

LOVE ALONE: HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AS A MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL RENEWAL

• Adrian J. Walker •

“‘Love alone’ is the principle
of theological intelligence.”

Introduction: Re-Theologizing Theology

Catholic theology is in the throes of an identity crisis, because Catholic theologians work under no overarching consensus about the first principle of theological intelligence.¹ I take it for granted that this fissiparous pluralism is a bad thing. This is not to deny, of course, that truth is “symphonic,” as Balthasar puts it in the title of one of his books.² Nevertheless, the “sym” of the “sym-phony” presupposes a unitary principle. Otherwise, legitimate theological

¹By “first principle” I mean not just a non-negotiable commitment, as when someone says that Jones is a “man of principle,” but the permanent source and governing architectonic of all the things falling within a certain order (here the order is “theology”). This source-architectonic is such that what comes from it processes from it, remains within it, and reverts to it, as Proclus says effects do with respect to their cause in his *Elementatio Theologica*, proposition 35. At the same time, the reversion is not simply a repetition of the procession, but includes a novel enrichment that testifies to the fecundity of the principle.

²Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch. Aspekte des christlichen Pluralismus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972); Eng. tr., *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

plurality would not be symphony, but cacophony. Such cacophony, moreover, would both reflect and result in what might be called “theological emotivism.” As Alasdair MacIntyre explains in *After Virtue*, “[e]motivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”³ Similarly, what I am calling theological emotivism is the conviction, expressed or unexpressed, that theological judgments are essentially expressions of incommensurable, pre-rational commitments that, as such, cannot be impartially evaluated according to universally recognized standards, viz., in the light of a single, overarching principle of theological intelligence. Theological emotivism thus obscures the reasonableness of the Catholic tradition and thereby calls into question the very existence of theology as “faith seeking understanding.”

Of course, sheer pluralism is actually impossible,⁴ and the pluralism of contemporary Catholic theology is in reality not quite so diverse as it first appears to be on the surface. For example, the ever more numerous “contextual theologies” that dominate Catholic theology departments in the United States today—feminist theology, *mujerista* theology, gay theology, liberation theology, and so on—actually do share a single, unifying principle: the appeal to so-called “*experience*.” In one sense, this reliance on experience is nothing new. The great tradition of Catholic theology has always known that faith is not just assent to propositions (while also insisting that it is not less than that), but includes a lived conformation to the theological realities which the propositions assented to are about.⁵ The current appeal to experience departs from this venerable tradition, though, in that it tends to make untutored experience an *a priori* measure of all truth-claims purporting to be drawn from divine revelation. However much contextual theologians might

³Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 12 (emphasis in the original).

⁴To cite Proclus again: “every manifold participates somehow in the one” (Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica*, proposition 1).

⁵See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine Theologische Ästhetik. I: Schau der Gestalt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 211–410 for a very positive and rich account of the role of experience in the act of faith. Eng. tr., *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 219–425.

thunder against “Enlightenment rationalism,” their own appeal to experience in truth continues the Enlightenment project of confining “religion within the limits of reason alone.” The only difference is that they have replaced the objectivist “reason alone” of Kant with a subjectivist “experience alone.” Contextual theologies are merely the latest offspring of Liberal Protestantism, distinguished from their stodgy ancestor only by the attitudes of 1968. Like much of multiculturalism, current American Catholic theological pluralism turns out to be merely the same old liberal monism decked out in colorful funky costumes.

Contrarily to what it may seem at first, then, the crisis of Catholic theology today boils down to a conflict between two and only two possible first principles: experience or divine revelation. Or, to be more precise: between the *logos* of what John Milbank calls “secular reason” or the *logos* contained in divine revelation itself.⁶ This contest, it is important to see, is an unequal one. Of the two alternative principles, in fact, divine revelation has the greater integrative power: it can comprehend all that is true in “secular reason,” whereas the converse is far from being the case. Recognizing this poverty of mainstream liberal theology, with its captivity to the secular social sciences as the oracles of all-judging experience, a growing number of voices on the English-speaking Catholic theological scene have begun to call for what William L. Portier has felicitously termed the “re-theologization of theology.”⁷ These theologians have found confirmation and support in the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who, contrarily to the stale clichés propagated endlessly by the media, have not been conservative “restorationists,” but faithful expositors of Vatican II’s attempt to reawaken in the Church a living awareness of its all-embracing catholicity—not on the basis of liberal cosmopolitanism, but on the basis of Christ who, in revealing the Father, also reveals man to himself (see *Gaudium et spes*, 22).

⁶See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1993). On the difficulties generated in post-Vatican II Catholic theology by the failure to understand this alternative, see David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communion Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995); Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁷William L. Portier, “Here Come the Evangelical Catholics,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

As encouraging as this re-theologization of theology may be, it is insufficient by itself. For theology must not only have a distinctive principle that sets it apart from other forms of knowing, but this principle must also be capable of illumining all of reality. Without abandoning the platform of its unique, non-negotiable commitment to the Creed, theology must also be universally relevant—and not just an in-house “grammar” by which the Christian community “parses” what happens to be its peculiar worldview. A re-theologized theology worthy of the name will therefore be neither “liberal” in the sense of mainstream American Catholic theology’s Babylonian captivity to the secular social sciences, nor again merely “post-liberal” in the sense of a tendentially historicist valorization of the peculiarity of Christian tradition without a corresponding emphasis on how this peculiarity vehicles a universal revelation addressed to all men by a God who wants them to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (see 1 Tim 2:4).⁸ A re-theologized theology, if it is to measure up to the Christian tradition it claims to recover, must go beyond the opposition between Christian uniqueness and universal relevance that both liberal and post-liberal theology assume, in order to re-learn that the distinctive principle of theology is itself what is most universally relevant, “so that holy teaching,” as Aquinas puts it, “is a sort of impression of the divine knowledge, which embraces all things in its simple oneness.”⁹

With that we come to Hans Urs von Balthasar, whom I would like to propose in the following pages as a master of theological renewal able to teach us how to re-theologize theology without sacrificing its hallmark claim to speak to universal human reason. To be sure, Balthasar clearly distinguishes himself from most other contemporary Catholic theologians by the radical consistency of his

⁸By historicism I mean a metaphysic that makes becoming simply prior to being, the temporal simply prior to the eternal. I do not deny that historicism reflects a concern that, *rightly understood*, is also a Christian one. But that is just the point: the qualifier “rightly understood” points to a synthesis in which the static and the dynamic, the eternal and the temporal both receive their full due. From the point of view of this synthesis, we can critique raw historicism, without having to subscribe to a one-sided “a-historicism,” either. What I would like to suggest is that this synthesis is the form of Christian revelation—indeed, that it is Jesus Christ himself as the revelational *Gestalt par excellence*.

⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (=ST) I, 1, 3 ad 2.

commitment to starting theology from, and letting it be normed by, the uniquely Christian revelation of God's trinitarian love in Christ.¹⁰ This Balthasarian commitment to "love alone" is, however, anything but an un- or anti-philosophical theological positivism. Balthasar's project, particularly in the *Trilogy*, is to maintain christological love as the first principle of theology, while simultaneously developing a philosophy of a "truly metaphysical range"¹¹ whose intrinsic openness to that love secures the connection between the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and universal human reason in its quest for first principles.¹² Balthasarian "love alone," far from adding up to a one-sided "theologism," is really another name for what is sometimes called the "Catholic 'and,'" which embraces both the "from above" and the "from below," grace and nature, theology

¹⁰This—and not simply that theologians also have to be holy in addition to being smart—is the main claim of Balthasar's famous essay, "Theologie und Heiligkeit," in *Verbum Caro. Skizzen zur Theologie. I* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960), 195–225; Eng. tr., "Theology and Sanctity," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1: *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181–209.

¹¹John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 83.

¹²See, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Philosophie, Christentum, Mönchtum," in *Sponsa Verbi. Skizzen zur Theologie. II* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961); Eng. tr., "Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism" in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2: *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 333–372; id., "Das Wunder des Seins und die Vierfache Differenz," in *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik. III. 1: Im Raum der Metaphysik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965), 943–957; Eng. tr., "The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Distinction" in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 613–627. The philosophical dimension of Balthasar's thought has been splendidly retrieved by three recent works that set the standard for what I hope is a new period in Balthasar scholarship that will free the Swiss theologian from the grip of one-sided interpretations: Juan Manuel Sara, *Forma y amor. Un estudio metafísico sobre la trilogía de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Privatdruck, 2000); D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth. A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004); Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Being as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The philosophy underlying Balthasar's work is also found to a large extent in other authors to whom Balthasar often refers; prominent among them are the German Thomists Gustav Siewerth and Ferdinand Ulrich, who are unfortunately as yet little known in the English-speaking world. For Siewerth, see Gustav Siewerth, "Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes," in idem; for Ulrich, see Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus. Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1998).

and philosophy in a differentiated unity that is plural without being pluralist and one without being uniform.

In what follows, I will attempt to illustrate and defend Balthasar's claim that "love alone"—meaning the trinitarian love revealed in Jesus—is not just an *object* of theological reflection, but is the very *principle* of theological intelligence itself *as intelligence*. In particular, I will emphasize how Balthasar reconciles this claim with theology's character as a *logos* having a purchase on universal reason. I will proceed in three steps of unequal length, all of which aim to bring home the unity-in-distinction of *logos* and love, and of *ens* and *caritas*, that undergirds this reconciliation. First, I will explain how the love revealed in Christ has to do with the very *logos* of being (section I). Second, I will argue that christological love, reflected in the whole existence of the theologian, plays an intrinsic role in the constitution of theological discourse as such. This will give us an occasion to reflect on how discourse and enfleshment are inseparable within the theological enterprise (section II). Third, I will give a more technical account, and defense, of the claim that love, as constitutive of the *ratio entis*, is also able to function as the principle of theological intelligence without undermining theology's rational character (section III). In the conclusion, I will underscore once again how Balthasarian "love alone" is not a recipe for a simplistic reduction of the *intellectus fidei* to enthusiastic piety, but is, on the contrary, a subtle and far-reaching program for a truly catholic thought that tries to think the world from God and God from the world in light of Christ, the concrete "*analogia entis*," as Balthasar himself does in his *Trilogy*.¹³ Because Balthasar is often unjustly

¹³"I have accordingly attempted," Balthasar writes at the end of his life, "to erect a philosophy and a theology on the basis of an analogy . . . of being [*Sein*] as it presents itself concretely in its (transcendental, and not categorial) properties" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Eine letzte Rechenschaft," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Gestalt und Werk*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Walter Kasper [Cologne: Communio, 1989], 15; Eng. tr., "Retrospective," in *My Work: In Retrospect* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993], 115–116.). Some Thomists object that the term "*analogia entis*" is of Suarezian, rather than of Thomistic provenance. This may be the case, but there can be no doubt that, for Thomas, there is an analogical community of predication of *ens* between creatures and God based on the former's participation in the latter. Moreover, it is also clear that Thomas uses the community of predication between the creature and God to illuminate the theme of participation and *vice versa*. Similarly, by "*analogia entis*," Balthasar means the participation of creatures in God as the foundation for, but also as illumined by, the community of predication

perceived as exalting grace at the expense of nature, I will also use the conclusion as an opportunity to suggest how Balthasarian theology includes a recovery of the notion of nature, whose defense is a hallmark of the universal relevance of a truly c/Catholic theology.¹⁴

between them. The “*analogia entis*” is thus for Balthasar a relationship of creature to God such that the former is similar to the latter (both by way of an “analogy of attribution” and an “analogy of proportionality,” which are really two sides of the same analogical coin)—but within a greater dissimilarity that clearly underscores the creatureliness of the creature and the free transcendence of the Creator. Christ, as both God and man, is at once the highest instance and the foundation of this relation—and in this specific sense can be said to be or embody the *analogia entis* in his own person. By calling Christ the “*analogia entis*,” then, Balthasar means to underscore how classical Christology implies that Christ is nothing less than the ontological key to all of reality. Among Balthasar’s many affirmations to this effect, see, for example, this one from his monograph on Maximus Confessor: “‘Synthesis,’ not ‘mixture,’ is from the outset the structure of all worldly being . . . ontology and cosmology are Christology in an extensive form, inasmuch as the hypostatic synthesis, as God’s final idea of the world, is also his first” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus’ des Bekenntners*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 204; Eng. tr., *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 207.

¹⁴While acknowledging the importance of philosophy for theological reflection, many proponents of re-theologized theology often evince a certain hesitation about the philosophical concept of nature. In a sense, this reticence is understandable, given the nature-grace dualism typical of the so-called “manualist” Neo-scholasticism that held undisputed sway in Catholic theology from the mid-nineteenth century to Vatican II. That said, there can be no c/Catholic re-theologization of theology without a retrieval of nature. This retrieval is all the more urgent today because of the breakdown in the culture of the distinction between the artificial and the natural, the made and the born. Catholic theology is called upon today to defend the naturalness of the natural, but without insisting on a Neo-scholastic “separated philosophy” as the only means of doing so. Such a project will require re-integrating the Aristotelian philosophy of nature within a metaphysics of creation as gift that is in turn embedded in a christocentric and trinitarian theology. Balthasar’s thought, especially as articulated in the *Trilogy*, seems to me to be a fruitful resource for this re-integration, as I will suggest briefly in the conclusion. Of course, such a re-integration must also proceed in dialogue with Thomas, on whom Balthasar builds to an extent that is not often recognized either by Thomists or by Balthasarians. Nevertheless, it is not just Balthasarians who need to learn from Thomists; Thomists need the *ressourcement* tradition to remind them of the full breadth of Aquinas’ thought and to help them avoid the temptation to reduce Aquinas to a catechetical handbook, reliance on which quickly becomes an intellectual pharisaism incapable of letting itself be interrogated by any questions formulated outside of the language of its own tradition.

I. *The Catholicity of Triune Love*

Schau der Gestalt, “seeing the form.” This title of the first volume of Balthasar’s *Trilogy* indicates the source of every renewal of theology: the catching sight of, and being swept away by, the novelty of Christian revelation. Balthasar sees this novelty embodied in Jesus Christ, insofar as he is *the* revealer *par excellence* of God as trinitarian love. Among the many expressions of this Balthasarian insight is the slim volume entitled *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, “love alone is credible.”¹⁵ The book opens with the question, “What is it that makes Christianity Christian?”¹⁶ and goes on to show that the answer to this question is also the answer to another: What is it that makes Christianity *credible*? Balthasar’s response to this double question is that the only “*logos*,” the only principle of intelligibility, which makes Jesus’ figure cohere into that single, compelling *Gestalt* whose luminous wholeness could captivate the entire existence of a Francis or a John Paul II—the only such *logos* is a love that comes uniquely from the trinitarian God.¹⁷ Indeed, for Balthasar, Jesus is the convincing *Gestalt* he is only because he is the appearing of trinitarian love in person, which means: only because he is himself the *Logos* of divine love in the flesh. Jesus either is the incarnate *Logos* of trinitarian love, or he makes no sense at all:

The designation of Christ as Logos in John points to the fact that the Evangelist thinks of him as occupying the place of the (Greek-Philonic) world-reason through which all things become intelligible. The sequel of the Gospel shows, however, that he

¹⁵H. U. von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963); Eng. tr., *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

¹⁶See *ibid.*, 5 (Eng., 9).

¹⁷One would have to add, in light of other affirmations of Balthasar, that Christ is both the incarnation of God’s love for us and of our love for him—the covenant in person. See, for example, the following passage: “the One, whose name is Jesus Christ, has to descend into the absolute contradiction against the Lord’s sovereign majesty, into the night of Godforsakenness and the amorphous chaos of sin. He must do this in order to set up and to be, beyond what man can imagine as form, *the* form that overcomes all futility, the intact and indivisible form that unites and reunites God and the world in the New and Eternal Covenant” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Eine Theologische Ästhetik. III, 2, 2. Neuer Bund*, 2nd ed. [Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1988], 12; Eng. tr., *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 7: *Theology: The New Covenant* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 14).

does not aim to demonstrate this by projecting the life of Jesus onto the plane of Greek wisdom (or vice versa), but through the self-interpretation of the very *Logos* who has appeared in the flesh. This happens insofar as the *Logos* makes himself known as “gracious love” (*charis*), and therein as “glory” (the “beauty proper to God,” *doxa*)—and precisely thus as “truth” [*aletheia*]: Jn 1:14). In this way, a kind of intelligibility becomes possible whose light raises the pure facticity of the historical to the level of necessity, even as any reduction to what man might demand or (for whatever reason) expect is ruled out as impossible.¹⁸

This passage from *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* claims that divine love is more than just a principle for interpreting the Christian Creed, more than just the in-house “grammar” we in the Christian community use when we speak *entre nous*. It claims, over and above this, that divine love occupies the “place of (Greek-Philonic) world-reason” itself. Balthasar can advance this claim because he knows that by dying, sojourning among the dead, and rising to new life, Jesus has made trinitarian love *the* Reality that holds sway throughout all the realms of being—and so has set this love up as the principle that keeps the world together as a meaningful whole and guarantees that it can be interpreted meaningfully in the first place (see Col 1:17: “all things hold together [*synesteken*] in him”). By the same token, the Christian experience concerns the whole of being, and so forces, by its very nature, fresh thinking about everything: motion, reason, personal agency, causality, technology, war and peace—all in the light of love as the *logos* of being:

Only a philosophy of free love can justify our existence, but it cannot do so unless at the same time it exegetes the essence of finite being in terms of love. In terms of love and not, in the end, of consciousness, or spirit, or knowledge, or power, or pleasure, or utility, but of all these things only insofar as they are modes of, or first steps towards, the one act that really fulfills them, the act which shines forth superabundantly in the sign of God. And beyond existence as such and the constitution of essence as such the constitution of being as such comes to light, in the sense that it “is” in no way other than by “not clinging to itself,” in expropriating itself of itself, into finite concretion. At the same time, finite essences can in turn receive and grasp being as it is in itself only if they do not try to protect themselves, but are trained

¹⁸Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 35 (Eng., 39–40).

by being in the love that gives away: consciousness, and the possession of oneself and of being, grow only and precisely in the measure that one increasingly breaks out of one's being by and for oneself into communication, exchange, sympathy with humanity and with the cosmos.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., 95 (Eng., 144). Note the connection Balthasar makes in this passage between the structure of the Thomistic real distinction between *esse* and essence, on the one hand, and christological love, on the other. In order to illumine Balthasar's understanding of this connection, we can recall a key text in which Thomas Aquinas, speaking of *esse*, says that it is "something complete and simple, but not subsistent" (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, I, 1, ad 1). While insisting with Thomas that creaturely essences have no actuality without the *actus essendi*, Balthasar also points out that these essences, while depending *de facto* on *esse creatum* for their very existence, nonetheless have their *ultimate* origin in God. If creaturely essence is not absolute, neither is creaturely *esse*, and the latter depends in its own way on the former as much as the former does on the latter. Created *esse*, then, is just that: created. Putting it somewhat paradoxically, we might say that *esse creatum would have been* God's being, except that it is always already given away as the "pure mediation" (Ferdinand Ulrich) of God's self-communication—and so is one with its Archetype only within this radical "given awayness," which makes it wholly transparent to God only at the moment it perfectly distinguishes created *esse* from him as ultimate origin of essences (and of created *esse* itself). The result is the following structure: *esse* makes essences be as their quasi- or supra-formal cause and, in so doing, depends on them; essences, thus affirmed in their otherness from *esse*, are caught up into the dynamic of gift carried in *esse* as "dependent actualization," so that the creature's exercise of *esse*, its subsistence, is a "having-received-oneself-from-God-into-a-dynamic-of-self-gift."

Now, according to Thomas, in the Incarnation the Son's hypostatic *esse* is communicated to the assumed humanity at the same point where created *esse* normally would be, "taking over" from created *esse* all the functions that created *esse* normally would perform for it, realizing it as a subsisting, individual, complete, fully operational human nature—in which the person of the Son of God can then subsist for the temporal expression of his eternal personal being in the context of his visible mission (see, for example, *ST* III, 17, 2). Developing this Thomistic position, Balthasar adds that the Son's hypostatic *esse* "stands in" for created *esse*, not only in its completeness and simplicity, *but also in its non-subsistence*, insofar as this non-subsistence is an expression of divine liberality in the sense explained above. The Son's hypostatic *esse* therefore makes his assumed humanity subsist constitutively in the dynamic of gift, as even *created esse* would, while simultaneously transforming that subsistence-as-gift into a temporal expression of the Son's eternal act of letting himself be generated.

In becoming man, then, the Son "relives" creaturely genesis from both sides—from the side of the "given awayness" of non-subsistent *esse* and the side of its reception by the creature—but from the platform of his eternal generation. By the same token, the Incarnation, while remaining for us a temporal event that occurs after the world is created, presupposes, on the part of the *persona assumens*,

II. "Love Alone" as the Principle of Theological Intelligence

So far, we have briefly sketched how the love revealed in Christ has made trinitarian love *the* Reality that determines the *logos* of all being. The task we now face is to give a brief account of how this ontological foundation plays out epistemologically in the theologian. The first thing to be said is that theology, as Balthasar understands it, is either con-figuration to the christological *Gestalt* of trinitarian love, in strict obedience to its normative pattern, or it is simply not theology in the first place. Christ, as *the* Figure of the trinitarian love *par excellence*, is not only theology's chief content, but also its primary method. Once again, "love alone" is the principle of theological intelligence in the strongest possible sense.

One surprising corollary of the primacy of christological love as the principle of theological intelligence is that theology is not just a matter of discourse, but also of the enfleshed display of what that discourse is about. The theologian can explain Christ's claim over the *logos* of all being, and prove its truth, only to the extent that he himself lets that claim be the Reality that determines all of *his* being—including his body—all of the time. It is important to stress that Balthasar is not encouraging the theologian to exhaust himself in a moralistic effort to "imitate" Christ, however. The theologian's enfleshed person becomes a statement and a demonstration of the truth of Christianity, not through his solitary initiative, but by being borne along by the already-flowing stream of ecclesial tradition. Precisely because ecclesial tradition is the ever-renewed presence *hic et nunc* of Jesus' eucharistic "traditioning,"²⁰ it is not a screen that

a timeless (albeit free) act that precedes the divine act of creation "in the order of intention." Only this intention is the person of the Son himself as he stands before the Father's face at the timeless "moment" when the Father first conceives, and resolves on, the creation of the world. In this sense, the Son's becoming man not only relives the "given-awayness" of non-subsistent *esse* and its reception by the creature; it also precedes, justifies, and defines the structure of the communication of creaturely being in the interplay of essence and *esse* as described here. The Incarnation not only presupposes the real distinction, but also grounds it—so that "the ultimate mystery of God's *kenosis* in Christ," without losing for an instant its character as a singular event deriving from an unanticipable free divine grace, "is analogically prepared in the metaphysical mystery of being," as Balthasar is suggesting in this passage from *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*.

²⁰Paul suggests this connection in a particularly dense passage in 1 Corinthians that links Christ's *paradosis*, his sacrificial handing over of himself, the institution of

comes between the theologian and his object, but is the concrete being caught up by, and indwelling in, Christ as the *Gestalt* of love *in actu exercitu* that, as I said in the previous section, is the principle of all true theological renewal.²¹ Conversely, the theologian's being

the Eucharist, and the apostolic *paradosis* about the Eucharist: "For I received from the Lord what I have also handed over [*parédoka*] to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was handing himself over [*paredideto*], took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me. And in the same way also the chalice after the meal saying, This chalice is the new covenant in my blood, do this, as often as you drink, in memory of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this chalice, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:23–26).

²¹Christ's eucharistic *paradosis*, by which he hands himself over for our salvation, and the *paradosis* of ecclesial tradition are strictly correlative. So much so, that tradition can be seen as the Eucharist spread out in time and space, even as the Eucharist can be seen correspondingly as the time and space of the tradition gathered up into the risen eternity of the Lord where past, present, and future interpenetrate beyond the fragmentation of earthly spatio-temporality. This suggests the distinctive feature of Balthasar's way of reading the Catholic tradition: the "reduction" (in the sense of "leading back" to the principle) of the multiple expressions of Catholic tradition to its simple core, which is nothing other than Christ as the revelation of the catholicity of trinitarian love. We could say that he interprets the Catholic tradition by trying to catch its various expressions in their native transparency to what he calls in *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* the "self-exegeting revelational form of love" (ibid., 36). It is as if Balthasar, in his interpretive practice vis-à-vis the Catholic tradition, were attempting to relive, say, the origin of the *Summa theologiae* from the core of the tradition with Thomas, or the origin of the dogma of Chalcedon from the same core with the Council Fathers. Balthasar's "formula" for interpreting the Catholic tradition, then is this: to begin anew from *the Beginning*—together with all those who have done so in the past—in a creative fidelity that brings out treasures new and old from the heritage that they have left us. This formula strives to combine the greatest fidelity to tradition (the expressions of the tradition that have been handed down to us are not just monumental fossils, but living vehicles through which the core of the tradition binds us to itself authoritatively here and now) with the greatest freedom (the interpreter not only sees the core of the tradition through its expressions, but, so to say, *with* them, in the same direction, out of the same spirit in which they took shape, and so is free to draw creatively from them without any fundamentalistic slavery to the letter). This is not to say, of course, that Balthasar thinks that familiarity with the canonical texts of the tradition is unimportant, or that one may play fast and loose with them so as to try to force them to mean something other than what they in fact mean. His point is simply that, insofar as these canonical texts emerged from the same tradition in which we stand today, they are not a death-dealing letter, but life-giving sources that flow here and now, participating in, and making bindingly present, the tradition's inexhaustible fecundity. The art of the interpreter of

“handed over to the pattern of doctrine” (Rom 6:17) is itself an act of ecclesial traditioning that makes quasi-sacramentally present the christological traditioning by which Jesus’ body reveals and enacts the all-encompassing catholicity of trinitarian love—and it is just so that the theologian can be said to theologize in the first place.

Although Balthasarian “love alone” builds what might be called the theologian’s “eucharistic enfleshment” into the theological enterprise itself, we would be fundamentally misreading Balthasar’s intentions if we imagined that he were proposing this eucharistic enfleshment as an alternative to discourse, or as a mere instrument for putting it into action (for “practicing what one preaches”), or even as a “liturgical consummation” of it that comes “*after writing*,” as Catherine Pickstock puts it.²² Eucharistic enfleshment, it is true, is not itself a discourse, and yet it is not so much *beyond* speech and writing as it is *the beyond of* speech and writing, which pervades them as the concentration and ground of their own proper intelligibility. Indeed, as we saw in the first section, the *Gestalt* of Christian revelation, as a Word-made-flesh, is in the first instance a *beautiful form* possessing a unique kind of intelligibility able to unite both the good and the true, concept and existence, word and deed, speech and silence²³ in a luminous, intact unity without confusion. Only such a luminous form, in fact, can adequately exposit the unique identity-in-difference of the Word-made-flesh, and state convincingly the claim that christological love determines the *logos* of all of

Catholic tradition is from this point of view to let himself be surprised by what that fecundity still has to reveal when held up to the burning light of *the Source*. The offspring of this fecundity will never contradict binding claims inherited from the past, but it will place them in new constellations that bring out hitherto unsuspected riches of meaning from them.

²²Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (London: Blackwell Publishers), 1997.

²³This presupposes that the lived body and the word are two sides of one and the same mysterious intimacy with, and distance from, the world that defines the structure of human existence as such. On the one side, the word refers to a world that is not itself, and does so by means of a reference that is not another word, but a kind of transparency that allows the world to appear, to be intimately present even, but as what is other than the spoken word. On the other side, the lived body enables us to be in the world, and so to need no bridge to reach it, and, at the same time, to stand over against the world as something other than ourselves. There is thus a convergence between word and embodied presence that allows them to interpenetrate without any undue confusion.

being.²⁴ Replicating in miniature the essential gesture of the Church's tradition, the theologian's body is not dumb, meat-like "flesh" that "profiteth nothing" (Jn 6:63), but, in the Spirit, acquires all the force of a life-giving *logos*, at the precise point where Christ's *kenosis* and the structure of created being mutually confirm and enlighten each other in the universality of their reciprocal belonging.

III. Being as Love

Balthasar's claim that "love alone" is the principle of theological intelligence, as we have seen, not only makes Christ's love an *object or theme* of theological discourse, but also gives it intrinsic relevance to theological discourse as such, which in turn acquires a constitutive relation to the flesh. But, an objector might ask, does not Balthasar's attempt to make "love alone" the principle of theological discourse therefore run the risk of mixing incommensurables, of confusing loving and knowing, enfleshed existence and conceptuality? Is not Balthasar's "love alone" a huge "category mistake"? If so, then his well-intentioned effort to exalt love actually destroys the very possibility of speaking coherently about love at all. Given this objection, incarnate love can at most be an object of theological discourse, but it cannot reasonably be elevated to the status of the objective principle of theological discourse *as a discourse* without undermining theology as a rational enterprise altogether.

Let me reformulate this objection more technically. According to Aquinas, being is the deepest and most comprehensive foundation of all intelligibility: as we read in Thomas' *De Veritate*, "all other conceptions of the intellect are gotten by adding something to being [*ens*]." ²⁵ Pre-eminent among these "conceptions" are the so-called transcendentals, which, though all substantially identical with *ens*, are nonetheless rationally distinct from it. But if we follow Aquinas in assuming that love emerges as such only with the transcendental *bonum*, then it looks as though Balthasar's claim that "love alone" is the principle of theological intelligence makes two crucial errors. First, it seemingly amounts to an illicit inference that,

²⁴The foregoing paragraph is indebted to D. C. Schindler's account of the foundation of reason in *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*.

²⁵Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* I, 1, c; italics added.

because the *bonum* and *ens* are substantially one, they are also therefore rationally one as well, that is, it confuses the *ratio entis* with the *ratio boni*. Second, by re-defining the *ratio* of being from the *ratio* of the good in this way, Balthasar also appears to compromise the transcendental *verum*, which Thomas sees as lying *between* being and the good as the primordial articulation of being's intelligibility in relation to intellect.²⁶ We thus come to the core of the objection: collapsing the *ratio entis* into the *ratio boni*, Balthasarian "love alone" makes it impossible to *think* the *ratio entis* in terms of the *verum* and thereby undermines the possibility of theology as a rational enterprise.

The objection that "love alone" destroys the rationality of theology does not rest only on a general consideration of the relationship between being, the true, and the good. For Aquinas, as for Augustine before him, the interplay of these three transcendentals is the key to articulating the structure of what is theology *par excellence*, namely, the "immanent Trinity." But both Augustine and Thomas hold that the priority of the true over the good in the manifestation of the intelligibility of being is necessary to account for the word-character of the Word. From this point of view, Balthasarian "love alone" seems to obscure the reason why the Son should have any special relation to the articulation of the intelligibility of the divine being as Word. Balthasar's account of the relation between the Trinity and the transcendentals, in other words, seems to deprive the Son of his word-character and, by the same stroke, of his ability to communicate anything like a *sacra doctrina* that delivers to us the objective truth about God. If "love alone" is the principle of theological intelligence, then it appears that the Word is not a Word, and theology is impossible.

In what follows, I will address this objection in three steps of unequal length. (1) First, I will deal with its ontological foundation, calling into question the reading of the transcendentals that I have just sketched. (2) Second, I will address the objection on the properly trinitarian level where the interplay of the transcendentals is brought to bear on the processions of the divine persons. (3) Third, I will return briefly to the question of how the Incarnation

²⁶Of course, Thomas also sees the good as in some sense foundational for the true. The Thomistic reciprocity of the good and the true in the interplay of intellect and will is an opening on Aquinas' side to the Balthasarian solution that I will sketch briefly in the remainder of this section.

can make the flesh the Word assumes part of his Word-character *for us*. Before beginning to lay out these three points, however, I would like to stress that my aim in doing so is not to polemicize against Augustine or Aquinas. It is rather to show that, by grounding truth in love, Balthasar is able to recuperate the basic intuitions of these two theological giants, while at the same time allowing theology to exploit perhaps more fully than even they did the concrete *Gestalt* of Jesus Christ, and the love that is its *logos*, in order to understand both worldly and divine being in their reciprocal illumination.

(1) Much could be said in response to the ontological part of the objection we are considering here, but I will limit myself to calling into question its underlying assumption that love first emerges only with the transcendental *bonum*, understood, moreover, as constituted by a relation to the will, such that the good is *ens* insofar as it is appetible.²⁷ To claim that “love alone” is the principle of theological intelligence, then, is not to confuse the *ratio entis* with the *ratio* of the good²⁸—or, indeed, with any of the transcendentals. It is

²⁷For a thorough treatment of this point, together with a detailed engagement with the objection against the Balthasarian primacy of love, see D. C. Schindler, “Does Love Trump Reason? Towards a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge. An Essay on the Centenary of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Birth” (*pro manuscripto*: www.communio-icr.com/conference).

²⁸I do not wish to deny, of course, that some special connection exists between love and the good, a connection which Balthasar himself acknowledges when he makes the good the thematic of the *central* panel of his *Trilogy*. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the aspect of love that Balthasar mainly associates with the good is not love’s appetibility for a will, but what he calls its “gratuity”: its uncalculating “whylessness,” to borrow a term from Meister Eckhart (“without why”: “*âne warumbe*.” See, for example, German Homily 5b in the Quint edition). The good thematizes this gratuity, moreover, only in concert with the other Balthasarian transcendentals: the beautiful, the true, and the one. Thus, the *pulchrum*, with which Balthasar opens his *Trilogy*, is the primordial appearing of love’s gratuity, which, as such, contains both the good (the beautiful is an appearing of *gratuity*) and the true (the beautiful is an *appearing* of gratuity, which therefore appeals to *logos*). For their part, the good and the true reciprocally ground each other as it were in the light of beauty: the good thematizes the gratuity that founds the *logos*-character of the true; the true emphasizes precisely this *logos*-character, without which gratuity would be irrational, and so could never be real gratuity at all. The oneness of the good and the true, already announced implicitly in the beautiful, then becomes thematic in the *unum* (which had always been present as the foundation of the other transcendentals), to which Balthasar fittingly dedicates his short recapitulation of the entire *Trilogy*: *Epilog*.

rather to claim that love is intrinsic to the *ratio* of being, and so lies at the root, not only of the good, but also of the beautiful, the true, and the one.²⁹ By the same token, putting love at the heart of the *ratio entis* does not compromise the originality of the *verum* in favor of the *bonum*. On the contrary, it qualifies the *ratio entis* as a unity of “whyness” *and* of sense, of freedom *and* of rational necessity, whose richness only the *interplay* of the true and the good—which first comes to light as wonder-provoking *pulchrum* and then becomes thematic in its inexhaustible fruitfulness in the *unum*—can sufficiently display.³⁰ In this interplay, the good goes to the root of the

²⁹How can being be said to be convertible with love? As Aquinas himself explains, the *ratio entis* as such is complex, inasmuch as it reflects the “real distinction” between *esse* and essence: the name *ens*, Thomas says, “is taken from the *actus essendi*,” even as it is the essence “according to which” every *ens* “is said to be [*esse*]” (Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* I, 1, c; italics added). By the same token, to understand the *ratio entis* is not just to grasp a self-contained quiddity, but to co-grasp the act of being that makes it, the quiddity, be denominable as *ens* in the first place. But this means, in turn, that, intrinsic to the *ratio entis*, there is a depth that is not in- or sub-determinate, but is rather the “hyper-determinate” (to borrow a term from Kenneth Schmitz) ground of being’s quidditative intelligibility. Balthasar, for his part, calls this inner depth or intrinsic ground of the *ratio entis* “love,” inasmuch as the creaturely *actus essendi* that accounts for it is a pure self-diffusion: “created *esse* itself is a similitude of the divine goodness” (ibid., XXII, 2, ad 2). So much so, in fact, that created *esse* never had any “self” to diffuse in the first place, but is always already “selfless,” viz. non-subsistent. Intrinsic to the *ratio entis* as such is something like a selfless being-given-away that, far from undermining the intelligibility of *ens*, actually founds it from within. We do not, of course, grasp the *actus essendi* apart from the concrete *ens* that “instantiates” it. We grasp it rather only insofar as the concrete *ens* displays to us its participated share in the richness of the *actus essendi*. But this display is in turn what the self-diffusion of *esse* “looks like” when it is “instantiated” in concrete *ens* as its subsistent supposit. For the concrete *ens*, which provides the “missing self” for *esse*’s self-diffusion, is, at the moment it does so, caught up into *esse*’s dynamic of self-diffusion, and so exists in itself only to the extent that it also exists outside of itself, and vice versa, in a reciprocity of ecstasy and enstasy. Insofar as the resulting communion of *entia*, especially of personal *entia*, provides the selves required for self-diffusion that, to put it figuratively, created *esse* wants, but cannot give itself because of its non-subsistence, it is the full display and unfolding of the *ratio entis* in its character as love. Of course, the *communio entium* and *personarum* in its own turn needs the trans-personal universality of created *esse* in order to be more than a contingent collection of individuals; in order to be just that, a communion of persons that, as such, has ontological weight and value.

³⁰According to Emmanuel Tourpe, Balthasar “give[s] the impression of not sufficiently expressing the in-stance or ‘reflexivity’ of indifference, which is

true, not in order to undermine its specificity and originality as truth, but to underscore the gratuity that is co-constitutive of the *verum* as an expression of the *ratio entis*³¹—just as the true goes to the root of the good in order to underscore the sense that is co-constitutive of the *bonum* as an equi-primordial expression of that same *ratio*.

(2) Now, in Balthasar's view the three divine persons are in their circumincession the *Gestalt*, the "form," of God's being as love (although without process or complexity)—and it is to this triune form as a whole that all the transcendentals primarily and properly belong in *their* circumincession as the joint co-explication of the coincidence of being and loving in God.³² It is on this basis that

immediately thrown back into the dynamic of gift" (Emmanuel Tourpe, "Dialectic and Dialogic: The Identity of Being as Fruitfulness in Hans Urs von Balthasar" [*pro manuscripto*: www.communio-icr.com/conference], 6). In other words, the whyless spontaneity of love seems to trump any reflexive self-mediation, and, hence, to undermine the specificity of the *logos*. Tourpe's objection (which he presents in an entirely friendly manner as responding to a one-sidedness that he thinks Balthasar has the resources to overcome) fails, however, to take account of Balthasar's claim that the whyless spontaneity of gift includes *both* gratuity and sense, ecstasy and enstasy, thought and action. It is this simultaneity of "ands" that Balthasar calls "gratuity" and to which he attributes what he calls (borrowing from Schelling) "*Unvordenklichkeit*": a priority, both temporal and ontological, over deliberative reflection. But that is just the point: this non-deliberative, self-less character assures Balthasarian gratuity precisely the highest possible degree of intelligence and selfhood. It therefore does not undermine the specificity of the *logos*, but rather simply makes the good and the *logos* mutually implicating, without collapsing them into each other.

³¹*Logos*, in fact, is a gathering of many into a one—into a "point" that one needs to "get" in order to understand *logos*. But this unitary point cannot ultimately be another *logos*, otherwise we would have an infinite regress, an endless unravelling of Derridean *différance*. It must be something that grounds without needing any further grounding. It must be in this sense "whyless"—not because it is absurd, but because its sense is to ground sense without needing to be grounded in turn. We can call this "whylessness" love because it is rooted in the gratuitous self-gift of the Creator, which is rooted, in turn, in the gratuitous self-gift of the Father. The *logoi* of creatures proceed from the abyss of paternal love together with, and in, the Word as their center and goal. The Word, for its part, makes sense, and is the quintessence of all sense, even as the sense it makes exists entirely in view of making the "point" that the Father is an abyssal fountain of love.

³²For Balthasar, the divine being, as the *analogatum princeps* of all being, is the first, most proper "instance" of the coextension of love and *ens*, which creaturely being accordingly only participates in. By the same token, God is also the primordial "instantiation" of the transcendentals, which are, after all, nothing other than the concrete "thickness" of being as love. God accomplishes this instantiation as Trinity

Balthasar can relativize the Augustinian-Thomistic appropriation of the true to the Son and the good to the Spirit: *both* the good and the true, in the interplay described in point (1), belong on Balthasar's reading to the personal properties of both the Son and the Spirit. Nevertheless, insofar as Balthasar assigns to the Son and the Spirit *distinct aspects* of the trinitarian *Gestalt*,³³ and, therefore, distinct aspects of the interplay of the true and the good as joint expressions of the *ratio divini entis*, he can do full justice to the undeniable truth contained in the Augustinian-Thomistic appropriations of the truth to the Son and the good to the Spirit—while simultaneously allowing us to take better account of the way in which the circumincession of the persons is required to unfold the *ratio* of the divine being in its fullness as love. Just as Balthasar makes the good and the true reciprocally grounding, while preserving the distinctive character of each, he can maintain the specificity of the production of the Word in the Trinity, while also showing that the co-eternity of the procession of the Spirit as the “consubstantial communion”³⁴ of Father and Son signifies the presence of love at the very origin of the Word—not because the Spirit is the source of the Word, but because the Word cannot manifest the *ratio* of the paternal being as love without himself being in a loving communion with the Father, whose bond and fruit is the Spirit.³⁵

according to Balthasar: the Trinity is the concreteness of God's being as love and, therefore, of the transcendentals. For more details, see Sara, *Forma y amor*.

³³The Son stands for that *Gestalt* as an objective expression of the Father's love, the Spirit for the fruitful unity of that objective expression and of the groundless ground of the “whyless” paternal charity that comes to light therein.

³⁴Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 5, 7.

³⁵The Word remains the principle of *sacra doctrina*, but precisely from within the circumincession of the three divine persons, where the Son and the Spirit, existing in an inseparable reciprocity as the Father's “two hands” even in the immanent Trinity, co-manifest the *ratio* of divine being as love in their dual unity. Significantly, Augustine himself seems to come close to this view in *De Trinitate*, IX, 12, 18, when he explains that an appetitive impulse lies behind the generation of the inner word, an impulse that then “becomes” love in the fully articulated sense once the inner word is generated. If we take this affirmation seriously, then we have to say that, even for Augustine, the “self-mediation” accomplished in *logos* not only grounds love, but is also grounded by it, and that intentionality and whylessness are mutually foundational. Indeed, this seems to be the point of Augustine's doctrine of the *filioque* as expressed above all in *De Trinitate* VI and XV: the procession of the Spirit depends on the procession of the Son, but also

(3) Balthasar's claim that "love alone" is the principle of theological intelligence, far from undermining the *logos*-character of the Word, explains it within the exigencies of the trinitarian *Gestalt* as the articulation of God's being as love. This insertion of the word-character of the Word within the triune *Gestalt* enables Balthasar to reconcile the Augustinian-Thomistic emphasis on the procession of the *verbum interius* as the analogical key to understanding the generation of the Word with the Bonaventurian-Greek emphasis on the Son as the intra-trinitarian *expressio* of the Father, who eternally manifests the Father's being in his own consubstantial *hypostasis*. Now, in light of this reconciliation, the word-character of the *Logos* appears, not only as a rational saying, but as a rational saying that is also a showing of what one says that is as it were "embodied" in oneself. The point, of course, is not that Balthasar projects flesh back into the immanent Trinity. It is rather that, presupposing the Incarnation, the Son's eternal word-character cannot be captured by verbal teaching alone, but only by verbal teaching in just the sort of *Gestaltic* reciprocity with silent, bodily presence that we described in section II. Hence the great advantage of Balthasarian "love alone," which justifies the value of our long and somewhat circuitous explanation and defense of it: "love alone" enables theologians to use Christ's concrete *Gestalt* to illumine the logical architecture of divine revelation, so that the specificity of Christian revelation can shape the rationality of theological exposition itself—without any fideistic reduction or rejection of traditional accounts of theo-logic. Balthasar's emphasis on "love alone" as the principle of theological intelligence, far from undermining the specificity of *logos*, offers a thoroughly Christian account of that specificity, which also secures the deepest insights of the philosophical account of *logos* inherited by Augustine and Aquinas, and so speaks to the universality of reason as such.³⁶

accompanies it, as the "consubstantial communion" of Father and Son. The Augustinian model of the Trinity is not one-sidedly "psychological," but seeks to point to the reality of God as combining both intra-personal oneness and inter-personal community in a real synthesis lying beyond all human analogies—just as Balthasar, in his different way, also tries to do.

³⁶For an indirect confirmation of this point, see D. C. Schindler, *Plato's Critique of Impure Reason. On Goodness and Truth in The Republic* (forthcoming).

Conclusion: A Theology of the “Catholic ‘And’”

Contrarily to a widespread impression seemingly corroborated by the unfortunate one-sidedness of some of his disciples, Balthasar is not a fideist or a theological positivist. For Balthasar, in fact, the novelty of Christianity does not consist in God’s violent invasion of an idolatrous world “from above.” It consists rather in Christ, who does not overturn what Balthasar calls the “*analogia entis*,” but rather *is* the “*analogia entis*,” the “marvellous accord of man and God” (to quote the felicitous title of a dissertation on Balthasar’s work³⁷) in person. Precisely because of his radical Christocentrism, then, Balthasar is, before anything else, a theologian of the so-called “Catholic ‘and’”: of the unity-without-confusion of the “from above” *and* the “from below”; of grace *and* of nature; of philosophy *and* of theology; of the radical following of Christ *and* of passionate love for the world; of tradition *and* of the development of doctrine. A theology of “love alone” in the Balthasarian style is thus catholic in the fullest sense, for it includes the guardianship not only of theological revelation, but also of worldly being, together with all of mankind’s attempts to do justice to it, not only in philosophy, but also in religion, science, and art. The theologian undertakes this guardianship in the grateful awareness of how much he and all Christians *owe* to the philosophers, the sages, and the artists of the universal human tradition, including those who have lived and labored outside the visible bounds of the Church:

[W]e will show that the experience of glory that distinguishes the Christian—which, however, will have to be thought through and formulated anew for our time out of the center of revelation—places the Christian under an obligation to enact and to live exemplarily the experience of being, which in any case can never be alienated. In this way, the Christian is to become the responsible guardian of glory as a whole, as indeed the Jew who sang the creation Psalms to his God was already the responsible guardian of the glory of the covenant *and* of creation.³⁸

³⁷Georges de Schrijver, *Le merveilleux accord de l’homme et de Dieu: Étude de l’analogie de l’être chez Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Louvain: University Press, 1983).

³⁸H. U. von Balthasar, *Herlichkeit. III. 1. Im Raum der Metaphysik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965), 19 (author’s italics); Eng. tr., *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 4: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Antiquity* (San Francisco:

One of the things whose guardianship Balthasar entrusts to the theologian is *nature*. Although Balthasar has relatively little to say *ex professo* about Aristotle, no one who reads both *Theologik. I: Wahrheit der Welt* and *Herrlichkeit. I: Schau der Gestalt* can miss the convergences (intended or unintended) between Aristotelian *physis* and Balthasarian *Gestalt*. At stake in both, in fact, is a basic, irreducible ontological unity that possesses an original interiority out of which it manifests itself with unmistakable clarity against the background of the world. At the same time, Balthasar offers the “meta-physical” grounding that is essential for opening *physis* up to creation as gift and, by means of this opening, for giving it a place and an ultimate safeguard within the christological analogy of the transcendentals between God and the world proposed in the *Trilogy*.³⁹ Central to this project is Christ’s Paschal Mystery, which can be seen as providing the deepest foundation—the “*intimior intimo meo*” as it were—of the bottomless abyss of self-manifesting interiority that Aristotle glimpsed in *physis*: in his *kenosis*, Christ recapitulates the “noughting” of non-subsistent being, presupposing nature in its non-instrumentalizable, inalienable depth-dimension—and, in so doing, giving nature that depth in the first place.⁴⁰ This connection between the depth of Holy Saturday and the depth of nature deserves much more attention among Balthasarians than they have hitherto given it.

Balthasar always insisted that “without philosophy, there is no theology.”⁴¹ This lapidary dictum means that theology both

Ignatius Press, 1989), 18.

³⁹See *ibid.*, 13–39 (Eng., 11–39).

⁴⁰Christ’s *kenosis* is the *concretissimum* of the non-subsistence of *esse* as a reflection of the divine liberality that shines forth when *esse*, at the very moment it accounts for created nature as a quasi- or supra-formal cause, also “depends” on created nature as the abyssal ground out of which it, created *esse*, is to be instantiated and exercised (as the natural thing’s substantial *energeia*). Christ thus presupposes and accounts for the whole relation by which created *esse* at once causes and depends on created nature—and in so doing both causes, and in causing depends on, created nature himself. Christ not only grounds *physis*, but simultaneously presupposes, and receives himself from, it—and (only) in so doing bestows on it its characteristic interiority in the first place.

⁴¹H. U. von Balthasar, *Theologik. I: Wahrheit der Welt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), vii; Eng. tr., *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 1: *Truth of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 7.

presupposes, and is a renewed re-entry into, the source-point of all thinking without exception: the *thaumazein* over reality that Plato and Aristotle claim is the principle of philosophy.⁴² And not just over reality in general, but also over *nature*, that “dearest freshness deep down things” (Hopkins) whose self-manifestation is the first wonder-provoking revelation of being with which we come into contact.⁴³ If Balthasar is a master of theological renewal, it is not just because he insists on the primacy of grace. It is also because, from the height of specifically Christian revelation, he gives us the eyes to wonder at *physis* again and the resources to stand up for its integrity. The contemplation of the Paschal Mystery, in fact, lays upon the Christian a genuine feeling for, and obedience to, the natures of things, just as Christ himself obeyed them when he received them from the Father to shepherd them up from nothingness in his rising from the “lower regions of the earth” (Eph 4:9). Care for nature is one of the chief tasks that falls to the Christian layman (to whom Balthasar primarily entrusts the theological exposition of the catholicity of trinitarian love⁴⁴) in the following of

⁴²Philosophy, on Balthasar’s account, is not just one more or less well paid academic discipline alongside others, or even a source of “conceptual tools” for theology; it is the falling in love with being as love—a falling in love that Plato called *eros*—that stands for the quintessence of all genuine understanding. This is not to say, of course, that Balthasar recommends setting aside hard thinking in favor of some sort of enthusiastic wordless immediacy. Balthasar knows that part of being in love means staying in love, and staying in love takes work, which in this case means a desire to do the highest justice to what one has seen by rendering the most comprehensive, subtle, and argumentatively sound account one can give of it. Balthasar’s point, then, is simply that, unless hard thinking is awakened and sustained by wonderment over the splendor of being as love, it cannot ever see the point of going all the way to the bottom of any problem—and so lacks the principle that alone can found the logical stringency that distinguishes hard thinking from mush.

⁴³This is particularly, but not exclusively, true of personal nature.

⁴⁴The “lay” represents for Balthasar a fundamental “place” where the Church and the world come together to anticipate their eschatological unity already in time. The “lay,” in turn, Balthasar entrusts to the new form of consecrated life in the world called the “secular institute.” Indeed, as is well known, Balthasar thought that the center of his own work lay not in his books, but in the secular institute he founded in 1945 with Adrienne von Speyr: the Community of Saint John. For more information on this point, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unser Auftrag. Bericht und Entwurf* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1984). For a good presentation of Balthasar’s theology of secular institutes, see his *Gottbereites Leben* (Freiburg:

Christ who, in the Paschal Mystery, went to the uttermost lengths imaginable to lay created nature, whole and intact, at the feet of the Father.⁴⁵ □

ADRIAN J. WALKER is an associate editor of *Communio*.

Johannes Verlag, 1993); and Juan M. Sara, "Secular Institutes in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2002).

⁴⁵One could express this by saying that Balthasar's theological aesthetics has enormous potential for the development of a sound theology of the environment and the natural world. See Connie Lasher, "*The Contemplative Glance of Faith*": *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Contribution to a Catholic Theology of Ecological Identity* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, UMI number 3135966: 2004).