THE WAY

a review of Christian spirituality published by the British Jesuits

October 2005 *Volume 44, Number 4*

SPIRITUALITY, TRADITION AND BEAUTY

a Special Number in honour of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988)

... if God wishes to reveal the love that He harbours for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognise, in spite of, or in fact *in*, its being wholly other. The inner reality of love can be recognised only by love.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, Love Alone Is Credible

FOR AUTHORS

The Way warmly invites readers to submit articles with a view to publication. They should normally be about 4,000 words long, and be in keeping with the journal's aims. The Editor is always ready to discuss possible ideas. Further details can be found on *The Way*'s website, www.theway.org.uk. In 2006 the special number, marking jubilees for Ignatius and for his first two companions, Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier, will be about Ignatian spirituality and growth in relationships. Contributions for this project will be especially welcome.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Translations: Philip Endean SJ.

Illustrations: Peter Brook SJ; Cornelia Capol at Johannes Verlag; Philip McCosker; www.visipix.com.

INTRODUCTION

'IN HIM WE SEE OUR GOD MADE VISIBLE, and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see.' Hans Urs von Balthasar quotes the Latin original of this sentence as he articulates what he means by a 'theological aesthetics'.[1] From within the beautiful form of Christ, a new light breaks forth, transforming us. The Word of God appears to us as something beautiful. For all that God's own life in grace transcends any created reality, we can nevertheless draw on our experience of beauty, both natural and artistic, to help us understand the life of faith.

This special number of *The Way* honours Hans Urs von Balthasar's centenary, and focuses chiefly on one theme in his work: what Gerald O'Collins refers to as the beauty of Christ. But the essays range far more widely in their explorations of beauty and God. Thomas J. McElligott considers some late paintings of Caravaggio; Philip McCosker looks at why both von Balthasar and his great Protestant contemporary and fellow Swiss, Karl Barth, were fascinated by the music of Mozart; Leo O'Donovan explores the architecture of Chartres cathedral. Christine Valters Paintner presents a more general account of a spirituality centred on beauty, while Joan L. Roccasalvo introduces us to von Balthasar's life and to the theme of beauty in his work.

One can only be selective with Von Balthasar. His achievement is massive, and it is only now, as we go to press, that English translations of the final volumes of his major three-part work are being announced. Probably no one is yet in a position fully to appreciate how his work as a whole holds together. His legacy appears at present as a set of fascinating, controversial fragments, often pointing in different directions. An immensely learned man, von Balthasar nevertheless attributed his theology in large part to the revelatory experiences of Adrienne von Speyr. Some reactionary forces in the Church may have adopted von Balthasar as their court theologian, particularly as regards

[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1982 [1961]), 119-120. The whole section (pp.117-127) has influenced this introduction.

women and vocation (a theme explored trenchantly here by Tina Beattie). Nevertheless, von Balthasar's theology of Church and authority was rich, nuanced and pluralist, as John McDade admirably shows. Moreover, von Balthasar's belief that we may at least hope for universal salvation (one that Erhard Kunz's essay suggests may be prefigured in Ignatius), leads some authoritarian figures to be highly suspicious of him.

In focussing on the themes of tradition and beauty, this collection in no way summarises von Balthasar's achievement as a whole, nor resolves the questions it raises. The apprehension of divine beauty is only the beginning of the Balthasarian process, one that continues through the drama of God's engagement and culminates in a reflection on divine logic.

If beauty leads us to God, then our sense of what is beautiful cannot remain merely conventional, as Andrew Louth's rich and subtle essay on the traditions of icon painting vividly reminds us. Christian tradition inevitably expands our sense of the beautiful, until it includes, like the creative love of God, the whole cosmos:

> … it embraces the most abysmal ugliness of sin and hell by virtue of the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into that divine art for which there is no human analogue.

We may begin with Mozartian elegance, with the kind of writing that T.S. Eliot evoked at the end of 'Little Gidding':

> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together.

But such easy graciousness eventually breaks down; the Incarnation we only half understand confronts us with the more mysterious beauty that Eliot evokes in 'The Dry Salvages':

> … music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.

Philip Endean SJ

THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST

Gerald O'Collins

ON THE WEST FRONT of the thirteenth-century cathedral of Amiens, there is a carved stone figure of Christ standing on evil beasts in serene majesty, and it is called 'le Beau Dieu'. The idea of presenting Christ as both beautiful and sovereign may typify the sensibility of the Middle Ages. But the theme of Christ's beauty goes back to sermons by St Augustine of Hippo, to the awesome and victoriously beautiful Christ in the Book of Revelation, and to his identification elsewhere in the New Testament with the radiantly beautiful Lady Wisdom of the Jewish Scriptures. Augustine provides one of the finest statements of this theme when commenting on a love song, on the royal wedding song that we know as Psalm 45:

> He then is beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth; beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents' arms; beautiful in his miracles; beautiful under the scourge; beautiful when inviting to life … beautiful in laying down his life; beautiful in taking it up again; beautiful on the cross; beautiful in the sepulchre; beautiful in heaven.[1]

This eloquent passage from Augustine takes one 'from heaven to heaven'—that is to say, from Christ's pre-existent life 'before' the incarnation to his 'post-existent' life when risen from the dead. At every stage in that story, beauty characterizes Christ, even when he is laying down his life on the cross. Augustine's comments provide a framework for reflecting on Christ's beauty, and for doing so out of the communicative wealth of the Scriptures. But first let me take a stand on what I understand by beauty. Even a provisional account can help us to explore the life of meaning in the biblical texts.

[1] *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 44.3.

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Beauty

Drawing on St Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain described beauty as follows:

> For beauty three things are required: in the first place, integrity or perfection (*integritas sive perfectio*), for whatever is imperfect is *eo ipso* ugly; in the second, proportion or harmony (*proportio sive consonantia*); in the third, clarity (*claritas*), for there is a splendour in all objects that are called beautiful.[2]

These three qualities of beauty—an exquisite flawlessness, a harmonious proportion, and a radiance—point to what we perceive in beautiful objects. They have a proper completeness; they display a perfect shape and order; and they enjoy a 'luminosity', or the right balance of colour and light through which they stand out appropriately. We rejoice in the 'radiant form' of some person, or delight in the 'splendid' performance of a symphony or a great drama.

Le Beau Dieu, *Amiens Cathedral*

What I have just said raises the crucial issue of participation in what is beautiful. Beauty attracts us, evokes our wonder and joy, and arouses a flood of delight and inconsolable longing. We fall in love with beauty, sing its praises, and want to stay in its presence. When Solomon succumbs to the beauty of Lady Wisdom, he wants to live with her forever: 'When I enter my house, I shall find rest with

[2] *Art and Scholasticism*, translated by J.F. Scanlan (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), 24-38, 159.

her; for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy' (Wisdom 8:16). At the same time, there is a mysterious quality to beauty which points beyond its mere visible expression, and leaves us asking: Where does that radiant loveliness come from, and why does it affect me in the way that it does? The mystery of beauty involves a depth of meaning which can never be exhausted. The significance of a beautiful person, a great piece of music, or a radiant painting cannot be plumbed and expressed once and for all, as the classic love poetry of the world has always witnessed. Even the masters of language lose their struggle with words and lapse into silence before the lovely object of their love. The impact of beauty is not only lasting but also total. Our whole existence is illuminated by what is beautiful.

At the same time, the experiences of reacting to what is beautiful and participating in it leave us with the question: is beauty something 'sensible', something we take in through our bodily senses? Is beauty to be met only in something which is material and wonderfully proportioned, materially speaking? Augustine wrote of God as 'the Beauty of all things beautiful'.[3]

The answer to that question is no. There is a beauty beyond what we can sense. God is utterly perfect, harmonious and radiantly splendid, that Beauty itself which perceptible earthly beauty reflects and in which it participates. St Gregory of Nyssa understood God to be not only beautiful but also the very essence and archetype of beauty (*De Virginitate*, 11.1-5). Centuries later St Bonaventure wrote about St Francis of Assisi moving from created reality to contemplate the most beautiful, beloved and wholly desirable God:

> In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself, and through [the divine] vestiges imprinted on [created] things he followed his Beloved everywhere, making from all things a ladder by which he could climb up and embrace him who is utterly desirable.[4]

What Augustine, Gregory and Bonaventure wrote about the beauty of God is firmly based in the Bible.

[3] *Confessions*, 3.6; see 9.4.

[4] *The Life of St Francis*, in *Bonaventure*, translated by Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist, 1978), 263. In this passage, Bonaventure echoes the Book of Wisdom and the language of love used by the Song of Songs.

The Old Testament frequently highlights something very similar: the 'glory' of God, or the radiant, powerful presence of God. When Jerusalem is restored, the luminous presence of God will appear over Jerusalem, which is called to reflect 'the glory of the Lord' and welcome home her children (Isaiah 60:1-5). Talk of the shining glory of God goes together with the biblical scenarios of fire and light. It is in a flame of fire out of a bush that God speaks to Moses (Exodus 3:1-6). The New Testament goes beyond speaking of God as dwelling 'in unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16) to declare simply: 'God is light' (1 John 1:5).

Even if no biblical writer ever says that 'God dwells in unapproachable beauty' or that 'God is beauty', some books of the Scriptures directly celebrate the peerless beauty of a divine personification, Lady Wisdom. Solomon declared this 'pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty' to be 'more beautiful than the sun'; he 'became enamoured of her beauty', and desired to 'take her' as his bride and teacher (Wisdom 7:25,29; 8:2,9). She is understood to be the agent of divine creation, with all its beautiful works. From 'the greatness and beauty' of these created things comes 'a corresponding perception of their Creator', the very 'Author of beauty' and hence of Lady Wisdom, who is the radiantly beautiful 'reflection' or 'spotless mirror' image of God the Creator (Wisdom 7:26; 13:3-5). In different ways the Scriptures celebrate the splendid glory of God and the divine beauty. Let us turn now to Christ's story and fill out the beauty revealed at the various stages listed by Augustine.

The Story of Christ

When Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels with the 'infancy narratives', they do not directly describe the beauty of Jesus in his mother's womb or after his birth. That he was 'beautiful in the womb' is hinted at by the joyful exchange between two pregnant mothers, Elizabeth and Mary (Luke 1:39-56). The beauty of the Christ Child likewise emerges indirectly, through the joy of the shepherds, who visit Bethlehem and go away 'glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen' (Luke 2:20), and through the impact of the Child on the two old people in Jerusalem, Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38). They have waited so long for this moment, they delight in the beautiful Christ Child, and now they can die in peace. Matthew writes

of the magi being 'overwhelmed with joy' when they finally arrive at the goal of their journey and can present the newborn Jesus with their gifts (Matthew 2:10-11). The angels in the nativity story also play their part in pointing to the beauty of the Christ Child (Luke 2:8-14). Our Christmas carols repeatedly pick up the wonder and joy of the angels over the birth of this unique and uniquely beautiful Child. For the Gospel writers angels are themselves memorably beautiful, and the beauty of these heavenly visitors mirrors the beauty of the One who has just been born. The infancy narratives present the birth of Jesus in terms of the 'glory' of God which shines on earth (Luke 2:9); they also speak of the star, the light from which guides the Magi to Bethlehem (Matthew 2:9-10).

A straight line leads from these biblical passages to the liturgy. Beauty threads its way through the Christmas services of worship. The opening prayer at the Roman Catholic Midnight Mass, for instance, describes 'this holy night' as radiant with the splendour and beauty of Christ. The first reading, Isaiah 9:2-7, signals the beautiful light of God which now shines upon those who have 'walked in darkness'. The second reading presents the Nativity as 'the manifestation of the glory [or radiant beauty] of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:11-14). Then the Gospel tells of the divine beauty or glory shining around the shepherds when they watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:1-14).

This biblical language underpins the theme of beauty introduced by Johann Sebastian Bach in his *Christmas Oratorio* when he acclaims the birth of 'the most beautiful of all human beings'. St Robert Southwell adapted the scriptural language of fire and love in his image of 'a pretty Babe all burning bright' who appears on Christmas day ('The Burning Babe'). Christian artists have rightly excelled themselves in depicting the most beautiful Child, whose beauty is mirrored in the beauty of his Mother as she holds him in her arms or gazes upon him with intense love. One thinks in particular of Murillo, with his delicate colour and ethereal forms, and a number of Italian painters. In his *Jesus' Christmas Party*, Nicholas Allan makes the same point at a popular level: everyone loves a newborn baby and everyone should love Jesus, the most special and beautiful Baby the world has ever seen.

The most beautiful Child, mirrored in the beauty of his Mother

Beautiful in His Ministry

In his *Confessions*, Augustine addresses God as the divine Beauty, reaching him through his five senses—through hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch:

> You *called* and *cried* to me and broke open my deafness. You *sent forth your beams* and *shone* upon me and chased away my blindness. You *breathed fragrance* upon me, and I drew in my breath and now pant for you. I *tasted* you, and now hunger and thirst for you. You *touched* me, and I have burned for your peace …. (10.38)

These words deserve to be applied to the birth of Jesus. For it enabled human beings to hear, see, smell, taste and touch the very incarnation of the divine beauty. The infinitely beautiful God reached out to us and became available through our five senses.

Augustine sums up the story of Jesus in his ministry as his being 'beautiful in his miracles' and 'beautiful when inviting to life'. Once again, the Gospel writers make no attempt to describe directly the exquisite appearance of Jesus. But even though they never tell us what he looked like, they certainly suggest his wonderful beauty through their accounts of his impact on others. People flock to him; if there ever was a magnetic, attractive personality, he is it. Mark has Peter and his companions say to Jesus, 'everyone is searching for you' (Mark 1:37). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to his audience: 'Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). If the poor and overburdened take on his light yoke, they will find enduring peace. As beautiful, divine Wisdom in person,[5] Jesus invites his hearers to take up the yoke of his message rather than put, or rather leave, their necks under the yoke of the law. He hardly needs to invite his audience to come to him. They know from others, or have already experienced, how tender, welcoming and comforting he proves to be. They want to stay in his presence and share in the mysterious grace of his person. The sick and sinful receive from him healing and a joyful wholeness.

The preaching of Jesus reported by Matthew and by Luke provides grounds for concluding that Jesus thought of himself in terms of

[5] The passage echoes what Ben Sirach says of the serenity with which Lady Wisdom has blessed his life (Ecclesiasticus 51: 23-27).

wisdom and made it possible for his followers to recognise him as the divine Wisdom come in person. This is tantamount to acknowledging in him the divine Beauty.[6] Likewise the Letter to the Hebrews calls him 'the reflection of God's glory' (Hebrews 1:3).[7] As one might expect, the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit transfigured what early Christians believed about Jesus. Nevertheless, their beliefs regularly reached back to the ministry of Jesus and to what they remembered him saying, or at least implying, about himself. This helped them to see in him the radiant splendour of the divine beauty.

During his lifetime one group, in particular, sensed that beauty in him. Children were drawn, in a special way, to the beauty and joy of Jesus' company. In the rural society of ancient Galilee, children were sent off as soon as possible to take care of sheep or in other ways prove themselves to be producers and not merely consumers. Since they did not know the Torah, they were low on the religious and social scale. Yet Jesus showed himself their special friend; he did things for them (Mark 5:35-43).[8] When his disciples wanted to keep them away, Jesus became indignant, took some children into his arms, blessed them, and declared that the kingdom of heaven belonged to them. Children heard him hold them up as models for adults: 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it' (Mark 10:13-16). To illustrate the new attitude to God that he required, Jesus singled out children; he did not say, 'Unless you become like priests and prophets, you will never enter the kingdom of God'. He expected all to show a trusting, childlike attitude to their heavenly Father. For Jesus, the seeming incapacity of children turned out to be their greatest asset. The fact that they had nothing to give or show in order to enter the kingdom of heaven made them receptive to all that God offered them. They could accept and appreciate the unique gift that they had not worked to deserve.

A US-Italian film that was first shown in December 1999, *Jesus*, ended with a striking tribute to Jesus as the beautiful friend of children.[9]

[6] On the wisdom theme in the preaching of Jesus, see Aidan O'Boyle, *Towards a Contemporary Wisdom Christology* (Rome: Gregorian UP, 2003), 121-149.

[7] Very appropriately, this passage from the opening verses of Hebrews provides the second reading for the Roman Catholic liturgy's daytime Mass on Christmas Day.

[8] In John's Gospel a boy does something for Jesus, by providing the five barley loaves and two fish (John 6:9) from which Jesus miraculously produces enough for five thousand hungry people.

[9] One should add that Jesus also showed himself a realistic friend of children; he knew that they could be petulant and hard to satisfy (Luke 7:32).

The film took its viewers through his life, death and resurrection, and then leapt forward two thousand years to the waterfront of Valletta (Malta). His long hair now cropped, Jesus stood there in jeans as a crowd of small children ran up to him. The film ended with his taking a tiny child in his arms and walking off with the others crowded around him. The beautiful Jesus exited with the beautiful children.

Before leaving the beauty of Jesus manifested in his ministry, we should recall two further items: his transfiguration and his self-presentation as the bridegroom. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Peter, James and John went up a high mountain with Jesus and saw him 'transfigured', as divine glory gleamed through him; his face shone like the sun, and two heavenly figures (the prophet Elijah and the law-giver Moses) talked with him (Mark 9:2-8; Matthew 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36). The disciples reacted not only with astonished awe but also with a desire to prolong the vision of the radiantly beautiful Lord that they were experiencing. In the new 'mysteries of light' added to the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the rosary, the transfiguration is the 'mystery of light' *par excellence*. As he was naming the moments when the divine beauty of Christ shone through, Augustine could well have added, 'beautiful in his transfiguration'.[10]

The Synoptic Gospels likewise report words of Jesus which imply that, in the joyful time of salvation, he had come as 'the bridegroom' for his followers (Mark 2:19-20; Matthew 9:15; Luke 5:34-35). The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, which presents the coming of the kingdom in terms of the coming of the bridegroom and the need to be prepared (Matthew 25:1-13), left its audience with the question: Who was this mysterious bridegroom if not Christ himself? This language evokes many Old Testament passages, such as the psalm which prompted Augustine's reflections on the beauty of Christ. An ode for a royal wedding, Psalm 45 highlights the glory, majesty and beauty of the king: 'You are the most handsome of men; grace is

[10] Some commentators on John point out that, while it includes no specific story of the transfiguration, the theme pervades the whole Gospel. It begins with the confession: 'the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory' (John 1:14). Then the miracles are understood to be 'signs' that reveal his divine 'glory' (John 2:11). Right through the Gospel, the radiant glory of Christ shines through; it is not limited to a particular episode on a mountain that involves only three disciples. See Dorothy Lee, 'Transfiguration and the Gospel of John', in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, edited by Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 158-169.

poured upon your lips …. Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty.' (Psalm 45:2-3)

Christians were to apply this spousal language to the union between Christ and the Church, for instance in the Letter to the Ephesians (5:25-33). The Bible ends with the Book of Revelation and its promise of marriage between the gloriously beautiful Christ and his Church (Revelation 21-22). The awesome splendour of the exalted Christ is evoked in the vision with which this book begins (1:9-20). The theme of Christ as the supremely beautiful bridegroom, for whom we are all waiting, was to have a long future, not least in the way that mystics would draw on the Song of Songs to express their ecstatic union with their divine Spouse.

Beautiful in his Passion

Augustine can seem bold and even audacious when he writes of Christ being 'beautiful under the scourge' and 'beautiful on the cross'. Has Augustine forgotten Second Isaiah, and those words about God's servant being cruelly disfigured through which the Christian tradition and liturgy have seen the suffering and death of Christ (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)? It is precisely in his most eloquent passage about the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5) that Paul calls the crucified Christ 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24). But Paul appreciates that we face here a mysterious, hidden wisdom. The divine wisdom and beauty revealed in Christ's passion are in no way self-evident; we meet here a unique challenge to faith. This is the beauty to be found in the weak and suffering men and women with whom Christ identifies himself (Matthew 25:31-46). His passion continues in them, until the end of history. In the words of Pascal, 'Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world'.[11] One might adapt here Paul's teaching about power being made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4), and say that the power of his beauty is manifested perfectly in the weakness and ugliness of his crucifixion.

Countless Christians and others have seen the *Pietà* by Michelangelo in St Peter's Basilica, or at least a photograph or replica

[11] *Pensées*, 736 (sometimes numbered 552 or 919).

Pietà (St Peter's Basilica), by Michelangelo

of it. Created when the artist was in his early twenties, this dramatically intense work represents the Virgin Mary holding the body of her Son across her lap and grieving over his death. Yet the physical beauty of two bodies takes away something of the grief and suffering from an emotionally charged scene. Later in his life Michelangelo carved other versions of the *Pietà*. One is now kept in the museum of the cathedral in Florence; Michelangelo himself mutilated and abandoned it, only for the work to be restored and completed by a mediocre artist. Another is the Rondanini *Pietà* (in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan), on which he was still working a few days before his death when he was almost ninety.

The first work places Nicodemus above and Mary Magdalene on the left, both helping the Virgin Mary to support the body which has been taken down from the cross. Her face is close to the face of her dead Son, and she is interlaced with him in a painful union that merges their two bodies physically and spiritually.

This physical and spiritual union emerges even more powerfully from the unfinished splendour of the Rondanini *Pietà*, which folds the body of the Virgin into that of the dead Christ. This work expresses the spiritual, inner, even divine beauty of suffering, rather than the external beauty of a young athlete dying in the prime of his life.

Few, if any, among Western painters have equalled Rembrandt in his ability to portray the beauty of Christ in his passion and death. This Dutch artist's images of Christ standing before Pilate, on the way to Calvary, or nailed to the cross itself let a mysterious, haunting beauty gleam through the pain and weakness of the suffering Christ. The power of Christ's beauty is manifested in the horror of his crucifixion, where he is weak, abandoned and powerless.

The Rondanini Pietà

Beautiful in His Resurrection

Augustine calls Christ beautiful 'in laying down his life' and 'in taking it up again'. These words obviously echo what Jesus says in the Gospel of John: 'I lay down my life in order to take it up again' (John 10:17). Here Augustine may have had in mind Christ's self-description in the very same passage of the Fourth Gospel: 'I am the good [beautiful] shepherd' (John 10:14). Although it is normally translated 'good', the Greek adjective *kalos* also means beautiful. It is applied in the Book of Wisdom to Lady Wisdom; she is both beautiful and good. Christ is likewise beautiful and good in laying down his life and taking it up

again. In his death and resurrection he is revealed as the beautiful shepherd, who 'knows his own', calls them by name, and is known by them (John 10:14, 3-4). We find this mutual knowledge dramatically exemplified a few chapters later in John's Gospel, when the risen Christ calls Mary Magdalene by name; she recognises his voice and clings with love to her Master, now gloriously risen from the dead (John 20:16-17).

Angels are present in the Easter stories of all four Gospels and provide an image of heavenly beauty that accompanies and mirrors the new risen life of Christ. The angelic beauty that reflects the beauty of the risen Christ reaches its climax in Matthew's 'angel of the Lord': 'His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow' (Matthew 28:3). In his majestic beauty, this angel functions as a kind of double for the risen Jesus, who is not described in any of the Easter narratives of the Gospels. It is left to another book of the New Testament to evoke directly the awesome beauty of the resurrected and exalted Lord, whose 'face was like the sun shining with full force' (Revelation 1:16). No wonder then that, when the Book of Revelation portrays the heavenly Jerusalem, it reports a vision of the future in terms of the glorious splendour of God and his Son: 'The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb' (Revelation 21:23).

St Paul writes of the glory of God on the face of the risen Christ, and connects our chance of knowing this radiant glory with the primeval act by which God first created light:

> It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

What the death and resurrection bring to all believers—the knowledge of the divine glory—sets them apart from Moses. When Moses prayed to see the divine glory, God warned him:

> 'You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen'. (Exodus 33:20-23)

This passage contains bold anthropomorphisms—the Lord's *hand* and *back*. The writer wants to stress that, even for the favoured Moses, God remains hidden, even when most vividly present. Paul, however, appreciates how faith and baptism bring a unique illumination, a knowledge of God's glory revealed in the radiant face of his risen Son. As the Revealer *par excellence*, Christ communicates God's beauty and loving goodness. If God is love and beauty, Jesus is that love and beauty in person.

Redeeming Beauty

Augustine's list of times closes with the risen and exalted Christ being 'beautiful in heaven'. But his whole commentary on Psalm 45 is also concerned with the impact of that glorious beauty on those in need of redemption. Dostoevsky declared in *The Idiot*, 'It is beauty that will save the world'; and we might add, 'It is beauty that is already saving the world'. We are led through beauty to truth and goodness.

Experience shows how the presence and power of beauty persistently provide a remedy for the meaninglessness that plagues so many lives. Falling in love with some beautiful person liberates us from chaotic wanderings, and brings order and direction to our lives. Beauty's revelation illuminates and transforms. Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* not only shows how beauty and goodness change the hard heart of old Scrooge; it also touches those who read the work, or see versions of it on the screen or on the stage. A truly beautiful story, it can deliver us from a self-absorbed existence and give a fresh shape and meaning to our own stories.

Beauty illuminates and transforms

Down through the centuries saints, writers and artists have witnessed to the redeeming impact of Christ's beauty in their lives. So the medieval hymn *Jesu dulcis memoria* ('The sweet thought of Jesus'):

O Jesu! Thou the beauty art	*Jesu decus angelicum*
Of angel worlds above;	*in aure dulce canticum*
Thy name is music to the heart,	*in ore mel mirificum*
Enchanting it with love.	*in corde nectar caelicum*

The anonymous author of this hymn knew the enthralling beauty and sweetness of Jesus and his name. And so too did St Ignatius Loyola. The Two Standards meditation of his *Spiritual Exercises* invites retreatant to let the beauty of Christ have its proper impact: 'The first Point is to

consider how Christ our Lord puts Himself in a great field of that region of Jerusalem, in a humble, beautiful and attractive place' (Exx 144).

Ignatius gave his heart to the beautiful Christ, as did one of Ignatius' Jesuit followers, Gerard Manley Hopkins, three centuries later. His masterpiece, 'The Windhover', catches the beauty of a falcon in flight, and takes us to the crucified and risen Jesus, who is 'a billion times told lovelier'. In a famous sermon on Christ, Hopkins said: 'There met in Jesus Christ all that can make man lovely and loveable'. No wonder then that he went on to admit: 'I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light'. Yet 'far higher than beauty of the body', Hopkins added, 'comes the beauty of his character'. He ended his sermon by urging the congregation to praise the beautiful Christ over and over again in their hearts.[12]

At a special consistory in 2001, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, suggested to his brother cardinals that the way into the culture of our time was through an appeal to beauty. By that door we can bring contemporary people to a sense of the truth and goodness of God. If we approach these latter two attributes of God directly, our audience may well remain sceptical or unmoved. Like Pilate, they can say: 'What is truth?'; and, while attracted by the ideal of goodness, they can feel put off by their sense of sinful inadequacy. It is beauty, the Cardinal suggested, that can provide them with a way into Christianity.

To that I would add: the door to Christ could well be his beauty. Beauty does not depend on us. Beauty always comes to us as a gift. The beautiful Christ invites us to open ourselves up, become flooded with delight, stay in his lovely presence, and let the impact of his unique beauty shape our whole existence, now and forever.

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[12] *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Christopher Devlin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959), 34-38.

CARAVAGGIO AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Thomas J. McElligott

HOW DOES ONE EXPERIENCE and live the resurrection of the body on this side of the grave? How does the belief in bodily resurrection 'actually transform a person toward fullness of life in Christ?'[1] This article explores what three of Caravaggio's paintings might tell us about such questions.

Christian belief in the resurrection depends on the resurrection of Jesus. The different accounts of the resurrection in the New Testament and the earliest credal formulas all testify to the resurrection of the body as a core teaching of the Christian community. Greek philosophical concepts have too easily corrupted the understanding of the resurrection of the body, reducing it to the immortality of the soul. But the biblical notion of resurrection refers to the whole person, body and soul, filled with the new life of the Spirit.

The Supper at Emmaus 1601

Caravaggio painted two pictures of the *Supper at Emmaus*, one in 1601 and the other probably five years later. The earlier, painted for Cariaco Mattai, now hangs in the National Gallery in London. The second *Supper* hangs in Milan's Pinacoteca di Brera.

The difference between the two pictures is obvious. The first, the 'London' *Supper*, is bright, exciting, full of enthusiasm. The second, the 'Milan' *Supper*, is subdued, quiet, even sombre in tone. The depictions of the body are quite different, not only in the case of the resurrected Jesus, but also in that of the other figures. Clearly we have two distinct

[1] Sandra Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', *Christian Spirituality Bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality*, 6 (Spring 1998), 3.

Supper at Emmaus *(1601), by Caravaggio*

interpretations of the Supper at Emmaus, and two interpretations of the resurrection appearance of Jesus.[2]

The first, the London Emmaus, shows the body of Jesus as beardless, youthful, flooded with light; his face 'framed with flowing hair, contrasts sharply with the earthly humanity of the disciples, with their heavy fishermen's hands, and torn working dress'.[3] With Jesus' gesture of blessing over the meal the disciples' bodies erupt into recognition of him as alive in their midst. The innkeeper, by contrast, stands unmoved with his hands tucked into his belt as he 'stares directly at the Risen Christ without seeing anything out of the ordinary'.[4]

The feast, spread out atop a white table-cloth draped over what appears to be an eastern rug, shows off Caravaggio's virtuosic skill as he carefully 'distinguishes between pottery and glass, bread and fruit'.[5]

[2] Readers may find it helpful at this point to reread the narrative of this event at Luke 24:1-35, and also to find good colour reproductions online through a URL such as http://www.artcyclopedia.com /artists/caravaggio.html.

[3] Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 231.

[4] John T. Spike, *Caravaggio* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2001), 116.

[5] John Drury, *Painting the World: Christian Pictures and Their Meaning* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), 122.

The divided loaf of nice crusty bread and the curled feet of the roasted chicken 'are as startlingly real as the basket of fruit improbably cantilevered over the table's edge'.[6] Ingrid Rowland, who reviewed *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, the recent exhibition at the National Gallery in London, presumably got very close to this painting. She writes that 'condensation glistens on the ceramic water jug and light plays through the glass flask on white wine, each substance more transparent than the other'.[7]

Both Howard Hibbard and Helen Langdon understand the dramatic body movement of the disciples as Caravaggio's way of involving us in the scene.[8] The disciple on the left is drawing his chair right out of the frame of the picture, while the disciple on the right extends his hands in the shape of a cross, reaches out of the picture with his left hand, and 'unites the painted actors with us, the living viewers, in a manner that signals a new age of participatory art'.[9] This destruction of what Langdon calls 'the barrier between the world of art and the world of the viewer' draws us into the drama.[10] The precarious positioning of the fruit basket, half on and half off the table, tempts us to draw near and catch it before it falls.[11]

Caravaggio's purpose in this 'participatory art', it seems to me, relates to his interpretation of the Church's attitude to religious painting. In the Council of Trent's twenty-fifth session, its last, a document on the depiction of religious subjects was written. Caravaggio may never have read the document, but he could not have produced so many religious works for various churches without knowing its contents. While the Council Fathers were well aware of the abuses which the Protestants had highlighted, they still believed that religious art could legitimately engage Christian believers in its

[6] Ingrid D. Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', *New York Review of Books* (12 May 2005), 10.
[7] Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', 10.
[8] Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 77; Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 231.
[9] Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 77.
[10] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 231.
[11] Drury, *Painting the World*, 122.

subject matter, whether that was a scene from the Bible or one from the life of a saint. The image should bring the beholder into the presence of the divine, so that:

> … through the images which we kiss and before which we uncover our heads and go down on our knees, we give adoration to Christ and veneration to the saints, whose likeness they bear.[12]

Caravaggio involves us in the Emmaus scene through what Walter Friedlaender calls 'realistic mysticism'. Friedlaender argues that Caravaggio's religious depictions were of a piece with the religious movements of his day. The popular emphasis that Caravaggio's contemporary Philip Neri and the Oratorians gave to the Exercises of St Ignatius, along with the reforms introduced by the newly established religious congregations of the Barnabites and the Theatines, awakened 'a simplicity of faith and a mystic devotion which gave each individual a direct and earthly contact with God and His Mysteries'.[13] Philip Neri's approach to the Exercises and to religious devotion allowed ordinary people to enter into the experience of their faith. He emphasized the 'naturalness and intimacy' of the spiritual life in a way that won him immense popularity with the Roman populace. Surely he must have made an indelible impression on the young Caravaggio, one that continued to influence the painter even in his later years.[14]

Does the London Emmaus scene, depicting a Roman tavern of Caravaggio's day, suggest to the viewers of that time 'a world in which the acts of every day are steeped in echoes of biblical reality'?[15] Does the 'uncomprehending gaze of the innkeeper … personify a simple, if unanswerable question: "Would I have seen the miracle, too, or stood there in the dark?"'[16] Does the beardless Jesus in the picture suggest the judge of the living and the dead, with his right hand raised to give a blessing instead of breaking the loaf of bread, as the Gospel story states,

[12] Council of Trent, 'On Invocation, Veneration and Relics of the Saints, and on Sacred Images', in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Norman Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward), 774-776, here 775. See also Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1660* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 108.

[13] Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969 [1955]), 123.

[14] Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 126.

[15] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 231.

[16] Spike, *Caravaggio,* 116.

and with his left hand copying exactly the left hand of Michelangelo's Christ in the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel?[17] In other words, is Caravaggio inviting us to treat the resurrection appearance of Jesus as a living reality that requires our response now if it is to have any meaning after death? Is Caravaggio asking us to reflect upon our spirituality of the resurrection of the body? We can approach these questions by studying the development of Caravaggio's understanding of what happened at Emmaus in his later depiction of the scene.

The Supper at Emmaus c.1606

The bodies in the Milan *Supper at Emmaus* appear quieter than in the London Emmaus. The outstretched hands of the disciple on our left convey surprise, but with a small gesture. The disciple at the right grips

Supper at Emmaus *(1606), by Caravaggio*

[17] Spike, *Caravaggio,* 116.

the table with his peasant hands as if to steady himself in his bewilderment as he recognises the risen Christ. Yet his straining neck and weather-beaten face hold back whatever emotions might want to express themselves. The Christ appears older, sombre, even sad, as he raises his right hand in blessing over the very meagre meal of bread and wine. Standing at the left shoulder of Christ an older innkeeper, still with a hand on his belt, his brow furrowed, is joined by a woman of similar age, perhaps his wife. They are both dressed like the poor of Caravaggio's time, while Christ and the two disciples wear garb associated with the time of Jesus. She holds a dish of meat, identified by Spike, Rowland and Langdon as roast lamb, 'the sacrificial animal of Passover and Easter, and one of the most ancient of all Christian symbols'.[18] An entirely new understanding of the Emmaus appearance presents itself to us here.

This second *Supper at Emmaus* was painted five years after the first, and just after Caravaggio had killed Ranuccio Tomassoni in a fight. The brilliance, the boldness and the dazzling colours of the earlier *Supper* yield to dark brown, blue-green shadows and evening light. The risen Christ, whose face is bearded, is 'a mature man whose weary expression suggests both the weight of his recent ordeal and of the endless mission to save humanity from its own folly'.[19]

In the Milan *Emmaus*, Caravaggio, exiled for killing Tomassoni, turned his thoughts 'to the extreme price paid by those excluded from God's grace',[20] even if not long after the killing Caravaggio was made a Knight of Malta, an honour which Pope Clement VIII, who knew what Caravaggio had done, made no attempt to prevent.[21] The killing of Tomassoni was anything but premeditated.

Langdon describes the Milan *Emmaus* as 'a tender portrayal of confidence in a redemptive Christ, who gently renews hope in the despairing disciples, and brings comfort to the poor'.[22] Rowland notes that, while the facial expression of the disciple at the right conveys his recognition of Jesus, we should focus particularly on his 'gnarled and ruddy' hands, because the right one rests next to Jesus' hand. 'In that

[18] Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', 10; Spike, *Caravaggio,* 178; Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 317.
[19] Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', 10.
[20] Spike, *Caravaggio,* 178.
[21] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 316.
[22] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 316.

touch, or near touch, Caravaggio has concentrated all the fervour of a burning heart and distilled the essence of Christianity' as the meeting of God and humanity.[23] Both Rowland and Langdon understand the painting as what Rowland calls Caravaggio's 'meditating in paint', in which, his personal problems notwithstanding, 'his wisdom as a painter could fathom mysteries as deep as this tired Christ, his hostess's quiet reverence, and the fiery faith of the apostles'.[24] Langdon adds that the dark shadows of the inn, out of which the five figures of the painting emerge in the evening light, represent,

> … the true Emmaus, the slow revelation of the divine to the despairing disciples, sharing an early Christian meal of extreme simplicity. It is an elegiac painting, suggesting the end of a weary day: 'Abide with us', said the disciples, 'for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent' (Luke 24:29). Night falls, but the risen Christ, with the power to forgive sins, brings hope in the dark journey through this world. The disciples recognise Christ in the breaking of the bread: 'And their eyes were opened, and they knew him: and he vanished out of their sight' (Luke 24:31).[25]

It seems to me that the Milan *Emmaus* shows a definite shift in Caravaggio's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. The arrangement of the figures tells the story. It puts aside the confidence in the image of the victorious Christ found in the London *Emmaus*, clothed 'in the triumphant scarlet and white colours', an image which breaks into one's doubts with the certainty of joy and the lavish display of abundant life.[26] In the London *Emmaus*, the bodies of the disciples are galvanised, witnessing instantly and enthusiastically to the marvellous event which surpasses all expectation. By contrast, the

[23] Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', 10.
[24] Rowland, 'The Battle of Light and Darkness', 10. Rowland understands the maidservant's posture as one of prayer.
[25] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 316.
[26] Spike, *Caravaggio*, 177.

arrangement of the figures in the Milan *Emmaus* makes us aware that people need time to recognise the reality of the resurrection. The figures are in dim light, with the bearded, mature Christ becoming present only slowly to the disciples. For their part, they seem to be growing before us in the understanding of what they see.

If one comes to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, one has to reconsider the whole of one's life. The London *Emmaus*, with its Roman tavern setting, suggests connections between everyday life and the continuous presence of Christ. By the time of the Milan *Emmaus* other experiences had become much more important to Caravaggio's understanding of the resurrection. These required more conscious involvement in the life of faith, in the spirituality of the resurrection.

The Death of the Virgin

In his *Death of the Virgin*, Caravaggio seems to be turning his attention to what death implies about the meaning of life. Faith's proclamation of life's fullness, expressed in the *Emmaus* paintings, needs to encompass the reality of death. The *Death of the Virgin* dates from between 1601 and 1605, with the balance of opinion favouring a later date. It was commissioned as an altarpiece for the church of Santa Maria della Scala in Trastevere in Rome by the prominent jurist Laerzio Cherubini, but was never installed.[27] The church had been given to the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, recently arrived in Rome, who had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven.

Looking at the picture one cannot avoid thinking of death. Yet it is the death of the Virgin Mother of God that Caravaggio was asked to paint. Roger Hinks expresses something of the works's power:

> Caravaggio has turned his back not only on Mannerism, but also on the whole of the High Renaissance. He has gone back to the beginning. He has asked himself what these people really looked like in their bereavement. Something tremendous, incomprehensible, had come into their lives—and gone out of it again, with the breath

[27] Spike, *Caravaggio,* 152; Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 246.

Death of the Virgin, *by Caravaggio*

> that had gone out of the wonderful woman they had loved and lost. No wonder they look so utterly forlorn and helpless.[28]

The woman, stretched out on a simple board, has died. A soft reddish light, entering the room from the top left, directly illumines the torso, head and hands of the Virgin, as well as the back, shoulders,

[28] Quoted in Spike, *Caravaggio,* 152.

head, hand, knee of the only other woman in the room, identified as Mary Magdalene. Moving back from the two women, the light reveals the presence of some men, probably the apostles, caught in various states of mourning. Over all the figures hangs an immense red cloth, seemingly suspended from the wooden ceiling. The room is bare; the Virgin and the woman next to her are dressed in the working clothing of the Trastevere women of Caravaggio's time.[29]

The iconography of the painting pays enough attention to the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* to show the apostles miraculously reunited at the death of the Virgin. But, contrary to the *Legend*, Jesus is not present here, nor are heavenly choirs ready to accompany the Virgin's soul to heaven.[30] In her book dedicated solely to this painting, Pamela Askew notes that, as far as she knows, 'Caravaggio's *Dormition* is the first independent self-contained painting of the subject in Italy in which Christ is absent'.[31]

The Virgin has a young body, and her hand, placed 'on her swollen belly', recalls for Langdon 'the protective gesture of a pregnant woman …'.[32] It seems that she has only just died and her body has not yet been laid out; the copper basin near the feet of Mary Magdalene suggests that the body is to be washed. The apostles kneel, bend or stand in various states of arrested grief or bewilderment: two have their heads bowed, overcome with grief, their rough, thick-veined, working hands shielding their faces from view. They are dressed in robes, which contrast with the contemporary clothes of the Virgin and of Mary Magdalene. The solemnity of their heavily draped, barefoot bodies, together with the dark interior and the soft evening light of the room, helps to make the grief almost palpable. Langdon sees in the painting 'the painful humanity of the Virgin', which 'does not negate redemption, but inspires a passionate contemplation of the mystery of the divine made human'.[33] Similarly, John Spike views the scene as a statement by Caravaggio that, however and whenever the sanctification of the Virgin and the Apostles took place, '… first of all, they were human':

[29] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 249.
[30] Spike, *Caravaggio,* 152.
[31] Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 25.
[32] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 249.
[33] Langdon, *Caravaggio*, 249.

> He was standing on solid theological ground, but squarely in the path of the proliferating regulations regarding sacred images. The Council of Trent had not been convened to grant artists licence to excise medievalism or reconsider pictorial traditions …. Caravaggio was making the case for personal experience. The painting's representation of a deceased woman surrounded by mourners was truer, and more deserving of belief, in his opinion, than the supernatural panoply required by tradition. He did not soften the blow. Death has not lost its sting. All the criticism directed against the picture started with this failing, in their eyes; nothing in the desolate chamber suggests that anything will happen next. The woman's swollen body is hardly in a condition to be assumed into Heaven.[34]

But Pamela Askew sees what Caravaggio's contemporary critics failed to see. The painting does point to Mary's assumption, even in the midst of the starkness of her death. The body of an apostle, identified by Askew as Paul, stands out in clear distinction from the others in the painting. His right hand is raised in astonishment, in a gesture of insight rather than of grief. His mouth is open in wonder; his eyes are lifted in a kind of amazement while Peter's are narrowed in puzzlement. Askew points to the 'golden colour of Paul's robe which identifies him with … light', and observes how 'his startled gesture make[s] clear that he has seen what

***Peter and Paul in the* Death of the Virgin**

[34] Spike, *Caravaggio*, 155.

he did not expect'.[35] Paul sees something more than the others do, and his bodily gestures express this revelation; this is why Caravaggio depicts him as distinct from them, bathed in a gentle light.

Caravaggio invites us to look closely at the death of Mary, for Catholic faith the most favoured of human beings apart from Jesus himself. He invites us, in that utterly human moment, to dare to acknowledge what Paul accepts: the privilege of Mary in being with her Risen Son, and our own eventual arrival with them in glory. But he presents this privileged death starkly. Only when we can stare at this death as really a human death, he seems to be saying, can we really know how to live a life that will bring us to the glory beyond death. Only then can we, like Paul, come to understand the privilege that she received, and the gift that awaits us at the moment of our own death.

The Biblical Notion of 'Body'

I have already noted the difference between the biblical and the Greek philosophical notions of the person. In the biblical understanding, human beings are not divided into body and soul, with only the soul being ultimately important as the place where the intellect and will reside. The writers of the Bible understood the person as an integrated whole of body, soul and spirit.

When we speak of the resurrection of the body, do we thereby mean that Jesus rose with the same flesh, blood and spirit that he possessed when he was laid in the tomb? Does the resurrection really mean the resuscitation of Jesus' earthly body? Definitely not. We need to explore more deeply the biblical notion of resurrection. To help us, we can draw on a recent essay by Sandra Schneiders, in which she discusses how the body is to be understood as a symbol of the self.

Schneiders' ideas arise in connection with a study of chapter 20 of John's Gospel. The concept of the body as symbol of the self is not new as such: Schneiders herself notes the chapter in Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations* on the subject.[36] Her explanation of the concept, however, aims to address directly questions raised by modern

[35] Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 41.

[36] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Resurrection (of the Body) in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Johannine Spirituality', in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, edited by John R. Donahue (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 168-198, here 172 n. 23. See also Karl Rahner, 'The Theology of the Symbol' (1959), in *Theological Investigations* 4. 221-252.

science, cosmology, psychology, anthropology and history regarding the resurrected body of Jesus. More importantly, she also articulates the vital role of a *spirituality* of the resurrection of the body. She shows us that to think of the body as the symbol of the self enables us to make sense of what the Bible says about resurrection, in a way inseparable from the demands that the resurrection gospel makes on us.

Schneiders lists four ways in which the body serves as a symbol of the self:

1. No matter what changes an individual undergoes, we still recognise the individual by their body.
2. The body distinguishes one person from another, and indeed from all others.
3. The body 'provides the condition of possibility and the ground of interaction with others'.
4. The body becomes the way in which all who relate to an individual form a relationship, explicit or not, with them.[37]

For Schneiders, the body of the risen Jesus fulfils all these functions. The risen Jesus is present in a way that is bodily but not physical.

1. Even after his glorification, Mary Magdalene and the apostles recognise Jesus in his resurrected body as the same person as before. He is 'not a ghost'.
2. He is still very much an individual, 'distinct from them and from everything else'. He is clearly visible. The apostles do not control his presence or absence, and they are not absorbed in mystical prayer when he appears.
3. Jesus interacts with the disciples; he speaks with them, eats with them. They experienced him actually doing things they could not have predicted him doing.[38]

[37] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Resurrection of Jesus and Christian Spirituality', in *Christian Resources of Hope*, edited by Maureen Junker-Kenny (Dublin: Columba, 1995), 81-114, here 97-98.
[38] Schneiders, 'Resurrection of Jesus', 99.

4 They relate to one another in a new way as a result of the appearances of Jesus which they have experienced. Jesus unites them to each other.

The risen body of Jesus is not 'as a physical "house" for the spiritual soul', but rather the symbolic expression of the self. 'The body of the risen Jesus', Schneiders writes, 'functions symbolically just as his earthly body did, but the difference lies in the character, not the fact, of his bodiliness'. What changes is the 'mode of the bodily or symbolic presence of Jesus among his disciples'.[39]

Since Jesus is no longer within history, his symbolic material—his body—differs from ours, which is limited by space and time and by the corruption that accompanies this limitation. Jesus' risen body is no longer within history, and so the conditions of physicality, of history, no longer apply to him. He was 'transformed in God in such a way that he could symbolize himself in ways that transcend our ordinary experience or capability (or his while he was on earth)'.[40] Nevertheless, Schneiders writes, 'if Jesus had ceased, at his death, to be a living human being then Christian faith as Christian has no real object'.[41] His bodiliness, this mode of presence as risen Lord, '… is integral to the meaning of [his] real, living humanity'.

Because of his glorification and resurrection, the primary symbol of Jesus' real, divinely human presence is 'his present historical body which is all the baptized who are corporately one as the body of Christ through the power of his indwelling Spirit'. For Schneiders, 'the glorified Jesus *is* the Christ of faith, *is* the principle of his body the Church, *is* the One whose cause continues in and through his disciples down through history'.[42] But he is not reducible to this mediated presence. Nor can he be confined within his mediated presence in Scripture, or in the sacraments, or in the faith-life of those who embrace his way of life as their own.

[39] Schneiders, 'Resurrection of Jesus', 103.
[40] Schneiders, 'Resurrection of Jesus', 103.
[41] Schneiders, 'Resurrection in the Fourth Gospel', 180.
[42] Schneiders, 'Resurrection of Jesus', 106.

A Spirituality of the Resurrection of the Body

If we as Christians are the body of Christ, the primary symbol of the divine and human presence of Jesus, then it is through our actions in relation to one another that we will embody a spirituality of the resurrection of the body. In their approach to the resurrection appearances of Jesus, Caravaggio's two *Supper at Emmaus* pictures seem to be saying that the mystery of the resurrection can only be lived in and through all the experiences of our lives. In the *Death of the Virgin*, Caravaggio seems to insist that we can only live the resurrection if we face squarely the reality of our own death and avoid resorting to sentimental images of a heavenly realm. In the stark encounter with our own mortality he hopes that we will discover what he depicts Paul as discovering: the truth that in death there is life.

A spirituality of the resurrection of the body must, it seems to me, address all those places and situations where embodied human beings have been given up for dead, or desecrated, or violated, or excluded from the fullness of life that is the ongoing presence of the Risen Jesus among us. A spirituality of the resurrection of the body must engage forcefully in all the issues of justice and peace. It is here that we will find an experience of living the doctrine of the resurrection of the body that actually transforms us toward fullness of life in Christ.

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RESPONDING TO BEAUTY'S CALL

The Shape of an Aesthetic Spirituality

Christine Valters Paintner

Longing

> *Beauty is to the spirit what food is to the flesh. It fills an emptiness in you which nothing else can fill.*
>
> Frederick Buechner (1926-)

I WAS INITIATED INTO THE CHURCH OF BEAUTY as a young child. Though neither of my parents were religious people, we would travel in the summers to my father's native Austria so that we could hike in the Tyrolean mountains. There we would stand in wonder and awe, surrounded as we were by massive, snow-capped peaks stretching towards the heavens. In the cities of Europe, too, we would walk with quiet reverence through the sacred space of museums and great cathedrals. The beauty of art and nature called to me.

Later in my life, it was this reverence for the aesthetic dimension that opened my heart to a religious commitment within the Roman Catholic Church. I had a profound longing for connection to a sense of meaning, to something greater than myself. I found deep resonance with an incarnational and sacramental spirituality. I could worship in a community that saw God so clearly in the stuff of our lives. Art directs us towards the realm of the senses; it immerses us in the physicality and sensuousness of the world. The arts are also integrative; they have the ability to unite intellect, body and emotion. I loved liturgies where I could touch, taste, smell, hear and see my way to the heart of the holy.

Art and symbol-making are ancient practices. As far as we can tell, they go back to the beginning of human consciousness. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer went so far as to designate the human race as *homo symbolicus*; human beings are inherently symbol-making

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 36-47

creatures. The aesthetic impulse seems to be a universal longing. As humans we seem to have an inherent need to express ourselves in gesture, song, story, symbol, colour, image, ritual. We use these to make sense of the world and to break open its meaning. The beat of the drum, the painting of icons, the soaring arch of a sanctuary space—we rely on the aesthetic in order both to express and to interpret the holy. The arts are evocative rather than descriptive; hence they provide a space within which God's mystery can be held.

Scripture tells us about our spiritual ancestors, and in particular about how the arts cultivated their relationships with God. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with images of the arts. Miriam dances for joy and plays timbrels in response to God's graciousness and liberation (Exodus 15:20). God has Bezalel bring together the artists of the community so that they can build a fitting tabernacle of gold, silver, stones and wood (Exodus 31:1-5). As the ark of the covenant returns to Jerusalem, Israel shouts 'to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals', and makes 'loud music on harps and lyres', while David dances exuberantly in celebration of the ark's return (1 Chronicles 15:28-29). The psalms were composed and sung in response to a deep longing for God; they express praise for God's beauty and presence in all of creation.

The Greek for 'the beautiful' is *to kalon*, an adjective related to the verb *kalein*—'to call'. Ancient peoples knew the longing in the human heart rising from an emptiness that, to use Buechner's phrase in the epigraph above, only beauty could fill. Beauty calls, and our heart reverberates with delight. When we experience beauty, there is a sense of homecoming; we find ourselves in the

place where we have always longed to be, in the place where we find ourselves at peace.

Hans Urs von Balthasar saw beauty as a joyful experience which calls us out of ourselves to connect with others and, most importantly, to connect us with the Other. Beauty is a bridge to God, and art is a means of cooperating with the divine in creation's act. For von Balthasar, the aesthetic saturates all of creation; it is not one source of insight among others, with its own autonomy. The aesthetic is woven into the fabric of human experience and our knowledge of things. When we see a beautiful work of art, or a radiant sunset, we are confronted with the mystery of its otherness. Every person has an aching need for beauty; in beauty we discover the face of God.

Spiritual and aesthetic experiences are intimately linked. Both reveal the unutterable, the invisible, the transcendent. Art invites engagement, interaction; it makes space for encounter with God. Symbols convey the multidimensionality of God, in ways that words cannot. Spirituality is about a longing for this God, for a connection to life's dimension of mystery, to the ultimacy that fills our world with meaning. An aesthetic spirituality is one that recognises this longing as a response to a call already issued, to an invitation always present in the world. We are called to awaken to beauty, to see more deeply, to cultivate practices of attentiveness. We are invited to let beauty penetrate the heart, and to respond to it by creating further beauty in our own lives.

Awakening

> *Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*
>
> Ar-Rumi (1207-1273)

Anyone taking the time to read this article must have had many moments of awakening to beauty, moments of wonder and awe at the potent fullness of the world. The process is much like the spiritual journey. We awaken to a moment of beauty where we are surprised by its sheer grace. The Spirit blows our hearts wide open. But then consumerism and busyness can make us forget beauty's exuberance, and once again we are dulled to majesty's presence in our midst. To participate in beauty is to come into the presence of the holy; yet all too easily we can exile ourselves from God.

Beauty includes what pleases us, but also much more. The experience of beauty is deeper than words; it touches the most profound recesses of our souls, and awakens us to a world beyond the daily grind. When we awaken to the call of beauty, we become aware of new ways of being in the world. The awakening to beauty invites us to look on all things with sustained attention and loving gaze.

This awakening may come through a moment of profound joy, such as giving birth or looking up at the vast night sky. But beauty pierces the dark corners of our world as well. Beauty is a powerful force precisely because it is so close to the brokenness, the fracturedness of our experiences. Beauty dwells in the cracks of our lives.

I was awakened to this truth in a profound way during the five days I sat vigil with my mother as she lay unconscious and dying in the hospital after a sudden onset of relentless pneumonia. I held her hands gently and rubbed lotion into her arms as a private act of anointing. I felt such tenderness for her failing body, a body which had become luminous even when we were bathed in the harsh fluorescent glow of hospital lights. Beside her body, surrounded as it was by a complex web of tubing, I found myself in sacred space: the most terrible of places and the most beautiful. The hours I lingered at this threshold with her were the holiest of my entire life. Beauty embraced me, sustained me through this passageway. Beauty awakens us with wonder and awe. We gasp as we catch our breath, and break out of our routine vision to see a glimpse of the divine presence radiating through all the corners of the world.

Beauty awakens us with wonder and awe

Seeing

> *Nobody sees a flower, really, it is so small. We haven't time—*
> *and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time.*
> Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

Once we are awakened, beauty invites us to a new way of seeing; it offers graced vision. The graced eye can glimpse beauty everywhere, seeing the divine at work in the hidden depths of things. It is so easy to let our senses be dulled and to settle for the ordinary. Often, life seems to be just what it offers on the surface; as Ecclesiastes puts it, 'there is nothing new under the sun'. The technology, speed and busyness so

prized by our Western culture foster a habit of blindness. For all the bustle, a dreary sameness comes to mark the places where we live.

The eye of aesthetic spirituality sees more than other eyes, and its ears hear more. Art helps to facilitate this awakening by granting us epiphanies through its transfigurations of the ordinary. We come to know more than what appears to us, and we begin to see all of life as what the Celts called a 'thin place'.

When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us. For John O'Donohue, seeing is not merely a physical act:

> … the heart of vision is shaped by the state of the soul. When the soul is alive to beauty, we begin to see life in a fresh and vital way.[1]

What we see is determined by how we see, and each of us is responsible for our seeing.

There is a scene in the film *American Beauty* that fosters this kind of graced vision. A white plastic bag is caught in the wind, in front of metal doors covered with graffiti. The bag dances in different directions, up and down, side to side, lifted and lowered by the air. The audience is invited to a slow, deliberate seeing, and what begins as a piece of litter on a dirty street becomes a symbol of how, even in the toughest and least expected places, beauty happens. Ricky Fitts, the character showing this image to his friend murmurs:

> Sometimes, there's so much beauty in the world, I can't take it—like my heart's going to cave in.

For brief moments, art transfigures the world around us, as it reveals beauty's radiance. Art wakes us up and trains our perceptions. For the purpose of art is not to send us to an alternative world, but rather to return us, even as our vision has been renewed, to the realm of the ordinary.

Some, like Augustine, have used 'beauty' as a name for God, a usage which expresses something about the divine nature. Beauty has long been considered one of the great means through which God is revealed to us, as, in von Balthasar's phrase, we 'see the form'. To

[1] John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 18-19.

experience beauty is to have your life enlarged—an aesthetic spirituality is about seeing the beauty of God in more and more places.

Von Balthasar believed that the word 'glory' in the Bible indicated the beauty of God. Of truth, goodness and beauty, the three transcendental attributes of God, it was beauty that, for von Balthasar, was the least obscured by our fallen nature, and therefore provided the clearest path to the Beatific Vision. Human encounter with the divine begins in a moment of aesthetic perception, in that glimpse of radiance, mystery and meaning which we can see in a work of art or in the natural world.

In the gospel story of the transfiguration, beauty becomes a window onto the divine. The burning light that once appeared to Moses in the bush now radiates from Jesus himself: 'his face shone like the sun' (Matthew 17:2). For Gregory Palamas, it was the disciples who changed at the transfiguration, not Christ. Christ was transfigured,

> … not by the addition of something he was not, but by the manifestation to his disciples of what he really was. He opened their eyes so that instead of being blind they could see.[2]

Because their perception grew sharper, they were able to behold Christ as He truly is.

We will only see beauty, through contemplating a picture or 'really seeing' a flower, if we train ourselves to do so. To peer into a deeper reality is a metaphysical endeavour, requiring that we 'see' with more than merely our eyes, and that we sense with more than merely our natural senses. Thomas Dubay has noted that,

> The full experience of a rose requires that we see with our minds the inner energy, the hidden origin, the radical form, and not simply the manifested colours, shapes and proportions.[3]

[2] *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*, translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, volume 4 (London: Faber, 1995), 222.

[3] Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 65.

Experiencing a rose's beauty involves more than merely our natural senses, more than our everyday powers of seeing. All the more does the point apply when it comes to experiencing God's glory.

Cultivating

> *Pilgrims go into the woods, but they carry with them the beauty which they visit …. Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting—a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower, and thank God for it as a cup of blessing.*
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

How do we welcome the glory of beauty into our lives? How do we cultivate a habit of staying awake and of seeing deeply the beauty of the world around us? As Georgia O'Keeffe reminds us, it takes time to see a flower, the way it takes time to develop a friendship. In a culture where the refrain 'I'm so busy' continually reverberates around us, time is something that we have to claim and inhabit. Beauty transports us to *kairos* time, time apart from the everyday, even if eventually it will also, having given us a new perspective, immerse us back in our everyday lives.

We can only welcome beauty if we adopt a posture of deep seeing and listening, and give the experience both time and space. We need deliberately to cultivate spaciousness in our lives if we are to apprehend the beauty that is there. One way in which we can do this is through the practice of Sabbath-keeping. Honouring the Sabbath recognises that we need space and time reserved for rest,

renewal and revelation. Sabbath-keeping helps us to let go of our compulsions, and to free our hearts and minds from distractions so we can focus fully on welcoming, receiving and delighting in God's beauty.

Beauty invites us to relish and take pleasure in the senses, to linger and savour. Beauty cannot be rushed or captured. When the disciples saw Jesus transfigured, they wanted to build a dwelling for his glory, but beauty cannot be domesticated.

But perhaps there is a prior question. Perhaps we can only welcome the beauty of the world around us if we can welcome the beauty that lies deep within us. We are created in the image of God, yet how often we deny our own beauty. What prevents us from recognising the beautiful presence of God within us?

Thomas Merton used the phrase 'the false self' to name what keeps us from truly seeing our own beauty. The false self wears masks; it acts only for the sake of others' approval, or to meet the expectations of family, culture, work; it is attached to things, placing more importance on them than they merit. The false self is perpetuated by the illusions we live under, by the veils we hold before our eyes, by the anxieties and fears with which we live. It is nourished by the merely superficial. The false self distorts us, either by inflating us or deflating us. It can appear as the intellectual self that wants to hover above the mess of life in clear but ungrounded ideas. Or as the ethical self that wants to live by some abstract moral code rather than wrestle with lived realities. The false self is what holds on too tightly to anything other than God.

Beauty nourishes our true selves

We each arrive in this world created as a unique and beautiful image of God. Merton describes this self as the 'true self', moulded and crafted lovingly by God. The true self wants nothing more, or less, than for us to be who we were created to be. That core of our being, created by God as whole and beautiful, is a wave in the ocean of God, a flame in God's fire. For Merton, the true inner self is a jewel resting on the bottom of the sea, and the path of contemplation is the journey to this true self from the false one:

> I break through the superficial exterior appearances that form my routine vision of the world and my own self, and I find myself in the presence of hidden majesty.[4]

This is the eye of aesthetic perception, seeing the 'hidden majesty' saturating the world. When we cultivate a welcoming way of life through contemplative practice, one that creates space to develop habits of seeing, our own beauty becomes more visible to us.

Teresa of Avila also described the soul as a jewel—a single diamond within which there is a castle with seven successive interior rooms. The central room is the place of the most intimate communion with God. Attachments keep us from entering this holy and hidden room that is deep within ourselves. When we reach that final room of the soul, the scales are removed from the soul's eyes, and we see how truly beautiful we are.

I attended a contemplative retreat several years ago. On the second day we were invited to go out into the natural world and spend time imagining God's profound love for creation, and indeed participate in it. I spent several hours that afternoon with an old oak tree, grand, gnarled and glorious. I had no doubt that God loved this particular tree with passion and fullness and I could feel my heart slowly expand with joy imagining God's delight in its beauty. On the fourth day we were invited to turn this love for nature we had imagined inwards, and to sense how that same divine love and delight were also directed toward each of us human creatures. It was such a simple exercise, but it led to a profound moment for me. Delighting in this love, I was invited to see how God loves every person in this way. Suddenly, the world everywhere I looked was 'charged with the grandeur of God', as Gerard Manley Hopkins so eloquently states.

Sister Wendy Beckett observes that art is spiritual when it makes us 'more aware of what we are meant to be'.[5] Contemplation cultivates in us a spaciousness necessary for the ability to welcome the beauty that dwells everywhere. In this act of welcome, we can come to see ourselves as radiating that same beauty, and begin to know ourselves as we truly are. In that insight we can revel more deeply in the beauty all around us.

[4] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 41.
[5] Wendy Beckett, *Art and the Sacred: The Mystical Now* (New York: Universe, 1993), 7.

Creating

> *And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?*
> *And have you changed your life?*
>
> Mary Oliver (1935-)

Awakening to beauty and seeing deeply into the beauty of the world demand of us a response. Beauty holds possibilities that enlarge and delight the heart. As our vision of what is possible is expanded, we are called to participate in the creative act ourselves. Our limited vision is broken wide open, and hope is born. The creative act and the prophetic act are woven together. An aesthetic spirituality honours creativity as one of Scripture's 'ancient paths, where the good way lies' (Jeremiah 6:16).

Art-making is a participation in God's creative activity. Every human being bears the image of God; every human being who creates, speaks, sings, writes or sculpts reflects something of the Creator. Art invites us to touch what is deepest in our being, and to do so with abandon. So will the divine spark be released within us, perhaps in forms we have never dreamt of. Whenever we awaken beauty, we are helping to make God present to the world. Every creative act calls forth the presence of God in beautiful colours and sounds and textures. The art-making process always transforms the raw materials with which the artist works. Like the spiritual journey, creative processes are transformation.

I take great delight in the classes I teach on the integration of the arts, spirituality and creativity, as I try to engage students in the creative process. The first day of class is often marked by tentativeness and resistance. Messages about what makes 'good art' linger, and must be cleared away. I invite students to surrender themselves to the process; they should listen to the Spirit within, and not worry about the product. Essential for the process is a safe space that allows them freedom to express their inner movements. There always develops a sense of play and enchantment that transforms the space of the room. Students are often surprised at what comes to them in this time of prayer. Symbols arise within them like dream images, offering them new insight both about themselves and about God.

As John O'Donohue says, 'at the deepest level, creativity is holiness'.[6] Creativity is not just about art-making, however. The primary creative act is living our daily lives:

> Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.[7]

We are called by beauty to make our life a work of art. More formal artistic processes such as painting, singing or dancing are valuable because they teach us skills, and ways of being in the world, that are essential for passionate and vital living. Through making art we come to know ourselves more deeply, and are given the space to discover and express our own voice. We take risks so as to be visible to the world. We learn to slow down and to see with graced vision. We discover the values of improvisation, and we surrender to a process greater than ourselves. Art-making helps us to be present to mystery. We give meaningful expression to our commitments, values and ideas. We make beauty present. The practices of art empower everyday life.

To Root an Aesthetic Spirituality

Longing, awakening, seeing, cultivating, creating—each of the previous sections of this article has been headed with a participle. An aesthetic

[6] O'Donohue, *Beauty*, 142.
[7] John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, April 1999, n. 2.

spirituality is active; it is properly evoked through verbs that point us towards a dynamic process, rather than through nouns that designate qualities to be nurtured or practices to be observed. The ways of being fostered by an aesthetic spirituality need to take root and become ever more expansive; the habit of seeing the world with eyes of beauty needs to become embodied in a way of life.

An aesthetic spirituality invites us into renewed ways of being in the world. All of our senses can be heightened and awakened to a world beneath and beyond surface appearances. God can be found in all that is sensuous and passionate. Wassily Kandinsky wrote that all reality has a spiritual dimension and an inner meaning; to be truly human is to resonate with the super-sensuous dimension of things. By this he does not mean that we should leave the world of the senses behind. Rather we are to immerse ourselves in the intensity and depth of the sense experience, so that it reveals the spiritual to us. We are to engage with what is most vital and provocative.

Beauty calls us to pay attention, to take time to relish and delight, and to make God's presence visible. Art-making can lead to beautiful relationships, to meaningful work, to the striving for justice, and to the building of the Kingdom. Ultimately is it our whole lives that are to be 'God's work of art'.[8]

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[8] Ephesians 2:10, NJB.

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR—THEOLOGIAN OF BEAUTY

Joan L. Roccasalvo

'THE FAITH NEEDED TO BE SHOWN under a new light and dealt with from another angle; he had no motive except the desire to make it popular for the salvation of people.'[1] So G. K. Chesterton sums up the theology of St Thomas Aquinas. Hans Urs von Balthasar too proclaims Catholic Christianity in a new way, in terms of love expressed as beauty, goodness and truth. His faith-vision advocates the whole instead of the part, the synthetic rather than the analytic.

Formative Years

Hans Urs von Balthasar was born into a distinguished family in Luzern, Switzerland. As a young man, he had considered a career in music or literature, and he was an accomplished pianist.[2] Von Balthasar studied with the Benedictines at Engelberg and then with the Jesuits at Feldkirch in Austria. Towards the end of his studies, he discovered Mozart, who represented to him musical perfection. He committed to memory all the composer's works; because he could hear any given piece within himself, he later gave away all his Mozart recordings. At the age of 22, von Balthasar did the full Spiritual Exercises, which proved to be a life-changing experience. Years later he recalled:

> [I was] struck by lightning …. It was simply this: 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. All I needed to do

[1] G. K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (Baltimore: Newman Book Shop, 1933), 93.

[2] What follows is indebted at many points to two articles by the Jesuit bishop Peter Henrici, a nephew of von Balthasar: '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), 7-43, here 9 (first published in *Communio* [USA], 16/3 [Fall 1989], 306-350); and 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Cultural and Theological Education', in *The Beauty of Christ*, edited by Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1994).

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 49-63

> was 'leave everything and follow', without making plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was to stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for.[3]

In 1928, the young scholar earned a doctorate in German literature and philosophy from the University of Zurich,[4] and the next year he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Feldkirch. After the novitiate, von Balthasar studied philosophy at Pullach, near Munich, between 1931 and 1933—an experience which he described as a 'languishing in the desert of neo-scholasticism'.[5] He then went on to study theology at Fourvière, near Lyon.

Henri de Lubac and the School of Fourvière

At Fourvière, von Balthasar complained about 'a grim struggle' with the 'dreariness of theology' and 'what people had made out of the glory of revelation'. He recalled, 'I could not endure this presentation of the Word of God. I could have lashed out with the fury of Samson'. Only his teacher and mentor, the philosopher Erich Przywara, 'understood everything; I did not have to say anything. Otherwise, there was no one who could have understood me.'[6]

Fortunately, von Balthasar came to be inspired by the older, French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896-1991), who lived in the same house of studies and also influenced Jean Daniélou, Henri Bouillard and others. De Lubac's dedication to patristic renewal laid the groundwork for a theological renewal, the *nouvelle théologie*. De Lubac's small circle founded the two series *Théologie* and *Sources Chrétiennes*—that great collection of patristic sources encompassing 'sacred scripture, modern philosophy and theology, the investigation of the human sciences, but above all, the whole tradition of the Church'. Until this time, schools

[3] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 11.

[4] His dissertation, entitled 'History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature', was published in the late 1930s under a title which translates as *Apocalypse of the German Soul*. For a handy list of the original German titles of von Balthasar's books correlated with translations, see *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 299-305.

[5] Since the mid-eighteenth century, the Swiss government had banned the Jesuits from any institutional presence, whether in schools or churches, owing to a civil war between the Catholic and Protestant cantons. Jesuits were tolerated as chaplains, however, and in 1947 a Swiss vice-province was established. Since 1973, certain restrictions have been lifted: a referendum has allowed them to vote.

[6] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 13.

of theology had given little attention to the treasury of patristic literature. Under de Lubac's aegis, von Balthasar embraced 'the symbolic-holistic understanding' of the Church Fathers 'and not the critical-analytic reflection of the moderns'.[7]

Hans Urs von Balthasar as a student

Nouvelle théologie formed the basis of von Balthasar's trilogy on the so-called transcendentals—beauty, goodness and truth—and on the unity between them.[8] This new theology overcame '"the two-storey thinking" of the neo-scholastic doctrine of grace' with its dualism 'between nature and grace', between history and revelation on the one hand, and experience and faith on the other.[9] It met with opposition from influential theologians such as Michel Labourdette and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, who linked it to modernism, which for them was dangerous.[10] In 1950, Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* obliquely made critical mention of it.

Jesuit Priest and Departure from the Society of Jesus

After his priestly ordination in 1936, von Balthasar served as associate editor of *Stimmen der Zeit*, the German Jesuits' cultural review, from 1937

[7] Medard Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait', in *The Von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, translated by Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (New York: Crossroad, 1982 [1980]), 5.

[8] The transcendental attributes of Being are so called because they surpass all the limits of essences and are coextensive with Being. They 'climb over or leap over all divisions, categories, and distinctions between and within beings, pervading them all': W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, In: U. of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 43.

[9] Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait', 5-6.

[10] See Michel Labourdette, 'La théologie et ses sources', *Revue thomiste*, 46 (1946), 353-371, and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, 'La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?', *Angelicum*, 23 (1946), 126-145, at 143.

Adrienne von Speyr

to 1939. He and three other Jesuits had been slated to open an ecumenical institute at Rome's Gregorian University, but he was given the option of going to Basel as a university chaplain, and he took it. In 1950, after a long discernment, von Balthasar left the Society of Jesus to devote himself entirely to the Ignatian secular institute, the Community of St John. He had founded the Community in 1945 with Adrienne von Speyr, a medical doctor who had been received into the Catholic Church under his direction. Her spiritual gifts convinced him that God was calling them within a double and complementary mission to special service within the Church, but conflict ensued with his superiors. It was understood that Jesuits would not assume the regular spiritual direction of women, and his request to be released for this task was denied. 'So for me', he reflected, 'the step taken means an application of Christian obedience to God, who, at any time, has the right to call a man … from his chosen home in a religious order, so that He can use him for His purpose within the Church'.[11]

Shortly after his departure from the Society in February 1950, von Balthasar renewed his religious vows at Maria Laach Monastery. In 1956, he was incardinated into the diocese of Chur, Switzerland, a step 'which officially dispelled the canonical cloud under which he had been working for so long'.[12]

A Renaissance Man

After 1950, von Balthasar immersed himself in university chaplaincy, in writing, in lecturing, in giving the Spiritual Exercises, and in serving

[11] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 21.

[12] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 23; Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 4.

as the director of the Community of St John. Such ministry put his theology to the test of reality. In Einsiedeln, he established the Johannes Verlag, a publishing company.

Von Balthasar wrote major theological works and studies in theological and philosophical history, philosophy and hagiography. With fluency in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and several modern languages, he also translated and edited works of Church Fathers, notably the great Greek figures, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor. He translated too the work of distinguished French Catholic literary figures: Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy and Georges Bernanos.

In 1951, von Balthasar published a major study on Karl Barth entitled *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*.[13] His friendship with Barth had begun with their mutual admiration for Mozart, and Barth considered von Balthasar 'one of his earliest and most accurate interpreters of his work'; equally von Balthasar's theology reveals the influence of the Reformed pastor.[14] According to one of von Balthasar's correspondents, whenever Barth was asked about the significance of his biblical theology, he replied, 'Read Urs'.[15]

Final Years

After Vatican II, von Balthasar's theology attracted international attention, and the honours accumulated. In 1971, he received the Romano Guardini Prize of the Catholic Academy of Bavaria. From 1969 until his death, von Balthasar was a member of the Pope's International Theological Commission, and, in 1971, he drafted a document on priestly spirituality at the second Synod of Bishops. With other major figures he founded *Communio: International Theological Review*, a leading Catholic theological journal, in 1972. In 1984, he received the International Paul VI Prize and, as if a life that began with the arts had come full circle, he received in 1987, as his final honour, the Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Prize. A member of the Community of St John published a bibliography of von Balthasar's writings in 1990;

[13] Translated into English as *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, by Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Communio, 1992). Barth was a theologian and pastor of the Swiss Reformed Church. He died in 1968.

[14] Thomas Guarino, 'Reading von Balthasar: Fundamental Themes', *New Theology Review*, 4/3 (August 1991), 52-53.

[15] Kenneth M. Batinovich, 'On the Death of Father Balthasar', *Communio*, 16/1 (Spring 1989), 152.

Hans Urs von Balthasar in later life

he wrote more books than the normal person reads in a lifetime—almost seven hundred in all.[16]

In his last years, von Balthasar applied for readmission to the Society of Jesus. His request was denied,[17] but in 1988 Pope John Paul II named him a Cardinal. 'Though tired and ill again', writes Henrici, 'he this time accepted, out of obedience to the Pope, what to him was an embarrassing honour'.[18] He died on 26 June 1988, two days before the official ceremony was to take place. De Lubac considered von Balthasar a 'modern Father of the Church', praising him as 'perhaps the most cultivated man of his time', and he adds: 'if there is such a thing as a Christian culture, here it is'.[19]

Theology and the Aesthetic Act

The theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar begins and ends with God's glory communicated as love to humanity, man and woman; it invites their response.[20] In his massive trilogy, von Balthasar proclaims God's love as beauty, goodness and truth. Known in philosophy as the

[16] Cornelia Capol, *Hans Urs von Balthasar, Bibliographie: 1925-1990* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990); Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 7.

[17] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 22.

[18] Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life', 41.

[19] Henri de Lubac, 'A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 271-288, here 272; see also Gerard O'Hanlon, 'The Jesuits and Modern Theology: Rahner, von Balthasar and Liberation Theology', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 58 (1992), 25-45, at 45.

[20] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982-1989), I: 204, IV: 11, V: 302, VII: 23 (hereafter *GL* cited in text). The word glory (Greek *doxa*) unifies God's beauty, holiness, and love. Glory forms not only the content but also the underlying theme of Scripture. It is expressed by some 25 different Hebrew words, of which *kâbôd* is the chief.

transcendentals, nevertheless these 'three sisters' are understood by von Balthasar to be anchored in revealed theology, and to be inseparable from it (*GL* I:18; IV:19). *The Glory of the Lord*, the first of the trilogy, presents Christian revelation and faith through what is called the 'analogy of beauty'. For von Balthasar, the love of created beauty can help us understand what it is to be enraptured by Christ. As Incarnate Love, he is not merely one object of beauty among others, but rather the perfection and measure of all worldly beauty (*GL* I:177, 431-432).[21]

As von Balthasar sees the matter, the Church since the Enlightenment has either abandoned the topic of beauty or belittled it as a mere trifle. She has forgotten the close links between truth, beauty and love. The advertising industry and the mass media trivialise all three of them, and Christianity has allowed these highly profitable businesses to define beauty and love for us. But God has given us beauty, and given it to us for a purpose. Our enfleshed spirits need pleasure, enjoyment and delight, just as the intellect seeks truth, and the will is attracted to goodness. Beauty is part of being human, and without it happiness cannot be fully realised. Beauty lightens daily burdens and helps society live in harmony. A thing of beauty uplifts us and expands our openness to reality (*GL* I:118). It reminds us human beings of our dignity, made as we are in God's image, and called as we are to the divine likeness. The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures greatly esteem beauty as something which calls us to faith. Deprived of beauty for any length of time, we seek forms of pleasure, often vulgar, which offend against our exalted vocation. As von Balthasar puts it:

> … whoever sneers at (beauty's) name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not—can no longer pray, and soon will no longer be able to love (*GL* I:18).

Von Balthasar was initially educated in the arts, and did not consider himself a professional theologian. The chief influences on his thought were the Church Fathers and Ignatius Loyola, the author of the *Spiritual Exercises*—these authors nourished a sacramental view of

[21] *The Glory of the Lord* focuses on the theology of perceiving beauty. *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*, though interrelated with *The Glory of the Lord*, are primarily concerned with 'God's dealings with humanity and the *manner* of *expressing* God's activity', the good and the true (*GL* I: Foreword).

the world, and an understanding of the act of faith as rooted not in reason but in love.

The Aesthetic Act

In an age that prizes the subjective, it goes without saying that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. But despite the prevailing temptation simply to equate human beauty with physical appeal, we know instinctively that beauty is more than a pretty face or an attractive body. We perceive beauty and respond to it in persons, places and things; we sense beauty in what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell. What, then, is beauty?

Beauty is what delights us—its quality and design please our senses, but also our other faculties: memory and imagination, intellect and will.[22] We can perceive beauty directly and intuitively, even if we do so by our experience and preconditioning. The beautiful strikes us as good and true, but understanding it may require some guidance.[23]

For von Balthasar, beauty is a dynamic event: what is objectively beautiful 'apprehends' and transforms the beholder, drawing him or her into a kind of union with itself. 'Beauty' therefore refers both to something given and to a personal response, and embraces both the objective and the subjective.[24] When confronted with beauty's revelation, people are drawn to it beyond themselves. Something good and true has taken place in this experience. Let us look at the objective and subjective aspects in turn.

The Objective Given

The beauty of a rose is something given. In the classical view, this beauty, this great radiance, comes 'from within' (*GL* I:20). Indeed, a thing of beauty reveals God's beauty, because it is God's creation and participates in God's own perfection of beauty (*GL* I:19-20). In the end, things can only be known in and through God (*GL* I:164). The world does indeed blaze forth with God's glory (*GL* IV:19-20; VII:242-

[22] According to St Thomas Aquinas, '… we call those things beautiful which please us when they are seen', or *id quae visum placet*. Translation of *Summa theologiae*, I, 5, 4 taken from Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 1988), 35.
[23] W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 299.
[24] *GL* I: Foreword. Von Balthasar notes that these moments complement one another.

243); it is 'charged with the grandeur of God'.[25] Nothing that exists can be totally devoid of this radiance. Von Balthasar notes that all great art is religious because it is an act of homage before the God of glory (*GL* IV: 13).

The Objective Christ

For Christians, Jesus, 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1: 15), surpasses any other worldly beauty.[26] Yet there are some parallels between our experience of beauty and our response in faith to Jesus Christ. He is God's radiant splendour in human form, and the light which shines forth through him is poured out on the senses. In the incarnation, Christ descended into our human flesh in order to show us the way to beauty, goodness and truth.

In the incarnation, however, the divinity of Jesus remains hidden. Nevertheless, his infinite depth reveals itself as the glory of God in human form, God's *kâbôd*. He is the pre-eminent beauty in the world; he transforms those who behold him and draws them out to himself. Jesus makes faith a fully human act, and therefore an act which engages the senses, a sensory act. In him life and culture assume a new meaning. The Christian is called to perceive Jesus as God's radiance, bathing the whole world with the sheer revelation of his glory.

The act of faith engages the senses

Jesus is also a sign of God's *eros*, God's jealous, ravenous love beckoning to us.[27] Though he may no longer be visible in the body, the beauty of his moral teaching continues to shine out from the New Testament. In him, the saints have always found their ultimate pleasure and delight.

Subjective Transformation

The German word translated in theological contexts as experience is *Erfahrung*. It is connected to the German word for 'to go' or 'to travel',

[25] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur'.

[26] Von Balthasar notes that theological aesthetics has nothing to do with the aesthetics of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Idealism or other 'profane sciences'. See *Love Alone is Credible*, translated by D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004 [1963]), 11. This line of thought attempts to apply the theory of beauty, subjective and self-conscious, to revelation and faith; this is an aesthetic theology (*GL* I: 38, 79). In contrast, theological aesthetics uses the methods of theology to study beauty. It argues for a genuine relationship between theological beauty and the beauty of the world (*GL* I: 39, 80).

[27] This idea is scriptural: see Exodus 13: 22; Isaiah 33: 14; Song of Songs 1: 18; Hebrews 13: 29.

and it thus conveys the notion of going out of oneself, of travelling to a different place—geographical, intellectual or spiritual (*GL* I: 222 and n. 38). The enjoyment we derive from the experience of beauty depends on our moving away from the self. Moreover, to perceive beauty is more than a sensory experience; one is also recognising the object's truth and rightness, its integrity and quality of design. Union with the beautiful brings with it a kind of transformation.

Christ, too, working through the Holy Spirit, 'transforms the believer as a whole' into his image. God's action in a person of faith may be likened to a person playing a violin. The artist must first tune the instrument, and then press with his or her finger on the strings to produce a note, perhaps, too, moving too and fro to generate an intense vibrato so that the violin sings beautifully. So too with the human person and Christian faith:

> Faith attunes humanity to *this* sound; it confers on humanity the ability to react to precisely *this* divine experiment, preparing humanity to be a violin that receives just *this* touch of the bow, to serve as material for just *this* house to be built, to provide the rhyme for just *this* verse being composed.[28]

Thus the whole self is taken into 'a Christian "attunement" to or "consonance" with God' (*GL* I: 242). In this process we are responding to God's initiative, and being transformed into God's work of art. Von Balthasar plays on the German word *stimmen*, which is both a musical term meaning 'to tune', and also a more general word denoting correspondence. He speaks of,

> … an attunement (*Gestimmtsein*) which is a concordance (*Übereinstimmung*) with the rhythm of God's own self, and therefore an assent (*Zustimmung*), not only to God's reality, but to His free act of willing which is always being breathed by God upon humanity. (*GL* I: 251)

Within the terms of this analogy, the music is at once God's outward self-revelation and humanity's response in grace and faith. We are called to participate in a circular movement that goes out from God and returns to God. What is at stake here is not some general scheme

[28] *GL* I: 220—emphasis added.

of 'emanation and return', but something utterly unique, grounded in the incarnation (*GL* I:477).

God of the Senses

The biblical experience of God takes place in the senses. In Christ, God appears to us right in the midst of the world's reality. Jesus uses simple things—bread and wine, fish, oil and water—to convey his message and accomplish his mission. The encounter with the Incarnate Christ necessarily takes place through the senses, through which alone humanity becomes aware of reality (*GL* I:365).

Without the sensory aspect of faith, there is a danger of falling into errors that denigrate the human, and impair the meaning of the incarnation. Von Balthasar writes that 'everything depends on the effects of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and especially touching the Word of Life, all of which culminates with the placing of the fingers in the wound on the side' (*GL* I:313). Christianity not only begins with the bodily; unlike other religions, it also culminates with the bodily: 'we abide in the seeing, hearing, touching, the savouring and eating of this flesh and blood' (*GL* I:314). Our theology must include a theological aesthetics because God's own reality, through the divine gracious initiative, can and must be seen, heard and touched (*GL* I:311).

The Convergence of Beauty and Love

Beauty needs, however, to be seen in a wider context; it is not an end in itself. God *is* Love; beauty is an attribute of love. Moreover, God's love goes beyond mere *eros*; God's love is *agape*, self-sacrificing gift. We must understand God's entry into our horizon in terms of the great dogmas of the Trinity and the incarnation.[29] The self-giving of Jesus demonstrates that love's beauty consists in its being given unconditionally and without limit.[30]

[29] See how von Balthasar explains the articulation of his major trilogy in 'A Resumé of My Thought', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 1-4, especially the final pages.

[30] Love and beauty in creatures are distinct, though interrelated. Whereas aesthetic maturity requires education of the senses, though perhaps not formally, unselfish love matures through the training, more or less explicitly, of the intellect and the will. Nevertheless, we must love as human beings, and not as pure spirits; harmony between matter and spirit is for us a lifelong pursuit. For us, *eros* is a way to God, but agapic love is the goal. In God, beauty and love are one.

Our experience tells us that what we love appears not merely beautiful to us but also *herrlich* ('overpoweringly glorious').[31] So it was for Paul on his way to Damascus. He had seen the highest beauty, and so was snatched up into the beauty of Christ (*GL* I:33). He loved what he saw, and never ceased proclaiming the beauty of the Lord now risen who had once been 'crowned with thorns and crucified'. Such mysticism conveys 'the notion of having been touched from the outside and from above' (*GL* 1:246). Paul is an outstanding example of a person who has been impressed with Christ's form.

Other articles in this collection address more fully the relationship between von Balthasar and the Ignatian Exercises. Here, however, it is worth bringing out one particular theme, that of the role of the senses in prayer, particularly in the so-called Application of the Senses.[32]

The Spiritual Exercises amount to an experience of salvation history realised in prayer. Throughout the Exercises, the individual meditates on the senses, with the senses, and through the senses as a way of becoming attuned to the mystery under consideration (*GL* I: 374). The senses put on the mystery; they live in the mystery. It is not that we leave the senses behind; rather we widen and deepen their range. We move beyond 'the concreteness of the simple happenings in the gospel', and reach a stage where, in our experience, 'the Godhead itself becomes concrete':

> … since what must be made real is, objectively, God's worldly and corporeal form, it cannot be made real—precisely in its full perfection—other than in a totally human way: in the encounter of the corporeal sinner who has been granted grace with the God who has corporeally become human. (*GL* I:375-376)

We live in our bodies; our spirituality is corporeal. Our redemption lies in the real world of space and time, the only world in which we can live. It is here and nowhere else that God's great work is accomplished.

[31] Von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 54—'radiant with glory'. The German title of *The Glory of the Lord* is simply *Herrlichkeit*: the standard German word for 'glory', linked etymologically to *Herr*, the word for 'Lord'.

[32] Von Balthasar's discussion of this Ignatian Exercise comes in *GL* I:373-380.

Guidance

Sometimes beauty, particularly in the natural world, evokes a direct, spontaneous response; often, however, we need to learn how to appreciate a work of art. Philosophers raise questions about beauty. If beauty is an objective reality, why is it that not everyone sees it? How is it possible for things that are truly beautiful not to appear beautiful. Francis Kovach names some factors that can prevent us from seeing beauty: closed-mindedness, prejudice, ignorance, family and religious attitudes.[33]

Von Balthasar identifies himself with the majority view of the ancients, for whom beauty is not arbitrary, relative or accidental. Things are not beautiful because they delight us; rather, we enjoy and love things because they are beautiful.[34] Beauty resides in things, objectively, whether or not we can see it. What we may need is a guide to help us see it.

When the beauty in question is that of Christ, it is, for Balthasar, the Catholic Church that at once continues and mediates the form of Christ, and provides the guidance we need if we are to perceive his mystery. From its beginnings, the Church has proclaimed the inner truth and vitality of Christianity and its divine origins. Christians have lived out their belief in Jesus, and have died for him and his mission. Their witness has taught subsequent generations; and for each of us, our ability to see with the eyes of faith has been learnt with the help of particular persons, places and events. The process has also involved, of course, our own reflection and perhaps some inner struggle, before we have come to see with adult faith. The search may last a lifetime.

[33] Francis J. Kovach, 'Aesthetic Subjectivism and Pre-Modern Philosophy', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 40 (1966), 209-221, here 211, 215.
[34] Kovach, *Aesthetic Subjectivism*, 215.

Von Balthasar in 1936, with his family, after he had presided at the Eucharist for the first time. His mother had died in 1929; his sister Renée eventually became General of a Franciscan congregation; his brother Dieter became a Swiss Guard.

A Culture of Love and Beauty

The Song of Songs, one of the most beautiful books in the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, affirms the dynamic convergence of body and spirit, of love and beauty:

> O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.
>
> You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. (Song of Songs 2:14; 4:7)

Augustine writes movingly of the restlessness that haunted his life until he could exclaim, in regret certainly, but more profoundly in gratitude: 'Late have I loved thee, O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new; late have I loved thee'.[35]

Augustine's restlessness is ours as well; the search for love and beauty is a quest intrinsic to the human condition. To build a culture of love, to change the world from the inside, this is our mandate. We are called to live as co-creators with the Divine Artist. In one sense the task is simple: live lovingly, and wonder at the unity of beauty, truth and goodness. Decry ugliness in all its forms. Help our human family to discern the beautiful in their own lives, and imitate it when it

[35] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10: 38—translation taken from *The Liturgy of the Hours*, volume 4 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975), 1357.

radiates from others. The ugly will not vanish, because sin will not vanish; but we can overcome the ugly by cultivating instincts of beauty and love. *The Glory of the Lord* sharpens our awareness of beauty's role in salvation history.

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ON PILGRIMAGE TO CHARTRES

Honouring the Centenary of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Birth

Leo J. O'Donovan

NO ONE WHO HAS MADE THE JOURNEY south from Paris to the cathedral of Chartres is likely to forget the first sight of the soaring towers sailing above the plains of the Beauce. In late summer, especially, the waving wheat and barley and brilliant golden rape offer moments of wonder and worship beyond even the most fervent pilgrim's expectations. These were the fruitful fields whose prosperity in part made the great church possible. They are fields made solemn ever since by the presence of a human achievement and an act of homage beyond adequate description.

Few have loved the cathedral as much as Charles Péguy. After some fifteen years of staunch atheism, he told his friend Joseph Lotte in 1908 that he had 'found faith again', and poured his anxious new conviction into page after page of plain but perfect poetry. Mary as Queen of Heaven is central to the poetry, and to her Péguy immediately entrusted his son Pierre when the boy fell desperately ill in 1912. When Pierre recovered, his father set off on foot to Mary's shrine at Chartres, as he had promised. The journey is 72 kilometres each way.

It is disputed how many pilgrimages Péguy made—whether two, or three, or a good many more. Two seem certain: the one on foot in June 1912 and another, probably by rail, in July 1913—a little more than a year before he was killed by a German bullet at the river Marne. In 'La Tapisserie de Notre Dame de Chartres' (1913), we find him under way:

> Morning Star, unattainable Queen,
> Here we come marching towards your great court.
> Here is the plate on which we spread out our poor love,
> Here is the ocean of our immense pain. …

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 65-80

> You see us advancing along the straight road.
> All dusty, all muddy, the rain in our teeth.
> On the fanned expanse, open to all the gusts.
> The *route nationale* serves as our narrow gate.

Then, astonished as so many others have been before and since, he sees the spire in the sky:

> Tower of David, here is your tower of Beauce:
> The hardest ear of corn that ever rose
> Towards a sky of mercy and serenity,
> And the most beautiful jewel flourishing in your crown.[1]

'I am a man of the Beauce', he told Lotte, 'Chartres is my cathedral'.[2]

Hans Urs von Balthasar came to love Péguy, along with Georges Bernanos and Paul Claudel, while he was studying theology in the mid-1930s at Fourvière, near Lyon. He admired in particular Péguy's lifelong concern with Israel and its prophets, his heightened sense of the dialogue between the Old and New Covenants, and his awareness of the incarnation reverberating through time and illuminating it. 'More perhaps than any other writer of our time', comments Louis Dupré, Péguy 'perceived the earthly ramifications as well as the historical consequences of God's entering this world and transforming its entire configuration'.[3] For von Balthasar, Péguy's thought provides a fitting climax to the two volumes of *Herrlichkeit* (*The Glory of the Lord*) that study 'clerical and lay styles' in theological aesthetics.[4]

Interestingly, however, von Balthasar does not discuss Péguy's devotion to Chartres except in the most general terms. He notes that Péguy's aesthetic 'is ultimately rooted entirely in the religious; he takes no account of any kind of art other than a religious one, an art of worship', and comments that 'cathedrals are for him "the prayer of fleshly people, a glory, almost an impossibility, a miracle of prayer";

[1] Translation based on Marjorie Villiers, *Charles Péguy: A Study in Integrity* (London: Collins, 1965), 320. For the original, see http://www.florilege.free.fr/florilege/peguy/beauce.htm.

[2] Louis Perche, *Charles Péguy* (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1957), 113.

[3] '*The Glory of the Lord*: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetic', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 183-206, here 193.

[4] Péguy is treated in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 400-517. See also von Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

they are "embodiments of adoration"'.[5] Nor does Péguy's own rapturous devotion to Our Lady of Chartres ever dwell on any details of the great church in which she is honoured.

For that we may turn to one of his contemporaries, Henry Adams (whom I do not recall him or von Balthasar ever mentioning). The American historian and critic's masterpiece, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, has led generations of pilgrims to follow his path across the Beauce. Scholarship may have advanced beyond Adams; he may be more technically reliable on the Mont than on Chartres. But no one has commanded more lyric language to describe the beauty or the grace of the place.

Adams retreated to the north-west of France after the shock of his wife's sudden suicide in 1885, losing himself among the twelfth- and thirteenth-century monuments of the region. His study there resulted, twenty years later, in the private printing of a hundred copies of his book. His heroine, like Péguy's, is the Virgin herself. At her shrine, he wrote to his niece:

> … the combination of the glass and the Gothic is the highest ideal ever yet reached by men; higher than the mosaics and Byzantine of Ravenna, which was itself higher, as a religious conception, than the temples of the Greeks or Egyptians.[6]

What is it that so captured the hearts of these two men, and of so many pilgrims since? Tourists will tell you immediately about the stained glass windows and 'the wonderful blue', which is all of course entirely true. More than one priest I know has chosen the Teaching Christ of the South Porch as a memorial card for his ordination. Architects speak admiringly of the unusually dynamic, wheel-like flying buttresses. But what finally captures and heals the heart at Chartres is not any of these marvellous parts but rather the remarkable whole—in all its complex simplicity.[7]

[5] Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: III*, 511.

[6] Quoted in Francis Henry Taylor, 'Introduction', in Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (New York: Heritage, 1957 [1913]), x.

[7] On the pilgrimage to Chartres, see Jean Favier, *The World of Chartres* (New York: Abrams, 1990), 27-34. On the labyrinth beloved of pilgrims there, see Gernot Candolini, *Labyrinths: Walking toward the Center* (New York: Crossroad, 2003).

Chartres Cathedral, West Front

Before the Royal Portal

Start by sitting before the west front, which gradually warms through the day as the sun comes from the east (Jerusalem) and finally sets here. You are at a site where at least five cathedrals have stood. An eighth-century cathedral was destroyed by the Danes in 858 and then rebuilt. In 876, Charles the Bald, Charlemagne's grandson, gave to this second church as a relic a veil revered as having been worn by Mary at the birth of Jesus. After a fire in 962, and a worse one in 1020, Bishop Fulbert rebuilt the whole structure, adding a crypt that remains to this day. (Fulbert was the first in a line of scholars, such as the brothers Bernard and Thierry of Chartres, Gilbert de la Porrée, and John of Salisbury, who made the school of Chartres central to the twelfth-century renaissance.) On 10 July 1194 the worst fire of all destroyed much of the town and nearly all of Fulbert's cathedral. When, a few days later, it was discovered that the veil had been saved, the town quickly decided to build anew—and largely completed the enterprise within a remarkably swift thirty years.

Two unequal towers confront the viewer from the west front. The later, fifteenth-century one to the north, by Jean de Beauce, is more

striking, with its lacy intricacies. But it is the anonymous twelfth-century tower that Adams, with reason, described as 'the most perfect piece of architecture in the world'.[8] Between the two, at a first level, are the three simple doors of the Royal Portal, above which are three lancet windows, all from the mid-twelfth century. The Portal, the lancets and the South Tower were saved from the fire and incorporated into the new church.

Now embellished by a great thirteenth-century rose window and a gallery of kings, this façade is solemn, almost severe, yet it sings of serenity. Statues on the pillars of the three doors bid us welcome. In the bay to the right, dedicated to the Virgin and Child, Mary is enthroned like a Byzantine empress above a nativity scene; she is honoured in the vaults around her by kings, workmen and the seven liberal arts. Above the central door, in the tympanum, the four animals of the apocalypse (later symbols of the evangelists) surround Christ in glory, with kings, queens and prophets as his court. An elegant tall queen with long plaits and an intense expression is said to be the Queen of Sheba, and is often called 'the elder sister of the Prodigal Son'. Opposite her is a marvellous king, who seems to smile gently and assure us that we will be at home here. The door to the left, the Portal of the Ascension, shows the Lord rising sublimely above ten apostles (there were only eleven at the time—an awkward number!). Here the archivolts, or decorated bands in the arches, show angels, along with fascinating, scary signs of the zodiac that delight children of all ages.

The Royal Portal sets the tone for the entire cathedral. Its timeless ideality is more about God's serene majesty and access to it through Our Lady than about suffering or sin. And it is consoling beyond description. Try to recall its solemn dignity as you walk around to the left towards the North Porch, on which the early morning light plays beautifully. Here, where Mary so clearly reigns, the full meaning of the church is revealed. Financed by King Philip Augustus, the porch was begun around 1215, and the basic architecture was finished by 1225. This 'Porch of France' is devoted entirely to the Virgin. Above the central bay she is crowned Queen of Heaven. The lintel below portrays her death, with Christ bearing her soul away while angels carry her

[8] Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 61.

body (the resurrection-assumption of Mary!). On the trumeau, or central pier in the middle of the door, is Anne with the infant Mary.

The pillar statues about the entrance include royal and biblical figures, who are far more individualised than their twelfth-century cousins: Abraham preparing Isaac for sacrifice; Moses lifting the brazen serpent; David with his crown; and an extraordinary, ascetic John the

The Coronation of the Virgin (North Porch)

Baptist. All have recently been cleaned so carefully that some of the original painting is now miraculously evident. They compete in grandeur with the delightful statuettes in the archivolts of the doorway's canopy. Here God creates light and darkness, the birds, the animals, and especially Adam (a small figure kneeling at God's lap). Just above is another depiction of the creation of Adam, with Christ as the model in the background, one of the cathedral's most famous sculptures. Opposing the contemporary heresy of the Albigensians, this sculpture, and indeed the entire porch, could scarcely be more engagingly orthodox. For a largely illiterate people these stories in stone formed both a library and a place of prayer. Today pilgrims journey to see them and to learn what people long ago knew about our faith. The sculptures ground, connect, incarnate the grace with which the mystery of life has chosen to take our human world, in all its wonder and wound, to itself.

Before entering the church, you might also walk around to the South Porch. The west front and the two porches are after all the entry ways for the people. It is the gift of another nobleman, Pierre Mauclerc, Comte de Dreux (1213-37), an avowed rival of Blanche of Castile, who eventually had him deposed.[9] As the North Porch belongs to the Mother, the South belongs to the Son. Here the tympanum of the central bay or doorway shows Christ enthroned and, below him, the Last Judgment. The Virgin's situation is new: uncrowned, with John the Evangelist, she implores Christ to be merciful. Below, Michael weighs the souls to be judged. But as Malcolm Miller, the incomparable English tour guide of Chartres, comments, 'the blessed look no happier than the damned'.

On the trumeau is the teaching Christ: humane, serene, consoling—especially in comparison with the rather worried-looking apostles on the piers to his left and right. More human and accessible than the sublime sovereign of the Royal Portal, he is one of us, though of course with greater dignity. The statue 'gives above all the impression of a noble, harmonious, and wise human being', says Titus Burkhardt. 'And yet, because the [unknown] artist eschewed all sentimentalism, its appearance is still much more spiritual than the majority of the later statues of Christ.'[10]

[9] Adams tells the story of the rivalry at 83.

[10] Titus Burkhardt, *Chartres and the Birth of the Cathedral* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1996), 118.

The bays to the right and left are replete with grand early-thirteenth-century statuary as well, with martyrs to the left and confessors to the right. Two young knights, Roland and George, the outermost figures in the embrasure of the left porch, are particularly fine. And from the other side of the street you will be able to see that, for all the emphasis on judgment, the gable at the very top of the transept has a colossal statue of the Virgin standing with the Child on her left arm. An early-fourteenth-century completion of the decoration, it looks small from ground level but makes a large point: mercy. The theology of the porch is of a Church militant—but equally of a merciful Lord and of the Communion of his Saints.

Everywhere at Chartres there is wonder and worship. But it is time now, alone or with a throng, to go into the church. And it is best to enter by the Royal Portal.

The Radiant Interior

Your first impression, depending on the weather and the time of day, is likely to be of colour, the cascade of dazzling, soft colour falling from window after window onto the rough floor and soaring pillars of the elegant, uncannily unified space. These miracles in glass serve not only as glorious decoration but also as an *illumination* that *shapes* a place for prayer. One thinks of von Balthasar's distinction between the form of the beautiful and the splendour that radiates from it.

Whoever the master architect of Chartres was, he learned the lessons of Notre Dame de Paris well. Chartres has but two side aisles, needing no others to support its lofty walls, which are already strengthened by heavy buttresses outside. Above the aisles a delicate triforium of arches and slender columns runs through the entire building, tying it together horizontally and raising its centre of gravity. But the tribune has been suppressed, allowing for far more stained glass than at Notre Dame. And the shafts of the cross-ribbed vaults fall from the ceiling to the floor in unbroken fluid lines, where in Paris they terminate at the capitals of pillars receiving them. Such an impression of majestic peace arises that it scarcely seems to matter how it has been achieved.

Looking up, you can see the mid-twelfth-century lancets glowing before you. These are often called the most beautiful glass in the world. They show, on the left, the passion and resurrection of Christ from the transfiguration to the supper at Emmaus; in the centre, the life of Christ (from the annunciation to the entry into Jerusalem in Holy Week); and on the right, the tree of Jesse (with the resplendent Lord enthroned at the top). The thirteenth-century rose window above, representing the last judgment, is difficult to read at close range—Adams, in fact, describes this rose as 'Our Lady's promise of Paradise'. In any case, its subject matter does not disturb the majestic serenity of the whole. As for the lancets, we are indeed before the glory of the Lord, reflected in the unrivalled blue of the tree of Jesse, in the dignified rondels detailing the passion, in the mandorla with the Empress Mary holding her blue-robed child at the top of the larger central lancet (sometimes called the 'Christmas window'). It is a place for endless wonder and worship.

Angels and Shepherds window

Few, if any, pilgrims are likely to have contemplated all 167 windows at Chartres, though some art historians certainly have. But if you make your way slowly, dazzled, down the nave, you can admire on the north side the procession of saints, prophets and apostles in the lancets of the clerestory, with a beautiful rose floating above each pair. Below are six lancets that tell the stories of Noah (again a beguiling joy for children), St Lubin, St Eustace, St Joseph, St Nicholas, and, my own favourite on this side, the redemption.

On the south side there is an especially grand lancet in the clerestory showing Mary as Queen (no longer an empress!) standing with her Son in her arms. Below, along with the stories of John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene, a theologically sophisticated lancet couples the parable of the Good Samaritan with the story of Adam and Eve. Next to it, a lancet celebrates the death, burial and assumption of Mary (the mystery to which the church is dedicated). It is worth

coming to Chartres to see this alone. After the unfortunate interruption of the fifteenth-century Vendôme Chapel, a neighbouring window celebrates the Miracles of Notre Dame.

Happily, Chartres has moved its main altar out of the choir and into the crossing where its great transept intersects the nave. A handsome new podium and altar were built from local stone in 1995. The crossing is also a thrilling place to sit for a recital of the grand seventeenth-century organ, especially on a summer evening as the full fiery light of the windows gradually fades to embers.

When Mass is not being celebrated, crowds gather to admire the two great thirteenth-century roses: the Rose of France to the north and the Rose of Judgment to the south. The northern window (*c.* 1235) centres on the Virgin enthroned with the Christ Child, surrounded by twelve medallions, some containing doves and some angels, and then twelve kings of Judah. It was the gift of Blanche of Castile and of her son St Louis. In the lancets beneath, Anne holds the child Mary and is flanked by Melchisedek, David, Solomon and Aaron. This window's gorgeously intricate stonework has recently been beautifully restored.

The glass of the southern rose (*c.*1230) shines even more brilliantly, since it receives more light. At its centre, choirs of angels and the 24 elders of the Apocalypse surround Christ in glory. The five lancets below, among the cathedral's most famous, show the Virgin and Child, with the Prophets Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah carrying on their shoulders the evangelists Matthew, Mark, John and Luke. Together they bear witness to the fulfilment of scripture in Christ, reigning above them in the rose.

Grand as this centre of the cathedral is, commanding remarkable views in every direction, it is still not the reason pilgrims come to Chartres. For you have yet to reach the choir and the apse of the cathedral, for which the whole was ultimately built—Mary's throne room and private apartments, in Henry Adams's lovely conceit.[12]

The choir, with its heavy sixteenth-century sculptured screen, is embraced by a double-aisled ambulatory with marvellously intricate vaulting. Here there is another resplendent collection of windows—and the church's great relic of the Virgin. When it is shown, it is in a

[12] Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 97.

The Choir Screen

small chapel on the north side of the ambulatory, just beyond the chapel devoted to Our Lady of the Pillar (also sixteenth-century), who herself draws crowds of visitors to prayer. In 1927 the cloth was scientifically examined and found to come possibly from the first century AD. There is even a legend that a statue of a virgin with a child, inscribed *Virgini pariturae* (To the Virgin Who Would Bear a Child), was worshipped in the crypt by pagans who were awaiting a saviour born to a virgin.[13] Popular stories such as these were meant to establish the primacy of the church of Chartres, both as community and as cathedral.

There are almost countless variations on the theme of the enthroned Virgin Mother reigning throughout her shrine. Presiding over all, in the centre of the clerestory above the choir, a great lancet shows her with the infant Jesus in majesty. The theological refinement of the window programme is nowhere more evident than in the smaller chapel lancet directly below and behind her, which is the easily legible window of the Apostles. Not far from it, near a statue of St Joseph, is a vivid presentation of the story of Thomas, who reaches tenderly toward the side of Jesus, surrounded by the *fleurs-de-lis* of France.

[13] On the veil and the legend of the statue, see Favier, *The World of Chartres*, 31. On the legend, see also Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculputural Program of Chartres Cathedral* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1959), vi.

Detail from the Zodiac Window

Because Gothic Chartres was built on the foundations of its Romanesque predecessor, the chapels surrounding the choir, in what the French call the *chevet*, or apse, of the building, are less prominent than they are, say, at Notre Dame de Paris. But the grace of the ambulatory and its windows more than compensates for this. A good many grisailles are here, grey windows with minimal coloured decoration, to give contrast and extra light. You will also find Charlemagne (considered a saint by many in the Middle Ages) engaged in wonderful battle scenes and, on the south side, the stories of Martin of Tours and Thomas à Becket, and the legendary Zodiac window, given by the vinegrowers.

Most famous of all is Notre-Dame-de-la-belle-Verrière, whose four central panels of the Virgin and Child date from the 1180s and were incorporated into a new window between 1215 and 1220. The window's lowest register shows the temptations of Jesus. Above this is the marriage feast of Cana, then the Queen of Heaven and her Son, in ravishing blue against a ruby background. She is surrounded and supported by angels with candles, censers and columns, offering her homage in which the pilgrims join. But this magnificence does not overshadow the image of Mary the lovely mother in the smaller window directly above to the right. Here she is no longer empress or queen, but perhaps simply a lady of the court, who breast-feeds her child. This too is Chartres, where grandeur and tenderness are everywhere one.

Notre-Dame-de-la-belle-Verrière, central panels

Beauty Saves

The pleasure we gain from journeys depends greatly on how we prepare for them, and the profit we draw from journeys on how we appropriate them. Both Péguy and Adams went to Chartres as pilgrims in need. They had each found the world of their time troubling. Péguy was disgusted by the Dreyfus affair in France, and considered defence of the falsely accused Jewish captain an almost sacramental duty. His *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* espoused a resolute socialism, and, as Julian Green comments, some numbers were entirely filled with his 'bold,

often indignant words in defence of the working classes and in attacks on our modern world which he hated'.[14] He was revolted by the materialistic rationalism he felt around him, and regularly contrasted the mystical and the political, fearing that the insights of the former always yield to the abuses of the latter. He himself, says Green, had 'an eye for the invisible which only the most mystical among primitives had had before him'.[15] And his love of the Church, like his profound patriotism, was always complex.

Henry Adams was no friend of the modern age either. One biographer ventured to summarise his fundamental convictions as these:

> a. The universe is unintelligible and inimical to man. b. Society is a fiction—an attempt to make the universe intelligible and bearable. c. There are various possible fictions on which society may rest. d. The fiction of the twelfth century was one of the best. e. It too failed—life is tragic.[16]

Francis Henry Taylor, introducing a new edition of *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* in 1957, called the book 'a protest against the world in which Henry Adams found himself'; Adams's medievalism was 'an escape from the inexorable disasters of the twentieth century which as a philosopher and historian he foretold'.[17]

Nevertheless, Adams thought that 'Chartres expressed, besides whatever else it meant, an emotion, the deepest man ever felt—the struggle of his own littleness to grasp the infinite'.[18] And Péguy wrote about the journey to Chartres, only days before he died, that 'the whole problem of the human spirit stretches itself out along that road'.[19] Today's pilgrim, returning to Paris after some days, or perhaps only hours, at Chartres, is likely to find the great capital suddenly noisier, more congested, even coarser that they had remembered. This is the typical reaction to 'the world' after a retreat. But you soon

[14] Julian Green, 'Introduction', in Charles Péguy, *God Speaks* (New York: Pantheon, 1945), 10.
[15] Green, 'Introduction', 11.
[16] Emily Stevenson, cited by Taylor, 'Introduction', xi.
[17] Taylor, 'Introduction', viii.
[18] Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 104.
[19] Quoted in Villiers, *Charles Péguy*, 362.

adjust. For this, or some place like it, is where your ordinary life unfolds. How, then, do you let Chartres stay with you?

Pilgrimages, like all prayer, are about attending to what calls for adoration. Need may bring you to it, or gratitude. But attention to the holy presence in a place is the reason for the journey. And whether we will it or not, such attention changes us. Hans Urs von Balthasar is a master teacher in this respect. As a devoted son of Ignatius of Loyola, he knew the dynamics of contemplation in action as well as anyone of his time. He cherished the great words of Augustine: 'Our entire task in this life … consists in healing the eyes of the heart so they may be able to see God'.[20] And so, in the seven astonishing volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, the first part of his great trilogy, he explores the analogy between our experience of earthly beauty and our experience of revealed, divine beauty, patiently examining the basic structure of the experience, great writers who have exemplified it, the metaphysical tradition that dealt with it, and its biblical presentation as well.

But von Balthasar also knew well that 'seeing God' leads to the desire to live like God. Such talk sounds blasphemous, but we can and must speak in this way because in Christ, crucified and risen, the human race's effort to live like God has been forever begun. And so five further volumes, forming the centre of von Balthasar's trilogy, are devoted to studying the dramatic relationship between God and creation (what von Balthasar called the *Theodramatik—Theo-Drama*). 'The divine ground actually approaches us', von Balthasar writes in the first volume, and 'challenges us to respond'.

Von Balthasar may have begun by speaking of beauty and glory, but as he continued, it became increasingly clear that our response must be more than a 'merely contemplative gaze'. It cannot 'be translated into any neutral truth or wisdom that can be "taught"', nor is it static. 'Reality is action, not theory', says von Balthasar. Mere aesthetics has 'to surrender itself and go in search of new categories': theology needs to articulate also 'the absolute commitment found in that drama into which the one and only God sets each of us to play our unique part'.[22] Here we see the intimate interrelationship between what scholastic

[20] Sermon 88:6. The then Cardinal Ratzinger quoted this text in his funeral homily for von Balthasar.

[22] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume I: Prolegomena*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 16, 66.

philosophy called 'the transcendentals': beauty, truth and goodness. The truth of things may be revealed to us through beauty, but this truth and beauty call us forward to goodness. The God who shows us the Son's truth in beauteous splendour thereby also calls us to a life of goodness.

We continue to make Chartres our own, then, not by remembering its architectural, historical or even theological 'lessons'. We make it our own by *seeing* again the serenity of the glorified Christ, the dignity of the prophets and kings, the approachable humanity of the Teaching Jesus, the aspiration of the vaulting arches in their all but weightless elegance, the sense of proportion in stone and statuary and glass, the jewelled history of salvation in the windows (along with life's most ordinary scenes as well), and—everywhere —the Sovereign Lady who presents to us her Son. Then, if we have worshipped in the midst of it all, we recall that this beauty was part of what we surrendered within ourselves to God, with the humble hope of being made in some small way more like to the Holy One whom for centuries it has honoured. And if we are like Him, we shall begin again to love God and our neighbour with all our heart and soul. Thus perhaps, if we long truly enough for it, Dostoevsky's prophecy will be fulfilled: 'Beauty will save the world'.

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'BLESSED TENSION'

Barth and Von Balthasar on the Music of Mozart

Philip McCosker

I HAVE NEVER MUCH LOVED the music of Mozart. This might be because I seemed to practise *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* endlessly at school, but his music has always seemed to me overly saccharine and predictable. Like an *éclair* or candy-floss, it seems too sweet and full of air: not a satisfying meal, still less a staple, though pleasant from time to time, no doubt. I certainly did not think his music an interesting source for investigation into theology and spirituality.[1] For these reasons, it has surprised me how frequently theologians trumpet Mozart's work as theologically revealing and spiritually nourishing.[2]

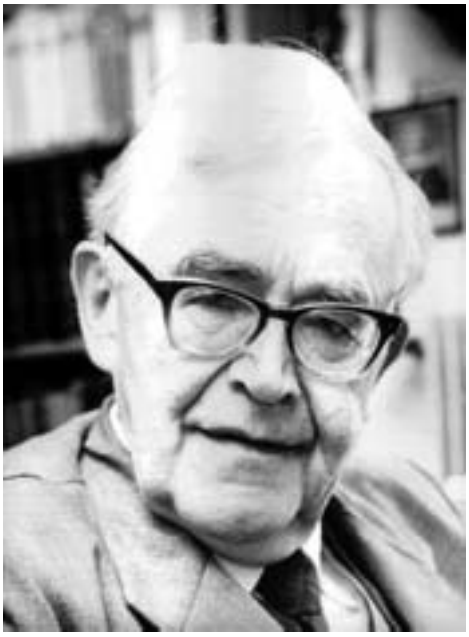
Among these are two of the theological giants of the Christological (and thus Trinitarian) renewal of the twentieth century: Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Both shared an intense love of Mozart's music. Indeed that love was probably what cemented their friendship,[3] a friendship which marked von Balthasar's theology indelibly—although it cannot be said to have had a reciprocal effect on Barth's, perhaps because Barth was eighteen years von Balthasar's senior.[4] One might go

[1] Actually, a number of journals of spirituality have published interesting articles on Mozart's music: Reginald Ringenbach, 'Mozart, chemin de l'absolu', *Vie spirituelle*, 126 (1972), 17-31; Jacques Colette, 'Musique et sensualité: Kierkegaard et le Don Juan de Mozart', *Vie spirituelle*, 126 (1972), 33-45; Günter Putz, 'Die Liebe hört niemals auf: Theologische Anmerkungen zu Mozarts Musik', *Geist und Leben*, 64 (1991), 447-459; Carl de Nys, 'Mozart, musicien de l'incarnation', *Études*, 374 (1991), 73-82.

[2] I therefore tend to agree with Francis Watson, when he writes that 'a musical taste that confines itself to Mozart can hardly be taken seriously' in his article, 'Theology and Music', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 51 (1998), 435-463, at 454.

[3] For their friendship, see the references in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), and in Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Milan: Paoline, 1991).

[4] On the differing relations between the theologies of these two men, see most recently John Webster, 'Balthasar and Karl Barth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 241-255. See also John Thompson, 'Balthasar and Barth', in *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, edited by



Karl Barth

so far as to say that von Balthasar's theology is a brilliant rewriting and amplification of Barth's, captivated by its overriding and thoroughgoing Christological perspective.

Barth and von Balthasar were, and remain, not alone among theologians in their love of Mozart. Such diverse figures as Søren Kierkegaard,[5] Hans Küng[6] and the recently elected Benedict XVI can also be numbered among the writers on theology and religion who are captivated by Mozart. One of the few snippets of personal information widely known about Benedict XVI is that he plays the piano (in addition to being fond of cats!). We are told that he prefers the works of Beethoven and Mozart, and he writes of how, during his upbringing,

> … Mozart thoroughly penetrated our souls, and his music still touches me very deeply, because it is so luminous and yet at the same time so deep. His music is by no means just entertainment; it contains the whole tragedy of human existence.[7]

Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1994), 171-192, as well as Ben Quash, 'Von Balthasar and the Dialogue with Karl Barth', *New Blackfriars*, 79 (January 1998), 45-55.

[5] See Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical Erotic', in *Either/Or*, part 1, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), 45-135.

[6] See Hans Küng, *Mozart: Traces of Transcendence*, translated by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1992).

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, translated by Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), 47. For his reflections on the theology of music, see his 'On the Theological Basis of Church Music', in *The Feast of Faith*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 97-126. It is interesting to note that the then Cardinal Ratzinger organized the first ever performance of Mozart's music in the Vatican: the Berlin Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan played Mozart's Coronation Mass in St Peter's Basilica at the mass for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul in 1985.

Barth and Mozart

That the current successor to St Peter can make such statements about Mozart only underlines the question: what do all these theological types see in Mozart's music? How can Barth happily say, for instance,

> I even have to confess that, if I ever get to heaven, I would first of all seek out Mozart and only then inquire after Augustine and Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher.[8]

Or, again, in a piece couched as a letter to Mozart:

> … it may be that when the angels go about their task of praising God, they play only Bach. I am sure, however, that when they are together *en famille*, they play Mozart and that then too our dear Lord listens with special pleasure.[9]

Barth exalts Mozart not only above all other musicians, but also above his chief theological sources.[10] He even suggests that the Roman Catholic Church should beatify Mozart![11] What does he see in this music?[12]

[8] Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, translated by Clarence K. Pott (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 16. This volume contains all of Barth's occasional pieces (mostly speeches) dealing with Mozart; the original German texts date from 1955/6, a year of celebration for the bicentenary of Mozart's birth.
[9] Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,* 23.
[10] In Barth's study at Bruderholzallee 26 in Basel—as Barth himself was wont to point out—the portraits of Mozart and Calvin hung at the same height. For a photograph see Busch, *Karl Barth*, 419.
[11] A suggestion he put at an ecumenical meeting of bishops and theologians on 28 Feburary 1968, at which he and von Balthasar spoke. See the letter to Kurt-Peter Gertz in Karl Barth, *Letters: 1961-1968*, edited by Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Stoevesandt, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1981), 284-285.
[12] There has been a certain amount of work on Mozart in the thought of Karl Barth. Most thorough is David Mosley's (as yet) unpublished (2001) Cambridge thesis: 'Parables of the Kingdom: Music and Theology in Karl Barth'. He would disagree with my suggestion here that Barth's thought on Mozart sits uncomfortably with his stated aversion to natural theology. He suggests on the contrary that Barth's reflections on Mozart's music do not suggest an about-turn regarding natural theology, but rather point to his 'Christian theology of nature'. Also interesting is the comparative thesis by Philip Stolzfus, 'The Theological Use of Musical Aesthetics in Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth and Ludwig Wittgenstein' (unpublished thesis, Harvard University, 2000), which contains a great deal of information on Barth's musical life (145-155), although he seems erroneously to think that von Balthasar was a student of Barth's (140). There are also a number of essays of interest: Sander van Maas, 'On Preferring Mozart', *Bijdragen*, 65 (2004), 97-110; David J. Gouwens, 'Mozart among the Theologians', *Modern Theology*, 16 (2000), 461-474; Colin E. Gunton, 'Mozart the Theologian', *Theology*, 94 (1991), 346-349; Theodore A. Gill, 'Barth and Mozart', *Theology Today*, 43 (1986), 403-411; Jacques Colette, 'Joy, Pleasure and Anguish: Thoughts on Barth and Mozart', *Concilium*, 95 (1974), 96-104; and Arthur C. Cochrane, 'On the Anniversaries of Mozart, Kierkegaard and Barth',

It seems that what Barth hears in Mozart's music is the sound of a good and ordered creation (his main texts on Mozart in the *Church Dogmatics* are found in the volumes discussing this doctrine), an ordered creation which sings and points towards its Creator:

> Why is it possible to hold that Mozart has a place in theology, especially in the doctrine of creation and also in eschatology, although he was not a Father of the Church, does not seem to have been a particularly active Christian, and was a Roman Catholic, apparently leading what might appear to us a rather frivolous existence? It is possible to give him this position because he knew something about creation in its total goodness that neither the real fathers of the Church nor our Reformers, neither the orthodox nor the Liberals, neither the exponents of natural theology nor those heavily armed with the 'Word of God', and certainly not the Existentialists, nor indeed any other great musicians before and after him, either know or can express and maintain as he did. In this respect he was pure in heart, far transcending both optimists and pessimists.[13]

This order in creation seems to be marked by balance, and is entirely without exaggeration. This resonates with some of my own reservations about the predictable sweetness of Mozart's music mentioned earlier:

> This implies that to an extraordinary degree his music is free of all exaggeration, of all sharp breaks and contradictions. The sun shines but does not blind, does not burn or consume, Heaven arches over the earth, but it does not weigh it down; it does not crush or devour it. Hence earth remains earth, with no need to maintain itself in a titanic revolt against heaven. Granted, darkness, chaos, death and hell do appear, but not for a moment are they allowed to prevail …. What occurs in Mozart is rather a glorious upsetting of the balance, a turning in which the light rises and the shadows fall, though without

Scottish Journal of Theology, 9 (1956), 251-263. Barth's theology of Mozart's music has been teased apart from a feminist perspective by Heidi Epstein in *Melting the Venusberg: A Feminist Theology of Music* (London: Continuum, 2004), 71-77. She does not consider von Balthasar's musical thought, nor the relation between the two.

[13] *Church Dogmatics*: *Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation: Part III: The Creator and His Creature*, 298. Most of Barth's substantive comments on Mozart are to be found in volume III of the *Dogmatics*, or else in his little volume referred to above.

> disappearing, in which joy overtakes sorrow without extinguishing it, in which the Yes rings louder than the ever-present No.[14]

Barth seems to extol a placid Mozart; yes always trumps no. He does not emphasize the darkness of the late symphonies, or of some of the quartets. His Mozart composes the music of an ordered universe, evoking life before the Fall, and providing after the redemption a 'parable of the kingdom'. Mozart, for Barth, bespeaks a natural theology—for all that Barth often sounds so hostile to such a thing. For what else is natural theology but the affirmation of the evidence of God's handiwork in creation and its fruits?

> There is a question which I shall leave unanswered, but which surely has not escaped you. How can I as an evangelical Christian and theologian proclaim Mozart? After all he was so Catholic, even a Freemason, and for the rest no more than a musician, albeit a complete one. He who has ears has certainly heard. May I ask all those others who may be shaking their heads in astonishment and anxiety to be content for the moment with the general reminder that the New Testament speaks not only of the kingdom of heaven but also of *parables* of the kingdom of heaven?[15]

One might describe Barth's natural theology of music as 'Arian'. Just as Arius believed that Christ enjoyed some kind of intermediate status between the divine and the human without really being either, so the music of Barth's Mozart seems to occupy some half-way position between natural and revealed theology: it is neither the kingdom itself, nor is it not the kingdom, but something between the two. As such, perhaps, it invites us into the contemplation of the reality it bespeaks.

Von Balthasar and Mozart

What about von Balthasar, Barth's good friend and great admirer?[16] What did he think about Mozart's music?[17] The Roman Catholic

[14] Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 53, 55 (slightly altered).
[15] Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 56-57.
[16] The best, constantly updated (if rather hidden), bibliographical source for secondary literature on von Balthasar is to be found at http://mypage.bluewin.ch/HUvB.S.Lit. Other websites worth consulting are those of the Balthasar Stiftung (http://www.balthasar-stiftung.org) and of the Centro di Studi di Hans Urs von Balthasar in Lugano (http://www.aventicum.ch). For a recording of two interviews (in French) with von Balthasar by Marcel Brisebois, follow the links at http://www.dieu-parmi-nous.com/r.videos.html. For recordings of Karl Barth: http://pages.unibas.ch/karlbarth/album1.html.

theologian has a more developed view of music in general, though he wrote less dealing explicitly with Mozart than Barth did.[18] Mozart seems to act as something of a cipher for von Balthasar's thoughts on music. This is probably because Barth was not really a music theorist himself, although he sang baritone and played the viola and violin—by his own admission 'discreetly, and in the background'. Von Balthasar, on the other hand, was a fine pianist and had had some musical education, both practical and theoretical. This is what his nephew, the Jesuit bishop Peter Henrici, says on the subject:

> As von Balthasar himself testified, his childhood and youth were pervaded by music, for which he had a quite extraordinary talent. He had perfect pitch, so that, after the death of Adrienne von Speyr, he was able to give away his stereo system on the grounds that he did not need it anymore: he knew all the works of Mozart by heart; he could picture the score and hear the music in his mind.[19]

And as von Balthasar relates himself:

[17] There is an increasing amount of scholarly reflection on the place of music and Mozart in von Balthasar's thought. See Stephan Lüttich, 'La muse qui est la grâce: A zene Hans Urs von Balthasar Gondolkodásában', Vigilia, 70 (2005), 508-517 (I am grateful to Fr Lüttich for kindly making the German original of his article available to me); Mark Freer, 'The Triune Conversation in Mozart: Towards a Theology of Music', *Communio*, 32 (2005), 128-136 (I am grateful to Emily Rielly of *Communio* for kindly making a MS copy of this article available to me); Sanders van Maas, 'On Preferring Mozart', *Bijdragen*, 65 (2004), 97-110; Manfred Lochbrunner, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar und die Musik', *Communio* [German edition], 29 (2000), 322-335; and PierAngelo Sequeri, 'Anti-prometeo: Il musicale nell'estetica teologica di Hans Urs von Balthasar', in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Lo sviluppo dell'idea musicale* (Milan: Quodlibet, 1995). This Italian translation not only includes Sequeri's essay, but also his useful notes to von Balthasar's original text. Sequeri's essay can be found in various other (slightly different) forms: '"La musa che è la grazia": Il musicale e il teologico nei 'prolegomeni' all'estetica teologica di H. U. von Balthasar', *Teologia*, 15 (1990), 104-129; 'Prometeo e Mozart: Il teologico e il musicale in H. U. von Balthasar', *Communio* [Italian edition], 113 (1990), 118-128. There is also his lengthy contribution, 'Mozart tra i teologi' in Andrea Torno and PierAngelo Sequeri, *Divertimenti per Dio: Mozart e i teologi* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1991), 40-165. And see the interesting reflections of Francesca Murphy, 'The Sound of the *Analogia Entis*', *New Blackfriars*, 74 (1993), 508-521, 557-565. I am grateful to Wolfgang Müller for the text of the lecture, 'Theologie und Musik im Gespräch', given in Luzern, 20 May 2005.

[18] Von Balthasar wrote two texts explicitly on Mozart: 'A Tribute to Mozart', *Communio*, 28 (2001), 398-399, and 'The Farewell Trio', in *Explorations in Theology: Volume III: Creator Spirit*, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 523-533. There are reflections on Mozart, however, throughout his works.

[19] Peter Henrici, 'A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 7-43, here 8-9.

> From these first tremendous impressions of music, Schubert's Mass in E flat (when I was about five) and Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* (when I was about eight), I spent endless hours on the piano. At Engelberg College [Benedictine] there was also the opportunity to take part in orchestral Masses and operas. However, when my friends and I transferred to Feldkirch [Jesuit] for the last two and a half years of high school, we found the 'music department' there to be so noisy that we lost our enjoyment in playing. My university semesters in poor, almost starving, post-war Vienna were compensated for by a superabundance of concerts, operas, orchestral Masses. I had the privilege of lodging with Rudolf Allers—medical doctor, philosopher, theologian, translator of St Anselm and St Thomas. In the evenings, more often than not, we would play an entire Mahler symphony in piano transcription …. When I entered the Jesuits, music was automatically over and done with.[20]

Mozart, surprisingly perhaps, entered von Balthasar's life relatively late. By his own admission, however, Mozart became particularly important to him and, along with Bach and Schubert, formed something of a musical constellation. He tells us in the speech, 'What I Owe to Goethe', made when accepting the Mozart Prize in Innsbruck in 1987:

> My youth was thoroughly musical; I had an elderly lady as a piano teacher—she had been a student of Clara Schumann. She introduced me to the romanticism whose last stars I was able to listen to during my studies in Vienna: Wagner, Strauss and above all Mahler. All this ended however, when Mozart entered my ear, and he hasn't left it until this day. For all that Bach and Schubert have become dearer to me in old age, Mozart has remained the immobile polar star around which the other two orbit (the Big and Little Bears).[21]

Von Balthasar was not only an avid listener and a performer of music, but also something of a composer. We learn from a letter to his father from Feldkirch that he was composing a setting of the Mass.[22] Unfortunately, we are unlikely ever to hear his music; von Balthasar

[20] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *L'institut de Saint Jean: genèse et principes* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1986), 29.
[21] Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 396, my translation.
[22] Letter from von Balthasar to his father, end of June 1930, cited in Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 33.

A portrait of Mozart by Doris Stock, 1789

never published his compositions, and left an embargo prohibiting the publication of works not already brought out by himself.[23]

Music, especially the music of Mozart, was an important component of many of von Balthasar's friendships.[24] This point applies not only to his friendship with Karl Barth, but also to that with Adrienne von Speyr, his longtime inspiration and colleague. Von Speyr debated for a long time whether to follow a career in music or in medicine. And among the sixty or so published volumes that von Balthasar took down from von Speyr in dictation (most of which are rather hard to find) is this vision of Mozart:

> (Can you see Mozart?) Yes, I see him. (She smiles.)
>
> (Does he have a prayer?) Yes, I see him praying. I see him praying something, maybe an Our Father. Simple words, learned in his childhood, which he prays knowing that he's speaking with God. Now he is standing in front of God like a child who brings his father everything: pebbles from the street, special twigs and little blades of grass, and once even a ladybird. For him all these things are melodies, melodies he brings to the good Lord, melodies which come to him suddenly, in the midst of prayer. When he's stopped praying—no longer kneeling and no longer folding his hands—he sits at the piano or sings just like a child. He no longer knows quite whether he is playing the good Lord something, or the good Lord is making use of him to play something to them both at the same time. There is a great dialogue between Mozart and the good Lord

[23] I am grateful to Jacques Servais SJ for confirming this in a conversation, as well as for his hospitality, and that of Sylvester Tan and the students at the Casa Balthasar, 29 June 2005.

[24] Interesting amongst these 'musical friendships' are those with Joseph Fraefel (co-founder of Johannes Verlag), Alois Grillmeier (a brilliant Jesuit patristics scholar), and Josef Pieper (an eminent Thomist). See Lochbrunner, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 330, for references.

> which is like the purest prayer, and this whole dialogue is made up of music alone.
>
> (And what about the people there?) He loves people. He shrinks from them and loves them at the same time. He shrinks from them a little as children shrink from tough children who might break their toys; but Mozart is actually more worried about the good Lord's toys being broken than for himself. He loves people because they are the good Lord's creatures, and he is glad that he can delight them with his music. In his own way he would like to put the question of God before them, even in his funniest pieces.
>
> (He doesn't distance himself from God in his art?) No. Certainly there are instances where the art takes priority in a way, but it remains enveloped in God. It is as though he had a lasting pact with the good Lord.
>
> (What about sadness?) That's there too. For he knows that God meets with sad and gloomy people as well, and that it is difficult to carry the hardships of the world. There are times when he feels as though there were a mighty weight on his soul; but then he takes everything into his music, and he must point out, through his music, everything which concerns God and humanity.
>
> (And Don Giovanni?) When he depicts pride he does not enter into it; he has no part in it. When he depicts sensuality then he does enter in a little bit, for of course sensuality is close at hand. But even his sensuality is so childlike that it actually never turns rotten.[25]

Music was clearly also important for von Balthasar's apostolate. On the eve of the entry of a group of students from his chaplaincy in Basel into the Society of Jesus, he 'listened with them to a complete recording of *Don Giovanni* and explained the whole work as a ritual of initiation, as a parallel to the nocturnal journey of the soul through the turmoils of passions and sin'.[26] He would also, on Saturday evenings at the chaplaincy, play complete operas by Mozart on the piano from memory for the students.

[25] Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Allerheiligenbuch I* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1966), 310-311, my translation.
[26] Kuno Räber, 'Sehnsucht nach Führung, Zwang zur Revolte', *Basler Nachrichten*, 189 (13 August 1988), 41. My translation from Lochbrunner, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar', 325.

Barth and Von Balthasar together

Von Balthasar's Musical Thought

Von Balthasar's first published work was in two parts, under the general title, *The Development of the Idea of Music: The Search for a Synthesis on Music*. The first part deals with the development of music using three successive building blocks: rhythm, melody and harmony. The second part seeks to develop a philosophy of music under three headings: structure, borders and values.[27] Mark Freer speculates on the various Trinitarian (and indeed Christological) analogies one might draw up using the three elements of rhythm, melody and harmony, although von Balthasar does not do so himself.[28] Interestingly, Mozart only appears once in this very early work; he had yet to become von Balthasar's 'immobile pole star'.

Two thoughts are very striking here. In his first sentence von Balthasar tells us that 'Music is the most ineffable art because it is the most immediate':[29] plenitude of presence goes with a complete inability to articulate that presence (presence and a certain absence commingle,

[27] The best analyses of this work that I have found are in Mario Saint Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, verité chez Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 46-110; and the work of PierAngelo Sequeri, mentioned above.
[28] See Freer, 'The Triune Conversation'.
[29] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Die Entwicklung der musikalischen Idee* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1998), 7 (my translation).

or indeed, are *identified*, in the form of music).[30] Secondly, we see that for von Balthasar music is not only at the threshold between the *apophatic* (saying what something is not) and the *kataphatic* (using positive terms with a sense of God's transcendence), but also (thus) on the cusp between humanity and divinity: 'Music is a borderland of the human, and it is here that the divine begins'.[31] Von Balthasar sees music as *liminal*, between that which can and cannot be spoken, between God and humanity, between Creator and creation. Music speaks ineffably of that which cannot be spoken, or even spoken of.

Indeed, it seems to be the case in von Balthasar's thought that music is the meeting-place of opposites, or at any rate of contraries. Thus music lies at the confluence of time and eternity,

> … music's present moment is nothing apart from its tension *vis-à-vis* past and future; each note played only has significance insofar as it successively interprets, unveils, justifies the past and anticipates what is to come. And what is to come cannot be constructed out of the present (even in the case of strict fugue). The present moment—in a Mozart symphony, for instance—is so full to the brim with tension that the genuine listener has neither time nor inclination to think of the past, let alone anticipate the future. With the passing of each note we sense the presence of the whole, which simultaneously comes into being in time and—in some incomprehensible supratemporal realm—always *is*.[32]

That von Balthasar should take Mozart as an example here is consistent with my own experience of Mozart as *predictable*. In Mozart's music there is a particularly strong sense, at any given moment, of where it has come from and where it is going. A Mozartian melody has the form it has, and that form, the way the melody flows, is bound up in each of its parts; to alter it would be to ruin it. But as von Balthasar

[30] Here, and in other ways, von Balthasar's thought on music proves to be close to that of Denys Turner in his recent *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 108-122. Turner argues that music is at once fully formal and fully material, allowing it to be both immediate and universal. It is 'pure body' (p. 109). Music, as such, says nothing, for it has no one object and no one subject, enabling itself to overflow and be more than it is, always pointing beyond itself. It is thus a commingling of presence and absence, sharing the 'shape' of the Eucharist (p. 115). See also note 43.

[31] Von Balthasar, *Die Entwicklung der musikalischen Idee*, 57 (my translation).

[32] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume I: Prolegomena*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 350.

points out, Mozart himself had the ability to hear the melody as a whole and thus could alter any part of it if necessary (say when a particular singer for whom a role was designed didn't turn up) without disturbing the whole. So, I suppose, depending on the width of one's viewpoint, his music is either *pre*dictable or *retro*dictable.[33] The progression of the music feels 'just right' as one hears it, and an accumulation of such experiences enables prediction. The music is in this way bound to freedom: it obeys laws and yet is free. Its freedom cannot be reduced to the sum of the laws it obeys.

For von Balthasar, this *inclusiveness* of music by virtue of its 'both-and-ness', to the extent that it brings together and envelopes opposites, is in fact a quality of beauty itself. Von Balthasar distinguishes between a 'daimonic beauty', which concerns itself with the present, and gets stuck in it, and a richer form of beauty, linked not only to our origins as creatures but also to our ultimate goal in heaven, a beauty which is a memory of our past and our future. It is a beauty which, though not necessarily verbal, sets us within a kind of narrative. Sanders van Maas describes good music in von Balthasar's theology as self-effacing and *iconic*—it points beyond itself (in this way it can be fully inclusive), and hence does not get stuck pointing towards itself in the narcissistic self-reference of idolatry. It is not—to use van Maas' word—*idolic*.[34] Music, because of its iconic quality, is *das Ganze im Fragment*—the whole in a fragment, a microcosm.[35] The fragment is *not* a part of a whole, but expresses the whole in itself, rather as a gene in some way contains within itself the whole reality of an organism.

This leads us to another way of seeing the 'sweetness' of Mozart's music. Could it be that that its sweetness and levity is in fact its *humour*? Humour in its various forms, especially irony perhaps, requires an ability to see the whole, to see the particular within a much broader context and thus to place it in a different light.[36] In a delightful passage

[33] I am grateful to Denys Turner for an enlightening disagreement on this matter.

[34] Van Maas, 'On Preferring Mozart', *Bijdragen*, 65 (2004), 97-110, here 98, 106, 109. The word is borrowed from Jean-Luc Marion.

[35] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963), translated by William Glen-Doepel as *Man in History: A Theological Study* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

[36] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, translated by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brien McNeil, John Saward and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 153.

on the Catholic 'and' in his book on the Petrine ministry, von Balthasar suggests that it is precisely this ability which marked Mozart and his music, and ensured that he could never become a fanatic of any kind.[37] For fanatics choose a part and parade it as though it were the whole, as the history of heresy illustrates. Factionalism is humourless.

> But the saints are never the kind of killjoy spinster aunts who go in for faultfinding and lack all sense of humour. (Nor should the Karl Barth who so loved and understood Mozart be regarded as such.) For humour is a mysterious but unmistakable charism inseparable from Catholic faith, and neither the 'progressives' nor the 'integralists' seems to possess it—the latter even less than the former. Both of these tend to be faultfinders, malicious satirists, grumblers, carping critics, full of bitter scorn, know-it-alls who think they have the monopoly of infallible judgement; they are self-legitimising prophets—in short, fanatics.[38]

Von Balthasar looks forward to a book on the humour of the saints; he reminds us of G. K. Chesterton's comment that it 'is much easier to write a good Times leading article than a good joke in Punch'.[39]

Karl Barth exalts Mozart's music as the sound of creation's redeemed freedom, in which yes always trumps no, and Adrienne von Speyr celebrates a childlike Mozart united in prayer with God. But von Balthasar's vision of music, and of Mozart in particular, is richer. Taking up Carl de Nys' hint,[40] I would like to suggest that von Balthasar's thoughts about music are actually christologically shaped. The features that he sees in music are consonant with good ways of talking and thinking about Christ and about the relation between his divine and human natures. This is especially apparent in his understanding of music's 'wholeness': the confluence of opposites (eternity and temporality, ineffability and excess of expression, the part expressing the whole), iconicity, his holistic vision of humour.

I would like to suggest that these features share a common paradoxical structure; in other words, they bring together and embrace

[37] Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church, translated by Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986 [1974]), 301-307.
[38] Von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 303.
[39] Von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 305.
[40] See de Nys, 'Mozart, musicien de l'incarnation'.

contraries. I would further suggest that this structure, or shape, pervades all reality, both created being[41] and God in His triune existence. The shape of that life is that of the God who is love itself in its radiant beauty,[42] especially as made manifest in the whole figure (*Gestalt*) of Jesus Christ: he is a microcosm of the redeemed cosmic harmony. Moreover it is precisely these features, palely imitated and echoed in our own lives, which embody a theology of the Christian life. The harmony recreated by the perichoretic resonance of Christ's humanity and divinity presents us with the outlines of a musical score by which to play our own parts in the Christic symphony of the universe, drawing ever closer to God, and the love that He is. It is here, I think, that even those of us who are tempted to find Mozart's music a little slight might begin to acknowledge what the theologians discern in it, and thus begin to hear it, and indeed other music, in a new way.

I leave the last word to von Balthasar:

> Today, therefore, perhaps the most necessary thing to proclaim and take to heart is that Christian truth is symphonic. Symphony by no means implies a sickly sweet harmony lacking all tension. Great music is always dramatic: there is a continual process of intensification, followed by a release of tension at a higher level. But dissonance is not the same as cacophony. Nor is it the only way of maintaining the symphonic tension. Mozart imparts something winged, buoyant, internally vibrant to his simplest melody—how often he works with simple scales!—so that the power that enables us to recognise him after only a few bars seems to flow from an inexhaustible reservoir of blessed tension, filling and tautening every member. The Church's reservoir, which lies at its core, is 'the

[41] I think, therefore, that von Balthasar would resonate with Rowan Williams' discussion of Jacques Maritain's idea that poets, and artists more generally, are about picking up and re-presenting the 'pulsions' of 'being'. 'It is all to do with things "being more than they are".' (Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Morehouse, 2005), 27.) It is that 'being-more-ness' that Mozart seems to pick up in his music, setting our lives in the broadest perspective, and thus showing us how we are more than we are.

[42] For von Balthasar, love and beauty implicate each other: we are seized by love's radiance, or its beauty. See his *Love Alone is Credible*, translated by D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004 [1963]), 54 and throughout. It is important to remember that the love and beauty which Christ embodies are *wounded*. For some excellent reflections on this theme see the address by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, 'The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty', given to *Communione e Liberazione* in Rimini in 2002, which can be found at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020824_ratzinger-cl-rimini_en.html.

> depth of the riches of God' in Jesus Christ. The Church exhibits this fullness in an inexhaustible multiplicity, which keeps flowing, irresisitibly, from its unity.[43]

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[43] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 15. I am glad to be able to offer this essay in commemoration of the centenary of von Balthasar's birth, and as a first step towards some comprehension of his arresting theology. I am grateful to Philip Endean SJ, Pauline Matarasso and Michael Tait for much assistance in helping me express what I wanted to say.

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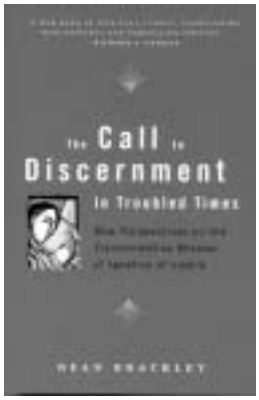

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VON BALTHASAR AND THE OFFICE OF PETER IN THE CHURCH

John McDade

> *The Pope is head. Who else is known by all? Who else is recognised by all, with the power to infiltrate the whole body because he holds the main branch which infiltrates everywhere? How easy it would have been for this to degenerate into tyranny! That is why Christ gave them this commandment: 'But not so with you' (Luke 22:26).*
>
> (*Blaise Pascal*, Pensées)

IN ENGLISH, WE HAVE A BOOK by Hans Urs von Balthasar called *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*. This title, however, ignores the point of the original German: *Der antirömische Affekt* ('The Anti-Roman Feeling').[1] The work was originally published in 1974 (in the pontificate of Paul VI) to offer a theological reflection on the 'deep-seated anti-Roman attitude within the Catholic Church' (p.9), 'the strangely irrational phenomenon of the anti-Roman attitude among Catholics' (p.16), an attitude that has 'not only sociological and historical grounds but also a theological basis' and that 'has to be overcome again and again by the community of the Church' (p.9). 'Throughout Church history, and today more explicitly than ever, there has been an evident *contest* within the Church herself, mostly against the Petrine principle.' (p.314) Von Balthasar presses the Church to examine the bias in its nature against its central focus of authority.

In von Balthasar's view, the papacy is misrepresented if it is pictured at the top of an ecclesial pyramid: such a hierarchical conception he regards as a legacy of imperial Rome and as a reaction

[1] The references in the text are to *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, translated by Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986 [1974]).

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 97-114

to the encroachments of medieval emperors. Such an image distorts the relation of the papacy to the rest of the Church. The Pope is not 'above' the Church in any serious sense, nor is the Church 'under' him (' … but not so with you'—Luke 22:26). Only Jesus stands above the Church as its Lord (p.308). Equally, von Balthasar has little time for attempts to remove the *scandalon* of the Petrine office by softening it into an Orthodox 'primacy of honour' based upon the autonomy of particular churches (p.77). Instead, the Papacy is one of the elements within the complex identity of the Church: it is both a *primary* feature of the Church as 'the guarantor of concrete unity in the concrete centre of the Church' (p.127), and *relative*, '*one* of several indispensable elements in the ecclesiastical structure' which, by their very relationship to one another, constitute the Church's identity (p.21). Hence both protestantism and papolatry are unacceptable, because they dissolve the differentiated character of the Church, one by excising episcopal and papal authority from the structure, the other by exalting the Pope above everything else. Von Balthasar quotes Möhler's sharp comment on their common source in an exaggerated egoism:

The Pope is not 'above' the Church in any serious sense

> Protestantism is papism carried to the extreme, that is, complete egoism *in principle*. In papism each gives himself unconditionally to *one* person: in protestantism, each *one* is in a position to oppose all others (in so far as he makes of himself the principle of interpretation of revelation).[2]

Von Balthasar prefers to speak of the 'multi-dimensional reality' of the Church' (p.26), the 'force-fields that bear upon the Church' (p.22), the 'network of tensions in the Church' (p.24). In the Church, there are 'more fundamental tensions' than that between primacy and collegiality or 'monarchy' and 'democracy' (for von Balthasar, sociological parallels from secular society are inadequate to the *mysterium*). In his view, the *necessary* tensions in the Church are neither the symptoms of spiritual shortcomings nor flaws which can be remedied by structural change: they are constitutive of the Church,

[2] Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolik*, volume 2 (Cologne and Olten: Hegner, 1958), 698, quoted and translated in von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter,* 172.

because the Church is inherently *a complex, multi-dimensional network of principles*. He rejects the idea that the original form of the Church was a charismatic brotherhood of equality only later corrupted by patriarchal patterns of government. Instead, the Church, as shaped by Christ in its period of origins, is differentiated and invested with centres of authority, adjudication and service. Mary, Peter and the other figures around Jesus form a network of principles which, in their mutuality, interaction and tension, form the Church which relates to its Lord. Von Balthasar approves of Congar's definition of Catholicity as 'the Church's *universal capacity for unity*, or, in other words, the dynamic universality of the principles which yield her unity',[3] and proposes an ecclesiology of symbolic archetypes as a way of identifying these constitutive principles and missions which form the *Catholica*.

Catholic Identity

For von Balthasar, the 'larger unity' of the Church corresponds to the 'constellation' of people around Jesus in the New Testament, a constellation of 'real symbols' which designate particular missions within the Church, forming the dimensions of the *Catholica* (p.309). The historical Jesus stands within a 'constitutive human group'; withdrawing him from this differentiated network makes him (and Christology) 'hopelessly abstract' (p.136). The Church is born in the relationships Christ establishes in 'the period of origins' (p.158), and their symbolic pattern forms the subsequent pattern of the Church in which the Risen Jesus continues to give missions: it is this subsistent pattern of continuity between 'then' and 'now' which makes them constitutive *principles* of the Church in every age.

An analogy can be drawn between von Balthasar's ecclesiological approach and Carl Jung's account of the process of individuation. For Jung, all the elements which surface in a dream are aspects of the self pressing for attention. Becoming 'individuated' as a person means coming to acknowledge the self in all the aspects of its fullness. Just as the self is complex and composed of different dynamic aspects, all of which emerge from and contribute to an integrated personality, so the life of the Church is constituted by different elements or principles involved in a dynamic interchange and tension between the figures

[3] Yves Congar, quoted and translated in von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 323.

ARCHETYPES WITHIN THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

Peter
(Pastoral Office)

The Twelve
(*Collegiality*)

Paul
(*Adaptation to Cultures/Mission*)

The Baptist
(*OT Witness; Prophetic Martyrdom*)

Judas
(*Betrayal*)

Outsiders
(Sinners & Weak)

Children
(*Unlettered*)

Mary
(*Lay Holiness*)

Nicodemus
(Searchers)

Women at Tomb
(Generating Resurrection Faith)

Joseph
(*Fatherhood/Work*)

Martha & Mary
(*Domestic Church/Hospitality)*

Beloved Disciple
(*Love/Contemplation*)

James
(*Tradition & Law)*

who are archetypal dimensions in its 'individuation'. (Significantly, one of von Balthasar's essays is entitled 'Who is the Church?', rather than 'What is the Church?', because he favours imagery of the Church as Virgin/Spouse/Mother—a 'person' rather than an 'assembly'—in relation to God.)

Von Balthasar identifies a number of individuals and groups in the New Testament and amplifies their symbolic significance as foundational archetypes within the Church: Mary, Joseph, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, the Jews who were sympathetic to Jesus (Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simon of Cyrene), Judas Iscariot, John the Baptist, Peter, the Twelve, Paul, the Beloved Disciple, James, and so on. The diagram above gives an idea of the resulting picture of the *Catholica*. Mary is at the centre of the Church because her faith

represents 'the all-inclusive, protective and directive form of all ecclesial life' (p.208), 'the model of all being and acting' in the Church (p.206). The form of her faith radiates through the other dimensions, which, for all their importance, do not have the paradigmatic quality of Marian holiness. The Church, after all, begins in the chamber at Nazareth, in the faith of the Virgin 'through which the Son of God becomes man', and by which 'he also forms the truly universal Church' (p.207). The first of the redeemed, she is the 'archetype of the Church', the bodily image of the Church's holiness, realised in advance through her conception without sin and fulfilled in her assumption into resurrection life. In her is seen 'the nuptial encounter between God and the creature'. 'The entire Church is Marian', von Balthasar says, quoting Charles Journet (p.205), because 'Mary disappears into the heart of the Church to remain there as a real presence which, however, always gives place to her Son' (pp.158-159). For von Balthasar, the radiant heart of the Church is *lay, faithful and holy*, characterised by contemplative receptivity in relation to God, and symbolised by the femininity and virginal maternity of Mary: as she is, so is the Church.

Von Balthasar's use of male-female symbolism can pose problems in a society uncertain about these terms in its own cultural life. His fundamental distinction is between 'a feminine element … [which] makes a person *secure* in nature and in being', and a masculine element by which a person 'pushes forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own'.[4] At the level of individual identity there is a corresponding distinction between *who you are* and *what you do*. Mary symbolizes the Church in its core identity; simply by being herself in perfect union with God's self-gift in Christ, she expresses the identity of the Church.

Within this overarching Marian pattern, the other dimensions arise as active expressions of the Church's selfhood, just as personal identity flows into individual action. Hence, for example, von Balthasar can think of papal infallibility as arising within the trustworthiness of what is known in the Marian Church:

[4] An extract from *New Elucidations* reproduced in 'Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture', *Communio*, 22/1 (1995), 164-170, at 165.

> What Peter will receive as 'infallibility' for his office of governing will be a partial share in the total flawlessness of the feminine, Marian Church. (p. 167)

In the same spirit, one might say that the women at the tomb on Easter morning, who generate the Church's faith in the resurrection, speak of what Mary already knows of God's power and love. Similarly, John's contemplative discipleship, James's sense that Christ is the fulfilment of Jewish observance, and Paul's preaching of the universal efficacy of faith in Christ, are particular expressions of what is comprehended in Mary's faith.[5]

Peter has a distinctive role, set within the network of missions in the Church:

> As shepherd who has to pasture the *whole* flock, he has a right to claim authority (in doctrine and leadership) and to demand unity. This prerogative is his alone. But it does not isolate him from the others who have founding missions and who, in their own way, have no less a continuing life and representation in the Church. (p. 158)

The office of Peter, von Balthasar argues,

> … must take … (its) … bearings by the all-encompassing totality of the Church, which expresses itself concretely in the dynamic interplay of her major missions and in the laws inherent in her structure (pp. 314-315).

While he develops this idea, several alternative configurations are rejected as inadequate. Von Balthasar rejects a neo-scholastic division of the Church into a 'teaching' (*ecclesia discens*) and a 'listening' part (*ecclesia docens*), preferring a 'much more nuanced scale of ministries in the Church' (p. 236); even the New Testament ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11) are insufficient in his view to account for the scale of differentiation within

[5] I can only touch on the role of those principles which bear upon authority in the Church, but it is important to note the presence of 'sinners' within a communion called to holiness—omit them, and you create the Church of the righteous elect. The presence of Judas requires constant acknowledgment. The women at the tomb are an important symbol of the role of women in the Church, and the Josephite dimension of fatherhood and work has been an equally unexplored aspect of the *Catholica*.

the *Catholica*. Nor does he accept the typological division of the universal Church into 'Petrine' (Catholic), 'Pauline' (Protestant) and 'Johannine' (Orthodox) Churches (p.146). Paul and John are not to be thought of as principles 'tending in opposite directions' from Peter: *communio* is not incompatible with collegiality and primacy. But it is wrong to see the office of Peter as the defining feature of the Catholic Church, perhaps by contrast with a Protestantism understood as having a Pauline stamp, and an Orthodoxy that was somehow Johannine:

> … the communion of the *Catholica* cannot be characterized exclusively by the Petrine principle and thereby placed in opposition to other Christian communions and communities (pp. 145-146).

It is precisely the task of the Church to realise its Catholicity in ways which bring together Petrine, Pauline, Johannine and other dimensions within a concrete unity. Petrine authority is at the service of the other dimensions of the Church, and it flourishes when it promotes the functioning of the other missions and dimensions within the Church. When it marginalises itself from them—for example, by

acting as though they had no proper status within the life of the Church—or when it is marginalised by them—something not uncommon in some parts of the Western Church—the *Catholica* becomes as dysfunctional as a family in which the father has no role.

By displacing the Petrine office from the 'centre' or 'top' of the Church, von Balthasar aims to restore an ecclesiological balance which an over-juridical, ultramontane approach to papal authority has disturbed. He places the papacy within the 'larger unity' of the Church, within a network of other, equally valid principles and missions—'relativising' it, as he puts it, without marginalising it—and thereby restores to the heart of the Church the dimension of lay holiness and faith embodied in Mary. Participation in the 'all-embracing form' of Mary's faith, not obedient acceptance of Peter's authority, is the deepest dimension of the Church's identity. He argues that one nourishes the other—the Church is both Marian and Petrine—and that they are not to be opposed; but it is necessary to clarify the issue of which is *central* if we are to avoid an exaggerated estimate of papal authority:

> While this office [of Peter] is definitely not the centre, it must be rooted and maintained *in* the centre to become the criterion, the concrete point of reference for unity (and without it unity would fall apart), thus leading beyond itself to *the* centre, Christ, and liberating people for Christian freedom. (p. 287)

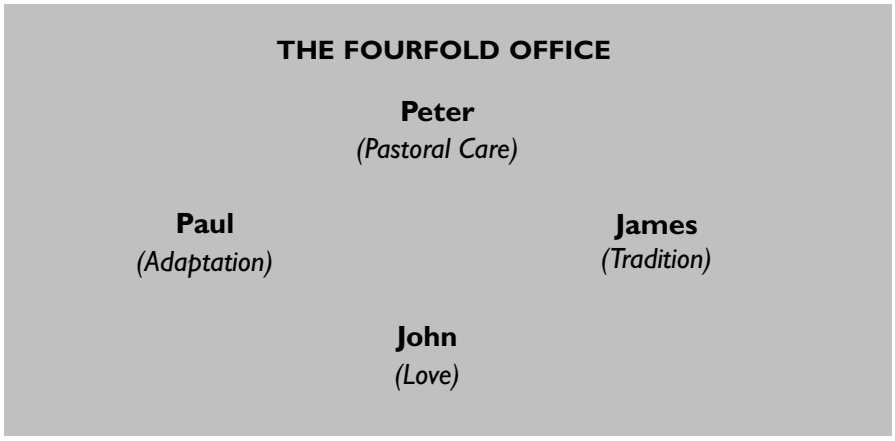
Differing Principles

> *If the Church is regarded as one, then the Pope, as its head, represents the whole; if it is regarded as a multiple reality, then the Pope is only a part. The Fathers sometimes looked at it in one way and sometimes another, and thus spoke in different ways about the Pope …. But in laying down one of these two truths, they did not exclude the other. Multiplicity which is not reduced to unity is confusion. Unity which does not depend on multiplicity is tyranny.*
>
> (*Blaise Pascal,* Pensées)

The structure of the Marian Church emerges during Jesus' ministry, when he appoints Peter and the Twelve to apostolic authority in his name, and is completed when the risen Christ calls Paul to apostolic service. Within the Church's complex network of principles, von Balthasar identifies a smaller network concerned with the exercise of

authority—what he calls 'the Apostolic Foursome' of Peter, John, James and Paul, the 'four who dominate the field of force of the developing Church' (p. 309). Each principle in the Foursome represents a mission within the Church, a mission which is at once clearly defined in itself and also necessarily involved with the others. Hence there has to be a 'breathing together' (*conspiratio*): Petrine authority must respect the demands of other principles, which function as 'checks' on its unrestrained power; conversely, the Petrine ministry sets a framework within which the other principles can operate most effectively.

Each principle, like each human being, has its own particular way of going wrong, the Johannine, Jamesian and Pauline no less than the Petrine. (Only the Marian gets it right.) Separated from the others, each principle in the fourfold office can become distorted. Johannine love can weaken into a mere 'universal humanitarian benevolence'; Pauline flexibility can become a fashionable assimilation to cultural mores; the tradition of James can give rise to an 'anxiously integralist, reactionary clinging to obsolete forms'; and the distortions to which the Petrine ministry is subject need 'no further mention here' (pp. 328-329). The four *equal but differentiated* foundational principles must interact with one another if there is to be genuine Catholicity.



Peter

Peter exercises the *pastoral office*. The scandal of Peter is that he is given 'singular participation in Jesus' authority', which obliges him to

'participate especially in Jesus' spirit of service and his readiness to suffer' (p.142). A sinful man, he is to hold the keys of the kingdom and feed the sheep and lambs of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In his weakness, he is chosen as the Rock and the Shepherd, who is to exemplify Christ's own position as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and as the true shepherd (John 10:11). His denial of Christ places him closest to Judas in betrayal, yet he is called to strengthen the faith of his brethren and be the unifying principle within the Church. The authority given to Peter is 'social and universal, affecting the entire flock' (p.62).

John

John, the Beloved Disciple, exercises the *office of love*, reciprocal love between Christ and his Church. This office is exercised by the saints of the Church, who always 'represent the link between the Marian and the Petrine Church' (p.225). Von Balthasar sees Johannine love as fulfilling a mediating role, first of all between Christ and Peter's pastoral office. When Peter is asked by Christ, 'Do you love me?', he is being asked to share in Johannine love as a condition of his exercising the pastoral ministry ('Feed my sheep'). Peter is reminded by Christ that Johannine love will remain in the Church until Christ returns in glory: 'In the unfathomable mystery of Jesus' good pleasure, John retains his own mission, distinct from that of Peter'. John 21 contains 'a subtly composed symbolic doctrine of the Church in which the task of "office" (Peter) and the task of "love" (John) become … intertwined' (p.142). John's second mediating role, between the (lay) Marian and the (institutional) Petrine Church, is signalled by his faithful discipleship at the foot of the Cross when, Peter having denied Christ, John becomes the son and guardian of *Maria-Ecclesia*. 'The truly Johannine Church is … the one that stands under the Cross in place of Peter and on his behalf receives the Marian Church.' (p.225)

James

James, the brother of the Lord, represents the dimension of *tradition and law* (Torah). He is the leader of the Jewish-Christian Jerusalem community (the Church of the circumcision), and takes Peter's place after he leaves Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). He represents continuity between the Old and New Covenants on the one hand, and on the other the dimension of Torah-observance that Jesus came to perfect. James mediated between Jews and Gentiles at the first Council of

Jerusalem, reconciling conservative Jewish Christians to the presence in the Church of those outside the Law. He puts forward nothing less than 'the perfect law … of liberty' (James 1:25). The Jewish writer Franz Rosenzweig suggested that God's 'Star of Redemption' had Judaism at its core, from which the rays of Christianity spread to the Gentile world; Rosenzweig argued that Christianity had to stay close to Jewish faith and observance or it would get lost in the gnosticisms of the pagan world. By regarding the principle of tradition and law as a constitutive element in the Church, von Balthasar echoes Rosenzweig in making the tie to Jewish tradition a bulwark against cultural assimilation and compromise.

Paul

Paul represents the dimension of *universalism and inculturation*. The apostle of the 'Church from the nations', he represents the Church's engagement with the cultures of the world in which it is to find a home, becoming 'all things to all people … for the sake of the gospel' (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). He also represents charismatic vocation—he is outside the structure of the Twelve, yet is given a vocation which the hierarchical Church must acknowledge as willed by Christ (p.144). He stands for the dimension that is the creation and development of local churches which are to find their place within the *Catholica*. He writes of his 'anxiety for all the churches' (2 Corinthians 11:28), and of his 'pain of childbirth until Christ is formed' in them (Galatians 4:19). Paul also symbolizes the dimension of freedom in the Spirit; the dialectic between James and Paul (Romans 4:2-3 versus James 2:20-23) mirrors the dialectic in the Church between freedom from the law and obedience to the law until the return of Christ. He represents, in short, the dimension of *apostolic energy* in the Church.

Authority and Reciprocity

> ***Pope.*** *God does not perform miracles in the ordinary conduct of his Church. It would be a strange miracle if infallibility resided in one man, but that it should be in the many seems so natural that God's work is hidden beneath nature, as in all his other works.*
>
> (*Blaise Pascal*, Pensées)

The Petrine office is thus set in an indispensable relation to other principles; the concrete centre of unity in the *Catholica* requires a

living relationship with the principles of love and holiness, of tradition and adaptation. It is important that the Petrine dimension, located in the *collegium* of the Twelve, is the only one to find visible, institutional expression (the papacy); there is no stable focus of holiness (how could there be?), while the principles of Jamesian tradition and Pauline adaptation have been in tension since the admission of Gentiles at Antioch, and continue to be so today.

Each element in the fourfold office should be directed, von Balthasar judges, towards what he calls 'the *eschatological centre of gravity* of the Gospel of Christ', a dense phrase whose meaning is

difficult to discern (p.329). I take it to mean that the fourfold office must aim at giving the most complete form of witness to God's unsurpassable self-gift in Christ, and must settle for nothing less than this. In which case, it is the Johannine principle, the ideal of holiness and unitive love for Christ, towards which the interaction of the other three principles must be directed. (John, after all, is the point of contact between Marian holiness and Petrine authority.) The goal of the fourfold office is the holiness of the Church. Consequently, the Petrine office should be enabling the Church to embody Johannine love and holiness, with an eye on what comes both from the Jamesian principle of tradition and from the Pauline principle of adaptation.

Sometimes the fourfold office discerns easily what teaching to give in order to foster love and holiness, but not always:

> … there are cases where it is extremely difficult to weigh the reasons for and against, particularly when one tries to keep in mind the 'eschatological centre of gravity', not only because some current situation did not exist in the period of biblical revelation, which means that conclusions have to be drawn from the spirit of a unique historical past and applied to a very different present, but also because Christ's Church contains a wide spectrum of human possibilities or obstructions, at the same time contributing to and detracting from a perfect human response to the perfect grace of God in Christ …. A decision that is justifiable for those whose love is alive might be impractical for the lukewarm … on the other hand, a decision made to suit these latter could seriously endanger the balance of the Church's eschatological response, the ideal of those who love. (p.329)

The situation generated by *Humanae vitae*, von Balthasar says, is precisely of such a kind. *Humanae vitae*, in which Pope Paul VI opted to point the Church's teaching regarding marriage and contraception towards the latter (Johannine) ideal, is the most controversial instance of recent papal teaching. Paul VI was offering a difficult teaching. Von Balthasar's presents the case of *Humanae vitae* in terms of the functioning of the fourfold office:

> … though empowered and obliged to take the final, personal responsibility alone, the Pope is directed to share in a dialogue with the other three partners of the 'foursome' (pp.330-331).

The problem, according to von Balthasar, has to do with the *form* of the teaching (an encyclical which bound the consciences of married Catholics) rather than its *content* (p.330). Von Balthasar challenges neither the decision made by the Pope to issue the encyclical, nor its (non-infallible) content. But he does wonder whether another, less decisive response might not have been as effective:

> It might have been sufficient to point to the ideal as a 'normative goal' to satisfy the objective, eschatological idea of the Christian concept of selfless and self-renouncing love, the personal ideal of the committed, while at the same time both stimulating and reassuring those who were either too unable or too perplexed to follow this course.[6] (p.330)

Peter's ministry has to be exercised collegially:

> … Peter too must be continually learning: he must not think that he can carry out his office in isolation (which could easily tempt him to overvalue it). He too must take his bearings by the all-encompassing totality of the Church, which expresses itself concretely in the dynamic interplay of her major missions and in the laws inherent in her structure …. Revelation is entrusted to the whole Church, and all, under the leadership of Peter, are to preserve it, interpret it and produce a living exposition of it. And since the office of Peter is borne by fallible human beings, it needs everyone's watchful but loving co-operation so that the exercise of this office may be characterized by the degree of 'in-fallibility' that belongs to it. More precisely, this means that a pope can exercise his office fruitfully for all only if he is *recognised and loved* in a truly ecclesial way, even in the context of instruction or dispute. (p.315)

That quotation is worthy of meditation, not simply for what it says about how the papacy should behave, but also because it directs attention towards the question of the appropriate response to Petrine authority. For authority to work well, the one in authority and the one under authority must be in accord; either of them can cause the process to break down.

[6] It might be argued, nevertheless, that what von Balthasar outlines here as an alternative is nevertheless what the encyclical actually achieved. For all its insistence on the Johannine ideal, *Humanae vitae* (for example in n.29) is coloured by a nuanced Pauline response to the presence of both 'strong' and 'weak' members of the community and a pastoral strategy for directing them toward unity (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-9:14)—a point which public comment often ignores.

Holiness, Maturity and Mutuality

At one point, von Balthasar engages with Lucien Laberthonnière (1860-1932), whose works were prohibited during the purges of theologians under Pius X. Though Laberthonnière was a sharp-tongued critic of Roman authorities, he asked three penetrating questions which von Balthasar sees as still pertinent:

> In what spirit and in what manner should leadership and instruction be given, to be truly human and Christian?
>
> And, in turn, how should a person who is progressing in faith prepare himself to receive guidance and instruction?

> How should people like us (who have not been given authority) act, so that, spiritually deepened by the acceptance of authority, we can contribute to the spiritual deepening of authority itself? (p. 262)

I cannot prescribe what the answers to Laberthonnière's questions should be, since they bear upon each Catholic's core of spiritual responsibility: Levinas' aphorism, 'responsibility cannot be preached, only borne', is exactly right here. But some comments can be made.

The third of Laberthonnière's questions looks for spiritual deepening in the *acceptance* of authority, something which can be expected to deepen correspondingly the *exercise* of authority. We are called to a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality: by my acceptance of authority, I am building up the conditions under which authority in the Church can be exercised fruitfully. I have obligations to help those in authority as they seek to promote the Church's holiness. I must acknowledge this responsibility if my membership of the Church is to make any sense, and if my identity as a Catholic Christian is to be spiritually and ethically mature.

For von Balthasar, Laberthonnière's last question 'is still with the Church', and it is 'the question of mutuality, of *communio*' (p. 265). It points, he says, towards how we should *help* one another. If we are to avoid provoking authority to respond in 'pre-conciliar ways', we need to bring this simple idea of 'help' to the fore in our reflections. Von Balthasar here is pointing towards the quality of *conversation* fostered in the Church, something for which everyone has responsibility. Where there is deafness, people shout.

In Laberthonnière's opinion, the mutuality which exists among members of the Church means that,

> *Obeying has the same dignity as commanding*; the existence of both is justified only if they lead to free brotherly union of minds and souls in love and truth in the bosom of the heavenly Father (p. 264; emphasis added).

This seems to me exactly right and evangelical in its insight. The question is not about where 'power' lies in the Church; the question is about how to eliminate the category of 'power' from Church members' attitudes. This will not happen by abrogating the claims of the Petrine

office, nor by transferring them democratically to synodical assemblies, however useful such bodies may nevertheless be.

That obedience has the same dignity as commanding is also the single point which disturbs any possible parallel we may want to draw between the Church and secular organisations: there are, after all, no 'greater' and 'lesser' individuals in the Church, since the only dignity which lasts into eternity is holiness. If obeying is not less than commanding, then the mature Christian acceptance of authority is not servility, but rather a responsibility freely undertaken for the good of all, as an expression of devotion to Christ. If commanding is regarded as no greater than obeying, it will be exercised humbly and responsibly.

Although von Balthasar would distance himself from the anti-Roman stance adopted by Laberthonnière in his long confrontation with harsh authority, there is an immense sympathy of tone between them. Laberthonnière's statements about the spiritual maturity which should be sought both by those who exercise authority and by those who respond to it are exact and profound: we help one another, not by creating an adolescent 'Church of Siblings' in which authority is banished or marginalised, but by fostering an attentive and humble maturity both in the exercise of authority and in our response to it.

Von Balthasar's constellation of ecclesial principles and of the features of the fourfold office describes the Church in a way which enables Laberthonnière's questions to be asked properly and answered appropriately. If von Balthasar is right that the centre of the Church is not Petrine but Marian, then the obedience of faith flowing from Marian experience generates a mature spiritual response to the authority of Peter and the *collegium*. A sense that the core of the Church is *lay holiness*, which precedes hierarchical structuring, is a corrective to any exaggerated estimate of papal authority, and should condition how the papacy conducts itself in the Church. If Petrine authority is to avoid destructive patterns of authoritarian isolation, it must acknowledge other, equally valid dimensions of the Church, and serve them and listen to them with respect.

At the same time, von Balthasar's insistence that Petrine authority is an indispensable dimension of the Church, whose role is not to be dissolved nor its claims softened, firmly sets papal authority within the essential structure of the Church and requires courteous acknowledgment from the members of the Church. His account of the fourfold office is, I think, a helpful configuration of the factors which

come into play in the proper exercise of Church authority. Von Balthasar indeed 'presses the community of the Church to examine the bias in its nature against its central institutional focus'; he also, I think, provides the Church with an account of its identity that enables authority to be set, judged, evaluated and valued in a way appropriate to the unique function of the Church in God's work of grace.

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AND IGNATIUS LOYOLA

Werner Löser

HENRI DE LUBAC ONCE SAID OF VON BALTHASAR that he was a 'fervent disciple' of St Ignatius.[1] His joining the Society of Jesus as a young man, his departure from it in 1950, and his attempt in his final years to rejoin it are all part of a life of constant loyalty to Ignatius. In 1974, when we were walking together, von Balthasar told me that he always used to let Ignatius lead him, and that he himself was like a blind man relying on his guide-dog. Von Balthasar let Ignatius' insights exert a significant influence on his thought—it is no coincidence that references to the Ignatian heritage appear throughout his work.[2]

What was distinctive in von Balthasar's reading of Ignatius? To answer this question, I will first try to bring out what von Balthasar and Ignatius had in common. Then I will offer a Balthasarian reading of the Ignatian Contemplation to Attain Love, as a way of illustrating and corroborating the relationship between them.

Von Balthasar and Ignatius' Theological Mission

The Ignatian Exercises have provoked a wide variety of interpretations, both in theory and in practice. We can separate out two basic approaches: the ascetical and the mystical. The ascetical tradition has recently been rearticulated by Gottfried Maron, the noted German Protestant historian, and then rejected—from a

[1] Henri de Lubac, 'A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar' (1967), now most easily available in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 271-288, here 273, where *fervent* is translated 'devoted'.

[2] For a helpful compendium of such texts see von Balthasar, *Texte zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, edited by Jacques Servais (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1993). See also Servais' study, *Théologie des Exercices spirituels: H. U. von Balthasar interprète saint Ignace* (Paris: Culture et vérité, 1996), and my earlier article, 'The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 103-122.

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Protestant perspective and not entirely unfairly—as unbiblical, counter to the Gospel.[3] Maron reminds us of the near-definition we find towards the beginning of the text: 'Spiritual Exercises to conquer oneself and regulate one's life without determining oneself through any affection that is disordered' (Exx 21). He then goes on to show how the ideas of self-conquest and ordering run through the whole book, arguing that both of these motifs arise from a Stoic ethics that has perverted the biblical gospel, transforming it into a subtle form of Pelagianism. Maron's description is without doubt fair to a way of interpreting the Exercises that was for a long time dominant. Moreover, such approaches are still current, for all that the ascetical language is no longer used.

But this ascetical approach has been largely replaced by what is termed a 'mystical' one—'mystical' here meaning a Christianised form of the Platonist and Neoplatonist idea of a quasi-erotic striving for God. The best known representative of such an approach was Louis Lallemant; Henri Bremond documented historically the tradition which Lallemant founded.[4] Two modern heirs of this tradition are Karl Rahner as a theologian and Franz Jalics as a retreat-giver.[5]

From quite early in his career, von Balthasar was consciously presenting an alternative to these two kinds of interpretation. We could call it the 'dramatic' approach.[6] His multi-volume major work—the trilogy of *The Glory of the Lord, Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*—presents above all a *dramatic* theology. The basic options implicit in this style of theology, options which are quite decisive for von Balthasar's thought, have their chief source in the Ignatian ideas that von Balthasar picked up, principally from his thirty-day retreat in 1927

[3] Gottfried Maron, *Ignatius von Loyola: Mystik—Theologie—Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2001).

[4] See Louis Lallemant, *Doctrine spirituelle*, edited by François Courel (Paris: Desclée, 1959); Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'á nos jours*, 12 volumes (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1921-1936).

[5] See Karl Rahner, 'The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola', in *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, translated by W. J. O'Hara (London: Burns and Oates, 1964), 84-170; Franz Jalics, 'The Contemplative Phase of the Ignatian Exercises', *The Way Supplement*, 103 (May 2002), 25-42, and Franz Jalics, *Contemplative Retreat: An Introduction to the Contemplative Way of Life and the Jesus Prayer*, translated by Lucia Wiedenhöver (Longwood, Fl: Xulon, 2003).

[6] The term had already been used by Raymund Schwager in his doctoral thesis on the tension-laden relationships surrounding Ignatius' understanding of the Church: Raymund Schwager, *Das dramatische Kirchenverständis bei Ignatius von Loyola* (Zurich: Benziger, 1970).

near Basel. The title of David C. Schindler's recent book captures well von Balthasar's cast of mind: *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*.[7] And a surprising confirmation of the idea that von Balthasar is a 'dramatic' theologian comes when we compare his work with that of Karl Barth. For all their differences, they inhabit neighbouring worlds of thought.

'To choose God's choice'—given the link with Barth we could almost say 'to elect God's Election'—sums up what lies at the heart of von Balthasar's dramatic interpretation of the Exercises:

> The central point of the Exercises is the Election; the central encounter with God is an encounter with an electing God.

'Indifference'—the active readiness to make God's choice for me my own—is 'the archetypal creaturely act'. Reality is fundamentally determined by the electing God and by the human person who elects God's election. The doctrine of analogy enables us to say, truly and literally, that that both God and creatures exist, albeit in infinite difference. But our existence as dependent creatures is a reality lived in freedom, and indeed in choice, both specifically within the Exercises and in everyday life subsequently. So von Balthasar extends the idea of the 'analogy of being' , and writes of an 'analogy of freedom' and an 'analogy of election':

For von Balthasar, truth is dramatic

> … the *analogia electionis* needs to become the form of the Christian life forming everything else.[8]

A dramatic theology understands the whole of reality as a great and serious drama that, thanks to God's action, culminates in the heavenly Jerusalem. And every human person is called to play his or her unique, inalienable part. The point of the Ignatian Exercises is to help people discover their role and make it their own. They do this by letting themselves be called, letting themselves be sent. Both Ignatius and Balthasar think dramatically; both start from the same intuition,

[7] (New York: Fordham UP, 2004).

[8] The source for this paragraph is a 1948 article, most of which is reproduced as 'People of the Church (V): Ignatius Loyola', in *The Von Balthasar Reader*, edited by Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, translated by Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1982 [1980]), 393-398.

even if the outward literary forms of their writing vary considerably. Von Balthasar's work is on a grand scale; it is written with linguistic virtuosity and moves on high planes of historical, literary, philosophical and theological erudition. The book of the Ignatian Exercises, by contrast, is rather skimpy, seemingly thrown together with no literary pretensions. All the same, it expresses, as von Balthasar emphasizes, a distinctive inner experience:

> The comparison with works that allegedly influenced the Exercises shows all too clearly how fundamental, original, unique Ignatius' mental vision is—a vision which he tries to capture in sentences with great effort and not very successfully.

Ignatius' mental vision is—according to von Balthasar—the expression of a strong 'theological mission' that should touch and stimulate the theologians who live after him. So it was that von Balthasar let himself be led, and it is for that reason that his *oeuvre* has the shape that it does. The point is in no way undermined—quite the contrary—by the fact that von Balthasar was also richly and significantly stimulated by his encounters with countless other figures—poets, philosophers, theologians. But these figures do not shape his basic approach; their function is rather to fill out and confirm the basic idea, and to articulate a wider context. So it is that von Balthasar's *magnum opus* came into being.

The Contemplation to Attain Love

The suggestion that the Exercises be interpreted as a drama—as opposed to a mystical text or an ascetical programme—arises obviously from the different stages building up to the Election: the meditation on the call of the King, the instructions about what is proper material for an Election, the various conditions laid down, the description of the three 'times' of Election. A dramatic interpretation can easily accommodate all of these.

But how can we fit into this kind of interpretation a text that seems clearly mystical: the Contemplation to Attain Love? If all we had from Ignatius was this text, perhaps we could interpret it simply as a set of philosophical doctrines, and not invoke the gospel at all. We could see it as an initiation along Neoplatonist lines into a particular style of meditation on the world, on nature, and finally on God. It is

therefore all the more important that we try to understand this text on the basis of the Exercises as a whole—which means interpreting the love on which this contemplation turns in the context of the dramatic theology of analogy, freedom and election that we find in the Election processes. We need to interpret the Contemplation to Attain Love as a text about human beings in history, playing their part in the divine drama.

In 1971, von Balthasar produced a little book called *Living within God's Engagement*.[9] This formula sums up the dramatic understanding of the Exercises, and therefore also of the Contemplation to Attain Love that rounds them off. To choose what God chooses leads intrinsically to a life within God's engagement—a reality which the Contemplation to Attain Love helps us to appropriate in prayer.

'Living within God's engagement' essentially involves two points, which Ignatius only hints at in his text but which von Balthasar fills out. The first is a particular image of God as Trinitarian: only if God is Trinitarian can we begin to think about a divine engagement. The second point is about where the divine engagement is directed: it is directed towards the world and towards every human being within it. Thus a dramatic theology of the Exercises, and of the Contemplation to Attain Love, has to be about action, about the Trinity, and about the world.

A God of engagement is a God of Trinity

In his last years, von Balthasar set out in one extensive text how the Contemplation to Attain Love could be interpreted in the light of a dramatic understanding of the Exercises. We find it the final chapter of his book, *Christlich meditieren* (*Meditating in a Christian Way*).[10] Here the author shows that the Ignatian Contemplation to Attain Love is directed towards Christian action, an action which points back to the Trinitarian God and out to the wider world. First, the Trinity:

> In the end, the person who meditates in a Christian way is constantly being led into this Mystery; they will be adoring this

[9] Predictably, John Halliburton's English translation was given a more conventional title: *Engagement with God* (London: SPCK, 1975).

[10] Translated as *Christian Meditation* by Mary Teresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989 [1984]). The chapter in question appears on pp. 88-97, and this quotation comes from the final paragraph. This late writing develops ideas that were already present in the much earlier 1948 article mentioned above. The extracts given here have been retranslated.

> Mystery without being able to see it, but in an awareness of living within it.

But it is also about action in the world:

> The final meditation of the Exercises opens out what have been meditations on the life of Jesus to the cosmic dimensions of the divine plan for the world, and places the person in ever new ways at God's disposal for the carrying out of this plan …. Going beyond personal and ecclesiastical boundaries is essential to being a Christian and to being a Church. Thus the drawing of the world into the meditation is in no way a distraction; it is intrinsic to recollection, to the focus on what is essential: the intention behind God's self-revelation.[11]

For von Balthasar, God's engagement must involve the Trinity, and must take place within the world. In the Contemplation to Attain Love, exercitants hand themselves over to God so that God can take them into this engagement. For von Balthasar, the Contemplation to Attain Love is about a theology of the Christian life as vocation and mission.

Theme and Variations

What follows is a Balthasarian commentary on the Ignatian text, the English version of which will reflect von Balthasar's own translation.[12]

First it is worth noting two things.

The first is that love must be placed more in deeds than in words.

The second: love consists in communication from both sides—this means that the lover gives and communicates to the beloved what they have, or out of what they have or can; and conversely the beloved to the lover, in such a way that when the one possesses knowledge or honour or riches, they give it to the one who does not have it. And so the one is always communicating to the other.

The preparatory prayer is the usual one.

[11] *Christian Meditation*, 84-85.

[12] Ignatius von Loyola, *Die Exerzitien*, translated by Hans Urs von Balthasar (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1983 [1954]), 59-60.

The first preparation is the composition. Here to see how I stand before God our Lord, before His angels, before the saints who are interceding for me.

The second: to pray for what I desire. Here to pray for inner knowledge of the benefits, such great ones, received, for this purpose: that in fully grateful acknowledgment I can in everything love His Divine Majesty and serve Him.

These preparatory pointers in the Contemplation to Attain Love name, so to speak, the one theme on which the four subsequent points are variations: the love that God and humanity are imparting to each other. The Contemplation to Attain Love is organically part of the *Spiritual Exercises* as a whole, and its content needs to be filled out on that basis. Central to the Exercises is the human person meditating on God's love, letting that love happen in their lives, and then responding by handing themselves over to God. The whole process is about appropriating the Word of God, the call of Christ, as something directed towards this particular person. When the person responds, they are therefore choosing what God has chosen for them. This dramatic event is what is central to the Contemplation to Attain Love. What God chooses, how God chooses—this choosing just is the way in which God's love is imparted to this particular person.

God loves individuals by choosing for them

Moreover, the process is more a matter of action than of word: God's action in coming towards His world. Faith consists in letting oneself be taken up into this action, so as to participate in, so as actually to become part of, God's love in activity. This is what it means for an Ignatian exercitant to enter the service of His Divine Majesty. From now on, such a person is living within God's engagement on the world's behalf.

Ignatius is not concerned, then, to get across a 'world-view' and to offer the one meditating some pure theory or contemplation. Rather he is showing us the links between Christian contemplation and action. Contemplation gives direction and shape to action.

The First Point

The first point is: to call into memory the benefits received of creation, redemption and special gifts, by considering with great commitment what a great thing God our Lord has done for me and how much He has

> *given me of what He possesses, and consequently how much the same Lord desires to give Himself to me, limited only by how much He can in accordance with His divine condescension. And then to think back on myself, and consider with much good reason and justice what I from my side by virtue of debt must offer and give to His Divine Majesty, namely everything I have, and myself with it, just like one who offers, with great generosity: Take to yourself, Lord, and receive all my freedom, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given it to me; to you, Lord, I return it. It's all yours. Dispose entirely according to your will; give me your love and grace, that's enough for me. (Exx 234)*

In the first variation on the theme, Ignatius is working on the assumption that the true dimensions of the Christian life are revealed to us only if we make a quite deliberate attempt to reflect. We are to recall that creation is more than the natural world; it is a realm which has been, and always will be, endowed with God's benefits. We are also to dwell particularly on the fact that God our Lord has given His very self to each individual human being, and thus reappropriate that truth.

This Ignatian use of memory is certainly something more than a natural consideration of the world; rather, we are looking at the world with the 'eyes of faith'. What the Bible and the Christian tradition say about the world flows into the consideration. Thus we see it as a *creation*, and therefore a work of God's hands; it is also a work of *redemption* through God's grace. 'Meditating in a Christian way' begins with a turning in faith to God and to God's deeds. For von Balthasar, our action must indeed be prepared by contemplating the mystery of 'God's fullness in His intra-divine self-giving, manifested in Jesus Christ, in his Eucharist and in his Church'.[13] But we move beyond straightforward prayer to a second phase, one in which we are taken with God into the world: 'Christian action is … a being taken up into God's action through grace', it says in *Love Alone is Credible*, even if it remains true that 'whoever does not come to know the face of God in contemplation will not recognise it in action'.[14]

The point applies not only to the world in general, but also to the individual within it: whoever I am, Ignatius says, it applies to me. I

[13] *Christian Meditation*, 86.
[14] Translated by D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004 [1963]), 116, 109.

'To think back on myself'

should also therefore 'think back' on myself. I should ponder God's deeds for me. God's benefits for me personally are also His invitation and calling to a task in and with His world.

This being sent into the world is something that is always unique. It is addressed to the individual human person, calling them by name. When we appropriate what we can be, ought to be, in God's plan, we become a person before God. First-person expressions are frequent throughout this Contemplation: *I* should consider how much God our Lord has done for *me*, and how much He wants to give *me* out of what He possesses, and consequently how much the same Lord desires to give Himself to *me*, and then think back on *myself* ….

The interchange here does not take the same form for everyone. It is always specific, individual, personal. The loving God always has 'me' in view when He is communicating Himself in creation and covenant. And, whoever I am, I can properly feel myself to be personally touched and gifted. I have my own personal answer to give; I must give myself to God. God is disposing my life in a way that is always new, always to my measure; and God does this by giving me a mission, or, better, my mission. To meditate in a Christian way is to hear this call and to accept the mission it contains to this God-given world. Hence it leads into the prayer of dedication.

Here we hand ourselves over to God in indifference, and then receive our identity back again, in renewed form, as people whom God has 'disposed' and is continuing to dispose in ever new ways. We are now living on mission, living within a task. The result is Christian action in the full sense, action in which God is found.

The Second Point

> *The second point: to consider how God is dwelling in creatures: bestowing in the elements existence, in plants growing life, in animals sensory feeling, in human beings conscious awareness. And so too in me: how He is giving me existence, animating me through and through, awakening senses for me, and giving conscious awareness—how He, so to speak, is making a temple of me, since I am created to an image and likeness of His Divine Majesty. And once more to think of myself, in the way said in the first point, or in another way if I feel this to be the better. And let it happen in the same way with each of the following points. (Exx 235)*

In this second variation on his theme, Ignatius expresses the embeddedness of the self in the cosmos, and the inclusion of the cosmos in the self. God's self-gift is not directed just towards the individual, but towards the whole of reality, of which nevertheless the individual is a part. Moreover, it touches not just the person's deepest interiority, but their whole self at every level. Conversely, the person's handing themselves over to God is not a purely interior, unworldly affair; it involves the whole range of the personality. Nothing is to be held back. The very cosmos needs to be brought into the movement of self-giving. The person of prayer returns everything to God, their Lord: their freedom, their memory, all that they have and possess.

Ignatius begins by looking at the different levels of being in the cosmos: the elements to which God is giving existence; the plants to which He is giving life: the animals which He is endowing with powers of sensory awareness; human beings whom He is enabling to be consciously aware. But then—and this is the central point—Ignatius has us meditate once again on our own selves—'to me as well'—under God's grace. Humanity is indeed the focus of all these gifts, integrated into an artistic, organic unity. But this much is not yet the whole truth. I am completely myself only in so far as God 'is making a temple of me', since I am made to be the image and likeness of His Divine Majesty.

'God is dwelling in creatures: bestowing in the elements existence, in the plants growing life'

As Ignatius here describes how my self is woven into the cosmos, he in no way forgets what he has already said in the first variation: human personality does not come 'from below'; it is not merely the product of the lower levels of the cosmos coming together in some new form of integration. Rather it comes 'from above', from God's free and creative action, creating human beings with particular names as images and likenesses of His divine communicativeness.

We are more than mere instances of a general kind, despite what some great theologians have said. Ultimately, we are the individuals we are because we have been created as individuals in God's image. And one can take the point a step further. The image that God has of each individual is already stamped with a mission, with a role that the individual has to play within the whole of reality, a role that he or she must strive to perceive and appropriate.

The Third Point

> *The third: to consider how God exerts Himself and takes pains for my sake in all created things in the world, that is, He behaves as one who undertakes strenuous work. So in the skies, elements, plants, fruits,*

herds, etc., by giving and conserving their existence, giving them growth and sensory life, etc. Then to think back upon myself. (Exx 236)

The third variation stresses a further characteristically Ignatian motif: the integration of prayer and activity, of contemplation and action. In the history of Western ideas, activity—especially when it takes the form of work—has often been viewed as something negative. The Latin word is *negotium*—'not leisure'; work is the antithesis of recollection, of play, of leisure. Against this background, our return to God is imagined as an entry into God's rest, into God's eternal Sabbath—a standard against which human activity can only appear deficient.

Ignatius, however, introduces a new emphasis. He is aware that the God of the Bible is something more than a mere sea of rest: this God is essentially a God who is working, who is making efforts. God's self-gift in creation and covenant, especially in the incarnation of the Son and in his death on the cross for us, entails a God who is engaged with a reality outside Himself. God's love takes the form of toil and effort on our behalf. Von Balthasar expressed the point thus:

> The dialogue between God and His world, between infinite and finite freedom, is a drama in countless acts with God Himself engaged. The final proof of this is the Cross. 'To consider how God exerts Himself and takes pains for my sake in all created things in the world, that is, He behaves as one who undertakes strenuous work.' Because of the sheer pressure of world history's slaughter, many no longer see God's engagement, or else suppose that He is raised up on a throne above everything as an indifferent observer. And then their meditation is often an attempt to find a safe place for themselves out of the slaughter, and to move into a place that is divine and secure. They forget how visible God's strenuous engagement is already in the Old Testament, where God shows himself as angry, as one who is thinking better of having created, as one who is wanting to punish, and yet also as one who is continually having mercy. 'My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal ….' (Hosea 11:8-9) Ultimately God takes the entire burden on Himself by letting His well beloved Son humble himself to death on the shameful gibbet, letting the Son himself become a curse, the embodiment of sin (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Anyone who wants to meditate themselves into an other-worldly God, happily unconcerned with all this, would be letting themselves be

> lulled into an illusion, leaving the deepest depth of reality to one side. The vocation of Christian meditation can only be 'to make one's whole self available for this effort' (Exx 96).[15]

It is in this sense that Ignatius speaks of a God working in all things. Ignatius is leading the exercitant to a sense of how God's love implies God's effort, God's working engagement. This note is struck already at the beginning of the meditation (Exx 230), with the talk of love being shown in deeds rather in than words. And humanity responds by placing itself at God's disposal in vocation and mission. Our mission involves an *effort* shared with the working God.

Engagement with work and toil is no longer, therefore, a regrettable interruption of restful contemplation. It has an intrinsic value; it is the service given by the human being united to God's effort. So it is we find an answer to the prayer which Ignatius has us make at

'God exerts Himself and takes pains for my sake'

[15] *Christian Meditation*, 91-92.

the outset of the meditation, the prayer for an awareness of God's benefits so that in all things I can not only love but also *serve* His Divine Majesty.

People have often noted, rightly, that Ignatian spirituality implies a 'mysticism of activity'. Work, the effort to serve humanity, is highly valued within it. Commitment to God and commitment to the world are very closely connected. Action and contemplation are indissolubly united. But we must also be aware that such a positive vision of work can lead us to idolize work and success. We avoid this danger, however, if we remember that 'God's engagement' for human beings reaches its climax not with some brilliant result of labour, but in the mute suffering of the crucified one. We must therefore reckon with the possibility that God will always be using those who give themselves to Him as *co-sufferers* with Jesus, and precisely in that way making them fruitful in ways invisible to worldly eyes. Ignatius was well aware of the point, and it is constantly coming through, for example, in his encouragement to the exercitant to be praying for identification with the poor, suffering, despised Jesus (Exx 167).

The Fourth Point

> *The fourth: to look at how everything good and all gifts come down from above—so as also my limited power from the highest and infinite above; and so too our justice, goodness, piety, mercy and so on, as the rays come down from the sun, from the source the water, and so on. Then finally to look back into myself in the way said. To finish with a colloquy and an Our Father. (Exx 237)*

Ignatius offers one final variation on his theme. Here *de arriba*, 'from above', is the central idea—which, for von Balthasar, corresponds to the other Ignatian word central to his thought: 'indifference'. The recognition that everything comes from above, from God, and the readiness (like that of Mary) to let oneself be taken into service, point to von Balthasar's consistent advocacy of an alternative to the Platonist idea of desire striving towards God—the model of growth that has always been so dominant in Christian theology. For von Balthasar a Christian can accept such ideas only if they are informed—in a way that he finds in Augustine—by the Ignatian doctrine of indifference and by the idea of 'from above'.

Ignatius writes of dependence as well as of union. He stresses that the human person owes everything they have to God, just as rays depend on the sun and water on its source. The human person is a creature, and remains so both in poverty and in dependence. It is only from that position they they can become both rich and free. In what they do, they have no need to work themselves up to the position that alone God can occupy. For Ignatius it is humility and calmness that characterize a person living within the task laid on them by God. And they perform their service not for their own honour and glory, but 'for the greater glory of God'.

'All things come down from above ... as the rays come down from the sun'

Von Balthasar expressed the point in his interpretation of the fourth point of the Contemplation to Attain Love as follows:

> When does this striving towards God … really attain the measure of God? When, as Augustine puts it, it consists in pure *longing for* God, an attitude that has at the deepest level understood that God alone in His freely and graciously descending love can still this yearning. The creature's longing can never be a will to power, a will to appropriate what God alone possesses—rather it is a will to give oneself over, to let oneself be appropriated by Him. And as such it is itself shaped by the form of the love that is God: a readiness to receive God's descending love, and a will to conform one's own

> love—both love for God and love for people—to this descending movement.[16]

A person 'corresponds' to God to the extent that they are fulfilling their mission, their task. Then they are developing a power that corresponds to the power in God and that is flowing out from God. What they are doing is being shaped by 'justice, goodness, piety, mercy and so on'—qualities corresponding to realities in God. In carrying out the task laid on them, the person is acting like God, as the image and likeness that 'His Divine Majesty' has created and called them to be.

In short, then: the Contemplation to Attain Love provides a sketch of the whole of Ignatian spirituality. Its central theme is that of humanity before God's love as it is revealed in Jesus. Humanity perceives the truth of this love and receives it in many ways—prayer, meditation, the Eucharist and so on. Then we respond to it in dedication, a dedication which includes our readiness for God to take charge of us. From then on, we are living 'within God's engagement'. We are doing the particular thing laid down by God for us and for no one else. We are carrying out the mission entrusted to us by God. The Contemplation to Attain Love presents this as a theme with four variations. That such a text, which can easily sound simply mystical or philosophical, can sustain von Balthasar's dramatic interpretation confirms the claim with which we started: von Balthasar was indeed 'a fervent disciple of St Ignatius'.[17]

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[16] *Christian Meditation*, 93.

[17] The original version of this essay, which was written as a paper for a von Balthasar centenary conference in Mainz, will shortly appear in Germany. The translation is slightly abridged, and the references have been adapted for English-speaking readers.

THE DIVIDED SELF, THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST, AND THE JOURNEY OF COMMITMENT

Ignatius, Von Balthasar, and the Human Condition

Erhard Kunz

WHAT DOES IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY IMPLY about the fundamental nature of the human person? How do we find this vision in von Balthasar's theology? Such are the questions that I want to explore here, obviously only in part. But if something of the totality comes through, then this essay will at least bear out the title of one of von Balthasar's books: 'the whole in the fragment'.[1]

Ignatius and Conversion

Is there one central point from which we can see who, for Ignatius and perhaps also for von Balthasar, the human person is? I think the answer to that question is yes. We can begin with Ignatius' initial generative experience: with his conversion. After all, the beginning of a spiritual process often reveals what will be decisive in its further development, even if this is still latent.

As everyone knows, Ignatius' spiritual journey begins at his sickbed in Loyola. Ignatius is badly wounded and has only just escaped death. He is given over to the 'vanities of the world'. But through reading two books he is suddenly confronted with the life of Jesus and the examples of the saints. This confrontation sets off in him a deep movement, first within himself, and later more publicly. The desire grows in him to

[1] *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963)—translated into English by William Glen-Doepel as *Man in History* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 131-145

place his life at the service of Jesus, as the saints did, and to follow Jesus as a disciple. Over time, this 'holy desire' comes to fulfil him, to console him, more than the worldly wishes that nevertheless also remain alive in him. In other words, the holy desire corresponds more to what he is actually yearning for in his depths, to what he is really wanting. Ignatius looks at Jesus, and at the process of discrimination between his different inner movements and desires which looking at Jesus has made possible. On that basis, he seeks out, through a long process, his own distinctive way of discipleship of Jesus, his way of service with Jesus for others.

In this seminal experience we can already see important aspects of Ignatian spirituality and of Ignatius' understanding of the human person. The story starts with *the dividedness of the human condition*. Ignatius is a strong-willed person, but he nevertheless experiences life's fragility and threatenedness. His leg is broken, metaphorically as well as literally. He has big plans and goals, but they are too much for him and beyond his reach, a fact which he represses. Very significantly, it says in the *Autobiography* that in his wishing and imagining,

> … he was so carried away by all this that he had no consideration of how impossible it was to be able to attain it. (n.6)

Then there is also *the encounter with Jesus Christ*. Christ comes to him and confronts him inwardly, through other human beings and through the Church—in the communion of saints, as it were. This coming of Jesus is illustrated for Ignatius during his conversion period in sensory form, in a nocturnal vision that he significantly calls a 'visitation':

> … being awake one night, he saw clearly an image of Our Lady with the holy child Jesus, at the sight of which, for an appreciable time, he received a very extraordinary consolation.[2]

The encounter with Jesus then prompts Ignatius to undertake a *personal journey*. The encounter sets a man who was previously immobile in motion; it encourages him and helps him along a

[2] *Autobiography*, n.10. Here already it is clear how important it is for Ignatius that the spiritual can inform the senses. The whole human person, with all its sensory faculties, is drawn into encounter with the God who has become human for our salvation.

The Loyola family crest

particular way (both inwardly and outwardly). From this point onwards, 'way' is a central word in Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius describes himself as a pilgrim, in a manner that is certainly indicative of his spiritual self-understanding. 'Holy desire', spiritual discrimination or discernment, and election, the decision for a particular form of discipleship of Jesus, are essential elements in his process. Before and during the journey, Ignatius needs to be open and ready for Jesus Christ the Creator and Lord—to exhibit what the Ignatian tradition calls 'indifference'.

Before I elaborate a little on these three aspects, I would like to draw attention to a further text, from the *Spiritual Exercises*, where they can also be found—a text which influenced von Balthasar's thought greatly. I am referring to the colloquy with the crucified Christ at the end of the first meditation of the First Week (Exx 53). Through the earlier points of the meditation, the exercitant has become aware of being inwardly divided, loaded down by sin, in a way that leaves them completely at a loss. In this state, they are meant to enter the presence of Christ on the cross. They are to look at him, eye to eye, and hold a conversation or 'colloquy':

> Imagining Christ our Lord present and placed on the Cross, to make a Colloquy; how from Creator he has come to make himself a

> human being, and from life eternal has come to temporal death, and thus to die for my sins.

By looking in this way at how Jesus Christ has come from God, and by thinking about his self-giving unto death 'for me a sinner', the exercitant is able, as the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* explicitly states, to look within themselves. An authentic, true understanding of the human person emerges from the encounter with the Creator, who, as a human being, has entered right into the abysses of human existence, into death and sin, so as to be present for me precisely *there*. True self-understanding arises from encounter with the 'Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).[3] However lost I may be, God is searching for me, loving me; God in person is making efforts for me, so that I can enter into a trustful relationship with Him, a conversation and colloquy with Him that is at once friendly and reverent (Exx 54). The relationship of the human person with God—before the crucified one, this point becomes quite clear—is a relationship of reverent acknowledgment and dedicated service. God is affirming the human person, even the lost human person; God is dealing with humanity as one who serves.

It follows that the human answer can only be to affirm God in return, to acknowledge who God is, and to do this in and through a readiness for service. The Principle and Foundation tells us that humanity 'is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord' (Exx 23). The foundation for this claim is established in the encounter with Jesus Christ crucified, in whom my Creator and Lord is lovingly present for me.

Consequently, it is when they are face to face with the crucified one that the person making the Exercises should think about how they are to answer God's engagement on their behalf. They ponder their actions, past, present and future. The question 'what ought I to do for Christ?', posed here in colloquy with the Son of God who has died 'for me', will remain a live one during the further movements of the Spiritual Exercises in the Second Week, until a concrete decision comes with the Election.

[3] In a footnote to an essay first published in 1969, von Balthasar explicitly links this Pauline text with Exx 53: 'Christologie und kirchlicher Gehorsam', in *Pneuma und Institution: Skizzen zur Theologie IV* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1974), 133-161, at 160-161, n. 17.

The threefold structure here (divided self, encounter with Jesus, specific option) is also characteristic of von Balthasar's way of thinking, and of his understanding of the human person. When von Balthasar speaks of the human person, he often, perhaps even predominantly, begins by pointing to the paradoxes of humanity: its brokenness, its ambiguity, its tensions and contradictions, its being torn apart. No human agency can resolve this tragic situation; its redemption cannot in any sense be seen as a natural potential of the human condition. The resolution does not come 'from below', from any kind of intellectual or moral effort on humanity's part. Rather, it comes as a gift, in the mystery of Christ that has its centre in the event of the cross.

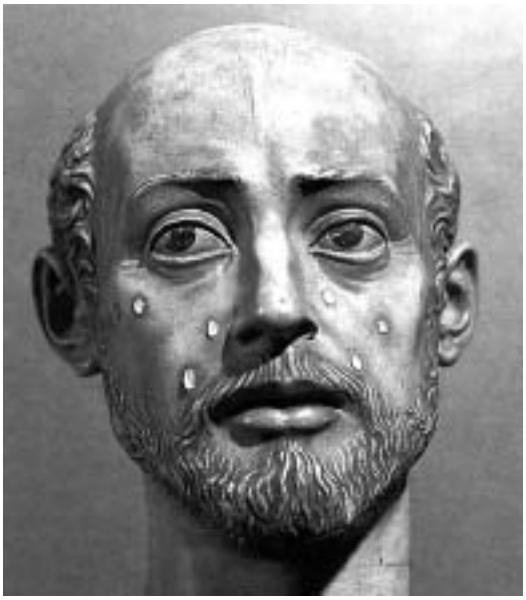
Von Balthasar begins with human brokenness

In his or her relationship with the mystery of Christ, the human person is confronted 'eye to eye' with the mystery of God's own self. Because humanity, riven as it is with tragedy, is nevertheless beheld mercifully and lovingly by God's own self as one with the crucified Christ, as incorporated into the crucified Christ, it can find reconciliation within its contradictions. Humanity is 'released from the impossible task (short of denying some part of its own reality) of projecting itself, from its position of brokenness, as nevertheless whole'.[4] Humanity is released from this task because it has been from the beginning affirmed and chosen by God, because what ultimately specifies who a human person is, the fact of their being chosen, is something *given* to them by God.

However, this prior affirmation and election by God does not preclude human activity; rather it calls that activity into being, and enables it to be free. We have to choose God's choice, God's act of choosing. 'But what God chooses for us is in every case a mission in the discipleship of Christ within his Church.'[5] The convergence with the Ignatian threefold structure is clear: the divided self, the reconciling encounter with the crucified Christ, the opening up of a way or process through a mission in the discipleship of Christ.

[4] *Theo-Drama*: *Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume II: Dramatis Personae: Humanity in God*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990 [1976]), 335-346, especially the last few pages. With 'eye to eye', von Balthasar is probably alluding to Exx 53.

[5] 'Drei Formen der Gelassenheit', in *Homo creatus est: Skizzen zur Theologie V* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1986), 31-51, at 33.



In what follows, I want to discuss further these three aspects as they occur in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and thus to bring out rather more clearly the Ignatian vision of the human person.

The Divided Self

What would the human condition be, had God not come to save and redeem it? In the meditation on the Incarnation, Ignatius has the exercitant cast a wide glance over the 'surface of the earth'. He notes firstly 'such variety, in dress as in actions'—in other words the diversity and range of behaviour, of customs, of cultures, of biological and social reality:

> … some white and others black; some in peace and others at war; some weeping and others laughing; some well, others ill; some being born and others dying, etc. (Exx 106)

The whole range of human life, rich as it is in its tensions, comes into view, in a way reminiscent of von Balthasar's wide-ranging discussions. All that is human deserves notice and meditation.

But we should not stay on the surface, however glittering it may be. If we look more deeply, we see that cynicism dominates us, and that people are swearing and blaspheming (Exx 107), a manifestation of despair. Rivalry and enmity are rampant. People are injuring and killing each other; they are on the way to total ruin; they are going to Hell (Exx 108). Why? Because they are not following the pattern given to human beings, the pattern engraved within them by God as Creator. It is in this discrepancy between the design or plan of God and how human beings actually behave that the real division of the human self is situated, the deepest rivenness of humanity.

The design towards which humanity is inwardly orientated is presented by Ignatius in the Principle and Foundation:

> The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save their soul. (Exx 23)

The praise, reverence and service of God amount, in the Ignatian understanding, firstly to a grateful acceptance of God's love, the love in which God gives Himself to humanity and commits Himself to their cause, and secondly to a response to that love that lets it be active both in oneself and in the world (Exx 230-237). In this consists human salvation. Everything else has to be directed towards this goal.

Hence the need for 'indifference', for freedom with regard to all created things, so that God's will, God's loving will, can be the determining factor in everything. But in place of this directedness towards God and this inner freedom, people experience themselves as constricted and enslaved at many levels—by powers and forces surrounding them, by human history, and by their own sinful attitudes. Ignatius here considers the cosmic, historical, social dimension of sin. Humanity has sinned and acted 'against the infinite goodness' (Exx 52), and has opted for worldly things (honour, reputation, wealth) rather than for God's service. The consequence is that humanity has lost its freedom; it is as though it is chained, imprisoned, exiled (Exx 47). Human beings are plunging themselves and others into ruin (Exx 58).

But is this ruin absolute? When we look at the human condition, can we find no chink of light? Is everything rotten to the core, as perhaps a Lutheran or a Calvinist might believe? Ignatius has the exercitant meditate on sin, both their own and that of the world, and hopes that the person will become deeply ashamed and confused on its account. But he also has the person recognise, in astonishment, that they are still alive. Despite all the sin, all the confusion and dividedeness, they have not sunk into a state of hopeless perdition; they are still alive. This is a matter of enormous wonder:

> … an exclamation wonderingly with increased feeling, going through all creatures, how they have left me in life and preserved me in it; the Angels, how they are the sword of the Divine Justice, how yet they have endured me, and guarded me, and prayed for me; the Saints, how they have been engaged in interceding and praying for me; and the heavens, sun, moon, stars and elements, fruits, birds, fishes and animals—and the earth, how it has not opened to swallow me up, creating new Hells for me to suffer in them forever! (Exx 60)

In the workings of creatures who are letting me live and providing for my continued survival, it is God's own self whose mercy 'has given me life up to now' (Exx 61).

This passage gives clues that are particularly revealing of how Ignatius understands the human condition. As long as people are alive, they are not completely lost, and therefore should not be regarded and despised as lost. For life is God's gift. In this preservation of life, God's creative love is active in humanity. This is the basis for an 'increased desire', for a new yearning for God, for hope. As long as people *are alive*, they have not been abandoned by God's love; on the contrary, they are being sustained by God's love.

But one can go beyond Ignatius. Does it not follow that human beings are also alive in the Hell that they have prepared for themselves by their own sinfulness? And that the creative, labouring, forgiving love of God and the hope it entails are still present among those who have closed themselves within Hell? Von Balthasar was to speculate along these lines, while Ignatius stopped short. But if God the Creator is 'infinite goodness', surely von Balthasar's question is legitimate.

God's Approach as One Who Labours

Humanity may be constricted by its sins, and live in contradictions. But it is not abandoned by God. God has decided definitively and irrevocably for the salvation of lost humanity. God has also decided to make this will manifest and effective in the incarnation of the Son, and in the Son's labours leading to his death on the cross. This theological reality is the basis for the whole process of the Spiritual Exercises.

Here I should like merely to indicate one point in the *Spiritual Exercises* that is theologically significant. According to the theological tradition long dominant in the West, God makes a choice of only some human beings for salvation out of the lost mass of humanity that deserves damnation. Perhaps indeed, most people are not chosen, and therefore do not attain eternal salvation; perhaps they are ultimately condemned to eternal damnation. Such an understanding, radicalised at the time of the Reformation, especially by Calvin, casts a dark and gloomy shadow on to God, the one who is described in the Bible as love, as graciousness and as goodness. What sort of love is it supposed to be that does not choose human beings from the beginning for

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salvation, and that has indeed positively excluded them from salvation? This kind of ambivalent understanding of God has an intrinsic tendency to cause a deep anxiety and insecurity in us, which we then try to resolve with a strident certainty about salvation.

In this context it is striking that nowhere in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, so far as I know, do we find any trace of this kind of covert restriction of the divine will for salvation. On the contrary, the reaction of the Triune God to the lostness of humanity in the Incarnation meditation is 'to save the human race' (Exx 102). God's will is not to call only a limited number of human beings out of the *massa damnata*; God's will for redemption is directed towards the whole human race, towards all human beings, without restriction. The Triune God looks 'on *all* the surface and circuit of the earth, and *all* the people in such blindness, and how they are dying and going down to Hell' (Exx 106). Full of mercy, God resolves: 'Let Us work the redemption of the human *race*' (Exx 107).

God's desire is to save the human race, composed as it is of such a diversity of living beings, in such conflict (Exx 106). Similarly, the call of Christ in the Kingdom meditation is directed towards 'all the entire world … and each one in particular' (Exx 95). Jesus Christ, 'Lord of the whole world', sends his disciples 'through all the world', and enjoins them to desire to help everyone (Exx 145-146). For it is his will 'to conquer all the world and all enemies'—enemies, that is, of salvation (Exx 95).

In Jesus Christ, God's decision to save the whole world is operative, and this decision provides the context within which the exercitant is to make his or her own decision. And because God has

decided unrestrictedly for the salvation of all people, then human beings, for their part, can open themselves to God in unrestricted confidence, as to a friend. There is no need for covert anxiety about a hidden God, whose desire for the salvation of the lost is perhaps not without restriction, who might perhaps want to demonstrate towards some people or many people His righteous anger. The Exercises, as I see the matter, never refer to God's anger. Sinners are not invited to cower in terror before the wrath of God, but rather to feel shame on account of their inner evil and the ugliness of their sin, and because of the malice with which they have acted against God's wisdom, God's all-powerfulness, God's justice and above all God's own 'infinite goodness' (Exx 52, 59).

This is not to deny that the talk of divine anger which is rooted in the Bible has a good sense; but it must be understood in such a way that the mercy and 'infinite goodness' of

God, ready in advance for forgiveness, is in no way thereby restricted. In the index to Peter Knauer's very extensive selection of Ignatius' letters in German, there is only one reference to the anger of God. Juan de Vega, Viceroy of Sicily, had in a letter to Ignatius interpreted his wife's death as a sign that the anger of God had been turned towards him on account of his sins. Ignatius does not simply reject the idea of God's anger, but he places it within the wider context of God's goodness and mercy:

> May our wisest Father be blessed, who is so kind when He punishes and shows such mercy when He is angry.[6]

God's Outworking in Humanity and Humanity's Openness to God

How does the salvific will of God, as made manifest in Jesus Christ, become effective in the divided, lost human self? How does God's fundamental will to save engage with human lostness? In other words, how does the justification of sinful humanity happen?

What Ignatius suggests is that God's salvific action is operating in two ways simultaneously: in history through Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Church, and in human beings at large through the

[6] Ignatius to Juan de Vega, 31 May 1550: MHSJ EI 3, 63-64; ET in *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, selected and translated by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1959), 217-218.

Spirit (Exx 365). God is leading humanity along a path; and humanity is letting itself be led. God's gracious action in the human person and humanity's free autonomous action are not, for Ignatius, two separate realities; rather, God works precisely in the action of humanity as the One who is enabling it. God acts through human beings allowing themselves their own activity, their own progress and movement. God's grace, God's justifying grace, is a power and adynamic that unleashes human action. The activity of God's love, which precedes and enables all things, operates through the activity of created beings.

God's activity does not occur in some special place, without mediation, such that we can just put our finger on it. God, rather, is acting through creatures: 'giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc.' (Exx 236). God is lovingly close to humanity, imparting Himself by drawing human beings to Himself, empowering them to a love that is divine. It is when human beings are directed towards God in faith, hope and love that God's loving, gracious, salvific activity exists. God acts in and through human action.

God comes to human beings, God gives Himself to human beings by means of—which is not to say 'because of'—a human openness to God, a human striving towards God. When human beings are longing for God, God is already close to them, present to them, present within them. This yearning is already 'the echo of God's descending love wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit'. This longing of the human heart 'already bears the hallmark of the divine self-emptying'.[7]

One should not therefore despise this yearning. Perhaps, in the end, all that is left to us is the longing cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?', and the simple prayer, 'Give me your love and grace—that is enough for me' (Exx 234). At any rate, that is how the Exercises end. In a person who can call and pray in this way, God is lovingly present; in that person the Spirit of God's own self is calling and praying (Romans 8:26).

If God is at work in human movements and actions, then the question arises as to whether this principle really applies to all human activity without exception. For obviously not every human activity, by

[7] 'Homo creatus est' (1986), in *Homo creatus est*, 11-30, here 28, 30.

a long way, is a manifestation of God's saving action. Ignatius is well aware of the ambivalence of human activity. There are movements in human beings, individually and collectively, that come from the 'bad spirit', that are dominated by the power of sin. Moreover, evil appears only too often under the appearance of good. Thus, given that Ignatius is convinced that God is operative in the world through human activity, he has to be concerned to make a discrimination between the different movements in the human person. What are the movements that correspond to the divine will for salvation? And, conversely, what are the movements that may derive their existence and power from God's creative action, but yet fall short of the good possibilities grounded in that action, and amount to a misuse of the power given by God—so much so that they actually work against God's salfivic action?

All we can do here is to point to one important criterion for discernment. God's activity occurs within a human activity only when the latter, however active it is, is shaped by an inner receptivity. The active person must let their activity come to them as a gift, let it be 'put in their soul' (Exx 180). They must be ready to choose and decide on their own account in favour of what is more for God's glory and human salvation. Such readiness for God's will is not to be forced, but to be prayed for. If a human decision is sustained by such readiness and emerges out of it, then we are not simply dealing with a self-willed, autonomous human decision; rather God's will is being acted out in the human decision. Freely, as his or her own decision, the human person chooses what God chooses.

And it is only because what one chooses is God's choice that one can reasonably intend to take an ultimate decision, given human fickleness. The Spiritual Exercises seek to lead a person to a serious

vocational decision, involving a commitment of their remaining lifetime without reservation. It is far from self-evident that such a life-decision is possible, given the failure of so many commitments and the consequent increase in people's anxiety about making them. The Exercises nevertheless presuppose that such decisions, binding for the future, are possible. But the condition for them consists, for Ignatius, in the fact that God's own self, and therefore the God whose loyalty is constant, is moving the human will. It all depends—to repeat—on God's own self placing in my soul what I should do (Exx 180). The detailed indications in Ignatius' text about how to make an election are intended to help individuals be moved by God's love in their decision processes:

> … that love which moves me and makes me choose this kind of thing should descend from above, from the love of God …. (Exx 184)

Only in so far I let myself be moved by God's irrevocable love can I give my love a specific, binding form. It is only God who can be the ground and the guarantee of such a life-decision; I cannot do this for myself.

Moreover, a rightly made election is still always a decision on the way, a decision-in-process. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the expression of this principle is the teaching that an election requires subsequent confirmation by God:

> … once such election, or deliberation, has been made, the person who has made it ought to go with much diligence to prayer before God our Lord and offer Him such election, that His Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is to His greater service and praise. (Exx 183)

Why is this 'confirmation' necessary if the election has been properly made? What does the confirmation consist in? When does it come to an end? Ignatius' text does not elaborate on these questions. But obviously Ignatius believes that even after I have taken good decisions, still I must always, or—better—can always, be handing them over to the ever greater God, over whom my good decision gives me no power. As the story of my life develops, with the God who is beyond control constantly there empowering it, my own decision will be

deepened, made more specific, perhaps even modified. Every human decision carries with it 'an unavoidable unfinishedness', to use Michael Schneider's appropriate phrase:

> Life with one's own election is a process of maturation and learning, a process of constantly seeking to preserve and carry through the truth and decisiveness of the beginning. The yearning of the heart that led one to make the decision in the first place will also be enabling the person to undertake future corrections and deepenings of the decision, and to be moving forward on their way decisively.[8]

A person who stands by their decisions thus remains still a pilgrim, and never ceases to seek out what corresponds better to the 'praise and service' of God. Decisiveness about one's way of following Jesus does not remove the openness and indefiniteness intrinsic to the human condition, for all that it does free us from the associated dangers either of uncommitted flitting from one thing to another, or else, in reaction, rigidity and narrow-mindedness. A relationship to the mystery of Christ confirms the 'indefiniteness' of humanity:

> … human beings see themselves through this relationship placed eye to eye before the mystery of God, and thus it becomes quite clear that they, as 'image and likeness' of the essentially unknown and unobjectifiable one *must* bear in themselves something of this theologically mysterious character.

Allegiance to Jesus Christ, the standing 'eye to eye' with the crucified one, frees the human person from the 'helplessness that arises from not being able to take a decision' and directs him or her 'to God's being ever-greater which can never be positively grasped'.[9]

This brings us back to what is central in both von Balthasar and Ignatius: the encounter with the crucified one. By looking at him, the Son of God, 'who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20), the human person, trapped in its divisions, confusions and guilt, can

[8] Michael Schneider, *'Unterscheidung der Geister': Die ignatianischen Exerzitien in der Deutung von E. Przywara, K. Rahner und G. Fessard* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1983), 213.
[9] *Theo-Drama: Volume II*, 343-346.

recognise who he or she actually is: a recipient of the self-imparting love of God, a love that is both calling for and enabling its answer.[10]

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[10] Translated by Philip Endean SJ from Fr Kunz's collected essays, published on the internet in 2001 as *Gott finden in allen Dingen* (www.st-georgen.uni-frankfurt.de/leseraum/kunz.pdf). The essay was originally published in *Gott für die Welt: Henri de Lubac, Gustav Siewerth und Hans Urs von Balthasar in ihren Grundanliegen*, edited by Peter Reifenberg and Anton van Hoof (Mainz: Grünewald, 2001), 293-303. Our thanks to Fr Kunz for giving his gracious permission.

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TRADITION AND THE ICON

Andrew Louth

ICONS ARE, QUITE OBVIOUSLY, a traditional form of religious art. They are painted according to traditional methods, which are jealously preserved; even the slightest deviation from these traditions—using oil-based paints instead of egg tempera, for example—is fiercely resisted. One suspects that people like them because they are 'traditional'—in the debased sense of being familiar, safe, unchallenging. Though they clearly originate in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, icons can be found almost anywhere nowadays. Many Western churches have icons, sometimes as a focus for devotion in a chapel set apart for prayer, often together with the reserved sacrament.

This state of affairs in the West is, however, quite recent. It is not that long ago that icons were thought of by most Westerners, if they knew anything about them at all, as 'traditional' in another sense: part of an old-fashioned, static culture that the 'birth of Western painting', the glories of the Renaissance, and all that followed had superseded. Their more recent popularity is perhaps of a piece with that of objects of art from many other 'traditional' cultures—Asian, African and American. The attraction these exert today could be interpreted in a variety of ways: a yearning for the exotic; the affluent West's nostalgia for lost certainties and simplicities; the denizens of a jaded, technological culture being fascinated by the naïve.

When, therefore, we say that icons are 'traditional', 'tradition' is a shifting, not to say a shifty, term. Indeed the question arises: is such talk helpful at all? In what follows, I want firstly to look at how Orthodox Christianity understood the relationship between icons and tradition. Then I want to explore what the 'tradition' into which icon painters are initiated amounts to—a more complex question than many suspect. In doing so, I shall raise some more general questions about tradition and art, questions that exercised Hans Urs von Balthasar throughout his life.

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 147-159

The Orthodox Tradition of Icons

Let us start by going back to the Seventh Œcumenical Council held in Nicaea in 787. This gathering, against the objections of the iconoclasts, declared icons and their veneration a part of the tradition of the Church. One of the iconoclasts' objections was that the cult of icons entailed objects of veneration, means of access to the holy, being subjected to the mere imagination of the painter. Icons, they complained, were not even consecrated. Later Orthodox practice has removed the latter objection by providing ceremonies of consecration of icons, which are, especially in the Russian tradition, of some solemnity and complexity. But the Fathers of the Council had no problem with the fact that icons were not consecrated:

> Many of the sacred things which we have at our disposal do not need a prayer of sanctification, since their name says that they are all-sacred and full of grace ….[1]

They gave as examples the cross (both the sign and images of the cross) and sacred liturgical vessels. Icons, making the sign of the cross, images of the cross, sacred vessels—all these are holy because of what they are. Ultimately, St John Damascene argued they are holy because they are made of matter that is holy, having come from the hands of the creator, and because they refer to the people and events through which salvation has been worked:

> I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked.[2]

This did not, however, mean that the imagination of the artist was to be regarded as the creative source of sacred objects—that iconoclast accusation, at least, the Fathers were keen to reject:

> … the making of icons is not an invention of the painters but an accepted institution and tradition of the Catholic Church.

The making of icons and the practice of placing them in churches go back to the teaching of the Fathers. It was they,

> … who, having built venerable churches, set up icons in them and offered inside them prayers to God and bloodless sacrifices which are accepted by Him, the Master of all. The idea, therefore, and the tradition are theirs [that is, the Fathers'], not the painters'. Only the art is the painters', whereas the disposition is certainly that of the Holy Fathers who built the churches.[3]

What makes an icon an icon is not the imagination and skill of the artist, but the fact that he or she is following the tradition of the

[1] Nicaea II, Session 6, quoted from Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos. The Sources of Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1986), 99.

[2] St John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, translated by Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), I. 16.

[3] Nicaea II, Session 6 (*Icon and Logos*, 84).

A mosaic from the sanctuary of S. Vitale in Ravenna. Here the hospitality of Abraham is related to the theme of the sacrifice of Isaac, both considered to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ.

Catholic Church, a tradition that goes back through the Fathers to the Apostles.

This tradition, like virtually all liturgical traditions, was an unwritten one, and remained so for centuries: icon painters learnt from other icon painters, and the 'tradition' was passed on like a skill. Its character as tradition in the full theological sense was safeguarded by the 'reception' of the praying people of God. The iconographic tradition, or traditions, was certainly not immune from development; art historians have traced stylistic development and related these stylistic changes to changes in social perception and liturgical use. Not enough has yet been done to relate these changes to theology, though a remarkable exception to this claim is to be found in the book by the Catholic scholar and hermit Fr Gabriel Bunge, *Der andere Paraklet*,[4] which discusses the deelopment of the depiction of Abraham's hospitality to his three angelic visitors, relating it to the developing exegesis of Genesis 18. Sometimes the scene is a theophany of the Word-to-become-incarnate, with the two accompanying angels providing an allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity; at other times it illustrates the three-in-oneness of the Godhead. Finally, in the

[4] Gabriel Bunge, *Der andere Paraklet* (Würzburg: Der Christliche Osten, 1994). My English translation is forthcoming (2007) from St Vladimir's Seminary Press. The pictures in the first part of this article illustrate Fr Gabriel's work.

atmosphere of Trinitarian devotion associated with St Sergii of Radonezh, there emerges the extraordinary and now famous icon of the Trinity, painted by St Andrei Rublev for the monastery of the Trinity founded by St Sergii. Fr Gabriel's research reveals how the rich liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church enabled an interaction between the devotional life of monastic icon painters such as St Andrei Rublev and the learned exegetical tradition that was probably in large part unknown to them.

In this account, the notion of 'tradition' is already beginning to diversify, if not unravel. There is Tradition in the full theological sense: the handing down of the message of the gospel in the Church, preserved and nurtured by the praying community that the Church is in the Spirit. This sense connects easily with traditions of scriptural exegesis and liturgical prayer. But then there is what looks more like a 'skills-tradition', handed down from artist to artist: conventions about how the figures and scenes are to be depicted; the whole elaborate procedure involved in preparing the panel with linen and gesso; the way and the order in which the layers of paint are applied, and so on. There are some very obvious links between the 'skills-tradition' and Tradition: the finished product of the artist's skill has a liturgical and devotional role to fulfil; conversely, ascetic demands such as prayer andfasting come to be made on the icon painter himself. Much, however, remains obscure, because the 'skills-tradition' of icon painting remained unwritten; it was passed on by word and example.

It is only well into the early modern period that written sources become available to us; the most famous Greek example of instructions for an icon painter, the *Hermeneia* (or 'painters' manual') of Dionysios of Fourna, belongs probably to the early 1730s. By then, the 'skills-tradition' of icon painting was already endangered; Dionysios wrote his *Hermeneia* to prevent it vanishing altogether. By the eighteenth century, icon painting in virtually all parts of the Orthodox world (apart from a few exceptions such as among the Old Believers in Russia) had been overwhelmed by the Western 'realism'. Naturalistic details were introduced, and even elements of the perspective that had been rediscovered at the Renaissance. People were beginning to depict the traditional scenes as historical events in the natural world, rather than as liturgical events drawing the beholder into the heavenly realm.

Novgorod icon, roughly contemporary with St Andrei Rublev. Here the biblical scene has been simplified to concentrate on Abraham and Sarah's worship of the Trinity, symbolized by the three angels.

In nineteenth-century Russian painting, realism and the icon traditions converge in a kind of meditative art: icon techniques lend an air of mystery to landscapes, while naturalist techniques are employed in the icon.[5]

Restoring the Tradition

From what has been said so far, it will be clear that the 'tradition' of icon painting, as we find it today throughout the Orthodox world and beyond, is *not* an unbroken tradition. The contemporary fondness for

[5] The development was richly illustrated in the exhibition *Russian Landscape in the Age of Tolstoy*, held at the National Gallery in London in summer 2004.

icons emerges, rather, from an attempt to *restore* a tradition that had been very nearly, if not entirely, lost.

'Restoring' a tradition is an odd business; it certainly involves some very untraditional activities. The story of how the tradition of icon painting was restored has yet to be told, and when it is told, it will reveal some surprises.

There were in the twentieth century apparently quite independent attempts within the different traditions of Orthodoxy to recover, restore, revive, the 'tradition' of icon painting. The famous names are Fotis Kontoglou (1895-1965) in Greece and Leonid Ouspensky (1902-1987) in the Russian diaspora in Paris—two people who never met, and did not even know of each other until 1949.[6] But as early as 1889, a synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decreed that henceforth only icons in the 'Byzantine style' were to be used in churches and in homes, and that non-traditional icons were gradually to be withdrawn from use. There seem to have been various motives behind this restoration. Churches newly free from the Ottoman oppression wanted to rediscover their authentic identity. For their part, the Russian *émigrés* in Western Europe looked back on the Westernisation initiated by Peter the Great as a distortion of Russian Orthodox tradition and culture that had led to retribution in the shape of the Communist revolution; the distortion needed to be corrected. The resulting style of 'traditional' icon painting is not at all uniform; one could not mistake one of Kontoglou's icons for one of Ouspensky's. Nevertheless the icons emerging from this movement bear a family resemblance; they are what most modern Orthodox feel to be 'traditional'.

The Meaning of Icons

A monument to Ouspensky's contribution is a book, first published in German in 1952, and then later in English with the title *The Meaning of Icons*. It is still one of the best introductions to the theological and religious significance of icons. The bulk of the book consists of short essays on the different types of Russian icon, relating the saint or the feast to the liturgical celebration of the Orthodox Church. There are also three introductory essays: one by Vladimir Lossky, the great

[6] See Kari Kotkavaara, *Progeny of the Icon: Émigré Russian Revivalism and the Vicissitudes of the Eastern Orthodox Sacred Image* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi UP, 1999), 338-339.

Orthodox theologian of the emigration in Paris, and two by Ouspensky himself.

Ouspensky's essays are directly about icons, their meaning and the technique of their making; Lossky's essay is called 'Tradition and traditions', and only mentions icons briefly towards the end. The placing of Lossky's article at the head of the work is very significant; it affirms the centrality of Tradition to any understanding of Orthodox icons, but in a very specific sense. Lossky is sharply conscious of the slipperiness of the term 'tradition':

> Tradition … is one of those terms which, through being too rich in meanings, runs the risk of finally having none.[7]

In his essay, Lossky seeks to get back beyond the idea of traditions and the traditional, and also back beyond the idea of tradition as a

Rublev further simplifies the scene, in particular omitting the historical figures of Abraham and Sarah, so that the worshippers of the Trinity are now those who behold the icon.

second source of Revelation, alongside Scripture, as the Council of Trent had understood the matter. For Lossky, Tradition is the whole life in God that the Incarnate Word has acquired for humanity through his death on the Cross, and passed on to his disciples. When we say that Tradition is 'unwritten', we are not saying that, though it might have been written, it remained the preserve of an esoteric elite. Rather we are saying that Tradition is inexhaustible. We experience it before we begin to understand it. It is not opposed to the written and spoken word; rather it is the silence in which that written and spoken word is uttered and understood. Lossky quotes St Ignatios of Antioch: 'The one who possesses in truth the word of Jesus can hear even its silence'.[8] Tradition is a 'margin of silence' that surrounds the revealed word of Scripture—a 'margin' manifest, sometimes, in the difficulty Scripture poses to the understanding, the resistance to interpretation that compels the reader to read and reread, to meditate and pray. The icon is 'traditional' in belonging to the unwritten Tradition, which can be grasped only by being experienced, and then in no definitive and final manner.

Tradition, as Lossky sets it forth, is, like the Church itself, something that can never fail. The 'tradition' of icons may falter, but it can be recovered if the Church immerses itself again in Tradition, which is ever new. That 'tradition' is being taken in this deeper sense is perhaps hinted at in another feature of *The Meaning of Icons*, not generally noticed. Though most of the illustrations are of icons from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, there are three illustrations of modern icons, and scarcely anything in between: the rediscovered tradition is fitted seamlessly into the old 'lost' tradition.

Tradition and the Individual Talent

There are parallels in the Western culture of that period. Take, for instance, English poetry. It has sometimes been remarked that in his works of literary criticism and his championing of the literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods—the poetry of John Donne and George Herbert, the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes—T. S. Eliot was nurturing a critical atmosphere in which his own poetry could find

[7] Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, translated by G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1969), 13.
[8] Ignatios of Antioch, *To the Ephesians*, 15:2, quoted by Lossky in *The Meaning of Icons*, 17.

Our Lady of Tikhvin, nineteenth century

appreciation. He, too, spoke in terms of 'tradition', and resurrected parts of the tradition of English literature that had long slumbered. What he wanted to erase from the memory was very much akin to the Westernisation that Ouspensky and Lossky wanted to erase from the tradition of the icon: an idiom emphasizing self-expression, of a kind that found its high-point in Romanticism. Instead, Eliot, Ouspensky and Lossky wanted to rehabilitate a more impersonal tradition, working through allusion to an established canon of significant images. What Eliot was doing finds parallels throughout the Western European (and North American) cultural phenomenon known as 'modernism', which, despite its name, was, in many respects, an attempt to make contact with a tradition that was felt to be receding—receding, indeed, in a way that threatened the possibility of meaning altogether.

Those seeking to recover the tradition of iconography saw what they were doing in very similar terms. The ideas prevalent in the West—which had been responsible for the overlaying and obliteration of the icon tradition—seemed to be making the world descend into an abyss of meaninglessness. Many Orthodox thinkers thought that the Orthodox tradition had itself very nearly succumbed to this drift towards meaninglessness, but that there was still time to prevent it. This is, at one level, the force of Fr Georgii Florovsky's only major work, *The Ways of Russian Theology*. A more recent representative of this analysis is the Greek Orthodox thinker Christos Yannaras, whose

seminal works are at last finding English translators.[9] The rediscovery of the icon tradition can be seen as part of this wider movement.

This can also be seen in what it was that was emphasized about the icon tradition as it was rediscovered. First of all, the stress on the face or countenance in the icon. Faces are never shown in profile (save for figures like Judas); the faces characteristically look out of the icon. The face is emphasized in various ways. There are techniques that separate the area of the face (*lichnoe*, from the Slavonic *lik*, face) from the rest of the icon (*dolichnoe*, the part that leads up to the face). The *riza* of precious metal, that protects the icon when venerated, leaves the face and hands free, and thus emphasizes them.[10] The Greek word for face, *prosopon*, is also the word for person. The irreducibility of the person, rooted in the mystery of the three persons of the Godhead, has become a central concept in most twentieth-century Orthodox theology, as has the distinction between the person, defined by relationship, and the individual—the impersonal 'unit' to which human beings are reduced by modern society, an aspect of the encroaching meaninglessness of modern Western society—have. It may be that all this has its roots less in the Greek Fathers than in the Russian *émigrés*' cult of the Slavonic and the Christian existentialism which they encountered in Paris. Nevertheless, the icon has profound theological and ethical significance, with the focus that it directs towards the face, and with the face-to-face encounter that takes place when people behold an icon. Fr Sergii Bulgakov may have been regarded by Florovsky as having succumbed to the West, but he too saw the icon as recalling values threatened by modern society and modern art; in particular, he too saw the erasing of the face in modern art as something profoundly inhuman, and pointed to the icon as resisting such a tendency.[11]

[9] See, most recently, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, edited by Andrew Louth and translated by Haralambos Ventis (London: T. and T. Clark, 2005); and *Postmodern Metaphysics*, translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, Ma: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2005). His *Orthodoxy and the West*, as yet unavailable in English, could be regarded as a Greek counterpart to Florovsky's *Ways*.

[10] On this, see Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, translated by Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 135-136. Florensky also invokes the famous funerary portraits, then (1922) only recently discovered in the Egyptian Fayum, with their extraordinary focus on the face, as precursors of the Byzantine icon (see 160-165).

[11] The complex of ideas here recalls the central intuition of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy in his concept of the countenance or 'visage'—an influence on Olivier Clément's meditations in *Le Visage intérieure* (Paris: Stock, 1978).

The rediscovery of the tradition of the icon involved, paradoxically, a serious attempt to avoid the associations of the more vulgar sense of 'tradition' that I mentioned earlier: tradition as the familiar, the safe and the unchallenging. It was precisely to this that the icon had been reduced by the incorporation of Western realism: Christ had become gentle and a bit ethereal, the Mother of God an attractive young woman.

The canons of traditional iconography do not lull us into such attitudes. The elongation of features and the use of reverse perspective evoke a strangeness, a sense that what is depicted is in some way lent from beyond; one is not at all tempted to admire the lifelikeness of the figures, the skill of the painter in that sense. This can be explained in bewilderingly different ways. It is important to recall that we have no authentic explanations of what the ancient iconographers thought they were up to.[12]

Fr Pavel Florensky wrote an essay that has now become famous on 'reverse perspective'. Its main concern is to demonstrate how 'true perspective' is a highly limited attempt to achieve certain absolutely abstract aims, rarely pursued with consistency even in post-Renaissance art. The effect is to reduce the world to a collection of objects to be possessed, the 'bitter Kantian fruits' of 'sweet Renaissance roots'.[13] In other words, it is 'true perspective' that limits what is depicted to something that we feel we can control; the 'reverse perspective' of the icon remains permanently unsettling, beyond our control, and capable of referring us beyond what is depicted, capable of disclosing an 'Other' to which we can relate, but whom we cannot accommodate.

In authentic Orthodox interpretation, here is nothing arcane or esoteric about the icon, nothing confined to privileged circles; the icon is not, to use Lossky's words, 'a kind of hieroglyph or a sacred rebus'. There is no mystery about its interpretation beyond the mystery into which all Christian believers are initiated in baptism; the best

[12] The isolated early (ninth-century) account of the appeal of a particular icon (the mosaic of the Mother of God in the apse of Hagia Sophia) by Patriarch Photios speaks of its 'lifelike imitation' (*akribôs … tên mimêsin*), which neither agrees with any modern perception of that icon, nor, indeed, with much of the rest of what Photios goes on to say about the 'magnitude of the mystery' disclosed by the mosaic. See Cyril Mango's translation of the sermon in *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 1958), 286-296.

[13] Pavel Florensky, 'Reverse Perspective', in his *Beyond Vision. Essays on the Perception of Art*, edited by Nicoletta Misler, translated by Wendy Salmond (London: Reaktion, 2002), 201-272, here 216.

interpretation of the icon is found in liturgical texts. There is no technique called 'praying with icons'; praying with icons is no different from praying with the saints whose presence they disclose. The tradition of the icon just is the Tradition of the Church. The icon enables us to enter into that Tradition and to hear the Gospel. It helps us in our efforts to respond alongside all those others, the 'saints', who have themselves heard and followed before us. It leads us to know in our hearts the 'light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

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SEX, DEATH AND MELODRAMA

A Feminist Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Tina Beattie

IT IS DIFFICULT TO OVERESTIMATE the significance of Hans Urs von Balthasar for the development of the Church's theology of sex since Vatican II, particularly under the papacy of John Paul II. While feminist theologians have by and large ignored von Balthasar, a growing number of conservative Catholic thinkers have been turning to him as the Church's answer to feminism. Among these, a movement has emerged that calls itself 'new Catholic feminism'. It takes its cue from John Paul II's call for women to promote,

> … a 'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination', in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation.[1]

A representative selection of 'new feminist' writings can be found in a book edited by Michele Schumacher, titled *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*.[2] Schumacher presents the book as a constructive dialogue between Catholicism and feminism, but in fact most of the contributors, with the possible exception of Schumacher herself, are highly antagonistic towards feminism. The essays in *Women in Christ* make clear the extent to which this so-called feminism is deeply indebted to the theology of von Balthasar and to John Paul II, to whom the book refers extensively but without a murmur of criticism. Thus a new generation of women writers have added their voices to an already significant number of male

[1] *Evangelium vitae*, n. 99.

[2] *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, edited by Michele M. Schumacher (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2004).

The Way, 44/4 (October 2005), 160-176

theologians—many of them associated with the journal *Communio*—who tend to lack any critical perspective in their reading of von Balthasar.

I want to explain why I think that this wholesale appropriation of von Balthasar's theology is potentially disastrous for the Church's understanding of human sexuality. This means exposing the contradictions and tensions which run through von Balthasar's writings on gender and sexuality. Sometimes, these tensions find expression in a violent rhetoric of sex, death and sacrifice—a rhetoric which should lead any discerning reader to question just how appropriate it is to offer this theological vision as the Catholic Church's answer to feminism.[3]

Von Balthasar and the Second Sex

Like Luce Irigaray,[4] von Balthasar argues that there is an insurmountable difference between the sexes. He claims that,

> 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.[5]

However, while all Irigaray's writing is mindful of the need to find a language in which to express the pervasive influence of sexual difference,[6] von Balthasar repeatedly forgets himself, and most of what he writes takes a non-gendered view of humanity. One of two implications must follow. It could be that for von Balthasar it is possible to say a great deal about human beings without reference to gender, so that the influence of sexual difference is not as extensive

[3] For a much fuller and more nuanced presentation of the ideas in this essay, see my forthcoming *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge).

[4] Luce Irigaray is often presented as a leading figure in French feminist thought, but she is in fact Belgian and does not call herself a feminist.

[5] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990 [1976]), 365.

[6] See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985 [1974]); *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993).

as he claims. More probably, von Balthasar's 'man' (*Mensch*) is in fact only the male (*Mann*). Man is the normative human being, and woman is his other in such a way that she is not authentically other at all. Since Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949,[7] feminists have been arguing in these terms: in the prevailing discourses of our culture, 'woman' is not a subject in her own right but merely a projection of man, enabling him to know who he is by showing him who he is not. Thus she becomes identified with all those ostensibly feminine attributes that do not fall within his definition of masculinity, but in such a way that she has no access to an identity or subjectivity of her own. She functions only as negation and lack in relation to him. For de Beauvoir, the solution is for women to seek equality with men—equality here understood in terms of a non-gendered model that minimises the biological significance of sexual difference.

De Beauvoir's feminist critique can certainly be applied to Catholic thinkers such as von Balthasar, but with some interesting complications. Von Balthasar inherits from the Catholic tradition a highly symbolic and dynamic understanding of sexual symbols—symbols which have generally been used more as metaphors expressing the relationships between human persons and God than as biological and scientific definitions of the body. So, while men were traditionally represented as 'masculine' and godlike in relation to women, in relation to God they were 'feminine' and creaturely. Von Balthasar draws on the mainstream usage: in his writing, God the Father is often imaged in terms of the initiative and activity attributed to the male sex, while God's creation, including male humans, appears as the 'active receptivity' of the female sex. But von Balthasar is making his own innovation in Catholic tradition when, partly in reaction to feminism, he insists on a fundamental psychological as well as physiological difference between the sexes, and—crucially—when he stresses its theological significance. He and the Catholic theologians who follow him are therefore using the language of male and female in two quite different ways: as a metaphor for the relationship between creator and creation, and as a reinforcement of a particular vision of

A fundamental difference between the sexes

[7] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parshley (London: Penguin, 1986 [1949]).

gender roles. The first of these usages has attracted considerable criticism from feminist theologians because of its problematic identification of masculinity with reason, transcendence and God, and of femininity with emotion, the body and creatureliness. However, von Balthasar's attempt to retain this metaphorical terminology while also interpreting it as a literal description of human sexuality results in considerable inconsistency. One cannot coherently insist on a radical and non-negotiable difference between the sexes, while at the same time arguing that men as well as women are feminine in relation to God.

Von Balthasar's account of how men and women function as human beings is rigid and essentialist as far as women are concerned: a woman, by virtue of her bodily givenness, can only be maternal and feminine. But when he is speaking of human beings at large in relationship to God, he draws on female images to express not only who women are before God, but also who men are. In this context, though the male body becomes an important symbol for Christ and for

ecclesiastical office, it is the female body that offers man the signifiers he needs in order to position himself before God. What are the consequences here for women? That is the question that needs to be explored.

For all its prolific and sometimes poetic excess, von Balthasar's theology is based on a particular account of gender which structures his whole understanding of relationships within God, between God and creation, and between men and women. The following quotation illustrates this vividly:

> The Word of God appears in the world as a man [*Mann*], as the 'Last Adam'. This cannot be a matter of indifference. But it is astonishing on two counts. For if the Logos proceeds eternally from the eternal Father, is he not at least quasi-feminine vis-à-vis the latter? And if he is the 'Second Adam', surely he is incomplete until God has formed the woman from his side? We can give a provisional answer to these two questions as follows: 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' (Ephesians 1:23).[8]

Here, we begin to encounter some of the problems with von Balthasar's theology. First, it depends on what Irigaray would term a 'phallocentric model': it equates God's creative power with male sexual activity, so that in von Balthasar's Christology (and indeed ecclesiology) it becomes important that only a male body can represent God, in a way which comes close to an idolatry of the masculine. Although this association of God's originating power with male sexuality has been a pervasive influence in Christian theology, the link depends on Greek philosophy, and not at all on the Bible. Neither in the creation story of Genesis nor in Luke's annunciation narrative is there any suggestion that God's creative initiative should be likened to an act of male insemination.

[8] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992 [1978]), 283-284.

In the second place, von Balthasar himself often refers to the originating activity of God also in *maternal* language and imagery:

> Man is brought forth into the world from God's creative womb; not, of course, in one single act of sending forth, like a human birth, for God must continually accompany the finite being and hold it in existence, but nevertheless in an act that establishes man in his existence in the world and frees him for this.[9]

Such writing suggests that God's creative and sustaining power can be expressed just as effectively in maternal metaphors, so why does von Balthasar repeatedly contradict himself by insisting on the essential maleness of Christ with regard to his divinity? A likely answer to this question is that to relinquish the association between maleness and Christ's divinity would open the way to women priests:

> … in so far as Christ is a man, he … represents the origin, the Father, for the fruitfulness of the woman is always dependent on an original fructification. Neither of these points is to be relativised, nor is the resultant representation of the origin by the Church's office.[10]

But if we read this in the context of the earlier reference to 'God's creative womb', we might ask which Father fructifies God's womb—a question that is obviously unanswerable and absurd. The attempt to

[9] Von Balthasar, 'Movement Toward God' (1967), in *Explorations in Theology: Volume III: Creator Spirit*, translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 15-55, here 31.
[10] Von Balthasar, 'Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture', *Communio*, 22/1 (Spring 1995), 164-170, here 168.

freeze these gendered analogies in the service of a particular ideology of sex and priesthood can be shown to result in theological nonsense.

But it is also interesting to note that von Balthasar seems to define femininity as something which proceeds from or emanates from the masculine. Thus, Christ must be 'quasi-feminine' because he proceeds from the Father, and the feminine, 'designed to complement the man', comes forth 'from within him'. But a being who is produced as another's potential from within himself and in order to complete him is a projection, not an authentically different person. This becomes clear elsewhere, where von Balthasar borrows a quotation from Erich Przywara (an extensive influence on his work), referring to the Pauline epistles:

> It is true, on the one hand, that the man is the 'head' of the woman, the 'body'; but it is also true, on the other hand, that the woman, the 'body', is the man's 'fullness' and 'glory'.[11]

An individual who exists as another's fullness, as his glory, is not a genuine other. As Irigaray would argue, a woman who exists as man's fullness is nothing but the mirror wherein man sees only the other of himself.

The Female Body

Let us now turn to the role of the female body in von Balthasar's account of the drama of salvation, bearing in mind that 'she' is both the man's fantasy and his feminine *persona*. She comes into being to complete his masculine identity, and he becomes her in relation to the masculinity of God in Christ (who is also 'quasi-feminine' in relation to God the Father). But who, then, is she?

Von Balthasar argues that the meaning of the creation of the sexes in Genesis can only be fully understood from the perspective of Calvary. When the Church is taken from the side of Christ on the cross, the full significance of the creation of Eve in Genesis is revealed. To explain how this is so, von Balthasar turns to the relationship between Mary and the Church, and to the identification of Mary's

[11] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: II*, 373, quoting Erich Przywara, *Mensch, typologische Anthropologie,* (Nuremberg: Glock und Lutz, 1958), volume 1, 140-141.

mission with that of the Church. On Calvary, Mary 'renounces her "I"'[12] in order to allow the Church to come into being. This means that,

> … the Mother must increasingly renounce everything vitally personal to her for the sake of the Church, in the end to be left like a plundered tree with nothing but her naked faith ('Behold, there is your son!'). Progressively, every shade of personal intimacy is taken from her, to be increasingly applied to the good of the Church and of Christians.[13]

Von Balthasar's understanding of Mary is highly complex, but this suggestion that her personal identity is sacrificed on Calvary is very important, for it holds the key to unlocking the hidden dynamics that I want to suggest drive von Balthasar's theology of woman. It is my contention that his staging of the Christian drama results in the female body's elimination, not its redemption, since 'woman' is redeemed only in the 'body' of the Church, where only male bodies are necessary for the enacting of the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church.

In von Balthasar's reading of Genesis, the first human, alone in creation, is male. The woman comes into being as secondary and contingent, for he can exist without her—even if his existence is lonely, incomplete and 'not good'. In Mary, the woman fulfils the purpose of her bodily existence when she gives birth to Christ. On Calvary, her bodily mission complete, the mother of Christ surrenders her identity to that of the Church, so that the female body no longer has any theological function or significance. Rather, in Christ the male body has become complete through the bringing into being of his feminine other, the Church. But this is not an individual, bodily other. It is a womanly community, wherein the man assumes the role of woman in order to enter into a 'suprasexual' relationship with the male Christ. The complication to this elegant sexual metamorphosis, however, is the persistent presence of the female body. Woman does not disappear when Christ dies on Calvary, but remains as an incarnate, sexual

Mary's whole purpose is to give birth to Christ

[12] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: III*, 352.

[13] Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1982 [1961]), 341.

presence, unravelling man's virginal dreams of wholeness by constantly luring him towards sex, the body and death. Let me attempt to justify these claims about what von Balthasar's position amounts to.

Von Balthasar is regularly acclaimed as a theologian who restores the body to theology. John O'Donnell claims that 'one of Balthasar's favourite words is "bodiliness"'.[14] Yet I want to suggest that von Balthasar's theology is profoundly hostile to the body. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his treatment of sexuality. For von Balthasar, our experience of sex is so contaminated by its association with death that we have no way of knowing what unfallen sex might have been

[14] John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 57.

like.[15] On Calvary, the 'suprasexual' relationship between Christ and his Bride, Mary/the Church, is revealed as it was intended by God in the beginning, since 'the vicious circle of sexuality and death is broken'.[16]

Von Balthasar's 'suprasexuality' is expressed not by marriage but by celibacy. It is hard to find in his work any real connection between the exalted vocation of the suprasexual celibate, and the day to day realities of human sexuality.[17] In fact, there is a persistent resistance to sexuality and the body running through his theology in a way that allows little if any scope for the bodily goodness of sexual love. Only eschatological 'suprasex' rises above his repeated association of sex with sin and death. He repeatedly suggests that the most lethal enemy that Christ must conquer is the flesh, supremely identified with the female sex, and that this is an unrelenting and deadly struggle. In order to demonstrate this, I want to consider briefly his description of Christ in hell on Holy Saturday, and of the Church as *casta meretrix*, or Chaste Whore.

Von Balthasar's account of Holy Saturday is regarded as one of the most original aspects of his theology. My concern here is not with his theology *per se*, but with his language and imagery. In hell, Christ experiences 'the second death' which,

> … is one with sheer sin as such, no longer sin as attaching to a particular human being, sin incarnate in living existences, but abstracted from that individuation, contemplated in its bare reality

[15] As Aidan Nichols quaintly observes, 'Balthasar takes more seriously than many modern students the assertions of the Fathers that in their state of original righteousness the proto-parents would not have known sexual arousal and the woman defloration as we know them now': *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2000), 86. (Do men really still think of women as being deflowered by sex?)

[16] Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume III*, 325.

[17] This is perhaps not unrelated to the fact that much of von Balthasar's theology was written while he was living in the home of Adrienne von Speyr and her husband, Werner Kaegi. For a highly deferential account of this relationship, see Johann S. M. Roten, 'The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), and Von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, translated by Antje Lawry and Sergia Englund Lawry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981 [1968]). I do not have the space here to explore the significance of von Balthasar's relationship with von Speyr, but her presence needs to be borne in mind in any discussion of his sexual theology. One might question the eagerness of recent theologians, including Pope John Paul II, to embrace von Balthasar's sexual theology when it is informed by this rather bizarre relationship, which surely has more than a whiff of symbolic adultery about it.

> as such (for sin *is* a reality!). In this amorphous condition, sin forms what one can call the second 'chaos' ….[18]

This is not now the active suffering of Calvary, but a state of total passivity in which Christ is rendered utterly powerless and dependent upon God the Father. Von Balthasar searches for words that will express this 'being in the abyss'[19] of Christ in hell, and he finds these in the language of the Book of Revelation:

> And when the great harlot of Babylon, as quintessence of the sin of the world, 'has fallen', and 'has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit', when she has been abandoned on all sides to be 'burned with fire' in 'pestilence and mourning and famine' (Revelation 18:2,8), when men see, at first only from 'far off' the 'smoke of her burning' (18:9,17), when she is 'thrown down' and is 'found no more' (v. 21), when the smoke arising from her 'goes up for ever and ever' (19:3), we have beneath our eyes the ultimate image to which Scripture has recourse in the representation of pure evil's self-consumption. … For what is consumed can no longer be kindled again by contact with a Living One. It can no longer do anything more than consume itself eternally like a flame that is darkly self-enclosed, 'to engulf for ever in the empty abyss the final burnt out relics of all that can be burned'.[20]

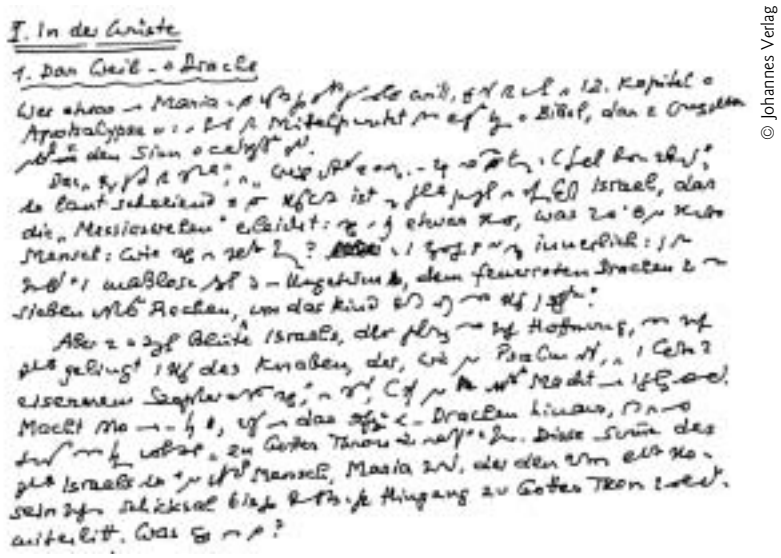
For von Balthasar, the most appropriate image to describe the 'pure evil' of hell, the 'quintessence' of sin, is the harlot—the sexual female body finally exterminated in the fires of hell.

This metaphorical association of the female sex with chaos, hell and death is hardly new. But it has a deadly consistency when used by von Balthasar, because the disappearance of the female body from the story of salvation is already implicit in his interpretation of Genesis. Like Mary, 'woman' must surrender her identity, her personhood and her sexual body, in order to become one with the Church, and in order to let 'him' become 'her' in his suprasexual love affair with Christ.

[18] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, translated by Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1990 [1967]), 173.

[19] Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 154.

[20] Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 173-174. For a Christian writer to use such language in the immediate aftermath of the *Shoah* beggars belief, and makes me wonder why none of the men who translate, study and interpret von Balthasar seem to question this.



From a late manuscript of von Balthasar:
'In the Desert: The Woman and the Dragon'

In reality, however, the female body does not disappear, and the celibate priest's violent psychological struggle to overcome the power of his own sexual desire is projected onto Christ himself, so that it becomes a cosmic battle between God and the flesh. In an early work, *Heart of the World*, written soon after his meeting with Adrienne von Speyr, von Balthasar describes the struggle between Christ and the earthly Church, an unfaithful bride who paints her face and goes whoring with the world. In a chapter titled 'The Conquest of the Bride', he gives a lurid account of Christ's battle to subdue this wayward bride:

> It is with you, my Body, that I am forever fighting the great, apocalyptic battle. … I, the strong God, have betrayed myself to you—my Body, my Church … I surrendered to the temptation of … delivering myself up to the obscure chaos of a body, of plunging below the shiny surface of the flesh; the temptation of passing over into this world—this simmering darkness, opposed to the Father's light … I dared to enter the body of my Church, the deadly body which *you* are. … No wonder you realised your advantage over me and took my nakedness by storm! But I have defeated you through

> weakness and my Spirit has overpowered my unruly and recalcitrant flesh. (Never has woman made more desperate resistance!)[21]

The widespread failure among those who engage with von Balthasar to question the violence of his sexual rhetoric is disturbing. It makes one wonder to what extent male theologians remain oblivious to the denigration of female sexuality which informs much of the theological tradition, and which is given new life by von Balthasar, particularly in his reclaiming of the medieval idea of the Church as *casta meretrix*.

In this context, von Balthasar turns to the writings of the thirteenth-century Bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne, who describes the earthly Church in terms of the biblical harlot. In von Balthasar's paraphrase, William condemns the clergy who,

> … prostitute Holy Church, because for squalid gain they invite all and sundry to shame her. And so her nipples are cracked and her breasts torn out ….[22]

There follows a long quotation from William, in which the Church is described in the words of Jeremiah, 'You had a harlot's forehead; you would not blush' (Jeremiah 3:3), and in the words of Isaiah, 'Babylon, my beloved, has become an abomination to me' (Isaiah 21:4). The following gives a flavour of what this lengthy diatribe amounts to:

> Is there anyone who would not be beside himself with horror at the sight of the Church with a donkey's head, the believer's soul with the teeth of a wolf, the snout of a pig, furrowed ashen cheeks, the neck of a bull, and in every other respect so bestial, so monstrous, that a person seeing it would freeze with terror. … We are no longer

[21] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, translated by Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979 [1954]), 194-197. There is surely something sickening about this image of a rapist Christ. I find it startling when Aristotle Papanikolaou argues that von Balthasar's idea of kenosis might be an effective theological resource for the healing of victims of sexual abuse, in his 'Person, Kenosis and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation', *Modern Theology*, 19/1 (January 2003), 41-65. I do not know what it would be like to read 'The Conquest of the Bride' as someone who had herself been abused, but I cannot imagine what form of healing we could be talking about.

[22] Von Balthasar, '*Casta meretrix*' (1948), translated by John Saward, in *Explorations in Theology: Volume II: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 193-288, here 196.

> dealing with a bride but with a monster of terrible deformity and ferocity.[23]

In her analysis of what she calls the 'prophetic pornography' of the Old Testament, J. Cheryl Exum speaks of 'the ethical problems raised by passages in which a male deity is pictured as sexually abusing a female victim'.[24] As well as the references in Isaiah and Jeremiah, she refers to the harlot imagery of Hosea, in which the prophet's unfaithful wife becomes the personification of Israel, whom God threatens to strip naked and expose to her lovers. Exum argues that the failure by biblical scholars to question this violent sexual imagery is an indicator of problematic attitudes to female sexuality that are still all too current. The general point, which is already highly relevant for feminist readings of von Balthasar, becomes all the more pertinent in the light of Exum's argument that these biblical passages are directed at a male audience:

[23] Von Balthasar, '*Casta meretrix*', 196-198.

[24] J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 102.

> The way to insult a man is to call him a woman. You insult him more if you call him a filthy whore who is going to have her genitals exposed, which is what these prophetic accusations do.[25]

In this context, it is surely suggestive that von Balthasar's vitriolic denunciation of the *casta meretrix* is directed at the male office-holders of the institutional Church, as also is his sexual tirade in 'The Conquest of the Bride'. Like the prophets of old, von Balthasar seems to think that the best way to describe men's infidelity to God is through metaphors of wanton female sexuality. Thus his Christ humiliates sinful men by casting them in the role of whores who must be raped and conquered so that he can purify them. The female flesh, meanwhile, is the abyss, the non-being, onto which this fantasy of rape and denigration is projected.

Ways Forward

Given these difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that feminist theologians have chosen to ignore von Balthasar. Nevertheless, his growing influence among Roman Catholic theologians, and some Anglican ones, makes it important that feminists should undertake critical readings of his work. It is worth asking, then, if there is anything that can be retrieved from von Balthasar for a theology of human sexuality informed by feminist insights.

Any feminist reinterpretation of von Balthasar would have to offer an extensive deconstruction of the abusive, violent rhetoric that so often poisons his ideas. Nevertheless, if his work manifests the poison, it might also provide the cure. In his writings, the Church's theology of sex, historically accumulated over two thousand years, internalised by countless men and women in their battle against their own sexuality, reaches an apotheosis—in no small part because of the pressure of twentieth-century feminism and the issue of women's ordination. Von Balthasar's theology brings to light a flaw that runs through the Catholic theological tradition with regard to sex. If we can understand where he is coming from, we might acquire a much greater understanding of the creative

[25] Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 102.

I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns … holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations'. (Revelation 17:4-5)

departures we need to make if we are to develop a more healthy and life-affirming theology.

Von Balthasar's theology at times cries out for liberation from its enslavement to a particular sexual ideology, so that its more radical and interesting insights can be allowed to flourish. For example, his theology of the motherhood of God might provide a resource for reflection on the female body's sacramental significance, and on how the priesthood might represent the maternal dimension of God's creative and sustaining power. His sometimes highly fluid and unstable sexual symbolics might invite a postmodern rediscovery of the metaphorical possibilities of pre-modern theology, before the poetry of theological language became ensnared in more rationalist and systematized forms of argument. Such a reading of von Balthasar's theology would require an abandonment of the sexual essentialisms that it is made to serve, and a critical exposure of the violence which distorts his representation of human sexual embodiment. Then, the play of sexual difference might be opened up to much more fluid and dynamic sacramental exchanges than von Balthasar allowed for. Perhaps, indeed—though I remain to be

convinced—such a prospect would enable a feminist to move beyond the rape and violence in his writing and enter into a truly fertile exchange with him.

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