity where he should have resisted it, and as distorting theology by moving its centre from God and God's revelation to man, so Balthasar saw Rahner.

Two further points of similarity with the Barth and Schleiermacher relation are worth noting. First, as it is often remarked, Barth combined his criticism and rejection of Schleiermacher with real elements of respect and admiration, and the same is true for Balthasar. Prior to the 1960s Balthasar sometimes waxed effusive about Rahner – he wrote of the first volume of Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie* (later translated into English as *Theological Investigations*): 'This is surely the only book upon which to ground hope in this area today. Seldom has the flame of theological *Eros* climbed so high or so steeply.'[7] Even when the dominant element became critical and polemical, Balthasar was capable of speaking of his admiration for Rahner's speculative ability and courage, and continued to make approving use of Rahner's ideas in various areas. Secondly, just as Barth in his criticisms was not always fair to Schleiermacher, so (as I have already suggested) Balthasar is not entirely fair to Rahner. If one were to gain one's knowledge of Schleiermacher entirely from Barth, it would be a very skewed Schleiermacher one came to know, and so also for Balthasar and Rahner. On the other hand, of course, Balthasar's criticisms of Rahner reveal a good deal about Balthasar and his concerns, just as Barth's criticisms of Schleiermacher provide a good way into the thought of Barth.

What, then, are Balthasar's criticisms of Rahner? They are wide-ranging. Balthasar is concerned about Rahner's philosophical allegiances. He thinks that Rahner is reductive in identifying love of neighbour with love of God, and thereby turning religion into ethics and losing sight of the true nature of Christian life. He reproaches Rahner for a failure to

take sin seriously enough, or to give a sufficiently important place to the Cross. And he thinks Rahner's notion of 'anonymous Christianity' leads the Church in a dangerous direction. If one wanted to offer a synthesis of the various aspects of Balthasar's objections to Rahner, it might go something like this: the problem begins with Rahner's concern to adapt theology to the times, and in particular in his adaptation of a form of German Idealism, and where this ultimately leads – in Rahner's christology, in his discussions of love of God and neighbour, and most notoriously in the concept of anonymous Christianity – is towards the loss of what is distinctive about Christianity. In order to make Christianity credible to the modern person, in other words, Rahner is in fact abandoning, or at least endangering, its substance.

BALTHASAR'S CRITICISMS CONSIDERED

One aspect of Balthasar's criticism of Rahner relates to the latter's philosophical allegiances. Balthasar consistently portrays Rahner's thought as fundamentally shaped by an appropriation of German Idealism. Balthasar, as noted above, reviewed Rahner's one work of philosophy, *Spirit in the World*, and he seems to be among those who think that this is of decisive importance for all that followed. Thus, for instance, Balthasar was able to describe Rahner as someone who had fundamentally taken the path of Kant, as opposed to his own following of Goethe.[8] Or again, nearly forty years after the publication of *Spirit in the World*, Balthasar's depiction of Rahner as 'the best-known representative of the transcendental approach' still begins with the fact that he is a follower of Jesuit transcendental Thomist Joseph Maréchal in his concern to reconcile Aquinas with German Idealism – that is, it begins with a description of Rahner as essentially the Rahner of *Spirit in the World*.[9] The fiercest criticisms of Rahner, those in *The Moment of Christian Witness*, are also implicitly, but forcefully, linked to the notion that he subscribes in some way to German Idealism. The context of these criticisms, that is to say, is the larger discussion of Christian witness (martyrdom), on the one hand, versus 'the System' (the system of German Idealism), on the other. Christians who want to be modern, to adapt to the times, to be able to speak to their fellow human beings in a language that can be understood, will be tempted to adopt the System in some form; but the cost, Balthasar maintains, will be the loss of martyrdom, of genuine witness, of genuine Christianity. The specific criticisms of Rahner's identification of the love of God with the love of neighbour, and of his notion of the anonymous Christian, follow on the basis of this general discussion of the temptations and dangers of German Idealism. And it is interesting to note that in a later postscript to *The Moment of Christian Witness*, Balthasar responds to rebukes for being so critical of Rahner by pointing again to concerns he had voiced in his original review of *Spirit in the World*, and raising again the question of the legitimacy of the interpretation of Aquinas developed by Maréchal and his followers. In other words, he presents Rahner's involvement in German Idealism, as evidenced by *Spirit in the World*, as a decisive element in his own reaction against Rahner.

Even if one accepts Balthasar's reading of German Idealism – as a glorification of

human autonomy which ultimately leaves no room for God – it is possible to question whether his view of Rahner's thought as profoundly shaped (and therefore compromised) by German Idealism is really a fair characterization of the driving motive of Rahner's theology. It is possible, that is, to ask whether Rahner's thought is really so decisively formed by philosophy in general, and by the philosophy laid out in *Spirit in the World* in particular, as Balthasar supposes.[10] Balthasar is not alone in this supposition, it must be said – many commentators have characterized Rahner's thought as grounded on and shaped by *Spirit in the World*.[11] Rahner himself, however, sometimes made remarks distancing himself from philosophical readings (he insisted that he was not a philosopher and had no philosophy) and from overly systematic interpretations of his work – he described himself as a theological dilettante, who took up topics in systematic theology unsystematically; he denied that he gave much thought to the employment of any particular method; and he rejected the idea that he had remained perfectly consistent over time. A number of strands in recent Rahner scholarship, moreover, point towards placing a considerably diminished emphasis on *Spirit in the World*. In an impressive recent study, for instance, Philip Endean argues that Rahner's work is 'ultimately rooted in his spirituality', and that the recognition of this 'relativizes the importance of his early philosophical works, and confirms how unhelpful it is to see Rahner's theological achievement as merely the outgrowth of *Spirit in the World*',[12] and I have argued explicitly elsewhere that Rahner's theology is best read as *not* logically depending on his philosophy.[13] Such readings raise serious questions about whether it is fair, on the basis of *Spirit in the World*, to characterize the whole of Rahner's work as compromised by Idealism.[14]

It might still be asked, of course, whether even apart from *Spirit in the World* Rahner's thought is not somehow decisively shaped by German Idealism. Certainly he uses some of the language of philosophers from Kant to Heidegger (terms like transcendental and existential), and makes use, in theological contexts, of ideas which first emerged in philosophical contexts. But this does not mean his theology is philosophically determined.[15] Certainly it is true that Rahner thinks that one cannot go back on modern philosophy's turn to the subject – at various points and in various ways he insists that the anthropological turn is necessary for modern theology. And of course for anyone such as Balthasar with Barthian sympathies, such an insistence is sure to raise hackles. Still, whether it is reasonable to give a very specific outline of the history of German Idealism as leading effectively towards atheism, and then to associate Rahner's thought as a whole with this, is another question. Balthasar can be a subtle and sympathetic reader of the texts of others, but at times (especially perhaps in polemical moments) he paints with very broad brush strokes, and, whatever the benefits of this, fairness to individuals may be one of the costs.

Perhaps the best-known element in Balthasar's criticism of Rahner is his attack upon the notion of the anonymous Christian, but this too raises interesting questions. This notion, Balthasar suggests, leads to a loss of the distinctiveness of Christianity, and also a

loss of commitment: 'Karl Rahner frees us from a nightmare with his theory of the anonymous Christian who is dispensed, at any rate, from the criterion of martyrdom' (*MCW*, 101). If one can be a Christian anonymously, why then bother with the costly business of actually professing Christianity? Rahner is making things too easy, dissolving Christianity, so that what we will be left with, if we go down his route, is a church full of anonymous atheists.

Such criticisms contain elements of misrepresentation and caricature. Rahner makes it clear, first of all, in the way that he sets up the relationship between the implicit and the explicit (the transcendental and the categorical) that for those who have heard, understood, and genuinely accepted the gospel, explicit confession of belief and explicit practice are not optional extras. His repeated insistence that transcendental never exists apart from the categorical, that the two are always closely connected, means that it would make no sense for someone who really understood what Christianity is about to decide not to bother to be a professed Christian, opting only to be one in the implicit depths of experience. To do this, on Rahner's account, would actually be to reject the offer of grace, to turn away from God. Secondly, even for the Buddhist or atheist, Rahner makes it clear that the offer of grace and its acceptance only reach their fullness, only become completely themselves, when they come to expression in explicit Christianity. So Rahner does not present an implicit, anonymous Christianity as fully satisfactory and sufficient unto itself, for anyone.[16]

It is worth noting, as well, that though Balthasar's criticisms on this point are so forceful, it is not in fact easy to work out how his own views differ from Rahner's on questions of non-Christians and their relationship to Christ, grace, and salvation. Balthasar does not deny the possibility of salvation outside the boundaries of explicit Christianity – in fact he is probably more emphatic than Rahner in maintaining the legitimacy of Christian hope for universal salvation. Nor does he deny the premise that salvation, even for those outside the Church, must not be apart from, but somehow through Christ – that the grace of Christ is active outside the visible Church.

Balthasar eventually (for instance, in a postscript to a later edition of *The Moment of Christian Witness*) adopts from Henri de Lubac a distinction between 'anonymous Christian*s*' and 'anonymous Christian*ity*': one can accept that there might be individual anonymous Christians 'who in one way or another have received insights originating from the Gospel', but not some sort of universal phenomenon of implicit, anonymous Christianity 'spread everywhere in humanity'. Exactly how this distinction will work is not easy to see, however. One interpretation of de Lubac's formulation is that it is in part a question of numbers: it is acceptable to suppose that here and there, in some exceptional way, individuals outside the Church are affected by the grace of Christ, but not that this happens systematically and everywhere. This still leaves a puzzle, however, given Balthasar's fundamental optimism about universal salvation.

Still, it would be going too far to say either that there is nothing in what Balthasar has to say about the theory of the anonymous Christian except misreading and caricature, or that he and Rahner were really ultimately of one mind about it. Balthasar may have

shared Rahner's views on the possibility of salvation outside the (visible) Church, but unlike Rahner he felt no need to offer an explanation, a theory, of how this was possible, and this in itself is a real and significant difference. And he was genuinely uneasy about the direction in which Rahner's own explanation moved. If one can conceive of Christianity existing in people apart from conscious, explicit reference to Christ and his Cross – even with all the qualifications that Rahner introduces – then this seems to undermine the understanding, which Balthasar is keen to insist on, of Christianity as a distinctive, particular form of life in response to the distinctiveness of Christ's love.

There are then some real differences between Rahner and Balthasar which the latter's criticisms can help to point to, but these are difficult to disentangle from the elements of misreading and caricature. All in all, the criticisms are more useful as a pointer to what it was that Balthasar feared, what he saw as the dangers confronting theology and the Church, than as a guide to understanding the real relationship between his thought and that of Rahner. For this a different starting point is needed.

BEYOND THE CRITICISMS

One way of bringing the relationship between the thought of Rahner and that of Balthasar into focus is to step back and look at a cluster of issues surrounding the assessment of modernity and of the apologetic task of theology in modernity. Both men were deeply concerned with apologetics, with the question of how to present Christianity in a world which is no longer well-disposed towards it. Both, furthermore, were dissatisfied with neo-scholasticism and its rationalist approach to apologetics. And both thought that modernity raised particular problems for being a believing Christian, and therefore for apologetics. In this very general sense they were in agreement. They differed, however, in their assessment of what was wrong with the neo-scholastic approach, and in their diagnosis of exactly what problems modernity posed for Christian belief. That apologetics was important, that neo-scholasticism was unsatisfactory, that modernity posed distinctive problems they agreed on – but *how* to do apologetics, *why* neo-scholasticism was unsatisfactory, and *what* problems precisely modernity posed, they did not.

The difference in their evaluations of the modern situation and the difficulties it posed is perhaps the most striking. In Rahner's view, as a result of the turn to the subject and the development of a scientific world-view, the modern person is in danger of finding Christian doctrine mythological, something which lacks credibility and which has fundamentally nothing to do with him or her. In response, theology needs to interpret Christian truths in such a way that modern persons will see the fundamental connection of these truths to their own experience. Balthasar, however, thinks that modernity creates problems for Christian belief in so far as modernity tends towards an over-reaching self-assertion that leaves no room for God on the one hand, and towards reductionism on the other (the reductionism involved in historical criticism, for instance, is a frequent target). What on his account is needed, then, is an exploration of the limits and inadequacies of all philosophies and systems of thought, and some schooling for modern persons in

perceptiveness, to teach them to *see* properly, to see the whole, to perceive the beauty of revelation in all its fullness.[17] Thus the problem between Christianity and modernity is located by Rahner largely on the side of Christianity – or to be precise, of how Christianity has sometimes been expressed – whereas Balthasar places it squarely on the side of modernity. A corollary of this, and one which is highly significant for the differing tone of the two authors, is that Rahner writes of that which is 'modern' as interiorly present within the Christian, and indeed within himself – it cannot be otherwise, and so it must be faced – whereas Balthasar very often *opposes* the modern to that which is Christian, and writes as one who stands outside and apart from his period. Rahner wants to help modern Christians overcome intellectual schizophrenia; Balthasar wants to bring them to see that there is a *choice* that must be made.

Both thinkers were trained in neo-scholasticism, and both found it inadequate, but they moved away from it in different directions – very crudely put, Rahner moved away in the direction of the subject, and Balthasar in the direction of the object. In Rahner's view, that is to say, neo-scholasticism was inadequate above all because of 'extrinsicism', because it presented a system of propositions which appeared to have very little intrinsically to do with me, except that I must believe them in order to be saved because God said so. For Balthasar neo-scholasticism was inadequate because it was dry as dust and reductive, because it failed to bring out, indeed it positively obscured, the reality and the beauty of the thing presented, the object of revelation. For Balthasar, then, what we need is to get away from a propositionalist system of theology so as to be able to be enraptured, taken beyond ourselves, caught up in the wonder of God's revelation. For Rahner, what we need is to get away from a propositionalist system of theology so that we can relate Christian doctrines to what we experience in the depths of our being.[18]

Both thinkers, as I have said, are concerned with apologetics in the broadest sense, but the way they go about it – even apart from their differing conceptions of the problems posed by modernity – is different: in particular, the dominant patterns they employ for relating the Christian to the non-Christian differ. For Rahner (or at least the Rahner of *Foundations of Christian Faith*), the basic model is that of the relation of the explicit to implicit: the aim of the apologist, on Rahner's account, is to show that what is offered in Christianity answers to something that is already there, that it offers an interpretation of people's experience, which they can now, in the light of Christian faith, really see clearly and identify properly for the first time. For Balthasar, on the other hand, the typical pattern is that of the relation of the whole to the merely partial and fragmentary: outside Christianity one can find genuine goodness and nobility, and genuine striving towards God, but this is always partial and incomplete, and is always ultimately frustrated. Christianity, then, needs to be presented as something genuinely new and unheard of, something which could not have been anticipated, and yet at the same time which takes up and brings to fulfilment the fragmentary goodness and truth that are already there.

The difference between these two models should not be exaggerated. In each the non-Christian is approached with a fundamental expectation of finding that which is of positive value (this is one point on which Balthasar is not particularly Barthian in his

emphasis), but also with an expectation that this will be in some way inadequate. They differ, however, on how to describe the nature of the inadequacy; but if one does not underestimate the significance that Rahner attributes to properly thematizing experience (in view of which he too could describe the non-Christian as incomplete, unfulfilled, fragmentary), it will be clear that they are in some ways close. Undeniably, however, there is in Balthasar an emphasis on the 'newness' of Christianity which is not found in Rahner.

A consideration of the question of the nature of theology and apologetics in the modern world, then, brings out a number of fundamental differences of orientation between Rahner and Balthasar. It would be misleading, however, to remain entirely at this general level. At least one very specific theological issue must also be mentioned: not differing opinions over anonymous Christianity – the relationship here, as we have seen, is full of ambiguity – but differing interpretations of the death of Christ.

In part this is a case of what has already been discussed. Rahner is concerned to avoid any suggestion that Jesus' death changes God's mind (which would appear mythological and unworthy of belief to the modern person) and uses a general theology of death to help to understand the meaning of Jesus' death.[19] Balthasar is concerned on the other hand to point us to the full and very particular drama of the Passion, even to the point of interpreting it as an inner-trinitarian event (in which the second Person of the Trinity is cut off from and abandoned by the first, God rejected by God).[20] The significance of Jesus' death is to be brought out not by relating it to some more general and familiar phenomenon, but precisely by highlighting its *unfamiliarity*, its distinctiveness, and its uniqueness.

What we see at work here are not only differing strategies for presenting Christianity to the modern world, but also differing construals of the fundamental shape of Christianity. Cross and atonement are absolutely central for Balthasar: to be a Christian on his view is at its heart to respond to the love shown on the Cross: the Christian is 'in love with the love that appeared to him in Christ' (*LA*, 107). For Rahner on the other hand it is the Incarnation which is most important. This, according to Rahner, is the high point of God's self-communication to the world, that towards which creation from the beginning was directed. It is therefore something that would have happened even apart from 'the Fall': sin and its forgiveness are real, and they are a part of the story, but they are not the dominant part.

A final, and important, dimension of the difference between Rahner and Balthasar lies in the manner in which they present their theology. This is not merely a matter of style. It is not even merely the fact that Rahner has a philosophically dense way of writing theology and Balthasar has something closer to a literary approach. One way of getting at the difference is to say that Rahner essentially writes short pieces and Balthasar long ones. Of course Rahner also wrote some long and difficult books, and Balthasar various collections of essays. But Rahner is at his most characteristic and his best in his brief essays – he uses them to look at a huge range of particular issues, from a variety of angles, to make proposals, offer suggestions, try out arguments. Balthasar's work, on the

other hand, almost always has a vast sweep: even when he writes essays, he is often not trying to deal with distinct and circumscribed issues, but to find a brief way to provide an overall orientation to theology and to faith as a whole. With the tremendous range and depth of his knowledge, Balthasar can take the role of one who, surveying a vast panorama and seeing everything in its proper place, reports the view, correcting our misconceptions as he goes.

Balthasar famously described his theology as 'kneeling' theology, and it is often closer to prayer, to the language of devotion, to contemplation, than to the language of investigation and argument.[21] This is one of its attractions, but it also can make it difficult to engage critically with Balthasar. Rahner makes particular proposals and offers particular arguments for them; he invites one to think along with him, and one may agree with certain things and differ on others. With Balthasar it is harder to know how to engage him in a conversation and how to disagree. Very often everything is woven together, everything is part of a whole that would fall apart if any part of it were lost – which raises the question whether one who disagrees may lack the 'eyes of faith', the true Christian conversion which makes the perception of the form of revelation possible. Balthasar would admit that any theology is provisional, fallible, and imperfect, but the way in which he weaves together and presents his own does not always make clear at what point he leaves room for legitimate debate.

Notes

1 Rahner was born in 1904, the year before Balthasar, and died in 1984, four years before Balthasar

2 It is customary as well to see the two roads continued in two journals: *Concilium*, associated with Rahner, and *Communio*, founded by Balthasar. See for instance the opening of Rowan Williams's discussion 'Balthasar and Rahner' in *The Analogy of Beauty*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986).

3 Rahner was under suspicion from the authorities in the 1950s and early 1960s, but came into his own at the Second Vatican Council and the years immediately following, only to fall from favour again as Balthasar, who had been marginalized during and after the Second Vatican Council, began to be taken more seriously, both by Catholics and by non-Catholics. At the moment it would probably be safe to say that at least in some parts of the theological world – in the theology most favoured by the church hierarchy, for instance, and also in non-Catholic English-speaking theology – Balthasar is the more favoured of the two: but in my judgement it would be premature to conclude from this that Rahner will be permanently left behind. There was a time when the theological world seemed to know that Barth, influential though he had been, was a passing phase, but this no longer seems so obvious.

4 *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994). The German, *Cordula, oder der Ernstfall*, was first published in 1966; subsequent editions included an afterword, in which, among other things, Balthasar responds to criticisms of his treatment of Rahner.

5 See Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', and Eamon Conway, *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity?* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993). Conway in particular collects a good deal of evidence of pre-Vatican II criticism. It should perhaps be noted, however, that a significant portion of the evidence Conway cites is in some sense hypothetical – Conway describes criticisms that Balthasar makes of general trends and argues that he must have had Rahner in mind. It is clear that beginning in the 1960s Balthasar *did* link Rahner with many of these undesirable trends, but there is perhaps room for argument whether he was already thinking in this way earlier.

6 Conway also notes similarities between Rahner and Schleiermacher, and certain similarities in the criticisms made of them respectively by Balthasar and Barth; *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity?*, p. 46.

7 Quoted by P. Henrici in 'Erster Blick auf Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Gestalt und*

Werk, ed. K. Lehmann and W. Kasper (Cologne: Communio, 1989), p. 55, which is in turn cited in Conway, *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity?*, p. 49.

8 Balthasar suggests this characterization in an interview, in the context of a reference to a book by Georg Simmel, *Kant und Goethe*. The comment is quoted in Edward T. Oakes, SJ, *Pattern of Redemption* (New York: Continuum, second edn, 1997), p. 72.

9 'Current Trends in Catholic Theology and the Responsibility of the Christian', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 5 (1978): 78–9.

10 It is interesting to note that even when Balthasar praises Rahner's thought, he does it with the assumption that his philosophy is central: in a review of the first two volumes of the *Theological Investigations*, Balthasar wrote 'the point from which his work shines forth is an entirely comprehensive and entirely open *philosophy* – outlines of which Rahner has already given in his book *Geist in Welt* – a philosophy which is precise and which allows him to grasp all questions, to transform them and in a new fruitfulness to let them go again' (cited in Conway, *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity?*, p. 49).

11 Francis P. Fiorenza, for instance, in his introduction to *Spirit in the World* suggests that 'the basic philosophical position developed here in dialogue with modern philosophy provides the unifying principle and presupposition of Rahner's whole theology'; *Spirit in the World* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. xix. Gerard McCool takes a similar view and draws the logical conclusions: 'If the metaphysical conclusions reached in [*Spirit in the World*] are justified by the philosophical method employed in it, then its author has won the right to proceed with his theological anthropology; but if on the other hand they are not so justified, then, despite its individual successes in dealing with one problem or another, his theo-logical anthropology as a systematic theological method will be doomed to failure' ('Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology', *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 561–2).

12 Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 7.

13 Karen Kilby, 'Philosophy, Theology and Foundationalism in the Thought of Karl Rahner,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002): 127–40. See also J. A. DiNoia, 'Karl Rahner', in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and N. Healy, 'Indirect Methods in Theology: Karl Rahner as an *ad hoc* Apologist', *The Thomist* 56 (1992) for readings which emphasize the unsystematic and *ad hoc* character of Rahner's work.

14 In my view, then, Rowan Williams's piece on Balthasar and Rahner, cited above, though it is helpful and perceptive on Balthasar, is misleading on Rahner. Williams goes to some trouble to introduce the Rahner of *Spirit in the World* – no easy task – but then unfortunately assumes that Rahner's theology can more or less be read off from this. He gives as a result an account of the relation between the two thinkers that is both unfair to Rahner and too simple. It may of course be an account that Balthasar would have been happy with.

15 Balthasar in varied contexts makes use of an image of a multiplicity of items clustering around, or radiating from, an invisible, ungraspable centre, but it would be unusual to rebuke his theology for being 'controlled' or 'determined' by this particular thought pattern. The case is not so different with Rahner. Both theologians – all theologians – make use of ideas, patterns of thought, intellectual material which lie to hand.

16 Balthasar recognizes that Rahner has in place safeguards and qualifications to prevent precisely the kinds of conclusions he draws, but dismisses them. His intention is to bring out the basic direction of Rahner's thought, the way it will inevitably be taken and used by others, even if that is not precisely what Rahner intended. This strategy allows him to build a highly persuasive case against Rahner, but it is worth asking whether any theologian, including Balthasar himself, could survive such treatment – a treatment in which the full complexity of one's position is ignored, and one is held responsible for the way in which it may be misinterpreted and misused.

17 This is a major theme in the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*. In order to see 'the form of divine revelation in salvation-history . . . a new and sharper vision is required, and there is little hope that we will receive and use such eyes unless we have to some extent learned to see essential forms with our old ones'. In our period we are too inclined to 'break [form] up' critically into supposedly prior components, and when form is 'broken down into subdivisions and auxiliary parts for the sake of explanation, this is unfortunately a sign that the true form has not been perceived at all' (*GL1,* 29, 20, 26).

18 The 'depths of our being', of course, for Rahner, always take us beyond ourselves into God – so it is hard to be too definitive about any of these differences. Indeed the way I have framed the contrast in this paragraph skews the discussion somewhat, since Rahner would insist that a move in the direction of the subject ought

never to be *contrasted* with a move in the direction of the object.

19 The direction of interpretation goes both ways, it should be said: Rahner also uses Jesus' death on the Cross to bring out what is at stake in the individual Christian's death.

20 See *Mysterium Paschale* and the fourth volume of the *Theo-Drama*. In each of these volumes one also finds the inadequacy of Rahner's theology of death and of his christology appearing as something of a recurrent theme.

21 An integration of theology and spirituality is also at the heart of Rahner's approach, as recent studies by Endean and Marmion have underlined: what is at issue here, however, is not the deepest concerns of each theologian, but the manner in which they engage the reader.

19

EDWARD T. OAKES

Envoi: the future of Balthasarian theology

Readers who have read all, or even most, of the chapters of this volume will already have come to the conclusion of this chapter: Hans Urs von Balthasar has bequeathed to the world a theology that is extremely hard to assess. Subtle and vast, his theology is also composed of parts so densely and tightly interwoven that no component can be jettisoned, or even much altered, without affecting the whole. For that reason (among others), judging the future influence of his theology is even more difficult. Take, for example, this programmatic manifesto, tucked away in one of his more obscure writings, where he is speaking of the effort it cost him to revise his one-volume dissertation, *Prometheus*, into the large, three-volume work, *Apocalypse of the German Soul*, a labour he undertook, he says, because he was resolved to '*rebuild the world from its foundations*'.[1]

But how does an outsider to his project even begin to assess such a programme? At least for Balthasar himself, it would seem that the only way of guessing what the future might hold for his theology is to see if he will finally succeed in 'rebuilding the world from its foundations'. Ambitious Balthasar certainly was, but will he prove successful in his ambitions? Very few readers, and among them only the captious ones, will deny that Balthasar was a great theologian; but will he prove an influential one in the long run?

Those theologians who accept the epistemological and ideological foundations of the modern world as basically sound will obviously have to answer No. For whatever else Balthasar learned *from* the modern world (and his erudition, which everyone concedes, is staggering), he never abandoned his insistence that modernity has been consistently looking at reality through the wrong end of the telescope (such was already the gravamen of his dissertation).

Even the order he adopted for his trilogy attests to that, as several chapters in this volume have already noted. According to Balthasar, Descartes initiated, and the German Idealists Kant and Hegel furthered, a method of what might be called 'epistemological obsession'. Not only was the question of 'warranted truth' forced into the foreground, the warrant for suchwarranted truth could only be found, and founded, in the subject, now cut off from things, and more especially cut off from the absorption and rapture that those things evoke by virtue of their inherent beauty.

The problem with any future 'reception history' of Balthasar's thought can perhaps best be encapsulated by a remark made in the introduction to this volume. There the editors mentioned that all other theologies are born out of and get their staying power

from larger social and theological forces, even those that are known by their greatest representatives (as transcendental Thomism, for example, is best known in the writings of Karl Rahner). Balthasar, however, has set his face *against* those forces, which means among other things that his theology will only be 'received' to the extent that he proves successful in counteracting those forces.

Take, for example, Balthasar's attempt to begin his treatment of Christian revelation with a presentation of its inherent beauty. It goes without saying that Balthasar is painfully aware of the coarsening of contemporary culture, a media-promoted barbarism that has invaded the consciousness of Christians too (that is the point of the epigraph, from Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*, at the front of this *Companion*). But how can that barbarism be counteracted? In a recent book on this theme, *Speaking of Beauty*, the Irish literary critic, Denis Donoghue (now at New York University), vividly captures the dilemma. Speaking specifically of Balthasar's aesthetics, Donoghue openly admits, 'if we took him as seriously as he deserves, we would have to change our lives'.[2] In the vast ocean of Balthasar's pages Donoghue has found exactly the best passage that shows what is entailed in adopting Balthasar's point of view, and few other passages express so well the difference between Balthasar's kind of aesthetics and that unthinkingly assumed by most other people when encountering the beautiful:

> Before the beautiful – no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it. The more complete this experience is, the less does a person seek and enjoy only the delight that comes through the senses or even through any act of his own; the less also does he reflect on his own acts and states. Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it. (*GL1*, 247; cited in Donoghue, *Speaking of Beauty*, p. 55)

But for Donoghue, just about everything in the contemporary landscape militates against such a stance, for we live in a society 'indifferent to smog, litter, what Henry James called "trash triumphant", lurid communications,wretched TV, billboards, strip malls, blatancies of noise and confusion'.[3] Balthasar would of course agree; and, peppered throughout his work, one can find scathing depictions of the dreariness of the contemporary landscape. The United States is usually taken as the prime example of this kind of ugliness, but Balthasar, perhaps because he is more familiar with it, concentrates his ire on Europe, as in his philippic against the industrial landscape of northern France in *Heart of the World* or in this analysis in *The God Question and Modern Man* of the forces working against a spirit of genuine prayer because of what has happened to the whole of western Europe in the twentieth century:

> Before the dawn of the technical age it was easier to create genuine culture from genuine recollection. Life was more peaceful, man's surroundings expressed eternal values more directly . . . How immediately can a landscape absent of men unite us to God, for example high mountains, a large forest, or a freely flowing river! . . . In the cities, however, only man's handwriting is everywhere visible . . . Concrete and glass do not speak of God; they only point to man who is practically glorified in them. The cities do not transcend man; hence they do not guide to transcendence. Quickly and greedily they devour the surrounding countryside and turn it into a dirty, defiled forecourt of cities. For some years now the Roman Campagna

> has ceased to exist, the Swiss landscape likewise. The Rhine has long 'had it'. Overnight, 'nature' will be turned into a reservation, a 'national park' within the civilized world; and besides, in national parks – mostly crowded – it is not very easy to pray either. (*GQ*, 57)

Perhaps Christians will wake up to this pathos and create, like the Benedictine monasteries after the collapse of the Roman Empire, little islands of civilization and peace, where prayer becomes once again possible in union with nature; but the prospects for such a turn of events, it should go without saying, are not bright.

Another feature of Balthasar's thought also tries to buck a trend with deep social and ideological forces behind it: relativism. Never in his life did Balthasar abandon his conviction that Jesus Christ cannot be subsumed under some wider category, like 'founder of a world religion' or 'great teacher of mankind' and the like. One of the most important bases for the theological friendship between him and Karl Barth was their shared conviction on this point. 'The ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus' (*Church Dogmatics* III/2, 132), said Barth, and Balthasar entirely agreed. But as one commentator said of Barth's thesis: 'This principle of theological anthropology is particularlyprovocative today because it does not at first appear to show how it can be connected with what we know generally about human being. And without such a connection, all statements of theological anthropology are in danger of hanging isolated in space, simply incomprehensible outside of theological discourse.'[4]

A similar dilemma holds for christology too. It is easy enough for Christians to *say* Jesus is the 'one Way' to salvation; but if that is so, why does God save in this way, and what are non-Christians to think of such a claim when they ask the same question? Are Christians to content themselves with hanging their confessions in isolated space, making their witness incomprehensible to those who live outside their private discourse? These questions have of late become so burning that they have given rise to the whole question of relativism (or pluralism), the touchstone and *Leitmotif* of postmodern thought.

There are, to be sure, some fascinating parallels in Balthasar's theology with postmodern themes. Both positions critique any 'totalizing' view; both insist on the ineluctable perspectivalism that inheres in all acts of perception; both insist on the radical finitude of the human intellect and on its inescapable historical determinations (Nietzsche's influence on Balthasar is particularly heavy here). But out of those common positions postmodern thought generally draws relativistic conclusions, while Balthasar would insist that such easily assumed relativism is itself a totalizing discourse, for it bleaches out what makes each religion unique, especially Christianity. For Balthasar it violates the basics of the phenomenology of Christianity to call Jesus the 'founder' of Christianity in the same way as the Buddha might be called the 'founder' of Buddhism, Muhammad of Islam, or even Moses of Judaism.

In a passage originally delivered as a lecture that has now become the *locus classicus* for understanding his christology, Balthasar insists that all other 'founders' might well, in their teaching and doctrine, point *to* the truth; but only Jesus claimed to *be* the Truth (*2SW*, 16–38). But – assuming it has actually been heard and not just dismissed as the

ravings of a madman, and especially when it has been heard in its unsettling plausibility coming from the otherwise 'humble' Jesus – such a claim will come across as a provocation, which will lead to the attempt to refute the claim by killing off the Claimer. But precisely because this is a claim that only God could validate, the claim can only be shown to have been retrospectively true when God raises 'this man Jesus' (Acts 2:36) from death – a death that he underwent, of course, only because of the claim. This triadic fusion of Claim–Death– Resurrection (or Provocation–Refutation–Validation) is for Balthasar *the* pattern (*Gestalt*) of redemption. This means that any toggling or adjusting of any of those elements that make up the pattern will destroy it.

An ancient patristic axiom held that 'what has not been assumed [by Jesus] has not been redeemed'. Similarly for Balthasar, if any part of the pattern of redemption is altered it will no longer be a pattern of *redemption*. Little wonder, then, that he so vigorously attacked all versions of relativism. According to Balthasar, when Jesus died he did so not just as a model or 'good example' for us to follow. Rather, in making the claim to be the Truth, he had in fact to *be* the Truth, so that when he died he took all earthly truths with him into hell, so that they could be raised with him into the presence of his Father. Therefore, any relativizing of this event would mean a diminution of redemption ('what has not been assumed has not been redeemed'):

> If the claim stands, the whole Truth must possess a ballast, an absolute counterweight, that can be counterbalanced by nothing else; and because it is a question of truth, it must be able to show that it is so. The stone in the one pan of the scales [of justice] must be so heavy that one can place in the other pan all the truth there is in the world, every religion, every philosophy, every complaint against God, without counterbalancing it. Only if that is true is it worthwhile remaining a Christian today. If there were any other weight capable, ever so slightly, of raising up the Christian side of the scales and moving that absolute counterweight into the sphere of relativity, then being a Christian would be a matter of preference, and one would have to reject it unconditionally. Somehow or other it would have been outflanked. To think of [this kind of relativized Christianity] as of more than historical interest would be a waste of time. (*2SW*, 29–30)

Once again we see how readily Balthasar is willing to raise the stakes. Having seen the social, world-political, theological, and ideological forces at work to make relativism so plausible, we then see Balthasar, almost like King Lear, setting his face firmly and determinately against these storms that, to his mind, threaten the very foundation of the Christian Good News. For him it really seems to be a case of all or nothing, of Balthasar *contra mundum*.

The nineteen authors of this volume have no uniform, no uniformly arrived-at, position regarding this remarkable man and his thought. Nor do they have a crystal ball that can see where the Church of Jesus Christ is headed in the next millennium. Still less do they pretend to be able to predict how the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar will be received in the future, what effect it will have on conversions, on conversation, on consensus. Suffice it to say, at this moment in church history, that he has spoken, and some have heard.

Notes

1 Introduction to Adrienne von Speyr, *Erde und Himmel: Ein Tagebuch*. Part II: *Die Zeit der grossen Diktate*

(Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975), p. 13; emphasis added. A goodly number of Adrienne von Speyr's books (diaries, journals, dictations, experiences of Holy Saturday, etc.) were privately printed. After her death Balthasar directed that those books composed for public consumption (biblical commentaries, theological portraits, essays, etc.) be the first to be published (their number is quite large); only then should the privately published volumes become available to the public. The citation given in this note is from one of the private volumes.

2 Denis Donoghue, *Speaking of Beauty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 56.

3 Ibid., p. 3.

4 Wolf Krötke, 'The Humanity of the Human Person in Karl Barth's Anthropology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 159–76; here 159.

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Common nouns that are too abstract to be helpful, such as 'dogma' and 'theology', and proper nouns that occur too frequently, such as 'God', 'Christ', 'St Paul', and of course 'Balthasar', are omitted from this index. Consultation of a more specific term, such as 'Trinity', will better guide the reader to a desired location. Boldfaced pages indicate the most important and extended discussion of the topic denoted by the word. Birth- and death-dates are given only for significant historical personages, not for contemporary scholars; all dates are AD unless specified as BC.

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