

TRIBUTE TO MOZART¹

• Hans Urs von Balthasar •

“Mozart serves by making audible the triumphal hymn of a prelapsarian and resurrected creation, in which suffering and guilt are not presented as faint memory, as *past*, but as conquered, absolved, transfigured present.”

Whereas we can always sense on the brow of Beethoven's music the drops of sweat it has cost its creator, and on Bach's at least the labor that stands behind so much tectonics, so much gigantic structure, the momentous work of Mozart seems to have sprung into being without effort, born into the world as a perfect child and grown into maturity without hindrance. A phantasmagoria from paradisiacal time—before man became prone to the curse “to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, to plow the soil of thorns, and to give birth in pain?” And should such an exceptional being even be associated with Christianity, in which the curse of suffering is resolved only by the deeper redemptive suffering of God? But are we not, considered from a Christian or a worldly perspective, on our way between “paradise” and “heaven”? Do we not come from God and return to him, passing through the waters and fires of time, suffering, and death? And why should we not permit ourselves to be led through

all the dissonances of our existence by the “Zauberflöte,” a tremendous adumbration of love, light and glory, of eternal truth and harmony? Is there a better, indeed another manner to bear witness to the nobility of our divine filiation, than to make present whence we came and whither we are going? All those whom we take for our models have tried to have it that way, and above all He who knew Himself to be the Son of the Father, who had the face of the Father before his eyes always, and whose will He accomplished. Mozart serves by making audible the triumphal hymn of a prelapsarian and resurrected creation, in which suffering and guilt are not presented as faint memory, as *past*, but as conquered, absolved, transfigured present. Hence no one may—Kierkegaard notwithstanding—misread in Mozart the aura of a sweet, infinitely youthful eros, permeating everything with a strong, intoxicating fragrance. The cherubic, and, more mature, the elastic gait of the white hero Don Giovanni, and finally, the overly heavy burden of pleasure, the sound of breaking hearts in “*Così fan tutte*,” and the long, cool shadows of the “*Magic Flute*.” Are not all these in one sweep with the great *Regina Coeli* (KC 276), with the two vespers, the litanies and masses, in which he did not consider it necessary to alter his voice and adopt a special spiritual style and tone; for what is it that should be transfigured if not creation, what redeemed and praised if not nature, the child of God? This is not “Baroque” but simply Christian. But where is the confession of sins? One will have to say: for this once, in the confession of grace. And where the fear of judgment? For this once, sheltered within the hope and trust in Redemption. In any event, everything ends in the shudders of the Requiem, that mysterious fragment in which the voice once given to so much jubilation, breaks. But the further time progresses, the clearer it soars above other voices, which seemed once equal in rank, yet are now falling back, appear pale, dated, perhaps even unauthentic. On Mozart not one speck has fallen . . .

—*Translated by Maria Shradly* □

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, the eminent theologian and co-founder of *Communio*, died in 1988.

¹This text was published by Hans Urs von Balthasar as member of the Swiss Committee “Pro Mozart” in 1955 (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Jg. 176, No. 385, Sonntagsausgabe, 13. Februar, Blatt 4). This committee, which next to Balthasar, included also Karl Barth, Carl Jacob Burckhardt, Arthur Honegger, and Ernest Ansermet had been established in support of the “*Neue Mozart-Gesamt-Ausgabe*.”