CAN AQUINAS AND BALTHASAR BE RECONCILED? ON A DISPUTED QUESTION IN TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

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"In God strength and weakness, majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, paradoxically go together, not just in the economy of salvation, but even in God *secundum quod Deus*."

Vis capere celsitudinem Dei? Cape prius humilitatem Dei. . . . Cum ceperis humilitatem eius, surgis cum illo.[1]

The property of love is never to seek itself, to keep back nothing, but to give everything to the one it loves.[2]

1. Augustine, *Sermones* 117.10.17. See also *De catechizandis rudibus* 4.8: "Magna est enim miseria superbus homo, sed maior misericordia humilis Deus." Thanks to Brian Daley, SJ, for this reference, for his gracious comments on this article, and for showing how the Angelic Doctor could stand to be supplemented by Ignatius. Thanks also to Michael Altenburger, David Hart, Michael Magree, SJ, Nicholas Healy, Aaron Pidel, SJ, and Alexis Torrance for help with, or helpful comments on, various aspects of this article.

2. John of the Cross, *Collected Works of John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD (Washington, DC: ICS, 1991), 351.

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One of the more disputed theological questions of the last fifty years has been the question of whether the kenosis of the Son of God in time (Phil 2:6–11) points to a kenosis within the immanent Trinity as its transcendent archetype. Hans Urs von Balthasar famously answered this question in the affirmative and strikingly so: not only does the temporal kenosis of the Son reflect an eternal kenosis in the form of the Son's eternal humility and obedience with respect to the Father; this same *phenomenal* kenosis invites us *speculatively* to consider as its ultimate transcendental condition a *primordial* kenosis—an *Ur*kenosis—that consists in the Father's eternally emptying himself in giving his Son all that he has and all that he is.[3] For Balthasar, in other words, the Son's temporal kenosis is ultimately a reflection of a reflection, a mimetic enactment of the Father's own total gift of himself in begetting him. Contemporary Thomists, on the other hand, have tended to reject the notion of an intra-trinitarian kenosis—and the corresponding idea that God is humble in himself—on the grounds that it introduces a category distinctive to the economy and bound up with the contingency of creation. As Bruce Marshall puts it with respect to Balthasar: "Our understanding of how the three persons are one God must not be infiltrated or 'contaminated,' as it were, by terms and concepts that refer only to the economy."[4]

Of course, this is not to say that we could know something about the Trinity apart from the economy, for Thomists themselves would have to admit that all our knowledge of God is dependent upon it and indeed "contaminated" by it, if this is the right expression—if by the economy we mean not just salvation history, but the whole of created reality as divinely superintended. The question is rather a question of ascription: what can one say about God in his eternal nature on the basis of the economy and what not? Take, for example, the Incarnation, or the fact that Christ suffered. Does God becoming man mean that God mutated into a man or that his divine nature suffered

3. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* (*TD*), 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988–1998), 4:325. Or again: "The ontic possibility for God's self-emptying in the Incarnation and death of Jesus lies in God's eternal self-emptying in the mutual self-surrender of the Persons of the Trinity." Ibid., 5:243.

4. Bruce Marshall, "The Unity of the Triune God: Reviving an Ancient Question," *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 17.

change in his suffering on our behalf? Orthodoxy has always denied such things, lest we confuse what it means to be God and what it means to be a creature, and turn theology (as reasoned discourse about God's Logos) into mythology. Thus, calling for careful distinctions, orthodoxy affirms that one of the persons of the Trinity indeed suffered, but also that the divine nature qua nature was nevertheless unaffected by it. In short, orthodoxy obliges us to affirm both of these things, almost paradoxically, in keeping with Melito of Sardis's famous formulation that "the impassible suffered" (τὸ ἀπαθές ἔπαθεν).[5]

Now, if Marshall and the Thomists are right that the human suffering of Christ cannot "infiltrate" the divine nature, which according to Scripture is immutable (Jas 1:17), and that it is ascribed strictly to Christ's human nature—without denying that God really suffers in Christ insofar as he is hypostatically united to it—then the pertinent question is what Balthasar thinks. Is he unaware of these subtle theological distinctions? Far from it. As one might expect from a great theologian, he was fully aware of the Church's teaching in this regard. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

> The early Christians . . . had to adopt a position vis-à-vis the mythological notions of suffering, changeable gods, and, most of all, they had to counter a mythological interpretation of the incarnation of God in Christ. If Christ was God, and thus in his human form a *Deus passibilis*, it was necessary to hold fast all the more energetically to the impassibility of the divine nature. This is the origin of the formulas that speak of "the Impassible One who suffers for us."[6]

In view of this and similar passages, a reader might be forgiven for wondering what the Thomists are so worked up about, and whether they are guilty of "friendly fire." For, obviously, for Balthasar, it is not that the impassible God is

5. Melito of Sardis, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*, ed. Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979/2012), 55.

6. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 5, *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 219. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* 2I, *The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 38.

converted into the passible, or that the immortal is converted into the mortal, but that the *impassible* God, by freely assuming a *passible* human nature, which is hypostatically united to him, *freely* suffers and dies for our sake. As he clearly puts it, here quoting Gregory Thaumaturgos: "If God . . . wishes to save men by freely choosing suffering, he suffers impassibly; since he suffers freely, he is not subject to suffering but superior to it."[7] In no sense, therefore, can Balthasar be accused of giving up the doctrine of divine impassibility, as if what happens in the economy caused or causes some kind of change in God's eternal nature. This should also be evident, *ex negativo*, from his adamant rejection of Hegel's theogony, which would collapse the analogical interval between God and creation and turn God into a passible creature.[8]

But if Balthasar can be cleared of this charge—that he has imported suffering into the divine nature—what about his doctrine of an intra-divine kenosis? Has he, his best orthodox intentions notwithstanding, crossed a line? Has he posited something peculiar to the economy, something having to do with what God does for us, in God himself? For his part, Marshall thinks so.[9] And other Thomistic theologians, such as Thomas Joseph White, OP, Joshua Brotherton, and Guy Mansini, OSB, have voiced similar concerns, ranging from measured reservation, in the case of White, to outright alarm in the case of Mansini, who goes so far as to say that "the Trinitarian kenosis of Balthasar destroys the Trinitarian theology of the Church."[10] What they all have in common, however, is the concern that Balthasar not only "projects" words and concepts proper to creatures, such as "enrichment" and "surprise," into the divine life, but that his

7. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 5, 219.

8. See Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1, *Hegel* (New York: Crossroad, 2014).

9. Following Thomas, therefore, Marshall counsels, we would do well to distinguish more sharply between the processions and the missions so that we are not tempted to back-read the latter into the former; see Marshall, "The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, OP (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 246–98.

10. Guy Mansini, "Hegel and Christian Theology," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 14 (2016): 999.

dramatic theology, which presents the persons of the Trinity as a veritable cast of characters, *dramatis personae*, willy-nilly turns Christianity into tritheism and theology into mythology.[11]

Such, then, is the *status quaestionis*: both Balthasar *and* the Thomists would seem to have theologically justifiable positions. They could even be said to have grounds for anathematizing one another. If the Thomists find Balthasar guilty of mythologizing theology and destroying trinitarian theology, as Mansini says, Balthasarians, in turn, could argue that the Thomists have failed to understand the meaning of the word "revelation." Is the Cross, for instance, just an ironic instrument of salvation? Does it not also reveal something about the nature of love, whose nature is to humble itself and empty itself for the beloved? For that matter, Balthasarians could argue that the Thomists have failed to see the glory of God in his kenosis, precisely in the way that someone without an aesthetic sensibility fails to see something beautiful and be moved by it—and in this case something so supremely beautiful that it moves one not only to offer oneself in return to the one who gave himself totally to us (this being the only adequate response), but, if one is a philosopher, also to wonder what transcendentally must be the case for God to have revealed himself in *such* a way (Jn 3:16). In other words, a Balthasarian can ask the Thomists: have they really seen the form of Christ *as* the form of God and been so inspired by seeing it that they inspire others with what they themselves have seen? Or have they not

11. See Guy Mansini, OSB, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," *The Thomist* 64, no. 4 (2000): 499–519 (it is not surprising that this should appear in *The Thomist*); Mansini, "Can Humility and Obedience Be Trinitarian Realities?" in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, ed. Bruce McCormack and Thomas Joseph White, OP (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 71–98; Mansini, "Obedience Religious, Christological, and Trinitarian," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12 (2014): 395–413; and most recently, "Hegel and Christian Theology," 993–1001. For a more charitable but similarly critical account, see Thomas Joseph White's magisterial study, *The Incarnate Lord: A Study in Thomistic Christology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 381–437; White, "Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 6 (2008): 377–402. See also Joshua Brotherton, "God's Relation to Evil: Maritain and Balthasar on Divine Impassibility," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2015): 191–211; Brotherton, "Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity after Balthasar," *The Thomist* 82, no. 2 (2018): 189–234; and Bertrand de Margerie, "Note on Balthasar's Trinitarian Theology," *The Thomist* 64, no. 1 (2000): 127–30.

only confused faith with intellectual assent in the way that one assents to mathematical truths—or perhaps even in the way that the demons believe—and turned the Gospel of God in the flesh into a skeleton of propositions without spirit and life?

Surely, these are rhetorical extremes, bordering on caricature. But they nevertheless say something about theological differences—not unlike the difference, which Balthasar famously noted, between Goethe and Kant or, more generally, between a more aesthetic-synthetic and a more logical-analytical sensibility. And this is at least one reason why Balthasar introduced the notion of theological styles, ultimately for the sake of a more polyphonic Church, which can appreciate the voices of all the saints (not just Thomas alone), and a *more* Catholic theology, which, I submit, is what the Church needs today.[12]

In the meantime, however, we would seem to be faced with a theological aporia comparable to that between the Dominicans and the Jesuits at the time of the *de auxiliis* controversy—not just between the prima facie positions of Thomas and Balthasar (the *quondam* Jesuit) but more broadly between the journals dedicated to their respective legacies, *The Thomist* and *Communio*. How, then, ought we proceed? Should we wait for another papal decree to bring an end to the dispute, which is highly unlikely given its highly speculative nature and more pressing practical concerns? Or should we rather recognize with Paul V that the lack of theological resolution is itself a sign of mystery and that no one school can claim to have a definitive grasp of it? In my view, this would be a genuinely Catholic way forward, especially when two faithful Catholic theologians seem to be in disagreement with one another. For the *Catholic* Church has never been the Church of Thomas *alone* or of Balthasar *alone*, or for that matter of any one theologian alone, as Johann Adam Möhler reminded us vis-à-vis the spirit of the Reformation in his *Symbolik*. Rather, though the Church sometimes signals its preference for one theologian (as Leo XIII did by promoting Thomas in *Aeterni patris*), it has from the beginning been a polyphonic Church (the Church of Peter, John, and Paul, et al.), whose distinct voices are orchestrated by the

12. See John R. Betz, *Christ the Logos of Creation: An Essay in Analogical Metaphysics* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 491f.

one Spirit—even if the polyphony of the Spirit is beyond our range of hearing.

Trusting in the creativity of the Spirit, we may therefore hope for some kind of resolution to this dispute that recognizes the *particula veri* on both sides, and therewith the possibility of a deeper integration beyond mutual recriminations. As Fr. White says with regard to Balthasar, "monolithic theological projects have to undergo revision, critique, and reconsideration so that the genuine insights of a given theological or literary genius might be integrated rightly and in true fashion into the catholicity—the universality—of the common communion of the whole church."[13] I could not agree more; for what applies to the words of the prophets (1 Thes 5:21; see also 1 Jn 4:1) also applies to the words of theologians. And so it is inevitable that Balthasar's kenotic theology would have to be proved—in the way that de Lubac's theology of the natural desire for the supernatural would have to be proved, however unfair his treatment at the hands of Garrigou-Lagrange and others may have been. But—and this is no tongue-in-cheek question—does this apply to Thomism as well? Or is it so well established to constitute a finished and irrefragable system? No doubt it can give this appearance. But Thomas's own famous last words, *ut palea mihi videtur*, would suggest otherwise, calling for humility on the part of Balthasarians and Thomists alike.

This is no excuse for cheap compromises, however. For the concerns of the Thomists are reasonable and must therefore be addressed. In what follows, therefore, it will be important to put Balthasar's theology to the test to see whether it stands up to Thomistic criticism. In the process I hope to show that, while the Thomists have legitimate concerns, they are greatly mitigated by Balthasar's unwavering commitment to the *Thomistic* principle of the *analogia entis* as he inherited from his mentor, Erich Przywara.[14] For not only does the *analogia entis* set the metaphysical stage for Balthasar's dramatic theology (precisely in the way that

13. White, *Incarnate Lord*, 437.

14. See Werner Löser, *Geschenkte Wahrheit: Annäherungen an das Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Würzburg: Echter, 2015), 42: "Man kann gar nicht genug herausstellen, dass von Balthasar bis an sein Lebensende darum bemüht war, ein philosophisches und theologisches Denken im Sinne der analogia-entis Lehre zu entfalten" (One cannot possibly emphasize enough that Balthasar

theology presupposes philosophy); it also, precisely as a stage, sets important limits to it. Equally, however, it will be necessary to call into question various certainties of the Thomists, above all their exclusion of humility from the divine nature as something defective, contingently assumed for the purposes of redemption, and unbecoming of God in himself. Here, too, Przywara will enter the picture as a uniquely mediating voice since he stands in many ways between Thomas and Balthasar. Specifically, with Przywara's help, I hope to show how Thomas's own teachings on divine power and simplicity are more amenable to Balthasarian emendation than meets the eye, and that Thomas's own theology begs us to consider more carefully the conclusion that Balthasar draws: namely, that the humility of God in Christ is not an accidental function of the economy of salvation and applicable to God only as man (in the way that passibility, as orthodoxy holds, is applicable to God only as man), but something *proper* to God as love. For, as Balthasar and such doctors of the Church as John of the Cross recognized, it is of the *nature* of love—and no accident of love's dealings with human beings—to humble itself and empty itself out of love for the beloved.

But if this is so, and if Balthasar's position is defensible, as we hope to show that it is, there is still work to be done, specifically with regard to understanding the context and origins of his kenotic theology—and all the more so inasmuch as Thomism has never really dealt with the German theological tradition from which Balthasar comes, and whose best fruits he has gathered up and offered to the Church for consideration. To this end it will be important first to consider, if only briefly, Balthasar's context in the German tradition and the literary, philosophical, and theological sources of modern kenoticism in particular.

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF KENOSIS IN THE GERMAN TRADITION

The first thing to keep in mind about Balthasar's kenotic theology is that it stands in a long tradition of German theological reflection on this topic, the most famous example of which is the

strove to the end of his life to develop a kind of philosophical and theological thought along the lines of the *analogia entis*).

so-called "kenosis controversy" that took place among Lutheran scholastics during the early seventeenth century. What was at issue in this controversy was whether the Son of God emptied himself so fully of his divinity as to abstain entirely from divine prerogatives, as the Giessen faculty argued (following Martin Chemnitz), or whether his kenosis entailed merely the cloaking of his divinity (following Johannes Brenz), which permitted the cryptic exercise of his power and authority, as the Tübingen faculty maintained.[15] Since these debates were largely a matter of Christology, what was not at issue was the further question of what the kenosis of the Son of God might mean for trinitarian doctrine.[16]

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, kenosis had become a broader trope for understanding all the works of the economic Trinity. For the Lutheran author and critic J. G. Hamann, for example, who developed insights of his teacher Martin Knutzen,[17] it was the key to understanding

15. For a venerable account, see the entry on Christology in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, 13 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 3:57–63.

16. For an excellent historical overview, see Thomas R. Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Stephen C. Evans (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 74–111.

17. See in particular Martin Knutzen's "Betrachtungen über die Schreibart der Heiligen Schrift" in *Philosophischer Beweis von der Wahrheit der christlichen Religion (1747)*, ed. Ulrich Lehner (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2005), 227–40, esp. 229–30: "Bei dieser großen Herunterlaßung der höchsten Weisheit, bey [sic] diesem ungekünstelt einfältigen Vortrage, leuchten indeßen doch hin und wieder die Strahlen der göttlichen Herrlichkeit hervor. GOTT [sic] bedeckt zwar sein Antlitz in der Schrift mit dem schlecht scheinenden Vortrage, wie Moses, weil unsere blöde Gemüthsaugen sein Anschauen viel weniger, als jene Israeliten des Mosis Glanz, vertragen können. . . . Das geoffenbarte Wort GOTTES hat, wie der vortreffliche Rollin anmerket, hierinnen eine besondere Aehnlichkeit [sic] mit dem selbständigen Worte des Lebens. Dieser eingeborne Sohn GOTTES verbarg die Größe seiner Majestät, so zu reden, unter der verächtlichen Knechts-Gestalt." (In the meantime, notwithstanding such great condescension on the part of the greatest wisdom, and such an unaffected and simple presentation, the beams of divine glory gleam here and there. Like Moses, GOD covers his face in Scripture with what to all appearances is a poor presentation; for the dim-witted eyes of our minds can bear his appearance even less than the Israelites could bear the glory of Moses. . . . In this respect, as the excellent Rollin has observed, the revealed Word of GOD

not only the kenotic form of Christ but also the kenotic form of Scripture (as appropriated to the Spirit) and the kenotic form of creation (as appropriated to the Father).[18] In other words, in Hamann, kenosis became a lens for understanding the work of all the persons of the Trinity *ad extra*. As he put it in his *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters* (1762): "It is proper to the unity of divine revelation that, by means of the styluses of the holy men he inspired, the Holy Spirit should have lowered himself and emptied himself of his majesty, just as the Son of God did in assuming the form of a servant, and just as the whole of creation is a work of the greatest humility."[19] As Balthasar observes in reference to these and related passages: "It is not just that Hamann marvels at the servant-form [*Knechtsgestalt*] of the Word in Holy Scripture (the very notion is almost a contradiction!); he marvels even prior to that at the 'humility' of God in the speech of creation, which well before Golgotha made the law of *moria*, of folly (Hamann writes the word in capital letters), into the law of the world."[20] In sum, for Hamann, kenosis and humility—for present purposes, the two are interchangeable—are not accidental features of God's self-revelation but consistent characteristics of it.

As a Lutheran who was averse to abstract metaphysical speculation not rooted in historical revelation, Hamann does not delve into the question of what such humility might mean for

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bears a certain similarity to the Word of Life himself. This only-begotten Son of GOD hid the greatness of his majesty, so to speak, beneath the contemptible form of a slave).

18. For Hamann's understanding of Scripture, see John R. Betz, "Glory(ing) in the Humility of the Word: The Kenotic Form of Revelation in J. G. Hamann," *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010): 141–79, and Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), esp. 43–45, 84–87, and 113–28.

19. Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols., ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna: Herder, 1949–1957), 2:171. As Hamann also put it to Kant around the same time, "Creation is not a work of vanity, but of humility, of condescension." *Briefwechsel*, 6 vols., ed. Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955–1975), 1:452.

20. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*, vol. 1, *Der deutsche Idealismus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 60; for Balthasar's lengthiest treatment of Hamann, see his chapter on Hamann in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 3, trans. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams, ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 239–40.

God in se; instead, his focus remains steadily on God as revealed in the economy of salvation. What especially interests him, however, is the way in which God remains kenotically hidden in the midst of his self-revelation, especially from the proud and learned, in keeping with Christ's words: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding and revealed them to babes" (Mt 11:25). Indeed, this was in some sense the source of his highly ironic authorship: his perception that the *Aufklärer*, although they claimed to see were in fact blind, and that, while they presumed to bring "enlightenment" to mankind, were themselves the ones who needed to be enlightened—not only about their own philosophical confusion, which Hamann was quick to point out, but by the light of Christ, which "shines in the darkness" (Jn 1:5). Accordingly, he tried to point out to his "enlightened" contemporaries that God's ways are invariably obscure to all who rely on (superficial) reason alone, which kept them from seeing in the earthiness of creation, in the sometimes crude stories of Israel, and in the lowly figure of the carpenter's son the reality of a *deeper* Logos who falls kenotically beneath their gaze. But, as Hamann recognized, such humility also serves an important purpose: it keeps at a distance and bars from the mysteries (by an implicit rather than explicit judgment) anyone who would refuse to humble himself and bow before a Logos deeper—and therefore higher—than his own.[21]

What is most relevant here, however, is the inference that Hamann draws from his various impressions of divine humility in the economy. As he puts it in his *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762): "The unity of the author is reflected in the dialect of his works—in all things one tone of immeasurable height and depth! A proof of the most glorious majesty and of the most complete self-emptying!"[22] In other words, humility is a peculiarity of God's "dialect"; it is the *basso continuo* of his works *ad extra* and

21. As he puts it, again in the *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters*: "If the divine style elects the foolish—the trite—the ignoble—in order to put to shame the strength and ingenuity of all profane authors: then it almost goes without saying that eyes that are illumined, inspired, and armed with the jealousy of a friend, an intimate, a lover are required in order to see in such disguise the beams of heavenly glory." *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:171.

22. *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:204.

the peculiar form, so to speak, of his majesty. Indeed, humility and majesty are so intimately related that they cannot be separated. What is more, in a kind of *coincidentia oppositorum* (to borrow Cusa's term), which was of fundamental importance to Hamann, they say something about the "unity of the author." Evidently, we are here just a step away from inferring with Balthasar that the works of the Trinity *ad extra* say something about the Trinity *ad intra*, and Hamann gives us reason for thinking in this direction.[23] In what sense humility might be predicated of the persons of the immanent Trinity or in what sense the unity of God in se might be a function of humility Hamann does not say except to suggest throughout his writings that in God majesty and abasement, glory and kenosis, *Golgotha and Scheblimini* (the title of one of his last works) are one.[24] As Balthasar keenly comments, anticipating one of the great themes of his own kenotic theology: "This revelation of the humility of God is that of His glory."[25]

While Hamann himself was averse to the kind of speculation one subsequently finds in German Idealism, such ideas, allowing for a possible admixture of Lurianic Kabbalah, were readily picked up by Schelling and Hegel, each of whom, for all their other differences, came to understand creation in terms of a divine kenosis—whether as a matter of divine necessity (Hegel) or divine freedom (Schelling). As Schelling put it, inspired by his first enthusiastic reading of Hamann: "The external creation, says J.G. Hamann, is a work of the greatest humility; the spiritual doctors are unanimous in their view of creation as an act of condescension."[26] Whatever one makes of Schelling's reading

23. This is corroborated by Hamann's consistent existential refusal to separate thought from life, form from content, etc., as when he quotes Buffon with approval, saying: "Le style est l'homme même" (ibid., 4:424).

24. "Golgotha and Scheblimini! Von einem Prediger in der Wüsten [*sic*]," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 3:291–320. *Scheblimini* is a reference to Ps 110:1 and, specifically, to the majesty indicated by the phrase "Sit Thou at my right hand" (*šēb lîyĕmînî*).

25. Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, 60.

26. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart, 1856–1861), 8:71. See also 8:167–68 and 8:181–82. While this particular statement comes from 1811, Schelling first started reading Hamann (at the latest) in 1808, having received a collection of his writings on loan from Jacobi; see John R. Betz, "Reading Sibylline Leaves:

of Hamann, to whom Schelling and Jacobi both appealed in their vitriolic public debate over the course of 1811–1812,[27] the concept of kenosis subsequently became an important feature of Schelling's philosophy, especially his late philosophy of revelation, which he introduced in his 1831–32 lectures in Munich and represents his (and arguably philosophy's) most earnest and sophisticated attempt hitherto to understand the doctrine of the Trinity.[28]

Not surprisingly, given his prominence after Hegel as the last of the great German idealists, Schelling in turn became an important conduit of modern kenoticism: from the Lutheran theologians of the Erlangen school, such as Gottfried Thomasius[29] and (perhaps more indirectly) Johannes von Hofmann,[30] to the work of celebrated British divines such as

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J. G. Hamann in the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009): 93–118, esp. 103–109.

27. See F. H. Jacobi, *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer dem Jüngern, 1811) and F. W. J. Schelling, *Denkmal der Schrift von den göttlichen Dingen &c. des Herrn Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi* (Tübingen: J. G. Cotta, 1812).

28. It should be noted that the Berlin lectures, which he delivered exactly ten years later on the same topic, upon being called to Berlin, were originally published without Schelling's permission by his bitter rival, Paulus, and therefore cannot be considered reliable. For a firsthand account of this affair see Johann Eduard Erdmann's *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der neueren Philosophie*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1853). For the original transcription of the lectures, see *F. W. J. Schelling: Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1992). For Schelling's understanding of kenosis insofar as it relates to the immanent Trinity, see especially his ninth lecture in which a kenosis is attributed to the Father, the first potency, who "disappears," so to speak, in ceding his subjectivity, his "being for himself," to the Son, the second potency. Indeed, as Schelling puts it, the Father is no longer him*self*. He is selfless. But in begetting the Son, the Father is also "liberated" from anything accidental in his nature and eternally established. Thus, for Schelling, in giving up himself to the Son, the Father is not changed, but is eternally who he is (Ex 3:14). While Schelling's philosophy of revelation is not wholly orthodox, it is a remarkable testament to a mind struggling to understand revelation and establish God's freedom with respect to creation, and so avoid pantheism, without falling prey to an empty and abstract theism.

29. See David R. Law, "Gottfried Thomasius," in *The Student's Companion to the Theologians*, ed. Ian S. Markham (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 326–37.

30. See Matthew Becker's study of Johannes von Hofmann, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

Charles Gore, A. M. Fairbairn, H. R. Mackintosh, and Frank Weston.[31] As David Law observes, citing G. L. Bauer, Schelling "provides 'the immediate link to the doctrine of kenosis' and 'the metaphysical basis for the application of kenosis to the concept of a personal God.'"[32] But Schelling was not merely an indirect influence on the development of British theology (not to mention Coleridge); he was also a major influence on Soloviev, who speaks of "Schelling and me,"[33] who in turn fascinated Balthasar[34]—not to mention Bulgakov, in whom modern kenotic theology reaches its speculative zenith inasmuch as his entire theology turns on the topic of kenosis, not just an economic kenosis (in creation, Incarnation, Cross) but a primordial intra-trinitarian kenosis, an *Ur-kenosis*, in the Father's eternal begetting of the Son (as was also the case with Schelling).[35]

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31. See David Law's excellent treatment of Schelling in *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 140–53. For a brief history of kenosis in Protestant theology, see Paul Althaus's entry in the third edition (1959) of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt Galling, 3:1243–44. See also Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Die neuere protestantische Kenosislehre* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1917), 159, 162.

32. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, 140.

33. See Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 82–83, 161.

34. See Balthasar's chapter on Soloviev in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* III: *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 279–352. As Balthasar put it to Przywara in a letter dated March 3, 1962, "I am deep in Soloviev: a summit that seems to me to tower as high as Baader and Newman, having the kind of hallucinatory clarity of a foehn effect, the whole spiritual world [*Geistwelt*] compressed into one; at some point you absolutely have to dedicate something to him [*ein Denkmal setzen*]." See Manfred Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologen-Kollegen* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009), 86. For Balthasar's appreciation of Bulgakov, see *Theo-Logic*, II: *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 177–78.

35. See Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 98: "The Father lives not in Himself but in His Son's life; the Father lives in begetting, that is, in proceeding out of Himself, in revealing Himself. The Father's love is ecstatic, fiery, causative, active. . . . This begetting power is the ecstasy of a going out of oneself, of a kind of self-emptying, which at the same time is self-actualization through this begetting"; also: "The Father's kenosis in creation consists in this going out of Himself, in which He becomes God for the world and enters into a relation with it as the Absolute-Relative. The *transcensus* toward the world is the sacrifice of the Father's love;

Needless to say, the point of the foregoing has not been to give an exhaustive account of modern kenoticism but simply to indicate that Balthasar's doctrine of kenosis was informed by a long-standing tradition of philosophical and theological reflection on this biblical trope. At the same time, as a Catholic theologian, he was by no means an unqualified assimilator of this tradition, as Cyril O'Regan has shown with respect to Hegel and Jennifer Newsome Martin has shown with respect to Soloviev and Bulgakov.[36] Indeed, in this respect, he is no different from Augustine with respect to the *libri Platonici* and Thomas with respect to Aristotle. And this begs to be remembered if one is predisposed to be suspicious of Balthasar for engaging modern kenoticism because in engaging it he did nothing other than what the unquestionably orthodox Augustine and Thomas did in their own time, the latter of whom was even censured for it. So, with this important qualification in mind, let us now take up the disputed question of Balthasar's kenotic theology.

2. THE QUESTION OF BALTHASAR'S KENOTIC THEOLOGY

Looking back on this brief history, we can now better see where, from a Thomistic standpoint, Balthasar's kenotic theology might seem problematic: not that he, like Hamann, affirms the humility of the works of the Trinity *ad extra* but that he draws the explicit conclusion that God is humble in himself (*secundum quod Deus*) and that it is therefore right to ascribe humility to the divine nature. But it is not simply that Balthasar *adds* humility to a ready-made list of divine attributes, however unthinkable this may already be from a classical philosophical standpoint; following Bulgakov, he also infers from the Son's self-sacrifice an

analogous to it is the birth of the Son in the intratrinitarian life, when the Father, depleting Himself, begets the Son." Ibid., 129.

36. For Balthasar's vigorous contesting of Hegel's form of kenoticism, see Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1, *Hegel* (New York: Crossroad, 2014). For Balthasar's qualified appropriation of Russian religious philosophy, see Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

eternal kenosis *within* the immanent Trinity as its transcendental condition—ultimately finding the archetype for the Son's kenosis in the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, thereby making kenosis *constitutive* of God as God. As he strikingly puts it: "[God] *cannot be God in any other way but in this 'kenosis' within the Godhead itself.*"[37] All of which raises the obvious and legitimate question: Has Balthasar gone too far?

Admittedly, from a Thomistic standpoint, it could very well look like Balthasar has transgressed the bounds of orthodoxy in the direction of German Idealism, specifically in the direction of Hegel's speculative Good Friday.[38] For like Hegel, Balthasar, too, sees the economy, centrally the Cross, as a kind of mirror of divine things, indeed, as a speculum off of which a divine logic can be read. But as soon as we note their similarity we have to observe just how different they are: for Balthasar, God's relation to the world is analogical; for Hegel, it is univocally identical; for Balthasar, God is God before the world; for Hegel, God does not really "exist" before it or apart from it, and so forth. Moreover, we have to keep in mind that, while Balthasar is very much engaged with Hegel, he is engaged with him, as Cyril O'Regan has shown, in order to overcome the subtle distortion of theological logic that he represents. In other words, what looks like Hegelianism is actually a deeply kenotic response to Hegel, a speaking of his language, so to speak, in order to overcome him in his own idiom. Granted, to a passing observer, such deep Catholic engagement may be mistaken for its opposite, and this is understandable. For in the thick of engagement, especially when the clashing is most intense, sides can become blurred to the point that one can no longer distinguish them. And so it is here: Balthasar can look like Hegel even and precisely in the midst of opposing him—just as a vaccine typically contains something of the virus it is meant to counteract.

But legitimate questions nevertheless remain, especially when one is dealing with Hegel, who has charmed and left his mark on almost everyone who has ever read him. Indeed, who

37. Balthasar, *TD* 4:325 (my emphasis).

38. For a strong critique of Balthasar (and other modern theologians) along these lines, see Bruce Marshall, "The Absolute and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014): 147–64.

has really been drawn into the orbit of whom? Which *Geist* has more gravitational pull? Has German Idealism been redeemed, or has Christianity been turned into German Idealism? To answer these questions, however, we need to ask another series of questions: What does one make of the phenomenal kenosis (and humility) of the Son of God? Is it merely a contingency of the economy of salvation? Is it merely an instrument of which God once made use, the way one uses a hammer that has no intrinsic connection to the person using it? Or does it say something about the nature of God in himself? In other words, we cannot answer the question of whether Balthasar has drunk too deeply from the wells of German Idealism until we gain a better understanding of kenosis and its range of significance, from the minimal to the maximal, within Christian theology.

Now if we follow Balthasar's maximal interpretation, the Son's kenosis is not simply (as on a minimalist reading) an external fact of redemption; in other words, it does not simply tell us how God *happened* to save the human race, which might have been saved differently. Nor, as significant as this in itself would be, is the Son's kenosis merely the pattern laid down for the whole of the Christian life: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at [cf. Gn 3:7], but emptied himself" (Phil 2:5–7).[39] For Balthasar, this same kenosis is also an *apocalypse* in the most literal sense of the word—an unveiling not only of the Son's eternal obedience to the Father but also of the nature of the Father who is revealed in his Son. Nor is this revelation partial; on the contrary, the revelation is as complete as the kenosis. As Christ himself says on the Cross: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).

At the most obvious level, these immensely significant words refer to salvation, specifically, to the conclusion of the

39. No one is more emphatic about this than Thomas à Kempis. In the words of Christ, as he imaginatively communicated them in *Imitation of Christ* 3.13: "I became the most meek and least of men that you might learn to conquer your pride by following the example of My humility." Indeed, he says, "You will make no progress in the interior life until you regard yourself as lower than everyone else" (2.2). See *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. and ed. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage, 1998), 95, 50. The inestimable importance of this book for the (making of the) saints of the modern period, from Ignatius to Thérèse of Lisieux, goes without saying.

definitive Passover by which the redemption of humanity is accomplished. But they admit of yet another significance, for in some sense there is really nothing more to see of God than can be seen in Christ. For *all* has now been revealed: not only God's love and will for creation in Christ (Eph 1:3–14), but the very *nature* of the Father who has *at last* been completely and perfectly revealed in his Son—who is not just any Word, but *the* Word, and not just any image, but *the* Image of his very being (Heb 1:1–3). As Christ himself unambiguously declares: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). But where is Christ more visible than on the Cross, where he is lifted up for all to see (Jn 3:14)? As John later says, in reference to Zechariah 12:10: "They will look on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37). Thus, paradoxically, according to the logic of John's Gospel, the Father is supremely *visible*, not supremely hidden, in the sacrifice of his Son—as is evident in that the evangelist transitions directly from the lifting up of the Son (3:14), who is eternal life to all who believe in him (v. 15), to the heart of the Father who so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son (v. 16).[40]

But if to see Christ is to see the Father, and if the Cross is where the Father is supremely visible, and if the Son does nothing but what the Father does in giving himself away, then, seeing Christ as the mirror of the Father's love, we have every reason to *speculate* with Balthasar that the Son's self-depletion (in time) is a mimetic revelation of the Father who eternally gives his Son *all* that he has and *all* that he is—not simply sharing what is his (as if *homoousios* meant nothing more than a sharing of what is held in common) but sharing himself *to the point* that he does not "exist," so to speak, except in his Son, in whom, however, he fully appears.[41] But, rounding out Balthasar's trinitarian theology, we

40. Granted, apart from faith, the one who is supremely visible is supremely hidden, more hidden, in fact, than ever before, having apparently abandoned his Son on the Cross. And so one could venture to say that it is the light *of the Father* (see Jas 1:17), which shines in the darkness—specifically, from the darkness of the Cross—that is not understood (Jn 1:5). Whence Paul, too, speaks of the glory of God, the Father, shining in the face of Christ but out of darkness as the dawning of the light of the new creation: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

41. To be sure, as a matter of patristic theological grammar, we say that the Father would not be the Father were it not for the Son—and we then go on to

can say still more. For, as the Gospels reveal, the Son's kenosis is from the beginning (Incarnation) to the end (Crucifixion) a performance *in the Spirit*, whose gift of life is totally—eucharistically—returned to the Father (Jn 19:30).[42] Accordingly, for Balthasar, the Son's kenosis on the Cross is not just an instrument of salvation; nor does it merely show us the meaning of spiritual life as a life of thanksgiving to the Father to the end; nor is it merely a representation of the Trinity than which none greater could be imagined. No, as far as this world is concerned, it is for Balthasar the supreme apocalypse of that total gift and total return of self that is the dynamic structure of eternal life, in which the Son ex-ists only in and for the Father who ex-ists only in and for him.

Needless to say, Balthasar's is a dramatic and speculatively daring theology. But if theology is an attempt to understand revelation—and if understanding is not excluded from faith, but one of its fruits, indeed, a gift of the Spirit—then Balthasar's logic as a *theo*-logic would seem compelling. For if Christ solemnly says that he does nothing except what he sees the Father doing (Jn 5:19), indeed, that in seeing him we see *the Father* (Jn 14:9), how can his self-emptying *not* reveal something about the Father?[43] Following Balthasar, we could put it even more strongly: not to see any analogical (or stricter) connection between what the Word does in his supreme gift of himself and what the Father

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say that the Father does not exist prior to his generation of the Son, which is an eternal generation. But, following Balthasar, we have even more reason for underscoring the consubstantiality and unity of the Trinity if we understand the Son as not only the Father's Word and Image, but as his very Ex-istence.

42. Following Thomas Weinandy, OFM, we might even go beyond Balthasar (who speaks of a "trinitarian inversion" whereby the Son, through whom the Spirit is said to proceed, is now the one who is passively sent by the Spirit) and say that what Christ does in time, in giving back the Spirit of Life to the Father, is an economic representation of the eternal Eucharist whereby he breathes back to the Father the Spirit of love in whom he is eternally begotten. For Balthasar's discussion of "trinitarian inversion," see *TD* 4:364–65. See Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995).

43. See Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44–45: "Christ's humanity is an appropriate expression of the divinity. . . . The obedience of Christ [is] the supreme manifestation of the divine being. . . . The whole being of the Son is there to express and represent the Father."

does or who the Father *is* (for here being and act are one) would be to deny that the Son is the Son *of the Father*, indeed, to separate the Father from the Son—and so to undermine not only the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation but the very meaning of revelation.

Such reasoning, which glories in the humility of God and refuses to reduce it to an accident of the economy of salvation, has been remarkably persuasive, so much so that over the past several decades Balthasar has come to enjoy the approbation of the papacy.[44] The election of his friend and quondam collaborator Benedict XVI in 2005 could even be said to mark a shift away from the older dogmatics, which gave pride of place to the Thomists, and a vindication of the *ressourcement* theologians, who once suffered censorship at their hands. By the same token, if one considers the range of figures included in Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*, it could be said to have signaled a shift toward a more

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44. Aside from Balthasar's well-known connection to Benedict XVI (then Joseph Ratzinger) as a cofounder with de Lubac of *Communio*, he was also elevated to the cardinalate by John Paul II, whose appreciation for Balthasar is fairly clear. See, for example, *Fides et ratio*, §93:

> The chief purpose of theology is to provide an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith. The very heart of theological enquiry will thus be the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God. The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death, a mystery issuing into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the Father, whence he would send the Spirit of truth to bring his Church to birth and give her growth. *From this vantage-point, the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return* (my emphasis).

See also Ratzinger's homily at the funeral liturgy for Balthasar: "No longer only private individuals, but the Church itself, in its official responsibility, tells us that he is right in what he teaches of the Faith, that he points the way to the sources of living water—a witness to the word which teaches us Christ and which teaches us how to live." Ratzinger, "Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). My thanks to Nicholas Healy for these references.

polyphonic conception of Catholic theology as universal enough to admit not just a renewed appreciation of the Church Fathers (Irenaeus, Maximus, et al.), but even an appreciation for figures outside the Catholic Church such as the Lutheran Hamann and the Orthodox Soloviev, both of whom are included as lay witnesses in the third volume of the *Glory of the Lord*.[45]

3. THOMISTIC CRITICISM

Understandably, however, the Thomists have not observed this development in silence but have challenged Balthasar's theology on a number of grounds, especially his notion of an intra-divine kenosis. Simply put, they worry that Balthasar has introduced categories into the divine nature (faith, humility, dialogue, obedience, suffering, sacrifice, and even a kind of "death") that do not belong there—categories that may very well be said of Christ's *human* nature, contingently assumed for the purposes of our salvation, but not of his eternal *divine* nature. Of course, Balthasar is too good a theologian not to make a number of important qualifications, as even Mansini recognizes. In the fourth volume of his *Theo-Drama*, for instance, Balthasar explicitly rejects all "fashionable talk of the 'pain of God'"[46] and dismisses outright any suggestion that divine kenosis entails a change in God's nature, much less a theogony whereby God becomes God in and through a tragic world process.[47] But such qualifications

45. For more on Balthasar's method, see Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology," *Gregorianum* 77, no. 2 (1996): 227–60. That this has precedent in the tradition goes without saying, being based upon the famous principle of Irenaeus concerning the *logos spermatikos* or *sperma tou logou*, i.e., the seeds of the Logos scattered abroad, which the Christian, inspired by Christ, can subsequently recognize as belonging to him as, at least, partial revelations that one can in good faith gather up in his honor and to his glory.

46. Balthasar, *TD* 4:327.

47. Balthasar, *TD* 4:324: "We cannot entertain any form of 'process theology' that identifies the world process (including God's involvement in it, even to the extent of the Cross) with the eternal and timeless 'procession' of the Hypostases in God." As Cyril O'Regan has shown in *Anatomy of Misremembering*, Balthasar is far too wary of Hegel (and Moltmann, for that matter) to be accused of making the immanent Trinity in some sense dependent upon its economic manifestation.

have not satisfied his Thomist critics. With regard to the question of change in God, Mansini writes: "It is hard to see how the invocation of a change in God unlike that which we find in our earthly experience . . . can be anything more than words."[48] Similarly, Joshua Brotherton observes, "Balthasar wants to trace [the suffering of God due to evil] back to a *primordial* 'wound' of sorts constituting the very being of God as triune."[49] Whence he concludes that Balthasar "ends up making God the primary analogate in the analogy of suffering, effectively subsuming the immanent dimension of the Trinity under the economic dimension of the Trinity in a manner differing little on the surface from Moltmann's theology."[50]

To his credit, Brotherton recognizes that things might "on the surface" seem worse than they are and that if Balthasar speaks of a "wound" in the divine nature, it is not a wound per se but only a wound "of sorts," namely, a "wound" of love by which the Father is "touched" by the Son's willingness to give himself up for the sake of the world's redemption. It is evident, in other words, that Balthasar is speaking metaphorically and perhaps never so much as when he speaks of the Father's generation of the Son as a kind of "death."[51] Nevertheless, for Brotherton, following Kevin Duffy, no amount of scare quotes—or what he and Duffy call the "metaphor defense"—is enough to save Balthasar's theology from (at the very least) incoherence. For what we see in Balthasar, in their view, is at the end of the day "an undifferentiated amalgam of metaphor and analogy" whereby "literal assertions such as 'There is super-change in God' are accorded a quasi-metaphorical status that they [strictly speaking] do not possess."[52]

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48. Mansini, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," 518.

49. Brotherton "God's Relation to Evil," 193. For Brotherton's complete treatment of the topic, see *One of the Trinity Has Suffered: Balthasar's Theology of Divine Suffering in Dialogue* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020).

50. Brotherton, "God's Relation to Evil," 197.

51. Balthasar, *TD* 5:84.

52. See Kevin Duffy, "Change, Suffering, and Surprise in God: Von Balthasar's Use of Metaphor," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76 (2011): 370–87.

For more generous critics like Brotherton, such conclusions do not rule out appreciation for Balthasar's project.[53] They might concede, for instance, that Balthasar was facing a crisis of unbelief the likes of which Christian Europe had never seen and that this called for a more dramatic response than Thomism alone could provide. They might appreciate, too, his reversal of the order of Kant's three critiques, seeing therein a genuinely Thomistic insight that faith is not given to us in abstraction from sensible experience but precisely in and through it (Rom 10:17; 1 Jn 1:1). They might even admire him as a *chef d'orchestre* who called upon the full resources of the Church, including a wide variety of Christian poets, saints, and theologians, hoping to persuade his audience more by the dramatic beauty of truth—that is, by the kenotic glory of love—than by a set of truths dogmatically proposed for belief. Yet the verdict remains. However appealing Balthasar's theological *aesthetics* may be to a modern audience used to the theater and impatient with arguments, it comes at too high a price: the confusion of salvific realities with divine realties and the mythologizing of theology. In Brotherton's moderate judgment (compared to Mansini): "I do not argue that Balthasar's conclusions are dogmatically heterodox, but that they are theologically questionable and in need of a particular 'demythologization.'"[54] In view of such a verdict, is there any room for an appeal? Dare we hope that Balthasar's theology can be "saved" and reconciled with that of Thomas?

In response to the concerns of Balthasar's critics, let us first remember what Cyril O'Regan has shown and is beyond dispute: that however close Balthasar may appear to stand to Hegel, his entire theology is in fact a dramatic attempt to inoculate Catholic theology against his influence. Granted, Balthasar also understands God to be constituted in and through a divine kenosis; indeed, as we have seen, for Balthasar God "cannot be God in any other way but in this 'kenosis' within the Godhead

53. Brotherton, for example, speaks of Balthasar's "valiant efforts" vis-à-vis Hegel to preserve the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, even if he does not think that he is ultimately successful. See "Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity," 200.

54. Ibid., 200–34.

itself."[55] Therein, we might say, lies the greatest similarity between him and the Swabian *Geist*. But, *nota bene*, this is *toto caelo* different from saying what Hegel says, namely, that God would not be God without his kenosis and self-recuperation *in and through the world process*. Therein lies the "greater dissimilarity" between them: for Balthasar, the difference between Creator and creature is never erased, not even in Christ, who is the perfect union of the *two*. If this last point is to be appreciated, however, we need to underscore Balthasar's implicitly *Thomistic* commitment to the *analogia entis* as he inherited it from Przywara.[56] For once we do, it becomes apparent that Balthasar is, in fact, much closer to Thomas than many of his critics realize. It also mitigates considerably their concern that he carelessly introduces human concepts such as suffering into the divine nature, since the *analogia entis* rules out any confusion of Creator and creation, and any linear attribution of human concepts to the divine nature, from the start. Admittedly, this metaphysical commitment gets obscured as Balthasar's theo-drama unfolds, for the point is the drama itself, not the staging, and that the audience be moved to an appropriate response. But the *analogia entis* is nevertheless the metaphysical scaffolding upon which the entire performance depends.

It will therefore be important to review, first, the nature of the *analogia entis* as Przywara understood it (this will help to clarify the role of metaphor and analogy in Balthasar's theology) and, second, the entailments of the *analogia entis* with regard to apophaticism and divine simplicity. For once we consider these two factors, it becomes evident that Balthasar is actually far more indebted to Thomas—and that there is more common ground between them—than meets the eye.[57] It will also become

55. Balthasar, *TD* 4:325 (emphasis added).

56. See James Zeitz, "Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy," *The Thomist* 52 (1988): 473–98.

57. See Jim Buckley's groundbreaking essay, "Balthasar's Use of the Theology of Aquinas," *The Thomist* 59, no. 4 (1995): 517–45, in which he masterfully constructs the dispute between the two theologians, which cannot be established on the basis of any single text or comment of Balthasar, thereby setting the stage for further dialogue. Indeed, pointing the way to reconciliation, Buckley not only shows the common ground between them, examining Balthasar's "persistent and massive use of Aquinas's theology" (538) and noting

evident that Thomas's understanding of divine simplicity is more capacious than meets the eye—so capacious, in fact, that positions which at first seemed contradictory might be reconciled in divine simplicity. Indeed, I would dare to suggest that the better we understand Balthasar the closer we come to Thomas and that the better we understand the *whole* Thomas, whose genius is more capacious than many of his disciples might admit, the closer we come to Balthasar as well.[58]

4. THE *ANALOGIA ENTIS* AND TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

As we have already seen, one of the chief charges made against Balthasar is that—going beyond the orthodox ascription of faith, obedience, suffering, and death to the *hypostatic* experience of the incarnate Son—he has introduced these realities into the divine *nature* as well, making God in his eternal nature the primary analogate of these terms (e.g., the Father's kenotic begetting of the Son is the archetype of every sacrifice and sacrificial death, the Son's eternal fidelity to the Father is the archetype of all faith, and so forth). All of which amounts to the charge that Balthasar fails to observe the *metaphysical* difference between Being and becoming, between the immutable Creator and the mutable creature, and the corresponding *epistemic* humility that this difference would seem to require, presuming instead, as Karen Kilby has charged, something like an "insider's view" of the workings of the immanent Trinity.[59] In other words, in the view of Balthasar's critics, the theologian who extolled the glory of divine humility ironically presumed to know too much about it.

In response to this charge, the first thing to emphasize in Balthasar's defense is that, according to the terms of the *analogia*

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his praise for Thomas's metaphysical genius (530–31); he also shows (538–39) that Balthasar's criticisms of Thomas do not necessarily stand up to scrutiny and are, in any event, not as weighty as they might at first appear.

58. See Erich Przywara, "Thomas von Aquin als Problematiker," *Stimmen der Zeit* 109 (June 1925): 188–99.

59. See Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), esp. 112–14. See also D.C. Schindler, "A Very Critical Response to Karen Kilby: On Failing to See the Form," *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 3 (September 2015): 68–87.

entis as Przywara and Balthasar both understood it, any univocal predication of creaturely terms such as faith, obedience, suffering, and death to God in his eternal nature is out of the question. For what the *analogia entis* at its simplest signifies is what the Fourth Lateran Council stated in 1215 in its edict against the trinitarian teachings of Joachim of Fiore—that no similarity can be noted between Creator and creature without also noting their greater dissimilarity (*inter creator et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari quin inter eos maior dissimilitudo notanda*).[60] Accordingly, however much one can positively say about God, even on the basis of revelation, ultimately requires an apophatic admission of incomprehension and a correspondingly humble submission of all human concepts to the God who is "ever greater." As Augustine famously says and Przywara never tires of repeating, God is not God if you comprehend [him]—*si comprehendis non est Deus*.[61] Thus, if we say with Balthasar with regard to the immanent Trinity that the Father's begetting of the Son is a kind of "death" or that the relation of the Son to the Father is a kind of eternal "fidelity" and "obedience," we have to remember that we are speaking *analogically* and that what is said is simultaneously unsaid because we do not, strictly speaking, know what we are saying. In other words, we have to remember that the *analogia entis* is essentially an apophatic qualifier on every cataphatic assertion. And since what is at issue here vis-à-vis Balthasar's critics is precisely Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity, it is all the more important to keep in mind—what Balthasar knew very well—that the *analogia entis* was formulated precisely as a corrective to what Lateran IV deemed to be Joachim's *overreach* in the matter of *trinitarian doctrine*.

Admittedly, the protégé is not reducible to his mentor, that is, Balthasar is not reducible to Przywara. For however similar they may be in terms of theological method (especially in

60. Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 806. The council, it should be noted, did not coin the term *analogia entis*. Rather, it was Przywara who drew the connection in order to underscore the apophatic finality of any properly Catholic understanding of analogy.

61. Augustine, *Sermones* 117.3.5, 52.6.16. We ought to underscore here that such humility is to be carefully distinguished from agnosticism, which lacks any cataphatic footing and has no basis in revelation.

the extent of their engagement with modern forms of thought and indeed the whole history of thought), one has to appreciate specific differences in theological style. Of the two, Przywara was clearly the more apophatic; Balthasar, the more cataphatic. Przywara's spirit is more like that of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Carmelites, as one sees from his *Analogia Entis* (which gives the final word to the Areopagite), his lifelong love for the Carmelites and translations of their poetry, and the way he reads Augustine and Thomas, always emphasizing the God who is "ever greater" (*Deus semper maior*) and known as unknown (*Deus tamquam ignotus*). Balthasar's spirit, on the other hand, is more that of a Bonaventure or a Dante who delights in God's kenotic presence and the polychromatic riches of divine revelation. And these differences in theological style led to occasional tensions between them.[62] What is important to underscore, however, is that these

62. For example, at one point in *TD* 3, Balthasar suggests that Przywara is *too* apophatic and that this prevented him from writing a Christology. This is an unfair characterization, however, since Przywara did produce a Christology in the form of his commentary on John's Gospel, one in which the *analogia entis* is finally disclosed as an *analogia caritatis*. For his part, Przywara seems to have seen Balthasar as leaning too strongly in a cataphatic direction, notwithstanding their shared commitment to analogy as a fundamental form. See his gnomic reading of Balthasar in 1941, "The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form," in *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David B. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 351–52:

> Over against this entire group, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* essentially employs a complete method of 'analogy' and opposes it to the forms of 'contradiction-identity' in virtually the same way that I do in my work. Here, too, the deeper form of analogy—which is the mystery of the Cross—holds sway: to ascend to the 'similarity, however great,' only to fall into the 'ever greater dissimilarity,' though it is in just this way that one first comes to participate in the majesty of God. In all of this, however, from the first volume of his *Apokalypse* onward, one hears a double emphasis: on the one hand, the (existential) emphasis upon a 'flowing with the flow of the world'; on the other hand, the (essential) emphasis upon a 'suspension of the image' [*Schweben des Bildes*]: the first being a subdued version of the Dionysian; the second, a subdued version of the mythical, though the mythical (as suspended) is ultimately subordinated to the Dionysian. As it happens, this yields a position comparable to the formula of Max Müller and Gustav Siewerth: an existential infinity (of a subdued Dionysianism, in Paul Claudel's sense) and an essential finitude (of

were tensions within the context of a lifelong friendship, just as tensions between apophatic and cataphatic styles remain tensions within the *one* rhythm of the *analogia entis* as Przywara and Balthasar both understood it. In other words, within the one rhythm of analogy proper to Catholic theology, there is no such thing as a purely apophatic or a purely cataphatic style but at most different stylistic emphases, just as the same symphonic score can be played differently depending upon the sensibility of the conductor.

In this regard let us note, furthermore, that the *analogia entis* subdivides into two basic types of analogy, an *analogia attributionis* and an *analogia proportionis*. While historically these have been understood in different ways, what is important here is how Przywara and Balthasar understood them.[63] Whereas the former type of analogy emphasizes the similarity of creatures to God according to an analogy of intrinsic attribution (whereby God is the archetype and cause of the goodness that is not merely said of creatures extrinsically but said of them *really* inasmuch as God himself is the cause of the goodness in them), the latter type of analogy emphasizes the dissimilarity between God and creatures, not according to a direct proportion (an *analogia proportionis*), but according to an indirect relation of relations: whereby the being of creatures (according to the so-called real distinction of essence and existence) is related to the identity of essence and existence in God. With the latter, in other words, comes the abyssal difference between Being and becoming: between what it means to *be* God, and what it means to "be" a creature.

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the mythical), and thus a rhythmic identity with God (because it is an existential infinity).

What Przywara means here is hard to decipher apart from the rest of his work and the dynamic way he reads the real distinction, but it indicates that in his view Balthasar leaned in a more colorful, vitalist, mythological direction for which imagery mediates a kind of "rhythmic identity." In the background here is also his critique of Siewerth's *Thomismus als Identitätsystem*: "The fundamental relation between God and creature is [for Siewerth] one of 'exemplary (ideal) identity,' to the point that finite being bears 'necessity, absoluteness, divinity' as the 'seal of its birth.'" Ibid., 351.

63. See Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014); no. 6; Balthasar, *TD* 3.

Consequently, whatever Balthasar ascribes to the immanent Trinity on the basis of revelation—as when he speaks of the Son's eternal obedience or even of the Father's self-sacrifice and "death"—is ascribed not directly but according to the *analogia entis*. In other words, it is necessarily qualified by the analogical difference between the being of God and the being of creatures, which explains his frequent caveats, qualifications, and deliberate use of quotation marks. Of course, one can choose to read Balthasar's caveats as nothing but words; and when Balthasar attempts to say that God's joy is not changed but "increased" by the redemption of creation, one can construe this to mean that, for Balthasar, God is not perfect in himself but admits of change, growth, and increase. And one can then go on to say that, for Balthasar, God would therefore not be *fully* God without the world. But is this really fair to Balthasar given everything else we know?[64] I would submit that it is a valid criticism *only* if one disregards what we have just established: that his theology is governed by his unwavering commitment to the *analogia entis*.[65]

Having just stressed the apophatic entailment of the *analogia entis*, even and precisely in the midst of Balthasar's more cataphatic theology, let us now spell out another entailment of the *analogia entis* or rather its metaphysical foundation, namely, the doctrine of divine simplicity.[66] Since this is a doctrine to

64. Mansini, "Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," 518.

65. As he puts it in the preface to his *Theo-Logic*, considering now the whole of his trilogy: "From the first to the last the trilogy is keyed to the transcendental qualities of being, in particular to the analogy between their status and form in creaturely being, on the one hand, and in Divine Being, on the other." *Theo-Logic*, vol. 1, *The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 1. See my review of Werner Löser, *Geschenkte Freiheit: Annäherungen an das Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* in *Theologische Revue* 113, no. 6 (2017): 501–4.

66. The doctrine of divine simplicity, let us note, has been much disputed in recent years. Some see it as a metaphysical appendix that is no longer needed in the body of theology; others question whether it can be reconciled with divine freedom or the obvious problem of affirming a Trinity of persons. See, for instance: Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 47; Ryan T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 181–203. While this is not the place to respond to these objections, it seems that they are predicated upon either misunderstandings

which Balthasar is certainly committed, whether or not he makes much of it, it should go a long way toward alleviating concerns of his critics that his theology separates the persons of the Trinity, raising suspicions of tritheism.[67] It will also bring us a step closer to seeing the positive (and not just negative, restrictive) relevance of the *analogia entis* (or this particular entailment of it) to trinitarian theology.

Simply stated, the doctrine of divine simplicity means that any number of things that are really distinct in creatures are not really so in God. In other words, following Aquinas, it means that God as Spirit is not composed of parts, and that one would therefore err if one were to conceive of the Trinity in such terms (however unavoidable it may be at the level of *dianoetic* conception). It also means that God is *pure actuality*, having no admixture of potentiality, whereas creatures are a mixture, so to

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of the doctrine of simplicity or a lack of imagination with regard to what is, at the end of the day, a mystical teaching. For an excellent discussion, see Thomas H. McCall, "Trinity Doctrine Plain and Simple," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014). For an attempt to defend the coherence of traditional trinitarian doctrine from an analytic standpoint, see Michael Rea's article in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 403–29.

67. See Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146–47. O'Hanlon admits that Balthasar's understanding of simplicity is more dynamic but nevertheless shows his commitment to it. For an account of Balthasar's Thomistic understanding of divine simplicity both as it qualifies his reception of Bulgakov and defuses criticisms of his theology, such as that of Alyssa Pitstick, see Katy Leamy, *The Holy Trinity: Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Sources* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015). As Leamy rightly concludes, "Balthasar's Trinitarian theology maintains the fullness of Divine Simplicity while positing the completeness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, particularly in his suffering and death. He is able to do this, not by positing an additional concept (Sophia) that somehow 'bridges' the distance between God and creation, but rather by following a Thomistic understanding of relation, where the single Act that constitutes the Divine Essence is the basis both for absolute unity and infinite difference, and then by extending this notion of relation analogously to the Creator/creature relationship" (76). Likewise, with regard to Pitstick's polemical monograph, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of the Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, MI, 2007), Leamy shows that Pitstick's charges rest upon a misunderstanding of the *paradoxical* nature of divine simplicity. This is an important point to which I will return presently.

speak, of potentiality and actuality. The distinction most basic to creatures, however, even to angels, is that between essence and existence; and it is this that is at issue here. For while the *analogia entis* implies an analogy between pure actuality in God and a composition of act and potency in creatures, it turns on the analogy between an identity of essence and existence in God and a real distinction of essence and existence in creatures. But if this is so, if what is meant by divine simplicity is, most precisely, that God alone is an identity of essence and existence and that this identity belongs exclusively to him who can say "I am who [or what] I am" (Ex 3:14), what else might this mean—and what might it mean for trinitarian theology?

Needless to say, the *analogia entis* is a phrase that can be reduced to a slogan, however rich its signification, but if we are to understand its entailments, especially for trinitarian theology, we would do well to pause here and appreciate the mystery to which it points. For what it suggests is that what finite minds cannot by any stretch of the imagination unite—essence and existence—are identical in God. But if this is so, then God might also comprise in his unique simplicity other characteristics that finite minds, which operate at the level of *dianoia* and not spiritual *noesis*, cannot reconcile. Take, for example, the apparent opposition between justice and mercy. We hold as a matter of faith that God is both just and merciful and, though we cannot fathom how it is so, that God's most righteous judgment of a sinful humanity is revealed precisely in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins (Rom 1:17).[68]

68. N.b., one thing that this cannot mean is that mercy negates justice, as if justice had no claim. For mercy is not mercy unless the claim of justice is first seen. Moreover, it is precisely justice that is rendered through the mercy of Christ, whose mercy makes sinners just; and it may well be that mercy, for pedagogical purposes, works through justice and that what appears to be discipline is in fact a mercy. It is not, in any case, that the mercy of God is pitted against the justice of God, or vice versa, but that they mysteriously go together (*allo pros allo*). Even the famous verse from James that "mercy triumphs over justice" (Jas 2:13) must be understood relative to judgment, as meaning that the just, who have been shown mercy, must show mercy in turn (thereby showing that they are living according to the merciful law of liberty, which triumphs over their own judgment by the law) lest they fall back under judgment of the law.

But if this is so, if in God justice and mercy are ultimately one, however different they may appear to us, then we are only a step away from seeing what the gospel begs us to consider but what the philosophers without its light could not begin to see, much less fathom: that in his eternal nature, as perfectly revealed in Christ, God is not just the God of justice and mercy but also the God of majesty and humility, glory and kenosis. For the same Jesus Christ who in forgiving our sins is the righteousness of God is also, in his kenosis, the glory of God. Indeed, the scandalous impotence of his Cross is the royal seat of his power from which he draws all things to himself (see Jn 12:32). In sum, what the doctrine of divine simplicity and the coincidence of opposites in Christ suggest is that the almighty is humble and that the one who could possess all for himself in love gives it all away.

5. THE QUESTION OF DIVINE HUMILITY

For his part, however, Thomas seems to have doubted this possibility because he did not believe that God could by nature be humble. Obviously, he believed that Christ was humble, as Scripture attests, and poignantly comments on the fact in many places.[69] It should also be underscored that Thomas understood humility to be a virtue, if not the root of all virtues, which is no small thing when one considers that the ancients did not regard it as such. But he did not draw from this the inference that the Son of God, by nature, is humble. For, he reasoned, while humility is fitting for creatures—and for Christ insofar as Christ had to show creatures how to be creatures—it would be an imperfection in the divine nature, in God qua God. As he puts it in a passage that Mansini has cited as evidence against Balthasar's theology:

> A thing is said to be perfect in two ways. First absolutely; such a thing contains no defect, neither in its nature nor in respect of anything else, and thus God alone is perfect. To Him humility is fitting, not as regards His Divine nature, but only as regards His assumed nature. Secondly, a thing

69. See, for instance, his beautiful *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher, OP, and James A. Weisheipl, OP (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

> may be said to be perfect in a restricted sense, for instance in respect of its nature or state or time. Thus a virtuous man is perfect: although in comparison with God his perfection is found wanting, according to the word of Isaiah 40:17, "All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all." On this way humility may be competent to every man.[70]

Clearly, for Thomas humility is a virtue for imperfect creatures; after all, not to be humble before God would be pride. But, Thomas reasonably asks, how could humility be admitted in God's case, since God is perfect and the one before whom all others must bow? Before whom, after all, would God need to be humble? Hence his conclusion: "Humility cannot befit God, who has no superior, but is above all."[71] Furthermore, Thomas observes, humility implies the distance between a lord and his subject; if humility were admitted in God, it would therefore imply disproportion *in God*, which is inconceivable—as though there could be anything in God to which God himself could be subject. Thus, Thomas not unreasonably concludes, humility in God would be a sign of defect, not perfection; weakness, not strength; impotence, not omnipotence. Finally, to admit humility into the divine nature would be to open the floodgates to other imperfections such as vulnerability and suffering. And before you know it one will have denied that God in his divine nature is impassible, leading to the shipwreck of Christian theology.

Such concerns should not be dismissed out of hand—least of all the concern about divine impassibility.[72] For they do justice

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70. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (*ST*), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911–1925), II-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad 4.

71. *Summa contra Gentiles* 4.15: "Though the virtue of humility cannot attach to Christ in His divine nature; it may attach to Him in His human nature and His divinity renders His humility all the more praiseworthy, for the dignity of the person adds to the merit of humility; and there can be no greater dignity to a man than his being God. Hence the highest praise attaches to the humility of the Man God, who to wean men's hearts from worldly glory to the love of divine glory, chose to embrace a death of no ordinary sort, but a death of the deepest ignominy."

72. But that is not even what is at issue here, because Balthasar, too, affirms divine impassibility, even and precisely when he seems to deny it. For God's suffering on our behalf in Christ is not a wounding of God's nature, as though

(in a good way) to the God of the philosophers.[73] The question, however, is not whether Thomas does justice to the God of the philosophers, but whether in this particular point he does justice to the God of revelation. To be sure, there is none before whom God must be humble, and so, philosophically speaking, there is no need for it. But, of course, neither is there any philosophical necessity for love, and by the same logic one could say it is proper for creatures to love God but not for God to love creatures—they are, after all, less loveable than himself. Indeed, from an Aristotelian standpoint, to love them would be beneath him. But obviously, revelation teaches us differently, raising the question of whether here, too, but now with respect to the question of humility, the God of the philosophers stands in need of theological revision according to the principles of Thomism itself, to wit, that faith does not destroy but presupposes and *perfects* reason (*fides non destruit sed supponit et perficit rationem*).

With all due respect to Thomas, there are therefore good reasons to find his treatment of divine humility—more precisely, his rejection of the notion—wanting, chiefly owing to the fact that it does not do justice to revelation. For God's willingly creating a world of creatures that would largely ignore and reject him and, in the person of the Son, willingly assuming a human nature that would open him to the wounds of insult, abuse, injury, and even death, are plainly functions of *divine* humility. To be sure, the divine nature cannot suffer injury and death as can the assumed human nature, and let us underscore this lest we be misunderstood; for to affirm divine humility is *not* to affirm divine *passibility*. Let us therefore hold fast to Melito's famous saying, "the *impassible* suffered." But in order to rule out the claim

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it effected some kind of change therein, but rather its apocalypse, an expression of the fact that God, according to his essence, is love, which nothing, not even sin and the utmost defiance of creation, changes.

73. Indeed, Catholic theology owes a debt of gratitude to the philosophers for preserving theology from mythology and ensuring that the gospel of the one and true Logos incarnate in Christ does not become, however inadvertently, a Mytho-Logos. See, in this regard, Matthew Levering's important work *Scripture and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and Reinhard Hütter's review in *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–10. See also Hütter, "The Directedness of Reasoning and the Metaphysics of Creation," in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 160–93.

that God suffered in his divine nature, let us not then make the mistake of forgetting that the "impassible *suffered*" and the corollary that God humbled himself in order to be able to suffer. For that matter, what is so striking about the gospel is not that a human being should humbly suffer the lot of human beings—to be insulted, abused, injured, and executed—but that God would do so on our behalf. But if God has shown such humility toward us—not just in becoming human but already in creating a world of creatures that could and would and still reject him—how can we then say that such humility is merely a function of the economy and not a characteristic of God himself? How can we say that God is love and not see that love is necessarily humble?

We must also consider the fact that Thomas's conclusions about humility are by no means universal and, in fact, strike a discordant note within the larger tradition, East and West. In Athanasius, for example, humility is not simply an attribute of Christ's human nature, but "belongs to the divine nature directly."[74] For Augustine, who speaks freely of "a humble God,"[75] it is nothing less than the sign of the true religion.[76] And then there are modern saints of the Eastern Church, such as Silouan and Sophrony, who speak not with words alone, but with tears shed from experience, of the humility of the Holy Spirit.[77] All of which

74. See Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 119. One of the most striking aspects of Anatolios's study is how it draws out and underscores the theme of divine humility in the Church Fathers—almost as if the development of trinitarian doctrine were essentially about this one mystery of divine self-abasement, which Arius and Eunomius et al. could not fathom.

75. Augustine, *De catechizandus rudibus* 4.8.

76. The most obvious example of this is what Augustine says in books 6 and 7 of the *Confessions* about the Platonists and the Manichees, who in their pride cannot see the humility of God, whether in Christ or in Scripture. See Brian Daley, "A Humble Mediator: The Distinctive Elements in St. Augustine's Christology," *Word and Spirit* 9 (1987): 100–17.

77. See Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan, the Athonite* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 43:

> What was the essence of God's prescription to Father Silouan [viz. Keep thy mind in hell and despair not]? It was not an abstract, intellectual disclosure but an intimation which existentially revealed to his soul that the root of all sin, the seed of death, is pride: that God is humility, and therefore the man who would 'put on' God

strongly suggests that there is more to humility (and poverty and meekness) than meets the eye and that it possess a greater range of significance, from the human to the divine, than Thomas in his pre-visionary writings was prepared to admit.[78]

Thus far, however, the Thomists have not been persuaded. On the contrary, they see humility as a contingency of salvation and a quality that God would not otherwise possess. But this, in turn, raises a number of serious problems, because it amounts to saying that God is only *apparently* humble and that in himself he is not. And then, before you know it, we have severed the bond between the immanent and economic Trinity, and revelation no longer means revelation. But could this be? Must we not, rather, following Balthasar, posit something in the immanent Trinity, something like the humility we see in Christ, that is the transcendental condition for the possibility of so dramatic a revelation? Can we really say that Christ's humility reveals nothing about his divinity—about God in himself? Could humility be so prized by the saints and so characteristic of the Mother of God, her virtue *par excellence*, as it were, were it not reflective of the *nature* of her Son, the nature of God himself, who says, "learn from me; for I am gentle and *humble* in heart" (Mt 11:29)? Is not her glory, like that of her Son, bound up precisely with her humility? Surely, it is. But if it is, then, once again we have reason to

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> must learn to be humble. Now Father Silouan realized that Christ's supreme, ineffably sweet humility, which he had experienced at the time of his vision, is an inseparable feature of Divine love, of Divine Being. Now he really saw that all ascetic striving must be directed towards acquiring humility. Now did his soul triumph—triumph after a fashion ignored by the world. It had been given him to know the great mystery of Being, to know it existentially. O, how gracious is the Lord—He reveals His mysteries to His humble servant and instructs him in the ways of eternal life! Now Silouan will cling with the whole strength of his soul to the path shown him by God Himself.

Thanks to Alexis Torrance for help with this citation.

78. For instance, as Alexis Torrance has pointed out in conversation, one would do well to distinguish between ascetical humility, as an expression of repentance for sin, and the perfect humility of Christ, who had no sin but was nevertheless humble.

find Thomas's answer to this question wanting—not to mention other reasons we might have to be troubled by it.[79]

As things stand, both sides in this debate thus have legitimate concerns, which we may now summarize as follows. The Thomists are concerned that, if Balthasar's theology is true, then the God of the philosophers has *de facto* given way to the gods of the poets and we are no longer talking about *Theo*-drama but Theo-*drama*; in other words, theology as reasoned discourse about revelation has given way to mythology. For their part, the Balthasarians are concerned that the Thomists are insufficiently attentive to the humble depths of divine love and to what the economic Trinity reveals about the immanent Trinity—to the point of severing the bond between the immanent and economic Trinity and saying that the nature of God in his self-revelation is one thing and that God in his eternal nature another. But have we then made no progress in our attempted arbitration, even after emphasizing Balthasar's commitment to the *analogia entis* and therewith his Thomistic credentials? It would seem that we have not, unless we can show how intra-divine humility can be reconciled with a doctrine of divine perfection and simplicity. Prima facie, this would seem to be impossible except in the sense already indicated: that the Catholic Church is big enough for both theologians and cannot itself be reduced to any one—notwithstanding strong recommendations it might sometimes make in favor of one theologian over another. But this amounts at best to an unsatisfying agreement to disagree when for love's sake it is

79. For instance, do we really believe in a sovereign power in which there is no trace of humility? Can we even imagine such a God or cling to such a God in love, as the Psalmist enjoins (Ps 72:28)? To be sure, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prv 9:10), and there can be no piety in the absence of reverence. But neither can there be true piety where there is sheer terror, and a God without humility is nothing short of terrifying. Worse, it suggests pride. In their concern to defend divine impassibility, the Thomists charge Balthasar with introducing suffering into the divine nature—though this suffering for Balthasar is nothing other than the voluntary suffering of love, which knows no bounds, descending even to hell, if need be, in order to seek and to save that which is lost (Ps 139). But have the Thomists, inasmuch as they follow Thomas *in this particular point*, not done something worse? Have they not, by stripping God of humility, unwittingly stripped him of (the peculiar form of) his glory? For that matter, in refusing to admit humility, have they not unwittingly introduced *pride* into the divine nature, than which nothing more offensive to piety can be conceived? Certainly, one can err by forgetting that God is the omnipotent sovereign and subject to none; but one can also err by forgetting that God is love and that it is the nature of love to be humble.

the task of Catholic theology *qua Catholic* theology always to seek reconciliation even where none seems possible. But what, then, is the way forward?

Curiously enough, the most obvious answer to this question, though it may have fallen beneath our notice, as humble things tend to do, is the very thing in question, namely, humility, and a corresponding willingness on the part of each side, if it is not prepared to think of the other as better than itself as the apostle exhorts, then at least be on the lookout for something on the other side that it may have missed on its own (Phil 2:3). So at the very least there is a practical way forward. But, as Thomas himself observes, humility is precious like nard[80] and so great a virtue that its lowliness, the root of divinity, is difficult to attain.[81] Theoretically, therefore, the way forward would appear to be simpler since it consists in a simple intuition of the paradoxical nature of divine simplicity in which majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, like mercy and justice, are inscrutably one.[82] But of course such *noetic* insight is ultimately a gift of grace to the eye that has been prepared for it, typically over a very long period of time; in fact, it may be more elusive than the humility it presupposes, since intuitions of this kind tend to be communicated in the dark ground of the spirit where the humble soul dwells with God. Until we are rooted in the humility of God, however, we dwell willy-nilly east of Eden in the land of *dianoia* where majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, are not seen as one but as very different, indeed as sharply opposed (*dia*) to one another. But in the meantime what shall we do?

In the meantime we can at least begin to think in terms of how they might go together, not just as dialectical concepts, which at some level imply one another, but as analogical concepts, which

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80. Aquinas, *Super Ioannem* 12.1598.

81. As Meister Eckhart puts it, attempting to explain the exalted nature of this virtue, "humility is a root in the ground of the divinity." *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge, OSA, and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 190.

82. For his part, Brotherton has defined this kind of a view as "paradoxism" and associated it with a kind of "aesthetic excess": "By 'paradoxism' I mean to indicate the tendency to view affirmation of apparent contradiction as a pathway to truth, born of the notion that truth at its profoundest consists in the (at least apparent) truth of contradiction, the most radical *coincidentia oppositorum*." "Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity," 191. This is well said, even if Brotherton seems reluctant to agree with the position he thus describes.

point to a deeper unity that is hidden in their apparent opposition. Practically, this would mean imagining how both sides in this dispute not only go together but in some sense need one another—if the Thomists are to fathom the bathos of divine revelation and the Balthasarians are to avoid inadvertently turning theology into mythology. This, at least, would be a genuinely Catholic way forward and one that charity itself commends, where there is no clear-cut choice between two faithful Catholic theologians. Then perhaps we will come better to see that the Church is the Church of Thomas *and* Balthasar and genuinely needs both of them—just as Przywara saw that the Church in the modern world needs Thomas *and* Augustine, Thomas *and* Newman, and so forth.[83] So, then, let each side recognize the *particula veri* of the other. But let us also recognize that doing so is more than a (negative) concession that each has a different gift, for instance, that Thomas is arguably more of a philosopher than a theologian and Balthasar more of a theologian than a philosopher.[84] For Thomas and Balthasar were equally and unmistakably committed to the final unity of reason and revela-

83. For Przywara's Catholic ecclesiology and corresponding understanding of theology, see, for instance, his review of the first international conference on Thomas in Rome in *Stimmen der Zeit* 119 (1925): 234–36, in which he advocates a richer, more dynamic, and ultimately more Catholic correlation of Thomas and Augustine. Przywara does not stop with this correlation, however (which could move the Church closer to reconciliation with Augustine's modern progeny in Luther et al.). In his attempt to renew the Church and so renew the world in Christ, he called upon the *full* resources of the Church, including not only the Franciscans and the Jesuits (Przywara could always find a place for Scotus and Suarez), but also Newman, whose works he introduced and edited, and Thérèse of Lisieux, whom he repeatedly commended as a saint for the times (as, ironically, the Church's most powerful response, given in the form of radical humility, to the titanism of Nietzsche, Heidegger, et al.). Among his many tributes to Thérèse, see "Mystik des Nichts," *Stimmen der Zeit* 122 (1932): 223–33, *Heroisch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1936), and *Crucis Mysterium: Das christliche Heute* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1939). For his recommendation of Thomas *and* Newman as a united Catholic front, see *Ringen der Gegenwart: Gesammelte Aufsätze 1922–1927*, 2 vols. (Augsburg: Filser, 1929). As Brian Daley has pointed out, it is from this union, so to speak, that Lonergan is subsequently born.

84. This, at least, was Balthasar's view of Aquinas. See *The Glory of the Lord* 3, 9. As Buckley points out, however, this should not be taken as a criticism. After all, Balthasar admired Thomas's philosophical and, specifically, metaphysical gifts. Indeed, "the vast majority of Balthasar's uses of Aquinas are constructive rather than critical." See Buckley, "Balthasar's Use of the Theology of Aquinas," 518.

tion, philosophy and theology. And so truth and charity oblige us to search for the deeper unity they themselves affirmed.[85]

6. PRZYWARA: BETWEEN THOMAS AND BALTHASAR

To this end, I suggest that we consider what further insights Erich Przywara might have to offer as a kind of theological-philosophical mediator between Thomas and Balthasar, and for two good reasons: (1) his immense respect for Thomas as "the teacher" to whom he dedicated his two-volume *Ringen der Gegenwart* in 1929; and (2) Balthasar's similarly great respect for Przywara as *his* teacher. In short, Przywara stands precisely between Thomas and Balthasar—just as he stands theologically between the Church Fathers and the scholastics and between Thomism and a reception of the modern world.[86] Specifically, let us consider

85. This is obvious enough with regard to Thomas. For Balthasar's stipulation of the importance of philosophical metaphysics, see his *Theo-Logic* 2, 173: "Since the question about being as such is the basic question of metaphysics, the theologian cannot get around it. For him, then, there is only one conclusion: he cannot be a theologian *ex professo* without at the same time being a metaphysician, just as, conversely . . . a metaphysics that refused to be theology would thereby misunderstand and repudiate its own object."

86. In this regard Przywara is well described as a leading representative of what Francesca Murphy has felicitously called a "creative Thomism," which wanted to put Thomas in conversation with the modern world, as Joseph Maréchal did by putting Thomas in conversation with Kant; not, however, in order to accommodate Thomas to the modern world but rather to show the modern world how Thomas's thought is still alive, relevant, and able to help modern intellectual life think through its own problems. In the main, however, Przywara thinks that the religious schools are not up to the task. Indeed, he thinks the schools tend to turn Thomas—a dynamic, living, dialogical thinker who was in conversation not only with prior Catholic tradition (Dionysius, Augustine, et al.) but also with Jews and Muslims and the best philosophy of the time—into an ossified and monolithic system of thought. In an article from 1925, for example, "Neue Philosophie: Das Problem von Philosophie überhaupt," *Stimmen der Zeit* 109 (1925): 294–95, which could be read as a clarion call for a "creative Thomism," he asks in reference to the "rubble" of Kantianism, which by the turn of the century had been reduced to aporias, whether the Catholic schools are up to the task of addressing the crisis in philosophy:

> Are they vivified by Aquinas's genuine perspicacity and breadth of vision with regard to the fundamental problems? Or have they exchanged the original expansiveness of the master for the anxious

how Przywara reads Thomas's understanding of divine power and see whether there is more to Thomas's own understanding of divine power than meets the eye, for example, whether omnipotence can tolerate any ceding of power. For if it can, then we are that much closer to seeing how power could be manifest in its surrender. Then let us see how Przywara understands Thomas's doctrine of divine simplicity and whether there is more to it, too, than meets the eye. Of course, we already know that, for Thomas, divine simplicity can tolerate intra-divine relations. But can it tolerate humility, which would seem to be opposed to the majesty of any classical philosophical conception of the Deity? Can it tolerate something like an intra-divine kenosis, which would seem to disturb the perfect tranquility of the divine nature? I would argue that it can, but for this we need to break through philosophical metaphysics by way of analogical metaphysics to theological metaphysics, from which standpoint we can see that God, however simple and unchanging, is not therefore a lifeless abstraction from all life but quite the opposite, the dynamic origin of all life as a simple *movement* of love. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

With regard, first, to God's power, Przywara's reading strikingly shows that, for Thomas, God's power is manifested most perfectly *not* in the exercise of total control—as a certain understanding of divine power would have it, which led ominously to nominalistic conceptions of divine power in the late Middle Ages, to the corruption of papal power during the Renaissance,

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> confines of the school? Are they genuinely able to see in the modern movement of philosophical life the emerging of the features of Thomas's [own thought], or do they bolt their doors all the more securely against the Pentecostal blowing of the Creator Spirit? The times are irretrievably past when Catholicism could multiply and cultivate its own scholastic traditions behind closed doors. What they are now facing is a call to creativity and leadership. . . . We are no longer talking about the comfortable old either-or between accommodation and rejection, but about creative criticism and critical creativity.

By the same token, Przywara faulted scholastic Thomism for not being Catholic enough, i.e., for not recognizing the relativity of Thomas's own theology, however towering, vis-à-vis the Church as a whole. Certainly, he believed, the Church needs Thomas, but not Thomas alone—no more than it needed Luther alone.

to the dread teachings of the Reformation on predestination, and to corresponding totalitarian visions of the modern State—but in the creation and toleration of real secondary causes.[87] Indeed, far from being a tyrant bent on total control or the crass exhibition of power, God shows his power in *giving it up*, in giving room to creatures, even "to the point that the creature is permitted to contradict God"[88]—not, of course, in such a way that God's purposes in creation could finally be thwarted by creatures, but in such a wonderful way that his will is infallibly achieved through rational creatures whose freedom as secondary causes he willed to be and voluntarily respects. But if this is so, then Thomas's understanding of divine power cannot be aligned without further ado with late-medieval conceptions of it or those conceptions one finds in Luther or Calvin, though any number of passages in Thomas, on predestination for example, might lead one to think that he is a proto-Calvinist. For, according to Thomas's fundamental (analogical) metaphysics of creation, the omnipotent is powerful enough to tolerate and work with other powers. One could even say that he wills to be weak in relation to what is not God in order to make room for finite creatures within his infinite life. All of which suggests, once again, but now drawing support from Thomas himself, that in God, strength and weakness, majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, paradoxically go together, not just in the economy of salvation, but even in God *secundum quod Deus*.

Now let us consider how Przywara reads Thomas on divine simplicity. While we ordinarily think of simplicity as a kind of abstract and empty concept, as though simplicity were simplicity by subtraction of everything complex and multiple, Przywara shows that for Thomas this is not so; that, in fact,

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87. *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, corp.: "Out of the eminence of its goodness, the first cause gives to other things not only their existence but the power also to be causes themselves."

88. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 294. See also *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, ad 3: *Deus plus amat quod est magis bonum, et ideo magis vult praesentiam magis boni quam absentiam minus mali . . .: ideo ad hoc quod aliqua bona maiora eliciantur, permittit aliquos in mala culpa cadere, quae maxime secundum genus sunt odibilia* (God more greatly loves the greater good—and thus more greatly desires the presence of the greater good—than he does the absence of the lesser evil . . .: thus, in order that certain greater goods might be brought forth, he permits some to fall into evil crimes, of a kind most odious).

simplicity implies plenitude. As Thomas himself puts it, "It belongs to the perfect unity of God that those things that are multiple and separate in others abide in him simply and singly"; and again, "Whatever is contained in lower beings deficiently and partially and in manifold manner is contained in higher beings eminently and in a certain kind of fullness and simplicity"; and again, "In God, as in the highest summit of things, all things super-substantially preexist according to his simple being in itself, as Dionysius says (*Divine Names* I, 5)."[89] Plainly, for Thomas, divine simplicity is no bare abstraction or empty point of singularity, as an impoverished theism might imagine, but rather a perfect fullness, a singularity in which all things that appear "multiple and separate" coincide. But if this is so, if perfect simplicity includes multiplicity, inasmuch as all things pre-exist in God (the world of essences is not a separate world on which God reflects but is known essentially in God knowing himself), does this mean that God in his simplicity comprises not just things that are opposed but even apparent contradictions, such as majesty and humility, glory and kenosis?[90] Could it be that divine simplicity is at some level paradoxical or at least that it appears so to finite minds that operate at the level of *dianoia*, where things fall into this and that, and not yet at the level of noetic insight?

89. *ST* I, q. 13, a. 4, ad 3; I, q. 57, a. 1, corp.

90. N.b., we are not talking here about "opposites" that admit of no reconciliation whatsoever, except insofar as one is overcome by the other. Such is the "opposition" between good and evil, or as C.S. Lewis fabulously described it in *The Great Divorce*, the "opposition" between heaven and hell, which can never be "married." These, in fact, are *not* genuine opposites; rather, the latter term in each of these "pairs" is a privation of the *reality*, a shadow—long or short—of the other. In other words, evil is not a reality in its own right (it is nothing "known" by God either in the biblical or neo-Platonic sense) and so cannot be part of a *real* pairing of opposites that could be one in God. Rather, we are talking about opposites such as male and female that can be united and in fact are united (as in the mysterious union of man and woman in marriage) as a sign of the more extreme opposition and therefore more mysterious union between Creator and creature in Christ (Eph 5:32). The very logic of Christianity, in fact, compels us to ask this question: If Creator and creature, than which no greater opposition can be imagined, can be *one* in Christ, *vere Deus et vere homo*, is it not possible that the simplicity of the divine nature *as a simplicity comprising apparent opposites* is the ground and final transcendental condition for the possibility of so exceedingly great a union?

To answer these questions we need to probe more deeply what we mean by divine simplicity. For if we admit with Thomas that divine simplicity is no mere abstraction from multiplicity but a singularity that mysteriously contains all multiplicity, we come back inexorably to the question of the relation between the One and the many. More precisely, we come back to the question of how the One and the many are united in the One such that the One is the One—the simple One in which all things separate and multiple coincide—and not just one thing, as it were, set over against many other things. In other words, the question of simplicity leads ultimately into everything and to the question of how all things are related one to another in the One. All of which raises anew the ancient question of the "middle," or what mediates between the One and the many. Is it the human being who possesses both a material body and a spiritual soul—whom the fifth-century neo-Platonist Hierocles described as a "middle ground" (μεσότης) being "the last thing from on high" and "the first of those below" and whom the rhapsodic Pico described as an "intermediary between creatures" and the "marriage hymn of the world"?[91] Or is it the pure spirits, the angels, whose knowledge is both receptive and productive, whose freedom is intermediate between God's immutable freedom and the vacillating freedom of human beings, and in whom the universe and its causes are represented?[92]

For Przywara, following Thomas, it is neither angels nor men who comprise the actual middle, for all of these plausible middles "fall short of the personal revelation of God as middle in the 'mediator.'"[93] In other words, the middle is Christ (1 Tim 2:5), who by virtue of his descent transcends all creaturely forms of mediation (e.g., from the human being to angels). Indeed, as

91. See Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 92; see also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Robert Caponigri (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1956), 3: "Man is the intermediary between creatures, . . . the familiar of the gods above him as he is lord of the beings beneath him, . . . set midway between the timeless unchanging and the flux of time; the living union (as the Persians say), the very marriage hymn of the world."

92. See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 298.

93. Ibid., 303, 301.

the unique "way in which God-the-middle assumes the All," he is "the unifying head of everything from the invisible to the visible, not only of all persons of every age, but also of pure spirits."[94] But, for Przywara, the uniqueness of Christ consists not simply in that he is "the One" in whom God and creation are one in the hypostatic union or even the one in and through whom God is eschatologically all-in-all (1 Cor 15:28). Przywara strikingly adds that Christ is the manifest "uniqueness" (*Einzigkeit*) of God himself: "the 'All-in-one' of the mediator [is] the immediate visibility of the oneness of God."[95] What are we to make of this statement? At the very least it suggests that, for Przywara, following Thomas, we can no longer speak of divine simplicity in the abstract but must do so in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, whose unique mediation makes him and him alone the Christ, the Messiah, and therewith the manifestation of the oneness and uniqueness of the God of Israel (see Dt 6:4). To put it more strikingly still, it means that there is no thoroughgoing monotheism apart from him, if it is in him alone—in the one Christ, head and body—that God is not just one thing among other things but the One who comprises all things in himself from beginning to end.

But if this is so, things would at first appear to be much more complicated. For the unity of the mediator is not simply a unity that includes multiplicity and apparent antitheses (e.g., between matter and spirit, male and female, Jew and Gentile) but a unity that bears in itself—and overcomes in itself—the real contradiction of sin. As Przywara puts it: "The mediator appears not merely as a human being (rather than pure spirit), but as the expiation for sin. . . . Hence, what is meant by the concrete form that 'God-as-middle' assumes in the mediator is . . . a 'oneness' with (through the vicarious bearing of) the nothingness of sin."[96] Far, however, from this being an admission of defect in God, it is precisely in this way, by virtue of this marvelous exchange in the "scandal of the Cross," that Christ brings all things to perfection, which is to say, makes all things one in God.[97] When, therefore,

94. Ibid., 301.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., 302; see *ST* III, q. 1, a. 3, corp., and *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 4, ad 3.

97. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 305.

we speak of divine simplicity, what we mean is no empty singularity, nor even the ideal implication of all things in the eternal Logos, but the *real* unity of all things in the incarnate Logos, in whose body we see the manifestation of the oneness of God.

Now, admittedly, this is precisely where one might want to distinguish between the unity of the Trinity from all eternity and the unity of a perfected cosmos in Christ in order to avoid any lingering specter of Hegelianism—even if we are not talking about the relation between God and creation as such, but about the relation between God and a *perfected* creation, which, having reached its end, has become a universal transparency of God who is now all-in-all. And, ever wanting to maintain the Creator-creature distinction, this is precisely what Przywara does, underscoring the final difference between God and the perfected universe even and precisely where Thomas himself could appear to conflate them.[98] For what we have in the end of a perfected universe is still a perfected *universe* vis-à-vis the God who brought it into being. Indeed, it is only in the end that the universe is in all its integrity what it is, not just a creation but a real *uni-verse*, which is complete *in itself* inasmuch as it is turned away *from itself*, that is, really turned toward the One from which it has come, *like* the Logos who is turned toward the Father from the beginning. By the same token, it is only then that creation is an analogy of being in the full sense of the term, which is to say, an analogy of the Logos, who is the Father's eternal ex-istence.

What is at issue here, however, is not whether the unity of God is reducible to the unity of a perfected universe (following Przywara, it clearly is not) but what the unity of God in Christ says about divine simplicity. Specifically, it raises the

98. Ibid., 594: "However much God may reveal himself as veiled in the 'all in all' of time and space, or even, in the bold words of the book of Sirach (43:27), simply as 'the all' (in the way that even Thomas Aquinas speaks almost interchangeably of God and the universe), . . . this same God declares himself as the Sovereign God preeminently in the 'καιρός,' in the breaking open of every context as the ever new turning point of an ever new turn." See *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4., corp.: *Unde idem est dictu, quod Deus omnia propter se ipsum fecit, et quod creaturas fecerit propter earum esse, quod dicitur Sap. I, 14: creavit enim ut essent omnia* (Consequently it amounts to the same whether we say that God made all things for himself according to the text of Proverbs 16:4, The Lord hath made all things for himself, or that he made creatures that they might exist, according to Wisdom 1:14, He created all things that they might be). See also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 16, corp.; a. 17, corp.; *ST* I, q. 13, a. 4, ad 5.

question of whether divine simplicity might include not just things that are opposed in the way that male and female are opposed, however wonderful an image of divine simplicity their union-in-difference may be, but even apparent contraries such as majesty and humility, plenitude and poverty, glory and kenosis. (And let us reiterate immediately that we are not talking here about "contraries" such as good and evil since these are *not* real contraries, however real our experience of them as contraries may be in a fallen order. For inasmuch as evil is only a privation of being, it cannot be a contradiction per se without ceasing to be at all.)[99] In other words, is it possible that a *Thomistic* account of divine simplicity, taken to its logical conclusion, might entail what Nicholas of Cusa meant by a *coincidentia oppositorum*?[100] Of course, we need to be careful here if we are not to identify God as the identity of creaturely contradictions and so succumb to Hegelian dialectic.[101] And in the next chapter we will see more

99. See Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 65: "God as absolute existence, goodness, and wisdom (or rather, to speak more properly, as transcending all these things) has no contrary quality whatever. . . . We maintain, however, that the divine substance alone has not contrary because it is eternal and infinite and bestows eternity on the other substances. . . . Just as evil is the privation of good and ignorance that of knowledge, so is nonbeing the privation of being—but not of being properly so called, for it has no contrary."

100. According to Przywara, Thomas is the link between Pseudo-Dionysius and Cusanus, who explicates what Thomas implies. See also Przywara's review, "Plotin und Nicholas von Cues," *Stimmen der Zeit* 134 (1938): 263. See also *Analogia Entis*, 273, 473, 487.

101. To this end, following Przywara's understanding of the *analogia entis*, we need to recognize that the unity of creaturely opposites (*allo pros allo*) is not itself divine but only a mysterious *image* of the Divine. In fact, Przywara does not even allow that we call God himself a coincidence of opposites; rather, he posits that the coincidence of opposites is the veil before the mystery of God himself. See his tellingly entitled essay "Thomas oder Hegel? Zum Sinn der 'Wende zum Objekt,'" *Logos: Zeitschrift für systematische Philosophie* 15 (1926): 13, reprinted in *Ringen der Gegenwart*, 947: "By 'polarity' is meant the profoundest recognition of the creaturely as such, the profoundest glimpse [*Blick*] into its essence as an open [*aufgerissene*] 'question,' the 'answer' to which is God understood as pure being beyond all polarity—not that He himself is the '*coincidentia oppositorum*,' but that the *coincidentia oppositorum* [is] *the* revelation of what defies all creaturely comprehension, *the* image *through* which the creature intimates Him as the one who stands beyond every creaturely analogy as the *Deus tamquam ignotus*, the unknown God, as Thomas says in reference to the greatest knowledge of God (*In Boeth. De Trin.* q. 1. a. 1 ad 2)."

clearly where the line between dialectic and analogy is drawn and how analogy overcomes dialectic. In the meantime, though, given what we now know about the formal structure of analogy as a correlation of opposites (*allo pros allo*) and *a fortiori* in light of Christ as *totus Deus et totus homo*, it should be evident that this is indeed possible: that the "ever-greater God" (of majesty) is the "ever-smaller God" (of humility) unless one does not see in Christ the oneness *of God* or see in his kenosis the glory *of God*.

CONCLUSION: A PALINODE TO DIVINE HUMILITY

Up to this point we have tried to do two things: to mediate between Thomas and Balthasar, while making a case that humility is not only a human virtue (as Thomas himself says), but also a perfection and power of the divine nature. For it is by divine humility that the God of majesty lowers himself to become a man like any other, to submit to the demands of ordinary human life, and in supreme humility take upon himself the sins of the world. To attribute such humility only to the human nature of the Son, and not see it as an aspect of the *nature* of the Son of God *secundum quod Deus* would therefore seem shortsighted.[102] We have, however, one more step to take in order to connect these reflections on humility with the metaphysical genius of Thomas and to show that, as a genuine mendicant, his thought is not only capacious enough to admit *divine* humility but poor enough to beg for it. But how could this be, when Thomas seems to have ruled out this possibility?

One way through the impasse and toward reconciliation of the Thomists and the Balthasarians would be to sharpen our hearing and attend to the semantic range of the word "humility," distinguishing between the requisite humility of submission, which is owed to another as a subject to a king, and the voluntary humility of love, which submits to another out of love (see Eph 5:25). For his part, as we have seen, Thomas seems to have un-

102. Part of the fear here, of course, is that, if one admits humility, one *eo ipso* admits passibility in some form as well, but this is not so, for humility is not a passion but a power. Let us therefore be clear so that out of fear of betraying God's divinity we do not end up robbing him of his glory, which is the glory of his humility: to admit divine humility is not to admit divine suffering but only the condition of the possibility of God suffering for love's sake.

derstood humility more in terms of the former, as the appropriate virtue vis-à-vis the Creator, making it difficult, if not impossible, for him to attribute humility to the Creator himself (since in God there is absolutely no need for submission, except insofar as one may speak paradoxically of the "voluntary necessity" of love, which will of necessity, as it were, abase itself and give itself up for the beloved). But the two forms of humility are not necessarily exclusive, at least not in view of Christ. For, to adopt an old strategy of Augustine, we may distinguish between the humility of Christ *secundum quod homo* and *secundum quod Deus*. And then, suddenly, hope of finding a solution springs anew, once we see that there might be an *analogy* between the humility shown by Christ as man and the humility of Christ as God.

In order to do justice to Thomas's concerns, however, we must again be true to the meaning of analogy as we have stressed all along—not as a confused continuum but as a relation of one thing to another (*allo pros allo*). In other words, if a path forward is to be found, we need clearly to distinguish the two kinds of humility in Christ before we can see how they might go together. For example, divine humility can in no way mean the obligated submission of an inferior to a superior but only the voluntary submission of a superior to an inferior, that is, of divinity to the conditions of humanity. Once this is clear, let us then ask whether such voluntary humility out of love is a sign of weakness or strength? Clearly, it is a sign of strength and power, for not to be able to humble oneself would be weakness and impotence. But if humility is a power and the root of all virtues, how can it be denied of God *secundum quod Deus* as something that God can be? Creatures would then possess a good that God does not. Moreover, how could God produce such a virtue in creatures if he did not possess it himself? If God can produce wisdom in creatures because he is Wisdom Itself, how could He, who *invariably* brings about humility in the saints, fail to be Humility Itself? All of which strongly suggests that divine humility is the *primary* meaning of humility, to which all other meanings of humility refer, and the transcendental condition for the possibility of the humility that we see in Christ.

Now this would be the royal way to divine humility, to see it in the mirror of Christ and the saints, especially the Mother of God, but let us now approach it another way, through

Thomas's metaphysics. According to Thomas, God as the Creator is at once *interior omnibus rebus*, that is, intimate to all things, and *exterior omnibus rebus*, that is, outside all things.[103] In short, for Thomas, God is mysteriously immanent and transcendent at once. Of course, this teaching is hardly peculiar to him. For his part, Augustine understood it not only intellectually but also existentially, having been surprised and overwhelmed to discover that the God who is abidingly beyond him was also in him innermostly: "tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo."[104] It is also the clear teaching of Scripture, which speaks of God as dwelling both beyond the world and in it. In the words of Isaiah, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me?" (Is 66:1); but then, in the words of the Psalmist, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast" (Ps 139:7–10). In other words, there is no place where God is not present; even if we find ourselves in hell, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he is there, whether we are able to see him or not. And, finally, in Christ, in whom divine immanence and transcendence are perfectly one, God is said to "fill all things" (Eph 1:23; 4:10) and to be "above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6).

Clearly, the relation between divine immanence and transcendence is among the fundamental mysteries of the Catholic faith. It is also one that Przywara like none other in his day sought to safeguard by formulating and deploying the *analogia entis* as a *reductio in mysterium* over against every *halving*

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103. *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1, corp.; ad 1. *Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Deus est supra omnia per excellentiam suae naturae, et tamen est in omnibus rebus, ut causans omnium esse* (God is in all things, and intimately. . . . [He] is above all things by the excellence of his nature, but nevertheless in all things as the cause of their being).

104. "You were more inward than my inmost and higher than my highest." Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4. See also *De Genesis ad littera* 8.26 and 8.48: *interior omni re, quia in ipso sunt omnia, et exterior omni re, quia ipse est super omnia* (he is more interior to every thing since all things are in him, and outside all things since he is above all things).

and essentially every *profaning* of the mystery, whether on the part of one-sided modern and postmodern philosophies of immanence (from Spinoza to Heidegger) or that of the one-sided dialectical theologies of transcendence (as in the early Barth, Gogarten, and Thurneysen). What is relevant to our disputed question, however, is that a Catholic (and Thomistic!) metaphysics of the *analogia entis*, far from leading us into a comprehensible concept of God, leads us into a region of dazzling mystery, where things that seem opposed, in this case divine immanence and transcendence, are simply and mysteriously one. In the marvelous words of Gregory the Great:

> In order that the Almighty God may declare to all that He is within and above, He says that heaven is His throne. Truly in order to show that He encompasses all things He affirms that He measures heaven in a palm and encloses the earth in a fist. Then He is Himself inside and outside, Himself above and below; above by ruling, below by bearing, inside by filling, outside by encompassing. And he is so inside that he may be outside, He so encompasses that He may bear, He so bears that he may preside. . . . Hence the prophet also says to the Author of all: "Thy knowledge is too wonderful for me" [Ps 138:6] . . . [and having] labored with his understanding in the knowledge of God, tiring and failing, he added: "It is mighty, I cannot attain to it."[105]

As a good shepherd Gregory leads us into the mystery where concepts fail and paradoxes abound, where the outside is the inside, the above is the below, the transcendent is the immanent, and so forth. But what is most relevant to our argument here is what this passage suggests to us about divine humility if we can now say that God upholds all things by his humility just as he governs all things by his majesty and that in God, therefore, majesty and humility are one. For it is "not that humbling is one thing and exaltation another; but rather the most exalted

105. Gregory the Great, *Homilae in Hiezechielem* 2.5.11, in *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet of Ezekiel*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2008), 342. For the patristic and early medieval reception of Ezekiel's vision, see Angela Russell Christman, *"What did Ezekiel See?" Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel's Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

exaltedness of exaltation lies in the very depths of humility. The deeper and lower the depth is, the higher and more immeasurable the exaltation and the heights, and the deeper the fount, the higher it springs; height and depth are the same."[106]

Now, once again, coming from the realm of *dianoia* and an ordinary philosophical perspective, such conclusions might seem impossible, if not absurd. But thinking analogically—and we have good reason for doing so—we can at least imagine how it might be so: how two things, seemingly opposed, might be related, and not only related but one in God. Of course, in view of revelation such a mystery should not surprise us. For revelation tells us the same thing: that in God the way up is the way down (Eph 4:9), that in him the humble are exalted (Mt 23:12), and that by emptying himself (of his glory), God fills everything (with his glory). The words of the *Sanctus* are familiar: *pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua*. But if what we have argued is true, then we might want to sing it anew, with a new emphasis, as a song of divine glory that is equally a song of divine humility.

Perhaps the simplest argument for humility being a divine attribute, however, bypassing all metaphysical and scriptural paradoxes, is that love is never found in its perfection without it.[107] It is, as it were, love's root, its sine qua non, and the hidden ground of its manifestation—as in the Trinity the Son is the glory of the humble Father, who remains hidden in the depths of divine humility, withdrawing eternally into it, as it were, in order in the rushing of the Spirit of love to give all glory and honor to his Son, who in turn does the same in the economy, giving through the Spirit of the Eucharist all glory and honor back to the Father who gave it all to him. Indeed, let us say on apostolic authority, as a matter of definition, that *love is humble*, that it does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5) but lowers itself and abases itself, even to the point of becoming nothing out of love for the beloved, who may not be worthy of it (Rom 5:8). As Przywara

106. Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons*, trans. Edmund Colledge, OSA and Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 281. Thanks to Anthony Scordino for reminding me of this passage.

107. As Przywara puts it, humility is one of the *Erscheinungsformen* of genuine Christian love—the other being patience; see his late work *Demut, Geduld, Liebe: Die drei christlichen Tugenden* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1960), 47.

puts it, "The love, which is God and flows on in human beings, is . . . essentially a 'descent' from a glorious love into the deepest depth [*Unten*] of 'poverty, disgrace, and folly.' When love appears it appears as the most extreme humility, just as the most extreme humility (as abasement) is inspired by the spirit of love."[108] And, following Przywara (who follows Thérèse of Lisieux), let us propose in defense of humility that none of the theological virtues are genuinely found without it. As any number of saints have suggested, it is not something one might perchance add to the theological virtues, but their very root and condition of growth. It is not enough, therefore, to speak of faith, hope, and love, as we have done for so many centuries. One must also, and perhaps first of all, speak of humility.

Admittedly, we are speaking now of humility as a human virtue, but we have, it may be hoped, given sufficient reasons to believe that it is not just a human virtue or even just a theological virtue but even a divine virtue, indeed, the primal ground of the Godhead.[109] At the very least we hope to have shown that there is more to humility than meets the eye; that humility is glorious, as it is in Christ, his Mother, and his saints; and that this is *no accident* of the economy of salvation but a revelation of the nature of God himself.[110] □

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108. Ibid., 64.

109. To venture an even more speculative formulation, which, admittedly, even after multiple qualifications, is susceptible to the same criticisms that Balthasar's own kenotic theology has received, we might say that humility is the virtue by which the Father simultaneously withdraws into the divine essence, becoming nothing to see, and gives all the glory to his Son, in order that in him the divine essence might perfectly ex-ist and shine forth.

110. Whether, following Bruce McCormack's reading of Barth, one understands the humility of God in terms of God's eternal election to be for us in Christ is another question since this makes humility a function of the economy. See McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). But Catholic theology can be confident following Barth when he says: "The humility in which [God] dwells and acts in Jesus Christ is not alien to him but proper to him." See *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 193. Thanks to Bruce McCormack for his friendship and invigorating work on this topic.