RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF GOD

How Mission Makes the Person for Hans Urs von Balthasar

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR argues that we find an answer to the painful existential question 'Who am I?' by discovering our vocation. Peace and fulfilment derive from this discovery. The pursuit of our vocation can, however, be costly, because it can lead to our being separated from people who are close to us and set apart for the work of the Kingdom of God.

Many people today experience a restlessness that drives the search for meaning and value in their lives. This is an experience that they share with saints such as Thérèse of Lisieux, for whom resolution came only with finding God and the discovery of her unique vocation in God: 'I finally [have] rest … my vocation, at last I have found it'.[1] This was her joyous response to the discovery of God's unique call on her life.

To speak of responding to the call of God is a less formal way of speaking about living out one's vocation. I use the term 'vocation', or its synonym 'calling', in a more specific way than how it is usually understood. I do not use it to refer to a priestly or religious vocation, or to the undertaking of a particular role or job. As I use it, the term refers to the outworking of God's very specific will for a person's life. In this sense, everyone is called to discover and express his or her unique vocation. I will argue that, while the living out of this vocation can be costly, it can yield enormous compensations.

'Who Am I?' and the Question of Vocation

A. J. Conyers offers insightful reflections on the relationship between vocation and our present culture, arguing that the issue of vocation is

[1] Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux* (Washington, DC: ICS, 1976), 194.

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particularly pertinent for these times.[2] Conyers points to the extraordinariness of a notion that is typically given little thought. The idea of calling *is* extraordinary, for it challenges the notion that we are makers of our own destinies. It challenges the idea that individual choices, derived merely from self-centred processes of decision-making, determine what we are to make of ourselves. Instead, it suggests that we have the option of attending to a transcendent source for our decision-making, rather than looking only to egocentrically derived bases. For Conyers, vocation is a response to a summons rather than one's own choice for a particular course of action.[3] God has summoned people down through the ages, as both the Old and the New Testaments testify.[4]

Hans Urs von Balthasar received such a summons when he was on retreat in the Black Forest, and referred to it as a 'lightning flash of vocation'.[5] He was told, 'You have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve, you will be taken into service. You have no plans to make, you are just a little stone in a mosaic which has long been ready.'[6] This experience informed all his theological reflection and particularly his thinking on vocation. Although extraordinarily erudite, Balthasar was concerned to reach people's hearts.[7] Hence, his reflections on profound existential questions are motivated by a desire to be of pastoral benefit.[8]

The question 'Who am I?' is one of particular pastoral significance for Balthasar. It arises out of the painful experience of a discrepancy between our inmost experience of ourselves and our outer experience in engagement with others. It has, as Balthasar observes, echoed down through the ages. For him, the resolution both of the painful experience

[2] See A. J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Waco: Baylor UP, 2009), 10.

[3] Conyers, *Listening Heart*, 13.

[4] See, for example, Abraham (Genesis 12: 1), Moses (Exodus 19: 3), Samuel (1 Samuel 3: 4), Isaiah (49: 1), Simon Peter (Matthew 4: 19) and Saul (Acts 9: 3–6) who were all chosen by God for a particular task.

[5] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, translated by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 37.

[6] Quoted in Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 11.

[7] Peter Henrici, who was Balthasar's cousin, observed, 'For all of us, he was a little too great' (Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 7).

[8] For the observation that Balthasar's work was primarily pastoral, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame P, 1996), 3–4; Hilary A. Mooney, *The Liberation of Consciousness: Bernard Lonergan's Theological Foundations in Dialogue with the Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1992), 251. I would add that Balthasar's work was also prophetic, but there is insufficient scope to explore this idea here.

and the ensuing question derives from discovering the unique mission in Jesus Christ that God has assigned to us.[9]

Balthasar distinguishes the moments of election, vocation and mission. Our election is a matter of God's having chosen, or elected, us in Christ from eternity, from 'before the foundation of the world'.[10] It takes time before God's election manifests itself in our lives. When it does, as in Balthasar's experience in the Black Forest, it manifests as vocation, as a sense of calling. Balthasar lists an impressive array of people who, in the midst of living ordinary lives, had a vocation pressed upon them.[11] For each one the call was unexpected, and each felt unsuited for it: Moses, Abraham, Samuel, David and the 'barren women'—Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth. Mary, too, felt unsuited for her role of mother of the Son of God. Balthasar observes that the tasks assigned are often difficult. The chosen one may waver, exemplified by Jonah; a vocation can be refused, exemplified by Judas.[12]

Jonah and the Whale*, by Pieter Lastman*

[9] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 1, *Prolegomena*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 481–643.
[10] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 69; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 3, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 263.
[11] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3, 263–265.
[12] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3, 266.

Usually there is a preparatory period before the vocation is manifest. Often people must grow into their vocation before it begins to take a concrete expression in tasks that comprise a 'mission'.[13] Hence, the particular expression in mission is not immediately apparent. So Paul, for example, retired to Arabia after his dramatic conversion and only after three years submitted himself to the elders in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:17–19). In the case of the collaboration between Balthasar and his spiritual colleague, Adrienne von Speyr, he was thirty-five and she thirty-eight before they even met. There is, then, a distinction between our eternal election by God, the subsequent call expressed in an awareness of vocation, and its ultimate expression in a unique, concrete mission.

Becoming aware of God's election entails the experience of a divine constraint upon our sense of personal freedom. Balthasar reflects on the momentous nature of the encounter with God, describing it so vividly that it must surely reflect his own experience:

> When a person is struck by something truly significant … an arrow pierces his heart, at his most personal level. The issue is one that concerns him. 'You must change your life' …. The man to whom this has happened is marked for life. He has trodden holy ground that is in the world but not of it; he cannot return to the purely worldly world. He bears the brand-mark of his encounter with beauty …. Being touched in this way is election.[14]

An encounter with transcendent beauty, with divine glory, transforms the person so engaged. The 'brand-mark' is a consequence of the contact of divinity with humanity having its impact upon personal freedom. It has ramifications both for personal choices and for acting out those choices, because, as Balthasar insists, 'no one is enraptured without returning … with a personal mission'.[15] The mission will be the end result of practical experience gained after having received a vocation. It is this expression of a specific mission that gives a sense of unique personhood and yields utter fulfilment.

The mission will be the end result of practical experience

[13] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama,* volume 3, 267.
[14] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 302–303.
[15] Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 107.

The Cost of Responding to the Call

Obedience to the call will be costly, for it will entail following Jesus in his way of the cross.[16] It requires a state of being, modelled on John the Baptist, whereby one allows oneself to decrease in order that God within might increase (John 3:30). While perfect love is a commandment for all, Balthasar follows St Ignatius of Loyola in differentiating two ways, or states of life, in which loving obedience to God can be expressed. One can observe the commandments, or one can pursue 'evangelical perfection', which usually entails the adoption of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.[17] For Ignatius, and Balthasar, Jesus' life exemplifies both these states. The initial thirty years of Jesus' life demonstrate the first state, in which he lived obedient to his parents and the commandments.[18] The last three years demonstrate the second state, in which, abandoning all natural human ties, Jesus engaged in the 'pure service of His eternal Father'.[19] He left his mother and kin to forge a bond with his disciples and to serve those in need.

For the Christian, as for Christ, the first state comprises a voluntary and obedient surrender to God. Christians enjoy a new-found freedom in the abandonment of pursuits that previously engaged them and in the adoption of a life lived in Christ.[20] They discover the peace and joy derived from detachment from the things of the earth and obedience to the gracious leading of God. Most Christians find themselves within the first state inasmuch as they have not had a call to the second state. Yet, in Balthasar's view, the first state does not offer the freedom that intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in the second state affords. The

[16] D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), 325–338.

[17] See *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, edited by David L. Fleming (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), n. 135.

[18] For Ignatius' presentation of the two states, see *Spiritual Exercises*, edited by Fleming, nn. 134–135. For Balthasar, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, translated by Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 9, 41, 195. See also '*Status Vitae* as Paradigm of Dramatic *Gestalt*', in Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 325–338. While Balthasar refers to the two states as 'secular' and 'elected' respectively, I will simply refer to them as the 'first' and 'second' states. I do so in order to avoid the implication that a person in the 'secular' state may love God less than one in the 'elected' state, a position that Balthasar explicitly rejects.

[19] *Spiritual Exercises*, edited by Fleming, n. 135. It can be argued that these divisions are somewhat simplistic, since Christ was clearly obeying the injunction of his heavenly Father when, for example, he remained in the temple (Luke 2:43–49), even though it caused his family significant distress. Nevertheless, I would contend that Jesus' leaving his family home was an exterior expression of the interior priority of serving his heavenly Father. Note that Balthasar is at pains to point out that the first state is not inferior to the elected, a point I develop below.

[20] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 196–197.

call to the second state reveals a freedom beyond that of the first state. It reveals the liberty that derives from being bound only by the law of love.[21] Balthasar comments, 'Christian freedom within the ordinances of this world does not represent man's ultimate freedom'.[22] There is a much greater freedom offered to those who are prepared to accept the painful call to follow God's lead into a specific, God-ordained task. Such leading entails the breaking of all natural human attachments.

While the loosening of earthly bonds in pursuit of supernatural bonds offers freedom, it also entails pain—both for the one who is called and for those who are left behind. Jesus demonstrated the consequences of obedience to the call when he denied his natural bond with his mother and brethren (Matthew 12:47–50). Analogously, to the degree that human beings seek to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit, they too can experience a transition from the first to the second state, if the Lord so chooses. They, too, will be led to set aside natural human bonds in favour of supernatural, divine bonds. Balthasar points to the evangelical counsels as having their typical expression within the Church in the context of priestly and religious life. However, there can occur within the lay state a 'differentiated vocation' to greater intimacy with God, in which the lay person is called to the second state.[23]

Reflection on Thomas Aquinas helps us to understand Balthasar's position in this respect. Aquinas recognises the counsels merely as a 'means to an end that is superior to the means and that, under certain circumstances, can be achieved without them'.[24] In other words, the means of the evangelical counsels merely serve the greater end of love. They just assist in the development of a total surrender of the self to God. It is this latter disposition that Balthasar and von Speyr stress again and again as the necessary condition for receptivity to God's gracious working in one's life. Balthasar's reflections suggest that God can lead a person into total self-surrender without a formal living out of the evangelical counsels.

[21] For the observation that 'law is the stern countenance which love shows the person who does not yet possess it', see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, volume 1, *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 239.
[22] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 197.
[23] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 366.
[24] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 59. Balthasar reflects on Thomas' question as to 'Whether it is right to say that religious perfection consists in these three vows?', for which, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2.2, q. 186.

Whether one is in the first or second state, Balthasar insists that the lack of a specific call does not mean that the former state is inferior to the latter. Indeed, the call to the second state cannot be universal. Since it entails such radical renunciation, it would endanger the continuation of the order of nature ordained by God after the fall.[25] Balthasar emphasizes that love does not require the second state for its full expression. Reflecting on the nature of love, Balthasar highlights a recurring theme in his thought, namely the value of abandonment and attentive receptivity to God's will for all people, regardless of their state:

> To love with all our strength does not mean indiscriminately to drag into the house and cast at the feet of the beloved all the outward and inward gifts we possess. To do so might prove embarrassing to the beloved …. the gift proper to it is to place itself and all it possesses at the disposal of the beloved, allowing him to decide, to choose, what will be given him. This presumes … a disposition of self-giving that is no less perfect than that required for a literal and voluntary renunciation of all one's possessions.[26]

If people in the first state are foundationally available for a radical renunciation, not only of their possessions but also of their very selves, they too express a comprehensive and intimate love for Christ.

While those in the first state must be prepared to abandon all, those in the second state are required to abandon all. The call to the second state is costly. The 'searing uniqueness' of the call necessarily exposes its recipient to differentiation from those still identified with their family, social or institutional groups.[27] It will lead to life lived 'outside' (*Ausserhalb*) the standard norms of social expectation.[28] Such being outside involves the privilege of participating in the mission of Christ; it involves also accepting the cross in union with Christ.[29]

A more recent commentator has similarly reflected on the cost of the call. James Fowler helps us understand to what Balthasar's 'outside' refers. Writing on the six stages of faith through which people pass in their growth towards union with Christ, Fowler describes features of the last of the stages:

[25] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 167.
[26] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 55.
[27] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 197.
[28] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 197–199.
[29] Balthasar states that the 'inmost form' of the second state is established by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, for which see Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 199.

> Heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order that are involved, Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist *incarnation*—a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and justice …. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent reality.[30]

Here Fowler points to the typical elements that constitute being 'outside' one's habitual circle, and to the interior dynamic that leads people in this situation to serve others in love and justice.[31] Such people demonstrate concern neither for themselves, nor for close family ties, nor for the institutions to which they belong.[32] They have a vision of another reality and are prepared to lose all for it. When James and John, for example, left

Calling of the First Apostles, *by Domenico Ghirlandaio*

[30] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove, 1981), 200. Italics original.
[31] Balthasar refers to this as the 'second state'. It is worthy of note that Fowler does not limit this stage to those who have adopted celibate, priestly or religious roles. He includes married people such as Martin Luther King and non-Christians such as Mahatma Ghandi. See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 201.
[32] For the similar observation that such persons are 'independent of people, things, status, institutions, and free from fear', see Bernadette Roberts, *The Path to No-Self: Life at the Center* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 122.

their father to pursue his fishing business with only the hired men for help (Matthew 4:21–22; Mark 1:19–20), they demonstrated a disregard for the 'primary group' of their immediate family.

Fowler observes that the contribution of people in Stage 6, with their transcendent vision, often appears subversive, generating serious confrontation with the very ones whom they seek to serve.[33] Conyers similarly observes that, while the call is for the sake of community, it actually sets its recipient against the community.[34] Although Jesus was a member of the Jewish race and 'came to what was his own … his own people did not accept him' (John 1:11). Jesus came to serve the community, yet he was rejected by the community. Such people demonstrate the 'scandal of the particular' in their concrete, historical expression of a vocation that can surprise and shock, yet nevertheless reveal something of transcendental value.[35] Like Christ, they are subjected to criticism by those around them. The archetypal symbol of the cross becomes embodied in the lives of such people. The pattern is present in all cultures. Balthasar notes that in Greek culture one who had received a personal vocation often encountered opposition through his refusal to be 'integrated seamlessly into the social edifice'.[36] This is but an analogy for the suffering of the cross. For Balthasar the cross is the ultimate consequence of Jesus' surrender of himself to the Father.[37] It is frequently the ultimate consequence, also, for those in Fowler's Stage 6, where a physical or social martyrdom may be the reward.[38] Nevertheless, martyrdom is, Balthasar asserts, the paradoxical expression of the total freedom that life in Christ affords.

I now reflect specifically on Balthasar's notion of mission, to which he refers more frequently than to either election or vocation. This is because Balthasar believes that the particular mission entrusted to an individual determines the individual's unique manifestation of his or her essential self, a self which is ultimately grounded in Christ.

Mission: The Manifestation of the Person

Whether it be great or small, surrendering to the reality of one's mission involves being admitted to a sphere that is simultaneously personal and

[33] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 202–203. For a comparable reflection see also Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Self-Discovery* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1986), 136.
[34] Conyers, *Listening Heart*, 17.
[35] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 207.
[36] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 1, 355.
[37] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 198.
[38] For historical individuals who have suffered in the pursuit of their vision, see Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 201.

transcendent. This is because it is the sphere of the 'transcendent Logos', which is both concrete and universal: 'In this unique event, the Logos has encountered him, the unique individual … yet this Logos is the all-embracing, universal Word that grounds all particular languages'.[39] Hence, by analogy, uniqueness and universality also coexist in the human person. Just as Christ poured himself out, so too the human person is poured out for others as he or she participates in the movement from the perception of the beautiful to the enactment of the good.[40] These dynamics have significant implications for Balthasar's notion of persons as those who, in the discovery of their mission, find not only fulfilment but their very selves.

The tradition has described the journey towards the discovery of one's self in mission in various ways. Balthasar identifies a number of contributors. Meister Eckhart speaks of the discovery of a unique 'path'. Ignatius describes it as a 'form of life'. Scripture refers to it as a 'charisma or vocation'. Paul talks of a 'new creation'.[41] Reflecting on Paul, Balthasar stresses that the new creation is not a merely accidental accretion. Rather, it constitutes the very substance of a person's expression on earth.[42] In other words, the mission constitutes the Christian's *form*, exemplified by Jesus giving Simon his new name, Peter: 'the "form" summed up in the name 'Peter', the particular mission reserved for him alone'.[43] Balthasar argues that accepting a unique mission, as Peter does, causes a socialising of the person, deprivatising him or her, and making the person an integral part of community.[44] Such people no longer have authority to determine their own lives; their lives are surrendered to a divine Other and hence to the society that they serve. In that expropriation, however, they find joy, freedom and fulfilment.

Making the person an integral part of community

Mission can take innumerable forms. It is often too simple and too obvious to be recognised. Life's circumstances and one's abilities may coalesce to identify one's mission, or accidents and chance encounters may point out a new direction. Even one's sins and mistaken choices can, in

[39] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 2, 31.
[40] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 2, 31. See also Balthasar, *Our Task*, 70 n. 79.
[41] 2 Corinthians 5: 17; Galatians 6: 15.
[42] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 2, 307.
[43] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, translated by A. V. Littledale (New York: Paulist, 1967), 48–49.
[44] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3, 271.

retrospect, be seen as contributing to the mission implicit in one's life.[45] While the content of the mission, its 'what', may well remain hidden, the awareness that one has surrendered in love to God's claim on one's life will suffice to constitute one as sent: 'Mission signifies above all a being sent away from the self and in the direction of others …. I discover myself outside where the cold winds of life are blowing, exhorting me: go, act, and commit yourself!'[46]

Foundationally, the expression of mission requires a readiness to surrender egocentric attachments in abandonment to God. It demands self-transcendence. Such surrender issues in holiness, a form of mission to which Balthasar gives particular attention. Balthasar argues for the evangelical value of sanctity. Sanctity constitutes a mission and belongs to the Church. It must not be seen simply as an 'individual ascetical, mystical manifestation'.[47] Ultimately, Balthasar insists, the Christian life comprises taking a grace-enabled faith stance in the 'personal divine-human reality that is Christ'.[48] The Christian life is, therefore, a condition determined by profound, interior dynamics constituted by immersion in, and relationship with, Jesus Christ.

All of this is the fruit of grace. Just as Israel needed to be cautioned that its election was pure gift, so too the elected one, given a vocation and sent out on mission, needs to be careful that a humble awareness of graced calling does not degenerate into a proud 'I am chosen'. As Balthasar points out, a salutary reminder, still relevant today, is the 'constant, paradoxical teaching of the Old and New Covenant, that God chooses even "things that are not to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:28)'.[49] Balthasar might also have quoted 1 Corinthians 4:7, 'What have you that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' Humility will always accompany the authentic exercise of mission.

Balthasar further develops his theology of mission by discussing two Carmelites, Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of Dijon, who eminently demonstrate such humility. Implicit in mission is the particular way in which each individual expresses his or her unique form of sanctity, a

[45] Peter Henrici, 'The Destiny and Determination of Human Existence', *Communio*, 17 (1990), 309.
[46] Henrici, 'Destiny and Determination of Human Existence', 310.
[47] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 39.
[48] Balthasar, *Christian State of Life*, 185.
[49] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, volume 3, 269.

sanctity derived from a life lived in alignment with the will of God.[50] Balthasar cites St Thérèse of Lisieux's desire to fulfil God's will. He explains that such fulfilment does not entail the pursuit of an 'anonymous universal law that is the same for all', but rather the pursuit of an 'individual law'.[51] Such a law is not binding; it is totally freeing, for it is the realisation of God's unique and loving design for an individual's life. Surrender to this law entails a person's whole being and yields the unique expression of sanctity appropriate to that individual. For Thérèse of Lisieux, as for all people in this situation, there was a correlation between her grasp of her mission and her growth in sanctity. Thérèse expressed the unique idea God had for her particular mission when she articulated her vision of the 'little way'. In so doing, she demonstrated the outcome of engagement with mystery and its incarnation in her life in both mission and holiness.

The example of Elizabeth of Dijon, whose religious name was Elizabeth of the Trinity, also assists Balthasar in his endeavour to articulate the elements of mission. Although expressing different dynamics in their unique calls, Balthasar sees Thérèse and Elizabeth as complementary. Together they reveal the unity of mission and holiness in how they pursued God's idea for them and the prayerful contemplative foundation so necessary for that pursuit. Elizabeth, like Thérèse, belonged to the Carmelite order, which Balthasar considered to have been granted great missionary graces. Balthasar notes that, as members of an enclosed order wherein contemplative presence to God was the 'one thing necessary', they model an alternative to the activism so typical of many church endeavours.[52] Elizabeth realised her mission in contemplative silence and in the suffering that coexists with such a call.[53] Her growth into that mission was not merely the unfolding of natural abilities. On the contrary, Elizabeth experienced suffering (as did Thérèse) because it entailed her compliance with a transcendent ideal accessible only through intimacy with God.[54] Foundational to this adjustment were the gifts of faith,

[50] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 20. For a study of Balthasar's notion of holiness, see Victoria S. Harrison, 'Personal Identity and Integration: von Balthasar's Phenomenology of Human Holiness', *The Heythrop Journal*, 40/4 (1999), 424–437.
[51] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 21.
[52] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 373.
[53] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 376.
[54] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 382, 393.

hope and love that allow one to abide in the 'orbit' of God's eternal plan.[55]

For Elizabeth such abiding yielded a limitless freedom.[56] However, her fearless abandonment to God was not for herself alone. It had, and continues to have, ecclesial and social ramifications, since those who respond obediently to God's calling will always be a testimony for others of God's gracious love.[57] Balthasar recognises that their certainty of faith is intended as encouragement for those whose faith lacks such experiential assurance: 'They are supposed to show what complete love, complete trust, complete confidence look like and to offer not only an example but an outstretched hand that pulls the others up higher'.[58] As Adrienne von Speyr observed, those who respond to God's call are meant to be a bridge between God and humanity.[59] Not only do such respondents find personal fulfilment and the resolution of existential quandaries, but they are able to serve and console others by both the testimony of their lives and the insights they have received on their journey.

Elizabeth of the Trinity

Many people are aware of a discord between their inmost experience of themselves when they are alone and their experience of themselves in engagement with others. Reflection on this interior pain can generate a question: 'Who am I?'. I have argued that the discovery of one's unique calling in Christ can be the means of resolving the interior dissonance. Obedient surrender to the call can, however, be costly, for the call can lead in ways that are not

[55] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 393–399.
[56] For Balthasar's reflections on the extent of such freedom derived from total surrender, see *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 420–437.
[57] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 419.
[58] Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 417.
[59] Balthasar, *Our Task*, 189.

compatible with one's original sense of self nor with the groups with which one has identified. Nevertheless, those who accept the cost find that there are great compensations. Discovering the unique mission to which God calls each person generates not only personal fulfilment but also a life of loving service that testifies to the glory of God.

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