

ABSTRACT

Love Itself is Understanding: Balthasar, Truth, and the Saints

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This study examines the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar on the post-Scholastic separation between dogmatic theology and the spirituality of Church, which he describes as the loss of the saints. Balthasar conceives of this separation as a shattering of truth — the “living exposition of theory in practice and of knowledge carried into action.” The consequence of this shattering is the impoverishment of both divine and creaturely truth. This dissertation identifies Balthasar’s attempt to overcome this divorce between theology and spirituality as a driving theme of his *Theo-Logic* by arguing that the “truth of Being” — divine and creaturely — is most fundamentally the love revealed by Jesus Christ, and is therefore best known by the saints. Balthasar’s attempted re-integration of speculative theology and spirituality through his theology of the saints serves as his critical response to the metaphysics of German Idealism that elevated thought over love, and, by so doing, lost the transcendental properties of Being: beauty, goodness, and truth. Balthasar constructively responds to this problem by re-appropriating the ancient and

medieval spiritual tradition of the saints, as interpreted through his own theological master, Ignatius of Loyola, to develop a trinitarian and Christological ontology and a corresponding pneumatological epistemology, as expressed through the lives, and especially the prayers, of the saints. This project will follow the structure and rhythm of Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* in elaborating the initiatory movement of his account of truth: phenomenological, Christological, and pneumatological. In each of these, truth is consistently expressed as and known through *dialogue* — through the rhythm of expression and response, donation and receptivity, *kenosis* and obedience. Dialogicality is the rhythm of love, and hence the proper form of truth. It is for this reason, we shall argue, that Balthasar's account of truth requires the saints as those whose lives are fundamentally dialogical insofar as they are constituted by prayer.

Love Itself is Understanding: Balthasar, Truth, and the Saints

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ABBREVIATIONS

- GL 1 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 1, Seeing the Form.*
- GL 2 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 2, Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles.*
- GL 3 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 3, Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles.*
- GL 4 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 4, The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity.*
- GL 5 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 5, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age.*
- GL 7 The Glory of the Lord. Vol. 7, Theology: The New Covenant.*
- TD 2 Theo-Drama. Vol. 2, Dramatis Personae: Man in God.*
- TD 3 Theo-Drama. Vol. 3, Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ.*
- TD 5 Theo-Drama. Vol. 5, The Last Act.*
- TL 1 Theo-Logic. Vol. 1, Truth of the World.*
- TL 2 Theo-Logic. Vol. 2, Truth of God.*
- TL 3 Theo-Logic. Vol. 3, The Spirit of Truth.*

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And to those whose love, friendship, and wisdom were living-giving throughout the last six years of this Ph.D., I'm afraid I have only inadequate words with which to offer my gratitude. Mom, for her Christ-like self-giving; Dad and Jeanette, for support and encouragement; Rob, Wendy, Ryan, and Jordan for laughs; Gram and Gramps for being a model of what love can be. Thank you to the Drinklings (David and Molly; Dan and Carrie; KC and Elisa; Jenny and Eric; Will; Courtenay and Sara), for being the form of true friendship; for keeping my speculative mind grounded in the concrete practices of the Christian life; for a thousand conversations that formed me as a friend, as a

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Despite all the assistance provided by Professors Candler, Wood, and Donnelly, I alone am responsible for what follows, including any errors, omissions, or redundancies that might inadvertently remain.

Matthew A. Moser
Feast of the Ascension, 2013

DEDICATION

To Robert W. Johnston (1917-2012)

In communione sanctorum

In luce aeterna

“He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted — to be a saint.”

—Graham Greene

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Balthasar and the Saints

“Give us the grace to realize from this moment onwards something of the Communion of Saints.”

— Hans Urs von Balthasar

“There is only one misery,” Léon Bloy famously declared, “and that is not to be saints.”¹

This dissertation explores Hans Urs von Balthasar’s answer to the loss of the saints in modern Christian theology. Indeed, the saints play a central but neglected role in the theology of Balthasar (1905-1988), one of the twentieth century’s richest and most energetic theological minds. His “theology of the saints” is a consistent motif throughout Balthasar’s wide-ranging work, in ways both obvious, as in his spiritual biographies of Térése of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity; and subtle, as in his great systematic Trilogy. This dissertation explores Balthasar’s constructive answer to the displacement of the saints from modern Christian theology.

In many ways, Balthasar’s theology of the saints is what was once called a “mystical theology” — the knowledge of the truth of both God and world in relation to God as mediated through the mystery of the incarnate Christ. A mystical theology is, according to Vladimir Lossky, a “spirituality that denotes a dogmatic attitude.”²

Balthasar’s theology of the saints is certainly this, but more. A theology of the saints is where the objective truth of Being, found in the truth of God, is subjectively encountered

¹ *La femme pauvre*, (Ebooks libres et gratuits, 2010), 260: “Il n’y a qu’une tristesse...c’est de n’être pas des saints.”

² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 7.

in the lived reality of Christ. The fruit of this encounter is an enriched understanding of both God and world. Saintliness becomes the disposition of theological knowledge as participation in the dramatic truth of the reality of Christ. It is, in short, theological knowledge as love.

In a certain sense, then, Balthasar's theology of the saints is indeed a "spirituality" insofar as it involves the personal and lived encounter with God in Christ.³ But this should not be confused with a "mystical psychology" concerned with the peculiarities of the saints' inner lives. Balthasar's theology of the saints is rather the coming together of the speculative, the affective, and the contemplative dimensions of Christian truth.

There is however a difficulty that attends Balthasar's eccentric use of the saints. The lives of the saints are typically the subject matter of works of practical and pastoral spirituality. What role can the saints play in a speculative, dogmatic theology of the sort that Balthasar writes?⁴ Balthasar thoroughly refuses the reduction of the saints to the theological ghetto of "spirituality." For him, the saints are the very *forms* of Christian existence and, precisely *as* such, are also the form of Christian theological reflection; their lives are explications of the central, dramatic truth of Christian belief — the mystery of the triune God revealed in the mission of Jesus Christ.

³ "Spirituality" for Balthasar is the realization "in practice, in the life of faith, hope and charity" of the objective revelation of God's Being and activity in the world. It is the performance of the theological act "in which the 'bride' responds to the call and self-giving of the 'Bridegroom'." Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Spirituality" in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 212, 214.

⁴ This is the question asked by David Moss in his brief overview of Balthasar's theology of the saints in his essay, "The Saints" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

This dissertation is a critical exploration of Balthasar's theology of the saints as a lens for interpreting his *Theo-Logic*.⁵ As we shall see, the saints are intimately associated with Balthasar's understanding of truth. It is Balthasar's unique theological genius to allow the saints to determine the shape and movement of his account of truth, to be the living reality that holds together his concern with the speculative, affective, and contemplative dimensions of the existential reality of the Christian life.

Because the saints are the form of Christian existence, they shape the pattern of Balthasar's theology. Just as many of the saints by whom Balthasar is influenced articulate their theology in the language of initiation (especially influential for Balthasar on this score are Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus Confessor, and Bonaventure), Balthasar's own theology can be described as a mystagogy, as a movement further and further into the heart of Christian mystery, an initiation and training for learning how to see, and how to understand.⁶ Balthasar explicitly adopts this

⁵ Balthasar's great Trilogy is composed of a three distinct series, each of which corresponds to one of the transcendental properties of Being: his theological *aesthetics* corresponds to Beauty; his *dramatics* to the Good; and his *logic* to the True.

The *Logic* hold a unique position in Balthasar's great Trilogy. The first volume, first published simply as *Wahrheit* in 1947, preceded the rest of the series, both the aesthetics and the dramatics, by nearly two decades. In it, Balthasar attempts a philosophical account of the truth (*Wahrheit*) of the world in its epistemological and ontological dimensions. In so doing, he plants many seeds of thought that will only come to harvest in his later theological aesthetics and dramatics. Indeed, the original *Wahrheit* should be read as the philosophical propaedeutic to the Trilogy.

Balthasar's original plan for a philosophical series following the publication of *Wahrheit* in 1947 never materialized. Rather, after the publication of the aesthetics and the dramatics in the 1960s and 70s, Balthasar composed his *theological* logical theory and republished the original *Wahrheit* (unchanged!) as the first volume in the series. A new extended introduction was written to tie together the philosophy of the original text to the two more explicitly theological volumes, *The Truth of God* and *The Spirit of Truth*, both published in the mid-1980s, not long before his death. The first volume of the *Theo-Logic* "considers truth as we first encounter it in the world [in its concrete reality], as the truth of things and of man, a truth that ultimately points back to God, the Creator. In this perspective, the truth of God appears as the origin and end (*principium et finis* as taught by Vatican I) of all worldly truth" (TL 1, 30).

⁶ It would be an exercise in futility to attempt an exhaustive list of all of the saints who play a formative role in Balthasar's thought. There have been attempts to tie Balthasar to a particular thinker (e.g., Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval*, New York: Crossroad 2002) which tries to show that Balthasar's is a recapitulation of the thought of St. Irenaeus

mystagogical model in his *Epilogue* (1987).⁷ Through the metaphor of the movement into the inner sanctuary of a church (forecourt, threshold, and cathedral), Balthasar develops the saintly journey of the Christian into the truth of God. This dissertation will follow this mystagogical structure in explicating Balthasar's project as a theology of the saints — one that holds philosophy, dogmatics, and spirituality together in a coherent theological vision.

Overview

Status Quaestiones

Balthasar is a notoriously complex thinker for a number of reasons, not least of which is the sheer volume of his writings. His fifteen-volume theological trilogy (including his theological aesthetics, dramatics, and logic) is just a fragment of his overall output. He also published highly regarded studies on Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus Confessor. He published several volumes of literary criticism (Paul Claudel, Reinhold Schneider, and Georges Bernanos), studies of mystics (Elizabeth of the Trinity and Térèse of Lisieux), commentaries on the *charismata* of Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola, as well as dozens of essays on a multitude of theological topics.

Yet his was not only an intellectual project but a pastoral one as well. Balthasar published numerous books on what has come to be termed “spirituality.” Books on

(as filtered through de Lubac). Also worth noting is Junius Johnson's recent Yale dissertation (2010) on Balthasar's doctrine of analogy. Johnson makes the case that it is St. Bonaventure who stands at the heart of Balthasar's thought. Both works are important contributions to understanding Balthasar's work but both make the mistake of forcing a hermeneutic onto Balthasar instead of letting him speak for himself in his full complexity and eccentricity. What these two projects *do* recognize is that Balthasar's work is deeply influenced by the heritage of the saints. The error of these two projects is to mistake the formative influence of these two saints on Balthasar's work as his subscribing wholeheartedly to their school of thought. As we shall see, Balthasar is too deeply engaged with the whole of the Christian tradition, even those outside the strict canon of Catholic saints (Adrienne von Speyr, is perhaps the perfect example of this) to be described as an Irenaean or a Bonaventuran *simpliciter*.

⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

contemplative prayer, liturgy, Marian devotion, discipleship, and Christian love occupy no less space among his collected works than his more philosophical and theological discourses. This variety has led to something of an impasse in Balthasarian studies. In a way, this impasse in secondary studies is to be expected due to the variety of genres in which Balthasar writes. Broadly speaking, his *oeuvre* is understood as having two distinct sides: the theoretical/speculative and the pastoral/spiritual. Scholarship therefore tends to focus on one side or the other, noticeably favoring his dogmatic and philosophical work over his pastoral writings. One notable exception to this general rule in English is Mark McIntosh's book, *Christology from Within*,⁸ which argues for the dogmatic, Christological "shape" of Balthasar's spirituality. Understanding Balthasar's spirituality as the act of embodying Christ's activity in the world is certainly an accurate interpretation of Balthasar's thought. Yet McIntosh's project, for all of its strengths, ignores the metaphysical and epistemological dimensions of Balthasar's spirituality. This dissertation will therefore build on McIntosh's work by expanding its initial impulse to demonstrate the organic union between Balthasar's theoretical and spiritual works. By identifying the spiritual heart present even in Balthasar's speculative works, this dissertation aims to bridge the divide so common in the secondary scholarship.

This shall be done primarily through an extended study of Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* series, which is perhaps the most speculative *and* the most spiritual of his works. Through his logical exposition of the transcendental of the true — the truth of both worldly and divine being — we can see the unitive power of his theology of the saints at work. Because Balthasar unfolds his speculative thought *within* the broader framework

⁸ Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

of his theology of the saints, one can identify in that thought a series of reductions to the *Gestalt* of the saints, that is, to love. We shall see primarily through Balthasar's *Logic* how the truth of the world and the truth of God are known most truly by the saints, that is, by those whose knowledge is love.

Little has been said about this spiritual, "saintly" dynamic in Balthasar's work, especially in his *Theo-Logic*. In fact, little has yet been published on Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* in English. The few published articles in English focus mostly on Balthasar's use of analogy in his theological method.⁹ These works, while correctly identifying analogy as a central motif in Balthasar's ontology, generally neglect the epistemic and mystical implications of that ontology.

There are two English sources on Balthasar's *Theo-Logic*, however, that are immediately relevant for this project. First, David C. Schindler's *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*¹⁰ focuses on the interchange between Being and human consciousness. Schindler's project bears a similar impulse to this dissertation though Schindler, a philosopher, limits his account of Balthasar to a philosophy of truth and knowledge with little attention to the spiritual dimension inherent in Balthasar's account of truth. Second, Werner Löser has published a brief article in which he synthesizes various elements of Balthasar's thought into a developed account of

⁹ See, for example, J. Palakeel, *The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective* (Rome, 1995); A.F. Franks, "Trinitarian *analogia entis* in Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *The Thomist* vol. 62 (1998), 533-59. Both of these examples correctly identify analogy as a central motif in Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* but neglect to develop the connection between Balthasar's use of analogy and his critique of subjective epistemology.

¹⁰ D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

Being as love.¹¹ Löser proposes that the best way to understand Balthasar's ontology is as a theological and philosophical elaboration of 1 John 4:8, "God is love." In this article, Löser gives an account of the Balthasarian synthesis of philosophical and theological ontologies but, due to its limited scope, fails to address the epistemic questions attendant to Balthasar's ontology.

Secondary criticism in German and French addresses many of the metaphysical and synthetic questions of this dissertation but fails to engage either the epistemological or the mystical dimension of Balthasar's work.¹² Important works on Balthasar's metaphysics by Gabellieri,¹³ Ide,¹⁴ and Schaerr¹⁵ especially elaborate the connection between Being and analogy in Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* but neglect the necessary spiritual fulfillment of that ontology.¹⁶

¹¹ Werner Löser, "Being Interpreted as Love: Some Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Communio* vol. 16, no. 4 (1989), 475-90.

¹² This problem is especially prevalent among commentators on the *Logic*. A representative example of the failure to see the genuinely spiritual shape of that series is Anton Strukelj, "The *Theo-Logic* of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Communio*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1996), 472-479. This essay purports to be an overview of the *Logic* but fails to place the series within the larger context of the Trilogy, and within Balthasar's larger concerns about the spiritual nature of truth itself.

¹³ Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Ontologie de l'image et phénoménologie de la vérité (à la lumière de H.U. von Balthasar)" in *Theophilyon* 93 (1971): 225-44. The phenomenological thrust of this article is especially helpful for tracing the movement from Balthasar's ontology to his aesthetics—from Being's expressiveness to its appearance in the world.

¹⁴ Pascal Ide, *Être et Mystère: La philosophie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Brussels: Culture et Verite, 1995). Ide's work is especially useful for its emphasis on the fundamental and irreducible mysteriousness of Being and the implications of that mystery for the philosophical task.

¹⁵ Heinz Schaerr, "Analogie und Geschichlichkeit der Wahrheit: Aspekte des Wahrheitproblems bei Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Annalen der Philosophischen Gesellschaften Innerschweiz und Ostschweiz* vol. 4, no. 4 (1948): 105-122.

¹⁶ There are indications that this is starting to change. Two promising, recent volumes address Balthasar's concept of truth in both its philosophical and theological dimensions in such a way that there emerges at least a possibility of an incorporation of his spirituality into the mix. See André-Marie Ponnou-Delaffon, *Le chiffre trinitaire de la vérité chez Hans Urs von Balthasar: La Trinité comme pincipe d'intelligibilité de l'articulation de la philosophie et de la théologie dans La Théologie* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2006) and Peter Blätter, *Pneumatologia crucis: Das Kreuz in der Logik von Wahrheit und Freiheit: Ein phänomenologischer Zugang zur Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Würzburg, Echer Verlag GmbH, 2004).

Regarding the more pastoral side of Balthasar's corpus, little has been published. The major study of Balthasar's spirituality, Raymond Gawrowski's *Word and Silence*,¹⁷ argues that Balthasar's spirituality is a synthesis of Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox practices. As important as this book is for the study of a major aspect of Balthasar's thought, Gawrowski does not situate Balthasar's spiritual writings concerning the saints alongside his more speculative thought.

Scholarship's tendency to bifurcate between the speculative and the affective dimensions of Balthasar's thought represents a fundamental misreading of his method, a misreading caused in part by scholarship's neglect of his theology of the saints. This dissertation counters this tendency by offering a mystagogical reading of Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* in relation to his theology of the saints.¹⁸

Part of this reading consists in treating the God-World relationship as a central concern in Balthasar's thought. I am not alone in identifying the God-World relationship as a primary concern of Balthasar's speculative works. Joseph Palakeel makes a convincing case that at the center of Balthasar's thought is the form (*Gestalt*) of Christ, which is the key to understanding the God-World relation. Christ himself, in other

¹⁷ Raymond Gawrowski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter Between East and West* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark International, 1995).

¹⁸ I have decided to label Balthasar's theology of the saints as a "mystagogical" theology as something akin to the ancient "mystical theology." I am fully aware of the dangers and ambiguities present in any use of "mystical" language, which is often associated with a certain private and "uncontrolled subjectivity", far removed from the "public, shared, and therefore universally thematizable" language of intellectual or speculative discourse. Mystical language becomes shorthand for "subjectivity", or "experience", neither of which has any usefulness for an objective discourse about the world. While not denying the subjective and affective aspects of the mystical, this project shall offer a broader, more encompassing definition, that aims through Balthasar, to restore to mystical language its proper philosophical and theological dimensions. Cf. Jean Luc Marion, "What do we Mean by 'Mystic'?" in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-7.

words, *is* the God-World relation.¹⁹ But I venture beyond Palakeel, however, by suggesting that the meeting of God and world in Christ yields a theological method embodied by the saints, a way of knowing the truth of this relationship through love. For Balthasar, Christ is the God-World relation, and thus this relation is known most truly by dramatic participation in Christ. Thus the question of the truth of the God-World relation must be addressed not solely by philosophy or dogmatic theology, but by and in a living, existential participation in the Christological reality of that relation. This is not to say that Balthasar treats Christ as a means to the more important end of knowing the truth of the world; Christ is not for him a sort of cosmic cipher. Christ is rather the reality in which the saint, even the world itself, is enfolded. Christ does not point beyond himself to a further truth, but is himself the truth of both God and the world. The saint endeavors to know Christ, and in Christ, all things.

The Pervasive Question

At the heart of Balthasar's theology is the pervasive question of the God-world relationship. This question was especially prevalent for the theologians of modernity.²⁰ While this question has always been present in Christian theological reflection, it took on a special urgency with the advent of modernity when "cosmos" was replaced by "nature",

¹⁹ Joseph Palakeel, *The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1995), 67.

²⁰ See, for example, *Mapping Modern Theology*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2012). Other significant theological concerns of the twentieth century, related to this, are the nature-grace relationship as well as a renewed interest in Christo-centric theological anthropologies. See Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) and Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

metaphysical realism was confronted with nominalism, rationalism and idealism, and theology was reduced to anthropology.²¹

The urgency of this question becomes even more acute in twentieth century theology, especially in the debate between Karl Barth and Erich Przywara over the *analogia entis* and, within Roman Catholicism, in the controversial re-narrating of the nature-grace relationship in Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946). Balthasar himself was caught up in both of these debates. Much like Barth and especially the later Przywara,²² Balthasar sought to address the God-World relationship in a distinctly Christological and "dramatic" way.²³ To engage this question with Barth, Przywara, and de Lubac, Balthasar takes on the challenge of constructing a theological project with the drama of the God-World relationship at its center. This involves treating the great questions of metaphysics, epistemology, and theology itself in a distinctly new way.²⁴

But Balthasar's new way of addressing the God-World relationship should not be understood as sheer invention. Balthasar is a *ressourcement* thinker and thus attends to the question of the God-World relationship (and its sub-themes: metaphysical analogy,

²¹ On this, see Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 15-64. See also the first two chapters of Balthasar's *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), "The Cosmological Reduction" and "The Anthropological Reduction."

²² Most especially in his later works published after his landmark *Analogia Entis* (1932).

²³ D.C. Schindler offers a helpful summary of Balthasar's concept of *Dramatik*: "The term *drama* refers, in the literal sense, to the form of art created in Attic Greece, in distinction from the lyric and epic forms of poetry that are also due to the Greeks. What makes drama unique in relation to these other forms is, in the first place, that it is essentially *dialogical*, involving the interaction of relatively autonomous characters. Second, drama is not merely recited but *performed* and, indeed, performed before an audience." D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 17.

²⁴ This controversy has been recently revisited in a collection of essays entitled *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White, OP (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2010). One can expect another surge of interest in this debate with the forthcoming publication of an English translation of Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Reason*, trans. John Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2013).

knowledge of God, the truth of the world, etc.) *via* a retrieval of ancient and medieval theology, especially the Christian “mystical tradition.”²⁵ His unique contribution to this question comes in his construction of his theology of the saints, as a union of the speculative and affective, the objective and subjective, dimensions of Christian knowing.

This dissertation describes Balthasar’s theology of the saints as a mystagogy, or a theology of initiation. But we need to distinguish between the different orderings of theological knowledge that Balthasar adopts in his work. The first is the order of revelation. This is the ordering of his Trilogy. This ordering lacks (indeed, denies) all philosophical prolegomena, beginning instead with the disclosure of the form (*Gestalt*) of Christ in all its dramatic dimensions. Only after this surprising disclosure of Christ comes the understanding of the Christ-event the *Theo-Logic*. Christ heals our eyes; only then can we see. He speaks the truth; only then do we know.

The other ordering that Balthasar adopts is the order of initiation. He follows this ordering in his *Epilogue* and his *Love Alone is Credible*. This is the way of the religious quest, which progresses from the religious longing of man through the philosophical-religious truth of Being, and finally into the heart of the Christian mystery itself. This is the ordering of his *Theo-Logic* and thus the ordering followed in this project.

But what must remain clear is that the way of initiation occurs *within* the way of revelation. The way of initiation does not occur apart from Christ until it reaches its Christological climax. Rather, Balthasar adopts a method similar to that of Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*: Christ is the goal but he is also the way.²⁶ Within the order of

²⁵ On the impropriety of the term “mystical tradition,” see Andrew Louth, *The Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200-214.

²⁶ *De doctrina christiana*, XXXIV.38: “Thus He says, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’; that is, you are to come through me, to arrive at me, and to remain in me.”

revelation, the order of initiation is possible; analogy is possible because of kata-logy.

The way of initiation is Balthasar's existential interpretation of the religious *eros* of man that arises as a response to the existential reality of the Christ's *agapeic* descent. The way of initiation is discerned only *within* the light of the Christ-event. As Balthasar puts it in his *Epilogue*: "Entering this sacred space does not mean, however, that the 'forecourt' and 'threshold' have suddenly become otiose but only that the continuity of the Holy of Holies with the other two locations can be recognized by those alone who have crossed the threshold and now worship within the splendor of the cathedral."²⁷

Procedure

This dissertation follows the rhythms of Balthasar's mystagogical thought. Each chapter will focus on a different stage of the initiatory journey into the ever-greater mystery of God. But Balthasar, like all the great saints and mystics of the Christian tradition, does not stop at the "arrival" of the soul in rapturous union with the divine. Indeed, this union with God is in many ways just the beginning of Balthasar's thought, just as it is the beginning of the Christian life. The saint is not only the mystic but also the apostle. For Balthasar, the saint is the one who, in her mystical union with God, is commissioned, sent out on mission in the world. In this way, the saint participates in her own way in the mission of Christ. The structure of this dissertation reflects this initiatory movement into the mystery of God that is both union and vocation, rapture and apostolate. Just as sacramental worship ends, not with the reception of the sacrament but with the benediction and the commissioning (*ite, missa est*), so too does Balthasar's theology of the saints result in a distinctly Christian *ethos*, a way of being in the world.

²⁷ *Epilogue*, 89.

Applied to the discipline of theology, Balthasar's project re-envisioning theological knowledge as a way of being — a way of being in relation to God — that yields an understanding of God and world in and through the mystery of Christ.

The second chapter of this project is an overview of Balthasar's somewhat eccentric study and use of the saints. Because the locus of our reading of his theology of the saints is the truth of Being, the God-World relationship, this chapter will trace out Balthasar's genealogical account of the deformation of metaphysics and epistemology through a loss of the saintly dimension of theology. Especially important in his genealogy will be Meister Eckhart, whose mysticism lies at the root of the German Idealism that Balthasar critiques throughout his *Logic*. Especially key to this genealogy will be Balthasar's popular and programmatic essay, "Theology and Sanctity"²⁸ and his extended account in the fifth volume of his *Glory of the Lord*.²⁹ These genealogies will illumine the role of the saints in Balthasar's account of the God-World relationship, especially the way that the loss of the saints from theology signals the disintegration of the theological unity of the speculative and affective in the contemplative tradition of the saints.

The third chapter will be a study of Balthasar's ontological project in the first volume of the *Theo-Logic*. The task of this chapter will be to highlight especially 1) nature of creaturely truth as the irreducible *mystery* of Being; and 2) the corresponding epistemological form according to which the truth of Being is known. From this ontological vision, I will show how Balthasar's epistemology unveils the analogy

²⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity" in *Explorations in Theology: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209.

²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Brian McNeil & John Riches Kenneth (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1991), 9-47.

between creaturely and the truth of God. But this ana-logical truth can only be deduced from a prior kata-logical descent of the truth of God, namely, Jesus Christ. Thus the question at the heart of the truth of worldly being is the question of triune love as manifested Christologically in history.

If the third chapter corresponds to the “forecourt” of the initiatory journey into the heart of the Christian mystery, the fourth chapter corresponds to the heart of the cathedral itself, its inner sanctuary where its sacred mystery lies hidden. This chapter will be a study of one aspect of Balthasar’s Christology — the way that Christ is the “adequate sign, surrender, and expression of *God* within *finite being*.”³⁰ As the God-Man, Christ is the God-World relation; he is the truth of the world and the truth of God (John 14:6). This chapter shall exposit the way this dimension of Balthasar’s Christology functions as the “key” to all theological knowledge. Christ is both the goal of theological knowledge and, as I shall argue, the very possibility of knowledge of all truth. This chapter shall focus especially on this “Christology of mediation” in *Theo-Logic II*³¹ — Christ as the “synthesis” of both God and creation, as the God-Man.³² It is precisely as this synthesis, as the analogy of being, that Christ is the means and the end of theological knowledge.

The fifth chapter moves from the sanctuary of Christian mystery back out into the world through Balthasar’s account of the Spirit and the saints. Just as Moses encountered

³⁰ *Epilogue*, 89. Emphasis added.

³¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic II: The Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004).

³² This language of the “Christological synthesis” is derived from Balthasar’s study on Maximus Confessor: *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 207-275. “Synthesis” for Maximus, as also for Balthasar, “conveys... less the active achievement of uniting two things by putting them together than it does its passive result, which remains indifferent with regard to that achievement.” This synthesis is not a simple identity. It is rather “the unification of God and world, the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite, in the hypothesis of a single being — the God who became man” (235-236).

God in the luminous darkness of Mount Sinai and then descended back into the world,³³ so too does Balthasar's theology send the Christian out from her contemplative union with God to the world with a particular mission. This mission is to know the truth, and exposit that truth to the world. This can be done only through the activity of the Spirit of Truth. This chapter will therefore develop a pneumatological epistemology of the saints — an existentially embodied interpretation of the God-World relationship in which the speculative and affective dimensions of Christian teaching come together in what Balthasar describes as a “kneeling theology.” This is the spiritual synthesis or the “Christian realization” of the mission of Christ to be the truth of God and the world.³⁴ It is from within this pneumatological exposition of the mystery of Christ that the saint comes to know the truth of God, and the truth of Being. This kneeling theology of the saints serves as Balthasar's unique constructive contribution to the study of the God-World relation.³⁵

This project concludes by offering an assessment of Balthasar's theology of the saints. We shall argue that Balthasar's *Logic* is insufficiently dialogical and therefore does not successfully develop an ontology and corresponding epistemology of love

³³ Note this significant difference between the way the Moses story is narrated by Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Mystical Theology* and Gregory of Nyssa in his *The Life of Moses*. Both narratives follow Moses into the cloud of unknowing wherein he encounters God. But it is Nyssa who follows this mystical encounter in the darkness with Moses' descent from the mountain, with his return to the world, giving his account of the contemplative ascent a far more ethical, far more missional aspect than that of Pseudo-Dionysius.

³⁴ Thus in Balthasar's study of Maximus, the cosmological and metaphysical questions of God and Being are revealed only in the incarnate Christ who is himself the truth. But this truth must itself be realized existentially in the Christian life. When so lived, the Christian life participates in the truth of Christ and re-articulates the truth of his mystery afresh to the world in every generation. Here the philosophical, the dogmatic, and the spiritual play together, each signaling a different but harmonious note in the music of creation.

³⁵ In many ways, then, we are suggesting that Balthasar's theology of the saints is his commentary on St. Gregory the Great's great question: “What do they not see that see Him who sees all things?” (*Dial.* iv). See also Aquinas' clarification of Gregory's quote in *ST I*, 92.3.

through the saints. In light of this critique, we shall offer a constructive proposal, drawing from resources in his wider *oeuvre*, that addresses this deficiency. This will involve arguing for necessity of prayer for understanding truth. Through his earlier account of prayer, shall we see how Balthasar's seemingly eccentric call for the reintegration of theologian and saint might yield a renewed sense of theological knowledge — where truth understood most faithfully by the saints, those lovers of God. For indeed, as Balthasar will never tire of declaring, love itself is understanding.

CHAPTER TWO

Saints, Truth, and Theology

The Theology of the Saints

“It is not the dry manuals (full as these may be of unquestionable truths) that plausibly express to the world the truth of Christ’s gospel, but the existence of the saints, who have been grasped by Christ’s Holy Spirit.”

—Hans Urs von Balthasar

In a well known comment on his education in the Society of Jesus, Balthasar describes his time at the seminary at Pullach (1933-37) as languishing in the desert of neo-scholasticism: “My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation...I could have lashed out with the fury of a Samson. I felt like tearing down, with Samson’s strength, the whole temple and burying myself beneath the rubble.”¹

Contrary to the dry, abstract manuals of his neo-scholastic training, Balthasar found in the great saints of the Church a form and a beauty of theology as it was meant to be — a theology in which speculation, affect, and contemplation play together in a holistic articulation of Christian truth. Indeed, Balthasar became so enraptured by these writers that he would frequently stuff tissues in his ears to block out the dull lectures so that he could concentrate on his personal reading of their work. It was at Pullach that he became convinced of the idea that is fundamental to his theological project: it is the saints, not the manuals, that most truly know and convincingly present the truth of God to

¹ Quoted in Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Group, 2002), 2.

the world. It is no surprise then that when Balthasar sat down to write his own theology, it was determined by that saintly form he discovered in his extra-curricular reading at Pullach. This chapter serves as an exposition of his understanding of that saintly form.

Who is a Saint?

Balthasar offers little by way of a succinct definition of what constitutes a saint. He offers, at best, intimations — saints are lovers, marked by holiness, and commissioned by God for specific tasks in the world.² But in general, for Balthasar, there are two types of sanctity. There is what he calls “customary” sanctity, or the holiness of ordinary life. This is the vocation of every Christian, to “fulfill his vocation through the normal, unspectacular round of the Church’s life.”³ Every Christian can be — and *should be* — a saint in this sense. In addition to this, however, there is “representative” sanctity “by which God singles out some individual for the good of the Church and the community as a model of sanctity.”⁴ The difference between the customary and the representative saint lies neither in the quality of their holiness nor in their ecclesial importance. It lies, rather, only in the type of mission to which they are called. Sanctity is determined by the extent to which one hands oneself over to one’s missional vocation. This understanding of the saints is fundamentally determined by Balthasar’s Jesuit training; indeed it is the figure of Ignatius of Loyola who, more than

² See *Love Alone*, 12.

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols, Anne Elizabeth Englund, and Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 22. Subsequently referenced as *TSS*. This will be the image of the saint that we develop in the following pages.

⁴ *Ibid.* On Balthasar’s emphasis on the customary saint, see Jacques Servais, “The Lay Vocation in the World According to Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *Communio*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1996), 656-676. Balthasar’s insistence on the importance of lay sanctity lead him to leave the Jesuits in 1950 in order to found, with Adrienne von Speyr, the Community of St. John, for laypersons interested in adopting a ruled life in the midst of their “secular” vocations.

anyone else, fundamentally determines the shape and character of Balthasar's theology of the saints.

*Ignatius of Loyola.*⁵ Of all the figures from the history of the Church whom Balthasar studied (and they are legion), few have played as determinative a role in shaping his thought than St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).⁶ Balthasar was, according to Henri de Lubac, a “fervent disciple” of St. Ignatius for most of his adult life, maintaining his “spiritual association” with Ignatius even when he left the Society of Jesus in 1950. Throughout his life, Balthasar maintained private vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience at the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach “under the guidance of Ignatius.”⁷ It is from Ignatius that the recurrent themes of his theology of the saints — receptivity, obedience, and mission — spring.⁸

The heart of St. Ignatius' thought and spirituality is doubtless his *Exercises*, begun in 1522 and finally published in 1548. The *Exercises* are neither a treatise on the spiritual life nor an explicitly dogmatic theology (though Balthasar will argue quite ardently that it is implicitly dogmatic). It is rather a four-week exercise in contemplation, an extended meditation that serves as a manuduction into conformity to, and union with, Christ. Over

⁵ On Balthasar's fundamental formation as a “fervent disciple” and interpreter of Ignatius, see Jacques Servais, *Théologie des Exercices spirituels: H.U. von Balthasar interprète saint Ignace* (Bruxelle: Culture et vérité, 1996).

⁶ See Jacques Servais, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Continuing Youthfulness of the *Exercises*” in *Communio*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1994), 331-343.

⁷ Werner Löser, “The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” lecture at Boston College, January 28, 1999.

⁸ One could perhaps make the case that Balthasar's focus on the saints itself arises from the influence of Ignatius, who was also deeply influenced by the saints whom he read about in *Legenda aurea* by the Dominican priest Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298). Ignatius was probably familiar with the Spanish translation of this work, *Flos sanctorum* (“Flowering of the Saints”). Ignatius was most taken by the accounts of St. Francis and St. Dominic. One of the most distinctive features of Ignatian spirituality, the discernment of spirits, first emerges from his study of the lives of these saints.

the course of four weeks, the retreatant is guided through a process of purgation from sin, virtuous illumination in imitation of Christ, and the unitive practices that habituate one to Christ by sharing his suffering and joys. Each of the disciplines associated with the weeks serve to realize the created purpose of human existence: “Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls.”⁹

This “purpose and foundation” ties the *Exercises* and their “theology of choice” to some broader philosophical and theological concerns of modernity. But according to Balthasar, the importance of the *Exercises* is not limited to their spirituality. There is also a significant metaphysical injunction latent in the *Exercises*, namely, in the Prayer of *Examen*, to “find God in all things.”¹⁰ The goal of *Examen* is to recollect your day and identify the presence of God within it.¹¹ According to Balthasar, this contemplative practice is inherently metaphysical, insofar as it is an existential form of the cosmic question of the God-world relationship. The retreatant prays her personal prayer within the cosmic, Christological drama of God’s presence in the world. Thus the spirituality of the prayer is also a form of metaphysical inquiry, a foray into the truth Being as it stands in relation to God.

⁹ See the opening of the First Week, chapter 23, in Ignatius of Loyola, “The Spiritual Exercises” in *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 130.

¹⁰ See *Exercises*, chapters 233, and 235. See also his *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, III.1.26: “Further, [members of the society] should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things” in *ibid.*, 292.

¹¹ The five steps of examen are as follows: 1) recall that you are in the presence of God; 2) look at your day with gratitude; 3) ask for guidance in contemplation from the Holy Spirit; 4) review your day in the light of God’s presence, both your failings and successes in loving and serving God; 5) reconcile and resolve. Note here how the *sanctity* of one’s life is tied to the *missional* dimension of one’s existence — to know and serve God by loving him. In Balthasar’s interpretation, this call to know and to serve is both existential and metaphysical, as we shall see throughout the following pages.

A bastardized form of this idea, however, is possible. It occurs when God becomes the *means* by which man achieves knowledge of Being and rather than being himself the goal. “When this happens, man becomes the measure of all things, theology becomes anthropology.”¹² Balthasar sees this as the temptation of modernity, especially in forms of liberalism and Idealism.¹³ Indeed, he sees this temptation at work even in some medieval thinkers, those struggling to find the balance between the *eros* of knowledge and the *agape* of the descent of revelation. This problem is especially pronounced in mystical figures like Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), whom Balthasar sees as being more concerned with the human’s divine knowing than with the union of love that comes through the descent of the *Logos* in the economy of history.¹⁴

Ignatius’ major contribution is a balance between *eros* and *agape*. The erotic longing for salvation and blessedness that is the destiny of humanity arises only after the prior descent of God, to which the only proper response is praise and loyal service. Ignatius envisions blessedness not as a contemplative escape from worldly concerns, but as “right living” — that is, *living in harmony* within the “descending line” of Incarnation and Cross. “Ignatius clearly gave first place to the theology and anthropology that think in terms of descending *agape*, and he gave the subordinate place to the theology and anthropology of *eros*.”¹⁵ What is significant about Ignatius is that he does not remove the erotic epistemological and metaphysical elements from spirituality but integrates them

¹² See Balthasar’s introduction to Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley and Anna Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 9-10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See below on Eckhart.

¹⁵ Löser, 11.

within the larger, descending movement of divine love.¹⁶ The proper way of living within the reality of *agape* is by living “in praise, reverence and service and [by letting] [oneself] be sent, at the same time, with Jesus into serving others.”¹⁷ Living truthfully in the reality of Christ involves the active response to the call of Christ to a particular mission that participates in Christ’s own mission of love. This is the theological task of the *Exercises*. It is also the heart of Balthasar’s theology of the saints.

The *Exercises* accomplish this task by meditating on the “call of Christ” as the prior “deed word” to which the Christian is called to respond.¹⁸ This is the second main element of Ignatian spirituality. This response involves the Christian’s obedient reception of the call from Christ. This obedience may manifest itself in one of two states of life. The first is the state of the commandments: the obedience of regular, non-religious life. The model for this state of obedience is Jesus’ obedience to his parents —

¹⁶ According to Balthasar, Ignatius attempts “to reach a balance between the biblical glorification of God and the blessedness of God in antiquity. Ignatius is distinct from this balance inasmuch as he pinpoints ‘praise, reverence and service as the goal of creation,’ even in the final sentence of the ‘foundation’ according to which one must choose with indifference, ‘lo que mas nos conduce para el fin que somos criados’ (that which brings us most to the goal for which we were created). Only in a short final phrase and as if by the way does he mention that one thereby ‘saves one’s soul’ and reaches salvation. It must also be noted that Ignatius demands from the beginning the transcending of all selfish strivings for the sake of reaching that indifference which is the presupposition of pure praise and pure reverent service, and that this effort throughout the *Exercises* has as its aim that I make what God has chosen for me my own choice (no. 135), and thus that I choose ‘praise, reverence, and service’ from ‘generous’ love of God as the goal of my life. For this reason he can juxtapose and mention in one breath, almost by the way, ‘amor y alabanza’ (no. 15), ‘amor y servir’ (no. 233), ‘en todo amor y servir’ (no. 363). Just as the Psalmist who praises and serves God has the *Shema*, the main commandment, in his ear, so in Ignatius, throughout the *Exercises*, the love of God is present in a hidden and nevertheless effective way, in such a way, however, that he thinks and especially acts always for God and his glory (for all forms of prayer and choice in the Exercises are in an eminent sense action, which becomes clear already from the comparison with the bodily exercise in the first preliminary remark). Love finally emerges thematically in the ‘meditation for obtaining love’ (Nos. 230-237) while the concept of ‘blessedness’ still remains unmentioned; this concept need not be mentioned, because the entire blessedness of the person clearly lies already in the *Suscipe* (no. 234) which answers God’s abounding love. If one has given all one’s own to God, because one returns what one has received, what more can one ask for? ‘Give me your grace and your love and that is enough for me.’” “Homo creatus est,” *Homo creatus est*, 23-24.

¹⁷ Löser, 11.

¹⁸ See Balthasar’s lengthy commentary on this point in the *Exercises* in his *Christlicher Stand* (Einseideln, Johannes Verlag, 1977).

his fulfillment of the fifth commandment. The second state of obedience is what Balthasar calls “the perfection of the Gospel” — the obedient surrender to the will of the Father. It is the obedience to being sent on a particular mission. The core event of the *Exercises* is thus a Christological one — “the self-abandonment to God’s call, in choosing God’s choice.”¹⁹ The heart of the *Exercises* is sharing in the *kenosis* of Christ. By developing this “theology of choice,” Ignatius surpasses the medieval ascending “ladder of perfection” that attempts to attain to God apart from God’s call. Instead, Ignatius posits a theology of spiritual *response* as an “ever-actual event of freedom and love.” It is the freedom that chooses to love in response to love.

The proper disposition of the creature in this “theology of choice” is what Ignatius labels *indiferencia* — disponibility or self-abandonment.²⁰ Balthasar himself will use the language of receptivity to capture this idea. For Ignatius, *indiferencia* is not pure passivity but rather an “active indifference” both to receive and to act and obey, to be sent into mission.²¹ For Ignatius, this abandonment is not, as it was for many medieval writers (Ludolf of Saxony, de Cisneros, or Meister Eckhart, for example), an absolute emptiness that results in transcending everything creaturely in order to be immediately

¹⁹ Löser, 5. See *Lumen Gentium*, V-VI for a reprise of the ancient distinction between commandments and evangelical counsels: “In all the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshiping God the Father in spirit and truth. These souls follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be made worthy of being partakers in His glory. Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hopes and works through charity” (*Lumen Gentium*, V.41).

²⁰ See Balthasar’s summary of Ignatian *indiferencia* in his essay “*Drei Formen der Gelassenheit*” in *Homo creatus est*, 31-37.

²¹ This active indifference involves what Ignatius labels the *applicatio sensuum* (the use of the senses) in meditation (this is itself an aspect of the *Lectio Divina* tradition, especially the practice of *meditatio*). The role of the senses in the *Exercises* “intends to familiarize the person (who is going through the *Exercises* and choosing) in all layers of his being with the character of Jesus Christ, so that the choice can concretely orient itself by Jesus Christ.” There is thus a distinctly aesthetic dimension to the *Exercises*.

present to God. It is rather an active cooperation with God. What Ignatius posits is an *analogia libertatis* in the God-world relation. Balthasar argues that

[i]t is absolutely decisive that Ignatius, when he followed out the idea of indifference in all its Christian radicality, did not take over its metaphysical formulation by the Germans, especially Eckhart. Even when it is thought and lived without any subtraction, Christian indifference does not imply the hylomorphic schema of antiquity: form (God) and matter (creature). In this way, indifference need not be practiced in the direction of the annihilation of the creature's own being and will, a direction that, with more or less strength, has been given to spirituality from Eckhart to Fenelon, hidden monothelite, not to say oriental-pantheist parameters. By contrast, the true mystery of God, namely, "God in all", "I live, yet not I, Christ lives in me", may be sought as God's universal causality in the creature's active cooperation — in indifference, abandonment, and service. This cooperation cannot remain in the condition of indifference as mere "letting it happen"; rather, God's particular will, which is actively to be grasped and realized, must also actively be sought. For this reason, indifference, which stands at the end of Rhineland mysticism, stands at the beginning in Ignatius and heightens itself in the Second Week of the Exercises through the central event of the "choice." In the analogy of freedom between God and the creature, *man chooses what God our Lord gives us to choose*; he freely and spontaneously consents to the particular choice that has been made for us in God's eternal freedom.²²

This freedom is the freedom of obedience and love. Ignatius thus represents for Balthasar the saintly rhythm of gift and receptivity, call and response, vocation and obedience. These rhythms occur as the ascending love of the saints meets (or responds to) the prior descending love of God. Ignatius moves the question of the God-World relationship from a strictly metaphysical, speculative domain, toward spiritual interpretation via an analogy of freedom. This Ignatian *analogia libertatis* marks a reinterpretation of the questions of Western metaphysics and the emergence of a metaphysics of freedom in which receptivity, obedience, and mission make present the truth of Being unveiled as love.

²² GL 5, 102. Emphasis added.

Characteristics of the Saints: Receptivity, Obedience, and Mission

Balthasar derives his core understanding of the saints from Ignatius, especially insofar as the latter develops an understanding of a metaphysical and spiritual existence characterized by receptivity, obedience, and mission. These are the central themes of Ignatian spirituality and so become the central characteristics of Balthasar's interpretation of the saints.

Receptivity is a key concept for Balthasar, and means something more than the simple act of receiving. For Balthasar, receptivity connotes not only *act* but also *disposition*. In order to be receptive, one must be marked by a certain openness or, to use Balthasar's favored term, *disponibility*. This disposition, as we shall see, characterizes Balthasar's interpretation of the saint, the act of knowing, and even creaturely Being itself. Yet, as Balthasar will insist, the *disponibility* that characterizes created Being depends analogically on a fundamental and eternal openness in the life of the Trinity. Thus Balthasar holds that worldly receptivity turns on the eternal receptivity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the eternal act of *kenosis*. Worldly truth and worldly epistemological disposition are reflections of the divine.

The significance of Balthasar's use of receptivity in his speculative thought is its correspondence to his theology of the saints. The inter-subjectivity of the lives of the saints — especially the dialogicality of prayer — matches the receptivity, inter-subjectivity, and dialogicality of the truth of Being and, more fundamentally, the truth of the triune God revealed in Christ.²³ For Balthasar, receptivity is characteristic of love.

²³ Balthasar's emphasis on dialogue in the *Logic* should come as little surprise. The concept of dialogue was in the midst of a renaissance while Balthasar composed his Trilogy, both in terms of the philosophical dialogicians (such as Martin Buber), but also in the language of the Second Vatican Council. According to Ratzinger, *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the world, is

As such, it penetrates into the heart of the God who is himself love. It is this mystery of eternal love that is marked by a mutual, perichoretic rhythm of gift and receptivity, in which the saint participates. Receptivity implies both *gift* and *giver* — that is, something to be received and something (or, perhaps better, someone) to do the giving. What is received is the gift of Being and the giver is God himself, who is *also* the gift. The receptivity of the saint is an image of this eternal, divine rhythm of gift and receptivity. By imaging this divine love, the saint also expositis the mystery of Being itself. Thus, receptivity also carries within it the seed of Balthasar’s understanding of the *analogia entis* and more specifically his *analogia Christi* — which, in the end, *is* the analogy of Being.²⁴

Further, as is to be expected from an Ignatian thinker like Balthasar, receptivity, especially when understood as disponibility, also conveys the sense of obedience — a central theological theme throughout Balthasar’s corpus. The image of saintly obedience is the *fiat* — that “yes” that betokens the saint as the handmaid of the Lord. The *fiat* embodies the disponibility, receptivity, and obedience that characterizes the lives of the saints.

What the saint receives, what she is obedient to, is her calling to a particular mission. It is through their individual missions that the saints participate in, and perform, the mission of Christ. Christ himself is constituted by his mission in the world — to make the Father known. But in order for his mission to be universal and not just a

fundamentally determined by the idea of dialogue. Cf. “The Dignity of the Human Person” in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary On the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 117.

²⁴ For a concentrated study on Balthasar’s use of analogy see the recent dissertation by Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Yale, 2010). We will return to Balthasar’s use of analogy in chapters 2 and 4. There we will give an account of his appropriation of Pryzwara’s Christological interpretation of the doctrine of the *analogia entis*.

fleeting, though significant, historical event, his mission must be ever interpreted anew by the Spirit in the Church and through the saints.²⁵

The saints are those who share in the mission of Christ: “If men are to have a part in the One who is sent, they in turn must be sent out by him...the man who has a part in the ‘Son’ must be sent out from the Son’s source.”²⁶ While the mission of the Son is decidedly unique (for only in Christ are being and function identical), it is capable of imitation. The saints are those who share in the mission of Christ and, in so doing, share in the ongoing dramatic realization of his divine mission.²⁷

Further, the saint’s mission is a trinitarian reality because of her participation in Christ. The mission of Christ is to reveal the Father (John 17:26) but this revelation does not happen apart from the Spirit.²⁸ Indeed, the sending (*missio*) of the Son springs from a primordial proceeding (*processio*) from the Father in the Spirit.²⁹ It is into this trinitarian reality that the saint is drawn. Though the particularities of each saint’s dramatic — and

²⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 21.

²⁶ *TD* 3, 154.

²⁷ Here Sam Wells’ criticism of Balthasar’s dramatic theory as being too “epic” (that is, disembodied and extrinsic) rather than “improvisational” misses the point. Wells proposes improvisation as a solution to the criticism of Balthasar’s project being “too much about God” (50); improvisation, so Wells claims, adds a human, existential, and ethical dimension to Balthasar’s project. It gives humans a part to play in the drama of God. But this is precisely where Wells misses the point. Balthasar’s theo-drama is incomplete without his theology of the saints. It is the nature of the Christological drama that it cannot be observed in any kind of detached way but rather draws the audience into an active participation in it. This is the heart of his concept of mission (not to mention his understanding of ethics). See Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2004), 50-70. See also Christopher W. Steck, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2001). For Balthasar’s account epic versus lyrical theology, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1990), 57. Especially interesting to note is that Balthasar sees the *dramatic* as the union of “spirituality” and “theology”.

²⁸ Balthasar is deeply indebted to Bonaventure at this point. He goes on: “Even in the economic order, the logic of the incarnate Son cannot be restricted to the ‘historical Jesus’, but includes his ‘from’ the Father and his ‘toward’ the Spirit. See *TL* 2, 151-157. For Balthasar, it is absolutely the case that *Christus medium tenens in omnibus* [Christ hold[s] the middle in all things].

²⁹ *TD* 3, 154.

indeed subjective —realization of the mission of Christ may differ, they all contribute to the ongoing unfolding of the objective teaching of the Church, the passing on of the truth of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is through the concept of mission that Balthasar attempts to break open the “hollow human subjectivity” that has, since the late medieval period, characterized the spirituality and the “mysticism”³⁰ of the saints. The mission of the saints is, objectively, to express through their lives the truth of God in Christ. As such, “mission” is the harmonious meeting place of the subjectivity of saintly lives and the objectivity of their mission from Christ for the nourishment of the Church.³¹

³⁰ Like many of his contemporaries, Balthasar is keenly interested in mysticism, both as an element of generic “religious experience” and especially as an element of the Christian tradition. But he rejects the mystological preoccupation he finds in so many accounts of mysticism — fascination with inner states and heightened experiences. He critiques this as a reduction to subjectivist, experiential mysticism, which is, Balthasar believes, inherently individualistic, isolated from its proper *telos* — the communion of saints. Subjectivist mysticism is not a mysticism of love and therefore not a true ecstasy. Genuine mystical *ecstasis* comes only in kenotic self-giving that is an image of Triune love, a participation in the Christological mission.

But Balthasar takes care not to reject the subjective element of mysticism all together. He situates it rather *within* the overarching objective reality of that overwhelming *mysterion* — the original mystery “that has to do with the divine reality hidden under the forms of the human and worldly in the Bible and liturgy.” This mystery is objectively given in the free act of creation (which is itself an act of divine self-disclosure), in the formation of Israel, and most fully and truly in the gift of Christ. This objective mystery always retains its primacy in Christian mysticism. But as Balthasar never tires of saying, what is objectively *given* must be subjectively *received*. There is a proper ordering for Balthasar. First comes the objective mystery (to which the “full readiness of faith” is the expected response) and “only then personal experience: which *each* believer living out his faith will let flow, each in his own way, from the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” Cf. “Understanding Christian Mysticism” in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1995), 334. What we have then is the primacy of objective mystery freely given by God and then the subjective reception of that mystery in faith. This faith is decidedly ordinary for Balthasar — it is common to each and every believer as the necessary subjective response to the objective gift of God. But it is still mystical because it is the reception of the mystery — the mystical emerges first and foremost in the ordinary. Thus the Ignatian injunction to find God in all things.

It is only within this rhythm of objective donation-subjective response that extraordinary mystical experiences may emerge. But again, these extraordinary events are not meant to be accentuated subjective experiences. They are rather “special experiences given to individual believers for the benefit of others.” Extraordinary visions and experiences are therefore possible in Christian mysticism though their importance is relativized. They are present, not for the edification of the individual but rather for the edification of the Church, as a participation in Christ’s own mission of love.

³¹ See, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1993), 30-37.

What is the Theology of the Saints?

At this point, Balthasar's precise meaning of a "theology of the saints" may be insufficiently clear. He is not referring to the specific theologies, the particular intellectual representations, that any given saint may hold. Balthasar's theology of the saints is concerned with the theology that the saints' lives are rather than the particular theologies that the saints may hold.

Balthasar's theology of the saints has both an objective and a subjective form. According to the former, the saints act as an object of theological reflection; their lives present to the world a sensible image of an authentic theological existence. Subjectively, the theology of the saints is concerned with the *manner in which* the saints carry out the theological task. It is concerned with the style of saintly knowing, theologizing, and philosophizing.

What little scholarship has been done on Balthasar's account of the saints has generally focused on their objective purpose. While this objective dimension is an essential aspect of Balthasar's theology of the saints, the current project focuses on the relatively unexplored subjective form of saintly knowing.³² Before turning to the central task of this project, let us briefly explore the objective form of the saints; we shall situate

³² Cf. Victoria S. Harrison, "Putnam's internal realism and von Balthasar's religious epistemology" in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 44 (1998), 89. Harrison is largely critical of Balthasar's saintly epistemology. She accuses it as being underdeveloped and in need of a robust *philosophical* completion, which, she argues, can be offered by Putnam's realism. Harrison's essay is a decidedly non-theological and non-spiritual reading of Balthasar's use of the saints, and therefore sees the lack of a rigorous, systematic epistemological theory as a significant failure. While there are deficiencies in Balthasar's theology of the saints, the lack of a systematic epistemological theory is not one of them. The saints represent a distinctly *theological way* of knowing *truth* through their *lives*. The only methodology appropriate for them is a Christological one. Saints know by following the method of the one who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Balthasar acknowledges that his Christological account of truth may be accused of being methodologically sloppy. But he embraces this accusation, claiming that there is no other way that a genuine account of truth could be. Cf. *TL* 2, 363. For a study that develops a saintly epistemology *in light of* Balthasar, see David L. Schindler, "Sanctity and the Intellectual Life" in *Communio*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1993), 652-672.

our subsequent subjective account of the saints within the larger context of their objective mission in the world.

The objective form of the saints. In his attempt to define precisely how the saints function *objectively* in Balthasar's theology, David Moss draws attention to one of Balthasar's tantalizingly dense descriptions. Balthasar argues for "a sort of supernatural phenomenology" of the saints. The purpose of theology, then, is "to discern in the lives of the saints the '*intelligibile in sensibili*', where the *intelligibile* is precisely something supernatural."³³ That is, the lives of saints are an observable form that manifest by making present a supernatural reality. Moss identifies three phenomenological reductions that he finds present in each of Balthasar's treatments of the saints: theological unity, Christological obedience, and Marian fruitfulness. As Moss rightly notes, these three dimensions always attend divine love (John 15:12).

Because the saints are defined by a particular mission (*Sendung*), they become a model of the unity of the divine life which Balthasar defines as "being-for-one-another," an otherness-in-unity. Sainthood reveals the life of God "in its unfathomable dispossession and giftedness" that actually *constitutes* the unity of God. The saint (and her mystical experience) do not exist for herself alone (as has unfortunately become the problem in late forms of mysticism, as elaborated above). She exists for her mission of "self-giving" to the Church, as an image of the kenotic life of God. This kenotic act involves a participation in the radical obedience of Christ. Obedience here is the "creaturely analogue of the divine being-for-one-another," the act of handing oneself over

³³ Moss, 85. The saintly *traditio* finds its exemplar in Gethsemane, in Christ's handing his life and will over to the Father.

(*traditio*) to one's calling and mission. It is "an objectifying and deprivatizing obedience."³⁴

This "objectifying and de-privatizing obedience" results in Moss' third reduction, fruitfulness. Here Mary is the central figure whose physical fruitfulness in bearing Christ is bound to her spiritual fruitfulness as the mother of all believers, as the Church. Mary makes clear what Balthasar means by this "objectifying and de-privatizing obedience." The singular obedience of Mary results in the universalization of her obedience. Her calling is to exist no longer for herself but to birth the Church.³⁵ The saints (of whom Mary is the highest) allow their *subjective* calling, through the process of de-privatization, to nourish (perhaps even become a part of) the objective revelation of God. This is their obedient fruitfulness — their handing over of truth.

Moss' three reductions — unity, obedience, and fruitfulness — are particularly helpful ways of making sense of Balthasar's varied treatment of the saints throughout his work. These three themes will recur throughout the pages that follow. If the saints are the form of Balthasar's theology, these three characteristics help define that form. To be a saint is to participate in and thus model this triadic rhythm of holiness.

We should be clear that, for Balthasar, form can never be separated from content. Indeed, what Balthasar fears is being lost in the Church is not only the form but also the content of Christian truth due to the reduction of the saints to the realm of "spirituality." The theological form of the saints' lives enriches the objective teaching of the Church.

³⁴ Moss, 88.

³⁵ See, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1993), 40.

The saints function as the form of theology as well as offering specific insight into the content of revelation.³⁶ Only by being both does the saint illumine truth.³⁷

The subjective form of the saints. What then is the subjective form of the saints' knowledge? For Balthasar, the saints know as *lovers*, by *loving*. For Balthasar, "love" is shorthand for the disposition of receptivity, surrender, and obedience. By loving, the saints come into conformity — or *attunement* — with truth. Their existence is *adequated* to the truth of Being, and their knowledge arises from this adequation. *Love* is the *logic* of the saints.

As this dissertation shall argue, a critical component of both knowledge and love is *dialogue*. And so form (*Gestalt*) of the saints' loving knowledge is prayer. For the saint, prayer is union with God in Christ who, as the incarnate one, *is* the God-world relationship.³⁸ As such, prayer acts as an existential modality of the speculative knowledge *of* this relation. The dialogicality of prayer decodes the truth of the world in its analogical bond to the truth of God by means of its inhabitation *in* this relationship. In other words, for the saints, Christ is the truth of the world, and prayer is union with

³⁶ Moss recognizes this when he writes that "Balthasar will in turn let the dogmatic construal of these two central mysteries [the Trinity and the Incarnation] *stand under* the unique experience of the saints, thereby giving to Church dogma what he claims to be its truly existential depth. For example, in order to indicate how we are to understand Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross — however feebly and inadequately — Balthasar will direct our attention to the 'dark night' experience of certain saints and mystics" (82). Moss is overstating the case a bit. Balthasar never allows dogma or doctrine to "stand under" or be determined by the experiences of the saints. What he will say instead is that the saints inhabit the objective mystery, enlarging it and enriching it through their subjectivity. The "ecclesial vocation" of the saints and mystics is the enlargement or the "existential deepening" of the truth of revelation — what Balthasar calls "enlarging the cathedrals."

³⁷ For appreciative criticisms of Balthasar's apologetic use of the saints, see Victoria S. Harrison, *The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: Von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology* (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000); and Mark Van Steewyk, "Defending von Balthasar's Apology of Holiness" in *Quodlibet Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2005): <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/vansteenwyk-holiness.shtml> (accessed March 12, 2013).

³⁸ "Union" here describes, not a state of mystical bliss, but rather a state of obedience to one's calling, a calling that participates in and extends the mission of Christ.

Christ. In this union, Christ unveils truth. Those dimensions of the truth of Being — the subject-object relation, the inter-subjectivity of worldly consciousness and knowledge, are illumined within the participative, dialogical dynamic of the saint at prayer. In short, prayer is metaphysics in act.³⁹

What have the saints to do with truth? It may seem an odd pairing, this juxtaposition of the saints and the rigorous speculative thought of the *Theo-Logic*. What have the saints to do with Balthasar's speculative philosophy and theology of the True? How can the particularities of saintly existence shed any light on the theoretical concept of the True?

As we shall explain more fully below, truth is the living exposition of thought in practice; it is the harmony of contemplation and action. To use the language of *Theo-Logic I*, truth is the harmonious interchange of the objective and the subjective. It is the saints whose lives *are* this expositing practice, this harmony of contemplation and action, this concrete existence that embodies, not to mention illuminates, speculative doctrine. The saints are the living, subjective illumination of the objective truth of God that is Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

³⁹ As Balthasar himself explained it: "...Being and the subject are always richer and deeper in their appearing than that which can appear and that the historicity of the truth and its element of perspective, which are conditioned in this way, and its dialogical essence are ultimately a dialogue that has been going on from the very outset between Creator and creature and that the human act of seeking is enclosed a priori in the state of being safe in God and of having been found by God...More and more, everything tends toward the indivisible act of hearing the word [that is the Word, the concrete first Idea of the creating God and thereby the goal of the world] which is at the same time an act of prayer..." (*My Work: In Retrospect*, 22, 24-25). The difficulty with this comes in the fact that Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* devotes little space to a theology of prayer. Indeed we shall argue in our conclusion that Balthasar's *Logic* does not succeed in developing a thoroughly theological account of truth precisely because it neglects this central metaphysical act of prayer.

⁴⁰ Balthasar is significantly indebted to Maurice Blondel on this point. For more on his association with Blondel, see below.

As such, the saints function as a particular and paradigmatic form (*Gestalt*) of truth. Theirs is the form of a “theological existence” that participates in and thus represents through the ages the truth of Him who is himself the truth. Through their particular lives, “the truth of Christian doctrine is grasped and becomes followable in the Church.”⁴¹ The saints hand over the gift that forms them, that is, the “eucharistic life of Christ.”⁴² The saint is sanctified, made holy, by the truth of Christ (John 17: 19) and thus function as the form of theological existence that images this truth. The particular missions of the saints’ lives all contribute to the task of “enlarging the cathedral” of the Church’s truth. It is through the saints that theology returns again and again to the ever-new truth of divine mystery — the inner life of triune love revealed in Jesus Christ.

That the saints are able to function as such is due to their relation to the Holy Spirit, to whom Balthasar refers as both the Spirit of love and the Spirit of truth. Or, perhaps closer to Balthasar’s meaning, the third person of the Trinity is the Spirit of truth *as* the Spirit of love. It is the role of the Spirit to lead the followers of Christ “into all truth” (John 16:13-14), that is, into the fullness of the truth that Christ himself is. Because the truth in Christ is infinite (Colossians 2:3), “it will be impossible to come to an end in declaring this truth all down the ages, for although this truth resides in an apparently limited spatio-temporal phenomenon, it is nonetheless ‘the whole fullness of deity [dwelling] bodily’ (Colossians 2:9).”⁴³ The Spirit further elaborates on the infinite truth of God revealed in Christ through the free disposal of charisms, “glimpses of the very center of revelation” that “enrich the Church in the most unexpected and yet

⁴¹ Moss, 83.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *TL* 3, 21.

permanent way.”⁴⁴ These charisms take on both objective and subjective dimensions, neither of which can be neatly distinguished from the other. While more will be said on this in the succeeding chapters, we may say here that the objective truth of the Spirit is the institution of the Church — its offices, orders, and sacraments. The subjective truth of the Spirit is, in a word, the prayers of the saints — the pneumatic disclosure of objective revelation realized in the missions of personal holiness that characterize the saints. The saints’ lives are thus part of the Spirit’s subjective work of keeping the truth of God in Christ present in the *Heilsgeschichte* of the Church. The saints serve as one dimension of the Spirit’s guidance into “all truth.”⁴⁵

The Loss of the Saints

Balthasar’s claim is that the saints are necessary for the full exposition of truth because the saints are the exposition of theory in practice, the union of the speculative and the spiritual. Yet Balthasar is keenly aware that this claim is a controversial one, especially because the saint, as Balthasar conceives her, may not actually exist today. Balthasar recognizes that the form of saintliness that he envisages is for the most part missing from the Church. What follows is an elaboration of Balthasar’s genealogy of the loss of the saints and the implications of this loss for speculative thought.

The Stakes of Theological Sanctity

For Balthasar, one of the greatest threats to the integrity of the Church’s mission in the world is the fact that since the advent of modernity there have been few great theologians who were also saints, and few great saints who were also theologians. This is

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ See Jacques Servais, “Finding God in All Things” in *Communio*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2003), 209-281.

the problem that he addresses in his now well-known essay, “Theology and Sanctity,” an essay as programmatic as any of Balthasar’s writings.⁴⁶ According to Balthasar, spirituality and theology necessarily confront each other; their divorce is artificial, and represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the task of both and a betrayal of the true vocation of each.

In “Theology and Sanctity” Balthasar bemoans the fact that, since the period of Scholasticism, there have been few theologians who were also great saints. There exists now — as had not been the case in the early centuries of the Church — a startling and unnatural fragmentation between the theologian and the saint, between the thinker and the lover.⁴⁷ What Balthasar sees at stake in this fragmentation between the theologian and the saint is nothing less than the fragmentation of the “complete concept of truth.” Truth is that harmony of the “living exposition of theory in practice and of knowledge carried into action.”⁴⁸ The Christian saint is that person in whom theory and practice, doctrine and spirituality, knowing and living come together, not through an assimilation of one into the other but in symphonic harmony.⁴⁹ This harmony is love. Saints are

⁴⁶ This essay can be found in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209. What is especially interesting about this essay (beyond its important and substantial argument) is its placement in this volume of collected essays. It falls in the section titled “Word and Redemption” (the other section of essays in this volume is titled “Word and Revelation”). This placement is extremely revealing. For Balthasar, the lives of the saints — the subject matter of this essay — spiral out from that primal Word of God, the redeeming Word that is Jesus Christ. The saints find themselves within the drama of redemption.

⁴⁷ Balthasar is certainly not alone in identifying this division between the thinker and the lover as a problem for theology. Dante, the great poet of Christendom, juxtaposes in the realm of the Sun, the ring of the theologians and the ring of the lovers or mystics. The “reconciliation” of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure in *Cantos X-XIII* represents a Dantean version of the Balthasarian task — the reunification of the speculative and the affective.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁹ “*Wahrheit ist symphonisch.*”

above all else lovers of God; it is lovers who know God the best: *amor ipse notitia est*.⁵⁰

For Balthasar, the saints are the form [*Gestalt*] of theological *knowledge*. In the saint, knowledge and devotion are united in and as love. The separation of the saint from the theologian results in nothing short of the loss of the heart of the discipline of theology itself. If this heart of theology is lost then the edifice of Christian truth collapses. For Balthasar, the stakes could not be higher — without the lives of the saints, those lovers of God, the truth of God is not known, and the credibility of Christian truth is threatened.

This loss of the credibility of Christian truth should not be understood as referring solely to narrow fideisms. For Balthasar, *Christian* truth is nothing less than the truth Being. Therefore the exile of the saints from truth has metaphysical consequences. As I shall outline below, Balthasar constructs a genealogy of the divorce between the theologian and the saint that is at the same time a genealogy of the death of metaphysics.

Genealogy of the de-sacralization of theology. Balthasar denies the possibility of purely conceptual truth that can be known apart from engaged, subjective encounter. Truth cannot be known in a purely rationalistic way, but only through unitive action with that truth. As he makes clear, “there is simply no real truth which does not have to be incarnated in an act or in some action.”⁵¹ This is the logic behind Balthasar’s theology of the saints. They know the truth by participating in it; their theology, philosophy, and metaphysics arise from the action of their lives, their receptivity and obedience, and their prayer. It is through their prayers that the saints perform the truth of Being, knowing it

⁵⁰ “Lovers are the ones who know most about God; the theologian must listen to them.” *Love Alone*, 12.

⁵¹ “Theology and Sanctity,” 181.

and making it known. According to Balthasar, saints, not philosophers, are the true metaphysicians.

Such a claim is rooted in Balthasar understanding of the circumincession of the transcendentals: that which is true is also beautiful and good — and therefore generous, giving, self-revealing. That which is good cannot but give of itself in action, for the Good is self-diffusive.⁵² This allows Balthasar to make the claim (already hinted at above) that the incarnation of Christ is the “criterion of all truth.” Christ is the exemplar of the movement of truthful action, of “concept” becoming “agent.” Christ himself is the truth and thus both the form and the content of saintly life.

Because it is the reality of Christ himself that determines the form (*Gestalt*) of the saints, and because Christ’s person is both “theory” and “practice,” there can be no simplistic distinction between doctrine and spirituality. This was certainly the case with the Fathers of the Church: “When Irenaeus, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen or Augustine argue with their adversaries, they do not operate in a forecourt of theology, but in its very center” — in the reality of Christ, in the union of knowledge and life, contemplation and action.

In this early unity we see the harmony of subjectivity and objectivity, each at play, each displacing itself and making room for the other: “The Fathers found straightaway the appropriate dogmatic clothing for their very personal experience; everything became objective, and all subjective conditions, experiences, fears, strivings,

⁵² This is a common idea in western Christian metaphysics, going back to Plato, especially in his metaphor of the sun in *The Republic* 508b-509-c. This idea is influentially adopted by Dionysius, see *Divine Names* IV.1: “This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things.” Aquinas builds on this same idea throughout his works but see *ST* I.5.4 for an early treatment.

the ‘shock’ in a word, were made to serve a fuller understanding of the content of revelation, to orchestrate its great themes.”⁵³

How, then, did the unnatural separation of theology and sanctity, and the subsequent fragmentation of truth, come to pass? Balthasar traces the disintegration of the natural unity of theology and sanctity to the late middle ages. The early medievals — Anselm, Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter Damian — “knew no other canon of truth than the unity of knowledge and life.”⁵⁴ Yet with the rediscovery of Aristotle came certain theological concessions. Aristotle’s philosophy granted to nature (and hence to philosophy) a new sense of its own autonomy in which a self-contained natural or philosophical truth may exist. This distinctly philosophical conception of truth — *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* (the conformity of the mind to reality) — “envisaged, primarily, only the theoretical side of truth.”⁵⁵ Rather than utilizing philosophical concepts as pointers to divine truth, these concepts were granted an autonomy, or rather, an independence, that isolated them from theology. No longer were philosophical concepts primarily “taken up as part of the *assumptio humanae naturae* in Christ... [that

⁵³ This, and the preceding quote are from “Theology and Sanctity,” 190. This pattern of the saints is grounded in Paul’s own theology: “It had not yet been forgotten that Paul took all the subjective charismata, and, far from rejecting them, or setting them aside, resolutely freed them from the dangers of subjectivism and reoriented them by inserting them into the factual structure of the Church.” Further, what made this harmony of subjectivity and objectivity so natural was the primacy of the Church — the subjective “experiences” of the saints exist not for themselves but for the sake of the Church, as a further articulation of revelation disclosed to the Church. Sainthood is not solely an individual’s spiritual vocation; it is also an ecclesial one.

⁵⁴ “Theology and Sanctity,” 184. It is interesting to note that Balthasar explicitly affirms these theologian-saints as operating “under the aegis of Augustine” opposed to those “scholastic” thinkers who operate under the “elemental force” of Aristotelianism. We should note, in light of these comments, that Balthasar makes no attempt at a so-called “neutral” history. He clearly distances himself from the late scholastic style, identifying it as a major contributor to the sundering of theology and sanctity.

⁵⁵ “Theology and Sanctity,” 185. Again, Blondel is in the background, especially his claim that human action is the embodiment of theoretical, or metaphysical truth: “Human life is metaphysics in act.” See: Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 237.

they might be] ‘transfigured’, and become, like Christ’s humanity, wholly a function and expression of his divine person and truth.”⁵⁶ Instead, philosophy became an independent discipline and nature itself became an independent and autonomous thing.⁵⁷

The effects of this shift were not immediately felt. Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas were “peculiarly fitted for theology to irradiate and transfigure the self-subsisting science of nature [and philosophy], raising it to the plane of the sacred, and so to impart to the secular sciences a real Christian ethos, *one affecting the whole outlook of the scientific investigator*.”⁵⁸ Aquinas was an especially gifted synthetic thinker, drawing together the valuable insights of both pagan and Christian antiquity in a harmonious metaphysical balance where “Being (*esse*) with which [Aquinas] is concerned and to which he attributes the modalities of the One, the True, the Good and the Beautiful, is the unlimited abundance of reality which is beyond all comprehension, as it, in its emergence from God, attains subsistence and self-possession with the finite entities.”⁵⁹

But this equilibrium could not stand. Subsequent generations lacked the brilliance (or the formation) to accomplish this admittedly difficult, synthetic task. What begins to happen is the development of a “philosophical propaedeutic” to theology — a formulation of fixed, unalterable, and religiously neutral norms and concepts that

⁵⁶ Ibid. See also Peter Henrici, “The Spiritual Dimension and its Form of Reason” in *Communio*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1993), 639-640 for another interpretation of this genealogy.

⁵⁷ See Balthasar’s claims in *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 267-280. More will be said of this in the next chapter.

⁵⁸ “Theology and Sanctity,” 185. Emphasis added. In other words, these great medievals understood the truth *theologically* and *sacramentally* — seeing the intelligible in the sensible, the divine in the worldly. We shall frequently use the term “contemplative” to describe this kind of understanding of worldly truth as illumined by divine.

⁵⁹ *GL* 5, 12. In other words, Aquinas accomplishes a synthesis that gives a theological and metaphysical account of the God-world relation — the relation of God to Being and beings — or what Aquinas will call the “real distinction,” which does not eliminate the living spiritual encounter with God’s glory.

determine without any *substantial* transposition any subsequent theology. This was a threat that first emerged in Aquinas' day with the growing influence of Averroism and the philosophical isolationism that this thought represented.⁶⁰ Through the influence of Averroes, philosophy and theology were each granted their own truth — philosophy addresses the truth of Being known through reason, theology the truth of God known only through faith. Theology loses sight of Being, surrendering it to an autonomous and isolated philosophy.⁶¹ "Teachers behaved as though man knew from the outset, before he had been given revelation, knew with some sort of finality what truth, goodness, being, light, love and faith were. It was as though divine revelation on these realities had to accommodate itself to these fixed philosophical conceptual containers that admitted of no expansion."⁶² This seriously inhibits viable discourse about the God-world relation — knowledge of the one is utterly severed from knowledge of the other. Thus, when the philosophical mystery of Being was isolated in itself, the theological mystery was forced to retreat from metaphysical and epistemological discourse. This results in a kind of spiritualization of faith and doctrine.

⁶⁰ Of course, the influence of Averroes reached far into the Christian intellectual world of the time. Siger of Brabant and Boetius of Dacia merged Averroism with Christian thought, thus sundering the natural connection between the speculations of philosophical science from that of theology. Such a reading of these figures is contestable, though it is clear that Balthasar reads them as in fact accomplishing this synthesis with Averroism.

⁶¹ This autonomous philosophy does not long maintain its association with Being. As doubts grow about the speculative powers of reason, philosophy makes the turn to nominalism and from there to epistemology. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (Boston, Pauline Books and Media, 1998), 85. A figure like George Berkeley (a staunch opponent of empiricists like Locke and Hume) will even acknowledge that God can grant a subjective experience dissociated from the appearing of an object — "an epistemological smile on the face of an ontologically evanescent Cheshire cat" (Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, 147).

⁶² "Theology and Sanctity," 186. Balthasar stresses that the great thinkers of the high medieval period (Albert, Bonaventure, Thomas, even Duns Scotus) maintained the inner necessity of sanctity by clinging to the fullness of Christian truth that required "genius allied with holiness."

The net result of this “overloading” of theology with “secular philosophy” is a reconceptualization of truth. While truth had once been defined as the union of knowledge and holiness, the speculative and the spiritual, it came to be defined as an purely *intellectual* adequation between mind and object.⁶³ This strict intellectualization of truth has as a consequence the emergence of a new science alongside speculative philosophy and theology: the science of the *devotio moderna*, a transposition of medieval mysticism into an increasingly focused study of the subjective states of extraordinary spiritual experiences.⁶⁴ In other words, the purpose of saintly existence shifts away from the active encounter of subject and object in love to “one of subjective experience, individual states.”⁶⁵ The more dogmatic theology becomes beholden to philosophical propaedeutic, the more exclusively it focuses on a narrowly conceptual understanding of truth, and the more those untrained (or disinterested) in philosophy come to be relegated to their own exclusive science of the “spiritual life” as something distinct from speculative theology. In this spiritualism, the objective truth of revelation derives from the inner states that reveal them. An example of this tendency might be found in early modern Spanish mysticism (e.g.: St. John of the Cross), wherein an objective doctrine of

⁶³ While Balthasar, as a committed realist, does not want to dispense entirely with this notion, he does seek to enrich and extend it through a phenomenological account of truth.

⁶⁴ Readers should take care not to interpret Balthasar as suggesting that the *devotio moderna* was intrinsically negative or lacked teachers of holiness. On the contrary, “we continue to find saints. [But] it is also true that, later, there were still teachers who were saints: John of the Cross was a doctor... Canisius — certainly no theologian — was an interpreter of doctrine to ordinary people; Bellarmine a controversialist; Alphonsus a moralist. None of them centered his life, I do not say on dogma, on dogmatic theology” (“Theology and Sanctity,” 191-192).

⁶⁵ Balthasar will consistently accuse the late medieval Spanish mystics of an indulgent preoccupation with the science of the interior life (“Theology and Sanctity,” 190-191 and “Understanding Christian Mysticism,” 318-193). In contrast, he holds Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity as supreme examples of Christian self-forgetfulness that fuels their *ecclesial* spirituality. Adrienne von Speyr is for Balthasar another example of this kind of ecclesial mysticism.

the dark night of the soul emerges *from* the subjective experience of that dark night.⁶⁶

This is the ghettoization of the saints and the mystics, exiling them to the shadowy regions of subjective experientialism. The saints of the *devotio moderna* have a distinctly different focus from that of the saints of earlier periods. The focus of the new saints is the mystology of subjective, religious experience, its “degrees, laws, sequences, variations.”⁶⁷ No longer is the saint forgetful of herself, focused solely on her duty of embodying the revelation of the Church. Theology — the explication of objective revelation — ceases to be their focus. The connection between the two becomes more and more tenuous.⁶⁸

What follows from this, predictably enough, is the mutual isolation of speculative theology from spirituality. Saints such as Thérèse of Lisieux or John Vianney no longer speak to theology but are rather “left for ‘spirituality’ to plunder.”⁶⁹ Through this unnatural separation, theology results in the dry manuals of neo-Scholasticism that Balthasar so loathed, while spirituality becomes a psychological laboratory in which the saint’s personal experiences are dissected; where the saint is required to describe her experience of God (“and the accent is always on experience rather than on God: for the nature of God is a subject for the [speculative] theological specialist [alone]”).⁷⁰ This transforms spirituality into an altogether vacuous thing, little more than the religious form

⁶⁶ “Theology and Sanctity,” 190-191. See also Turner’s interpretation of the concept of the dark night in *The Darkness of God*, 226-254.

⁶⁷ “Theology and Sanctity,” 191. This corresponds to Turner’s experientialist mysticism.

⁶⁸ While the connection between this form of spirituality and dogmatic theology becomes more tenuous, it may be that the “connections, parallels and analogies with religious phenomena outside Christianity are correspondingly more frequent and prominent.” The possibility opens for a “generic” spirituality or mysticism that reduces these to sociological or psychological concepts.

⁶⁹ “Theology and Sanctity,” 191.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

of expressionism and impressionism. Again, what is at stake here is the very heart of theology and thus the credibility of Christian truth:

Consider the doctrinal wealth drawn from the writings of the Areopagite — not without reason the most commented on of all the mystics — in comparison with that yielded by even the greatest of the moderns, John of the Cross. And then compare, if you can bring yourself to do so, the nourishment offered by a modern theological manual for a life of holiness with that contained in any patristic commentary on Scripture. The impoverishment brought about by the divorce between the two spheres is all too plain; it has sapped the vital force of the Church of today and the credibility of her preaching of eternal truth. This impoverishment is felt considerably more strongly by those who have to preach to the modern pagans than by professors in their seminary lecture rooms. It is the former who look round for some example of the conjunction of wisdom and holiness. They long to discover the living organism of the Church's doctrine, rather than a strange anatomical dissection: on the one hand, the bones without the flesh, 'traditional theology'; on the other, the flesh without bones, mysticism, spirituality and rhetoric, a porridge that, in the end, becomes indigestible through lack of substance. Only the two together (corresponding to the prototype of revelation in scripture constitute the unique 'form' capable of being 'seen' in the light of faith by the believer, a unique testimony, invisible to the world, and a 'scandal' to it.⁷¹

Distortions of Being

As suggested above, this divorce of the saints from speculative thought has significant consequences for the Christian metaphysical tradition. In fact, the sundering of sanctity from speculation and the subsequent de-formation of spirituality plays a significant — if oft-overlooked — role in the collapse of metaphysics and the reduction of philosophy to epistemologies of representation.⁷² When the saints are removed from speculative thought, the existential encounter with divine glory is lost from that

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Cf. Peter M. Candler Jr., *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2006), 30-35.

discourse, an impoverishment of the thought of Being.⁷³ The conceptual rationalism of the nominalists (and, in Balthasar's view, the Neo-scholastics) reduces the glory of the Lord to a formalized, abstract concept. Philosophy is no longer concerned with encountering divine glory and worldly beauty. Philosophy becomes a matter of representation. Being itself is no longer the object of philosophy; instead, philosophy is concerned with mental representations *of* the intellectual concept of Being. Things are reduced to "things for me" and the rational subject is no longer the *loving* reason but *legislating* reason.

The loss of the saintly dynamic from the speculative thought of the God-world relationship resulted two forms of the de-volution of Being. It may be formalized as a concept as was done by Scotus, Occam, and Suarez; or it might be equated with God, as in the thought of Eckhart. Both of these errors emerge from the *deformation* of spirituality, and result in a dangerous reformulation — Balthasar might say annihilation — of the God-world relationship.

The formalization of Being. In Aquinas' ontology, Being (*esse*) is the unlimited abundance of reality which is beyond comprehension as it, in its emergence from God, attains subsistence and self-possession within finite entities. There is a real distinction (*distinctio realis*) between Being and beings, a polarity that demands a transcendence beyond its as its own possibility. But this real distinction is not maintained by subsequent

⁷³ "Whereas during the early Middle Ages, up to about the time of Bonaventure, theology and (objective) mysticism were indivisible — something to which Augustine and Dionysius, Gregory the Great and Eriugena, the Cistercians and the Victorines, the Joachimites and the Spiritual Franciscans well attest — the 'mystic' is now identified increasingly in terms of his subjective experience of glory and is stamped as an exception, while the 'rule' is represented by the strictly logical and intellectualist metaphysics of the Church. Those who are concerned to restore the lost unity (Gerson, Nicolas of Cusa, Petavius, Gerbert, etc.) remain outsiders and often pursue paths which lead to speculative Idealism" (*GL* 5, 26).

generations. Eventually Being ceases to be the principle reality *of* reality and instead becomes a *formal concept*, the comprehensive essentiality of all things. Being can be either infinite or finite; it climbs above God, incorporating God within its conceptual totality. This ends up making God the object of reason *simpliciter*; the philosopher who knows Being through reason can incorporate God into her now limitless philosophical vision.

Balthasar lays much of the blame for the formalization of Being at the feet of Duns Scotus and Occam. Scotus' decision to elevate Being as the univocal category of comprehensive essentiality in which both God and creature are logically contained, is the triumph of the *ontic* — the elevation of essence over existence. This bequeathes to philosophy a radical independence from theology, even from revelation itself. According to Balthasar, it was Scotus' intention to grant to revelation its own space, free from the encumbrances of philosophical discourse.⁷⁴ This ends up reducing theology to a practical discipline that focuses on historical acts of God and the cultivation of faith and devotion (one sees here the beginning of the science of the interior life of late mysticism). Theology speaks to existence; philosophy to essence. A yawning gulf begins to open between two very different gods — the god of the philosophers (*ta theon*) and the God of Israel. Stripped of its access to Being, Christianity ends up losing its contemplative and gnoseological component in favor of the practicalities of faith and devotion.

⁷⁴ GL 5, 17. Balthasar cites *Theoremata*, though he acknowledges the possibility that this was not actually penned by Scotus himself. It should be noted that Balthasar, normally meticulous in his citations, is surprisingly weak in his references to Scotus' works. He relies almost exclusively on Siewerth and Gilson's studies of the philosophy of the medievals. Siewerth's especially is a genealogical account, very similar to Balthasar's, that attempts to defend Christian metaphysics from Heideggerian critique. See also Cyril O'Regen, "Von Balthasar's Valorization and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity" in *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 123-158.

With the nominalist Occam, the undifferentiated Being of Scotus defines itself according to its *haecceitas* — this-ness. Class and species become merely subjective schemes of interpretation and classification. Only specific, individual entities are real. Occam's nominalism lays the foundation for the empiricism of Locke and Hume, and of the positivism that asks no questions beyond the merely given.⁷⁵ Moreover, this individual thing that exists only exists according to the freedom of, not the love, but the sovereign will. Voluntarism here raises its ugly head; naked will rises above divine love — a strange idea for a disciple of St. Francis of Assisi for whom the world is the gift of the God who is “love beyond all limits of knowledge.”⁷⁶

The problem that Balthasar identifies here springs not only from a speculative but also a spiritual deficiency. Scotus and Occam represent the failure to match the spiritual attitude of Francis of Assisi with their intellectual speculation. By isolating Francis' saintly theology within the narrow confines of affectivism, the speculative thought of Scotus and Occam become unmoored from the ontological and metaphysical dimensions of Christian teaching.⁷⁷ Indeed, as Balthasar argues regarding Occam:

This formidable Franciscan creates space even more radically for the sole sovereignty of God when, sweeping away the entire Platonic and Aristotelian tradition, he directly opposes to the yawning abyss of absolute freedom a world which is fragmented into irrational points of reality. With this rupture within the tradition of a mediating or natural (philosophical) theology, every contemplative dimension of the *fides quaerens intellectum* is in principle removed. Theology, which now

⁷⁵ It is in response to this that Balthasar adopts a phenomenological approach in the first volume of the *Theo-logic*. Balthasar emphasizes the theological and philosophical significance of particular, concrete existence. But it is precisely in, not apart from, these existences that their essence is revealed. Balthasar's use of phenomenology allows him to return to a sacramental account of Thomas' doctrine of the real distinction.

⁷⁶ The preceding was a summary of Balthasar's genealogy in *GL* 5, 9-18.

⁷⁷ The irony here is that Scotus and Occam are both trying to grant to Francis' spiritual experience a metaphysical formulation. The problem with their attempt is their failure to see that such a formulation attends Francis' deeply Christological spirituality.

closes itself in upon itself, must become fideistic and can ultimately be only practical.⁷⁸

Balthasar sees a direct line connecting the formalization of Being with Scotus and Occam to the thought of Suarez, the father of Baroque and Neo-Scholasticism. While Suarez is a spiritual descendent of Ignatius of Loyola, he is the philosophical progeny of Scotus. What emerges in his thought is a twisted synthesis of the Ignatian notion of “detachment” with Scotus’ univocity of Being. As outlined above, Ignatian detachment is the spiritual form of Franciscan poverty — the emptiness of the whole self, an “ascetic transcendence of psycho-physical possession into a free receptivity to the love of God alone.”⁷⁹ This self-transcendence is, for Ignatius at least, *apatheia*, yielding, making oneself available to God. This spiritual, ascetic self-transcendence interrogates (or at least *should* interrogate) this new form of metaphysics that teaches the preeminence of reason for the knowledge of Being. “Transcendence of the self clearly becomes the yielding of the self... to the unfathomability of divine love.”⁸⁰ This surrender is the passivity of a nature being elevated by grace. More often than not, however, the opposite is the case: the spiritual charisms are forced into a foreign philosophical totality. This is, according to Balthasar, precisely what happens with Suarez, who bypasses the inherent intersubjectivity of the Gospel in favor of a static metaphysic of univocity.⁸¹

⁷⁸ *GL* 5, 20. On the fragmentation of the idea of *cosmos* that nominalism effects, see Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993), 15-40.

⁷⁹ *GL* 5, 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. Cf. Henrici, “The Spiritual Dimension,” 641-643.

⁸¹ “Thus in historical terms Christian thought is not commensurate with the forms of Christian inspiration, nor does it seek to keep pace with it, but is content rather to cut a paltry coat for it from the huge store of material of extant thought. Neoscholasticism, to which period the contribution of Ignatius belongs, was particularly burdened by the weight of prior thinking, of what was apparently already contained in the treasury of tradition, so that the original Ignatian vision of *Divina Majestas* and *Gloria* was no longer able to create any original mode of conceptual expression” (*GL* 5, 23). In other words, Balthasar

For Suarez, univocal Being is the object of all metaphysical enquiry. He trumps univocity over analogy, believing that focusing on analogy muddles metaphysical clarity because it disrupts the “unity of the concept” of Being. If either analogy or univocity had to be relinquished to achieve a comprehensive metaphysic, the former could be disposed without inhibiting the “certain” and “demonstrable” truth of the concept of Being. According to Suarez, a metaphysics that has knowledge of Being as whole will include God in the sphere of its object. God now becomes simply a material object, perhaps the highest example of Being. But God is not determinative of this metaphysic, insofar as it purports to offer an *a priori* account of Being without reference to God or revelation. Thanks to nominalism and the flattening out of reality, Neo-scholasticism can only recreate the depth of reality through constructive conceptualism. Concrete reality, existence, is lost in favor of the abstract concept.

In Suarez is found the unique conjunction of two things — the biblical vision of the opening of the heart’s most inward idea of God and the Greek metaphysical speculation about the *Theon* and the *Pan*. This conjunction

in which speculation apparently gains the academic qualifications to know *about* God, his essence, his thinking and his acting within the Creation, salvation and perfection (in faith), to receive Being laid bare to its depths and to manipulate it in these depths by conceptual meanings, with the support of an immense body of tradition which is composed of what has been ‘worked out’ partly dogmatically and partly in the schools, and has been already objectively thought (and which therefore is not to be thought through afresh): this conjunction stands behind metaphysics as it exists in the modern period both in the Church and beyond.⁸²

bemoans the fact that Christian thought has only ever borrowed from extant philosophical traditions as its mode of conceptual expression.

⁸² Ibid., 25.

It now becomes possible to penetrate the essence of God, to know God as an object, to know the divine by means of conceptual thought rather than through love. What this leads to, Balthasar fears, is the loss of a metaphysics of glory or, to put it another way, the loss of the irreducible mystery of Being.⁸³ Because Being (and, within that, God) as a concept lies ever open to reason, the believer is not required to dwell on the philosophical mystery but rather on the God who is searched and exposed to reason by the Holy Spirit. According to Balthasar, this loss of the philosophical mystery of Being destroys theological mystery as well.

This is where the major split occurs between logical, all-knowing metaphysics — an onto-theology — and the mystical, affective encounter with Being's glory. This metaphysics is incapable of perceiving the glory of revelation because it is limited by its conceptual rationalism. The "metaphysics of the saints" on the other hand, those "holy fools" as Balthasar will call them,⁸⁴ can perceive this glory because it is not restricted to the narrow rationalism of the metaphysicians. This is not to say, however, that saintly perception is illogical. On the contrary, there *is* a logic to the mystics and the saints, but it must come in its proper place *within* the disclosure of revelation.⁸⁵ This saintly logic is, first and foremost, a *Christo*-logic. The saints participate in the logic of Christ, that is, in

⁸³ By articulating his genealogy thus, Balthasar reveals his reliance on Heidegger. As Cyril O'Regen rightly argues, Balthasar is in essential agreement with much of Heidegger's critique of modernity, though Balthasar will question whether or not Heidegger can actually avoid the nihilism he critiques. Nevertheless, for both, "Scotus seems to instantiate the kind of formal-logical mania that characterizes all that can go wrong in metaphysics and did in fact go wrong in Scholasticism... If the tendencies of modernity hardly bode well for a theology that would be *doxological* in the strict sense, then neither the speculative grammar of Scotus, nor the Scholasticism of Suarez, nor the degenerate Thomism of the nineteenth century are calculated to preserve the irreducible moment of mystery and the emptying adorative response that defines the biblical and patristic attitude to God and the cosmos." See O'Regen, "Von Balthasar's Valorization and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity," 128.

⁸⁴ *GL* 5, 141-146.

⁸⁵ For another Balthasarian and Ignatian interpretation of this dilemma, see Henrici, "The Spiritual Dimension," 645ff.

the logic of divine love which faces even the contradiction of abandonment, of “being made sin.” For Balthasar, the logic of the metaphysics of the saints is truly a faith seeking understanding from within the life of the incarnate *Logos*.

Before turning to the second possible interpretation of Being after Thomas, we must note that there is for Balthasar a fundamental contradiction in Being in the Scotist-Suarezian picture.⁸⁶ For Scotus and Suarez, Being is the highest but also the most hollow concept. Being must, as a univocal concept, exclude all of its determinations. These determinations, existents, belong to and are Being (because Being can only realize itself *as* beings). The category of Being must therefore be contracted to the level of the singular. There emerges here a disjunction between the *real* and the *actual*. The real is that which is realizable, not what is actual. If reality is comprehensive Being (as a concept), then existence (that is, actuality) is “being ordered to Being” and thus bypasses God completely. Creaturely freedom can exist apart from the loving gift of God.

Thus one of the consequences of the de-sacralizing of theology, and the subsequent autonomization of philosophy is an overturning of the participative character of knowledge in favor of a formalization of Being that leads to the primacy of juridical reason. The stage is thus set for the cold rationalism of early modernity.

Being as God. If Scotus, Occam, and Suarez represent one side of the collapse of the Thomistic synthesis through their formalization of Being, then Meister Eckhart represents the other. Through his identification of Being with God (*Esse est Deus*), Eckhart comes to play a crucial role in modern intellectual and spiritual history. Though

⁸⁶ What follows is a summary of *GL* 5, 27-28.

his spirituality bears striking similarity to that of the later Ignatius, Eckhart expresses his in philosophical categories that do more to distort than to illumine the truth of Being.⁸⁷

Eckhart's identification of Being with God is, at least initially, a devotional move. It is an attempt to ascribe all things, all Being, to God alone.⁸⁸ For Eckhart, God belongs to all things and all things belong to God. His goal is to renew and enrich Christian worship through this totalization of God's possession of the world. Eckhart bypasses the Thomistic non-subsistent *actus essendi*, opting instead for four distinct propositions: 1) God is beyond all explication. He is the *whyless* (an idea picked up by Angelius Silesius and Martin Heidegger). The divine whylessness is the whylessness of love, freedom, thought, and form. 2) This whylessness is seen in the eternal font of divine fecundity. God is born of God in the Trinity. Further, God is born (or will be born) in all things, especially in Christians. 3) Being a Christian is a purely passively attitude of letting God be born in the soul. Eckhart's is a radical receptivity, both spiritually and ontologically; it is utter passivity. Mary becomes for Eckhart the image of the true Christian, exposing our universal task and destiny: our *fiat* leads to our glorification of having God born in us. 4) Christian spirituality is becoming. It is the dynamic movement toward divine birth, which is the same as divine Sonship. The divine birth is the central theological

⁸⁷ On Balthasar's reading of Eckhart, see Cyril O'Regen, "Balthasar and Eckhart: Theological Principles and Catholicity" in *The Thomist*, vol. 60, no. 2 (1996), 203-239. O'Regen rightly notes that Balthasar's assessment of Eckhart is largely ambivalent. On the one hand, Balthasar never doubts Eckhart's catholicity or his essentiality to the Christian tradition. On the other hand, as I shall emphasize below, Eckhart does make some theological claims that Balthasar sees as immensely problematic, even as a distortion of Christian metaphysics and spirituality.

⁸⁸ See, for example, his *Sermon 6: Deus communis est: omne ens et omnium esse ipse est*. Quoted in *GL* 5, 31.

mystery, not just for the Christian, but for all creation. All Being moves toward the eternal generation of the Word. And thus toward being God.⁸⁹

Thus a key phrase for Eckhart's spiritual metaphysics is that "Man should grasp God in all things."⁹⁰ One need not flee from the world to attain union with God. One instead reaches for the God who is present in all things. But this union with God in the world is not automatic. Union can be attained only through the cultivation of the soul through obedience. Obedience develops the capacity for God's divine birth in the soul. For Eckhart, obedience is surrender, the will to *absolute passivity* before the will of God. The kind of radical receptivity that Eckhart demands here requires an impoverishment and abasement of the self.⁹¹ Things are truly known only when accepted as gifts of disclosure from God, received by a surrendered self. What is being received is not an object separate from God. No, for Eckhart, what is received is God himself, given in all things.⁹² This surrender leads to the fruitfulness of the divine birth in the Christian. This divine birth is the goal of the spiritual life.⁹³

Thus far, Eckhart's spirituality fits well with Balthasar's desire to see a spiritual metaphysic in which the truth of Being is known and received through spiritual union with God. But all of this begins to go wrong for Eckhart the more he adopts foreign

⁸⁹ Balthasar will critique Eckhart on precisely this point, for treating the "generation of the Word" as an abstract cosmological principle that Jesus Christ only *exemplifies*. According to Balthasar, Eckhartian *Gelassenheit* lacks an appropriately grounded Christological foundation. Cf. O'Regen, "Balthasar and Eckhart," 223-224.

⁹⁰ *Instructive Discourses* VI. Note how close this comes to the Ignatian injunction to "find God in all things." The difference between them is the difference between an aesthetic seeing or finding in Ignatius and a more intellectualist "grasping" and comprehension in Eckhart. For Balthasar, following Ignatius, we find God present in all things but he remains ever hidden to us, even as we find him.

⁹¹ We see here an Eckhartian gloss on the ideals of Franciscan poverty and later Ignatian *indiferencia*.

⁹² Cf. O'Regen, "Balthasar and Eckhart," 210-211.

⁹³ It is also, interestingly enough, the undoing of ethics. Like Luther, external works for Eckhart contribute nothing to the generation of the Word in the inner life.

philosophical concepts to heighten the theological mystery of the divine birth. By equating God with Being, he unintentionally blurs the frontier between God and world.⁹⁴ The result of this is that he ends up equating all being with becoming. What is Not-God is by definition, for Eckhart, Non-Being. All creatures are nothing — matter to form, pure passive receptivity. Being is nothing more than a loan of God's own divine and absolute Being. The creature is preserved in this Being solely by the perpetual event-act of God's presence. Eckhart conceives of worldly being as an ever-receptive becoming, a constant "drinking in" of God. God, therefore, can only ever be pure event — the active begetting that corresponds to the absolute passivity of being begotten.

Because God is this pure event for Eckhart, "Being" as a concept is not adequate for him. Being is God's forecourt. His temple, so Eckhart claims, is *intellect*. For Eckhart, the *actus secundus* (knowing) is nobler than Being: God is *because* he knows; knowledge is the *fundamentum* of divine being. But knowledge for Eckhart concerns *intentional* rather than *real* Being. The movement of knowledge toward real things is an act of externalization and, as such, is a fall away from interiority, the location of the spiritual divine birth. Eckhart adopts the *exitus-reditus* model of Plotinus — itself the most common expressive language of early Christian mysticism — to argue that knowledge must involve the "reassembly" of the externalized part of the mind upon the intellect's return to their archetype in the soul.

Further, because Eckhart conceives of God as an *identity of unity* that comes to be in thought, he assumes that there is an absolute divine identity *beyond* the Trinity. This primordial identity is the intellect, the Plotinian One. Humans, created in the image of

⁹⁴ According to O'Regen, Balthasar is rejecting Eckhart's move of "converting Thomas's *Deus est Esse* into *Esse est Deus* and the dismantling of analogy that this involves" ("Balthasar and Eckhart," 218).

this One, share in this intellect and so, at their *natural* core, lies something uncreated. In light of this, Eckhart can conclude that all being is God (*esse est Deus*).⁹⁵ Later thinkers (especially the Idealists) will converge on this point by construing all Being in terms of that point of identity *in the intellect* where God and creature coincide.

Eckhart's thus becomes a spirituality of immediacy, one which rejects the classical idea of a relationship with God being mediated analogously through the cosmos. His spirituality adopts a philosophy that is "the first step towards idealistic speculation."⁹⁶ Eckhart's spiritual concern for the Christian's loving abandonment to God is ill-matched with his philosophy that articulates the relation of finite and absolute Spirit as a kind of *knowledge*. There is a clear divide in Eckhart between the speculative and the spiritual. Indeed, it is his philosophy that is read back into and ends up determining his spiritual theology. This is seen most clearly in the triumph of knowledge over love as the *fundamentum* of God's being, and the blurring of the distinction between the Creator and the creature.⁹⁷

While Eckhart's intention was to highlight the God-World relation as loving abandonment and receptivity, his philosophy ends up articulating this spirituality as a form of speculative knowledge, a kind of gnosticism, a secret interior knowing that displaces the external ways of knowing God in sacrament and worldly symbols. Eckhart carries us away from the spiritual adoration of this mystery to the speculative intellectual conquest of it in Idealism where knowledge of the God-world relationship is reduced to

⁹⁵ See, for example, his *Instructive Discourses* VI, 205. Balthasar is also basing much of his critique of Eckhart on Vladimir Lossky's *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Vrin Distribution, 1998).

⁹⁶ *GL* 5, 48.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

the epistemological dialectic between Infinite and finite. Here dialectic trumps dialogicality; love is subsumed into knowledge.⁹⁸ Eckhartian Being is indeed mystery, but it is not the infinite mystery of love. Being's mystery becomes in Eckhart's system something more akin to a riddle, a problem that can and must be solved, rather than a gift to be received and embraced.

The philosophical systems of Idealism that Balthasar sees as emerging from the legacy of Eckhart seek, each in their own way, to solve this riddle of Being. Balthasar sees this titanic systematization of philosophy emerging with new vigor between Kant and Fichte.⁹⁹ The consequence of Idealist systems negates “the sense of belonging in a world” through its obsession with “subjectivity and the self-constitution of the subject.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Thus, Balthasar's critique of Eckhart is that he is not properly *apophatic*. Cf. O'Regen, “Balthasar and Eckhart,” 215.

⁹⁹ Balthasar's relationship to Kant is complex. In many ways, the three parts of Balthasar's Trilogy is the direct inverse of the Kantian philosophical scheme. Yet Balthasar does not hesitate to give Kant credit where it is due. Kant is a “frontier figure” who, though he sets the stage for later titan Idealism, has not yet succumbed to that temptation. Balthasar holds, perhaps controversially, that Kant's philosophy still affirms a transcendent “thing-in-itself” that the subject bumps into. So receptivity remains a key element in Kantian thought. The transformation — or perhaps distortion — that the Kantian legacy effects, however, is phenomenalism: “even metaphysics ‘receives’ (in its receptivity) only phenomena, not Being. This is why the practical faculty, when it opens up the way to the Absolute, cannot mediate any objective (‘external’) knowledge, and if religion exists at all, it can do so only ‘within the limits of pure reason’.” (GL 5, 494).

¹⁰⁰ Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and Rahner” in *Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Riches (London: T&T Clark, 1986), 23. This already signals a philosophical capitulation to nominalism, as Dupré sees: “already the nominalist crisis had severed the bond between human words and the divine Logos. If we can no longer take for granted that God's decrees follow an intelligible pattern, then we also cease to trust that the eternal Logos secures the basic veracity of human speech” (104). Though Dupré is here referring to language, the same crisis plagues accounts of Being and truth in the wake of nominalism. In fact, the critique that Derrida will later bring against Western culture — that its logocentrism grants an undeserved discursive access to Being — misses the point. The problem, so Dupré claims (and Balthasar would agree), comes from an “impoverished interpretation of *logos* as residing exclusively in the human subject and depriving all other being of its inherent meaning” (Dupré, 24). This stripping of the world is the real problem that needs deconstructing: cosmos is replaced by nature and so teleological meaning is displaced and then lost altogether. This intrinsic and teleological meaningfulness of the cosmos, for ancients such as Plato and Aristotle, is based in a world that is, itself, divine. The Church will later transform this “ensouled world” in terms of a sacramental ontology. Both such metaphysical views will be upended with the rise of the nominalist crisis of the late medieval period

In Idealism, the Eckhartian I comes to be so elevated that the world itself is lost, absorbed into the cognitive functions of the Absolute I.¹⁰¹ For Fichte especially, the world is instrumentalized. This signals the death of beauty, the death of glory, the death of a transcendental, indeed sacramental, metaphysics itself. The world, rather than being the “sacred veil” which reveals God, becomes that which is “without significance independently of the ego... incapable of manifesting God. Spirit swallows up nature, and the non-human world is wholly subordinated to human self-fulfillment.”¹⁰² Idealism is haunted, says Balthasar, by the spectre of Nietzsche: Idealism is pure creative *self-will* of the ego. It is disembodied Mind that grants to the “I” the sponge to “wipe away the horizon.”¹⁰³ Idealism is a titanism, unable to rest until it has drawn everything into the Absolute I.¹⁰⁴

that, in many ways, returns to the Parmenadian suspicion of “appearances” or “phenomena” and searches instead for “foundations” that, ultimately, can only be found in the self.

¹⁰¹ There is a distinct movement in modernity that turns to introspection. This is the move that Descartes makes and, from Descartes, comes the introspection of Montaigne and others. Cf. Dupré, 101: “When meaning is no longer given with existence, existence itself becomes a quest for meaning.” It might be possible to link modern philosophy’s concern with introspection back to the interiority and introspection of Augustine. Michael Hanby, however, rejects such a move, claiming that Augustinian subjectivity is grounded more in a theology of creation than in the Stoicism that deeply influenced Descartes. See Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Especially notable for Hanby’s argument and for reinforcing Balthasar’s own critique of modernity, is an excerpt from Descartes’ letter *To Colvius*: “I... [contrary to Augustine] use the [*cogito*], to show that this I which is thinking is an immaterial substance with no bodily element. These are two very different things.” As Dupré notes, Cartesian interiority and selfhood is ultimately *functional* — the self as the source of meaning and value (118).

¹⁰² Dupré, 118.

¹⁰³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Parable of the Madman” in *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Press, 1974), 181-82.

¹⁰⁴ On Fichte, see *GL* 5, 547ff. Note especially: “it is not the objective world-systems which are the focus of attention..., rather, the totality needs to be developed from the transcendental art-structure of the thinking and acting subject... the ‘retreat to the man as the centre’ is in no way retracted; for the first time it is ‘Titanically’ [*sic*] pressed home” (547).

Despite all the talk of “absolute knowledge/knowing” that circulates among the Idealists¹⁰⁵ (and even in Eckhart himself), Balthasar sees Idealism as the death of knowledge precisely insofar as Idealism *absolutizes* it. Idealism’s absolute knowledge overturns the possibility of wonder. As Balthasar makes clear: “What has been disastrously lost in the metaphysical rake’s progress is the possibility of *wonder*, of *contemplative receptivity* in the face of the world’s richness, the overthrowing of a contemplative (and thus potentially God-directed) mode of knowledge by a model of *Bewältigung* — thought as mastery, domination, even exploitation, Bacon’s nature on the rack.”¹⁰⁶ Balthasar claims that this is the direct result of Eckhart’s *spiritual* and *metaphysical* error of equating Being with God, and elevating knowledge over love.

With the loss of the world goes the loss of wonder and, as Aristotle would insist, the possibility of the knowledge that begins in wonder. But Balthasar is concerned about something far more troubling to him than the loss of knowledge. This kind of metaphysically disenchanted world — the consumption of wonder by the *technē* of the I — is the loss of the ability to pray. “We can be sure that whoever sneers at her [beauty’s] name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past — whether he admits it or not — can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.”¹⁰⁷ For Balthasar, the loss of Being and the loss of the saints go hand-in-hand. The result of this twofold loss is the

¹⁰⁵ Balthasar tends to speak in generalities about the “Idealists” even though there is a huge variety among Idealist thinkers on just about every topic. We should understand Balthasar’s references to “the Idealists” as referring to an idealist trajectory or system, modeled especially in Fichte and Hegel, that elevates thought over Being. As Balthasar puts it, “While Kant and Schiller stop short at the finiteness of the human spirit in a way that might be judged to be more modern, the three Titans Fichte, Schelling and Hegel want to conceive of man within the wholeness of the Absolute, as its centre” (*GL* 5, 547).

¹⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Cordula*, 68-69. Quoted in Williams, 24. Of course also in the background here in Descartes’ claim that humanity is to be “masters and possessors of nature” by adopting a certain *technic* that can control the world. See also Balthasar’s account of Descartes in *GL* 5, 455ff.

¹⁰⁷ *GL* 1, 18.

annihilation of the world and the loss of the ability to pray and to love. The loss of the saints from theology in the late medieval period thus creates a vicious cycle in which *all* sainthood, and all prayer, is lost.¹⁰⁸

All of this helps make sense of Balthasar's critical appropriation of Heidegger, for whom all ontological knowledge is *as Dasein*, as being-in-the-world.¹⁰⁹ For Heidegger, "'Being' just cannot be statically comprehended as something that exists [*Seiendes*]. It is interpreted in reference to the understanding of being, and thereby drawn into the movement of decision-making existence... the totality of life."¹¹⁰ Heidegger brings the knower back to the world in such a way that knowledge — "care" — of Being can only occur *as Dasein, through Dasein, as In-der-Welt-sein*. For Heidegger, we *know* because we *are*. One *knows* Being by *being*. Heidegger will ultimately posit the poet as the one who knows Being as *Dasein* (in which "*existentia* is made the *essential* of *esse*").¹¹¹ Balthasar will put forward something analogous to the Heideggerian poet.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Balthasar once again sees Eckhart and Kant in the background here. Both clung to what he calls an "ethical, aesthetic sublime" that demands "contemplation" and "adoration." Though Kant dismisses prayer as ethically fruitless, contemplation and adoration are powers that "lift the soul" (*GL* 5, 502).

¹⁰⁹ The same goes for Balthasar's contemporary and friendly antagonist, Karl Rahner. Operative in the background of much of Balthasar's work is his debate with Rahner over the possibility of a theological *a priori*. For Rahner, there is a possibility of a formal pre-apprehension of Being in which, through which, we have a general knowledge of God. For Balthasar, as we shall see, there is no such thing. Truth, for Balthasar, cannot be pre-thought. He accuses Rahner (and his mentor, Maréchal) of offering a catholicized version of Fichte (*GL* 5, 548). For Rahner, our "agent intellect" (that is, the power that differentiates between perceived things) recognizes the "contingency" of all things: that they are but *could have been otherwise*. We come to understand the "open-ended potential of being itself." This is a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of "unlimited possibility" and ultimately of *esse*, being as such — the possibility of every specific possibility. *Vorgriff* of *esse* is a pre-apprehension of God, "not as an object but as the condition for grasping all objects" (Williams, 15). This is revelation of "being-as-such" which places man before God. This is then later supplemented by the revelation of God in the particularities of history. This is Rahner's theological *a priori* — we possess in advance a framework that allows us to understand the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁰ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2009), 72.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

For Balthasar, it is the saint, not the poet, that rightly inhabits and knows the world.¹¹³

Heidegger's poet knows by living toward death. Balthasar's saint knows by living, *with Christ, through* death toward resurrection, toward the eschatological dawn that casts a transfiguring, illuminative light on the world. In this way Balthasar endeavors to re-imagine the relationship between God and world, nearly broken by the legacy of Eckhart, through his own account of the truth of Being — the divine love revealed as Jesus Christ — through his theology of the saints.

The Saints and the Renewing of Theology

In many ways, Balthasar's project is strikingly similar to that of Eckhart. Balthasar too strives to articulate the truth of the God-World relation as love, as abandonment and receptivity — as *Gelassenheit*. Yet Balthasar endeavors to do this in a way that does not identify Being with God and, by so doing, elevates speculative knowledge over love. Instead, Balthasar wants to reclaim an account of the God-World relation that indeed “finds God in all things” yet maintains a robust sense of metaphysical and theological mystery — a mystery known participatively through the dialogicality of prayer and doxology. Such an account breaks the chains of cold rationalism and titanic idealism, returning theological metaphysics to the unfathomable truth of trinitarian love unveiled in Christ and known in the Spirit.

¹¹² On the metaphysics of the poets, see Dupré: “the poet not only represents the things of this world but also symbolizes those invisible forms that, according to the Platonists, constitute the true reality. He creates *idoli*, sacred images, that powerfully refer to a mysterious, invisible reality” (104).

¹¹³ Bonhoeffer states, far more succinctly than Balthasar, the danger of Heidegger's philosophy for theology. Heidegger's is a “consciously atheistic philosophy of finitude” from which the transcendent — revelation — is necessarily bracketed out. A Christian theology that learns from the blows of Heidegger will recognize that, theologically considered, finitude is *creatureliness*, that which is “open for God.” Balthasar would agree, though he endeavors to give Heidegger a bit more credit than does Bonhoeffer. See Bonhoeffer's discussion in *Act and Being*, 70-74.

Yet Balthasar is skeptical that a theology where dogma and spirituality are divorced is capable of articulating such an account of the God-world relation. The radical separation of the objective truth and its subjective performance has distorted the Church's ability to articulate a truthful account of Being. What this calls for is a serious reassessment of the nature of theology itself. What must be reassessed is this fragmentation in the heart of theology, especially between theology's form and its content. It is precisely a theology of the saints that allows Balthasar to do this. The saints stand with Christ at the "heart of the world," at the heart of the God-World relation, at the heart of the mystery of Being itself.¹¹⁴ It is by, through, and with the saints that Balthasar reassesses the very nature of theology.

Balthasar insists that the content of speculative theology is the truth as revealed in, and as, Jesus Christ. Theology cannot be conceived of as a "link" between revelation and secular philosophy. Theology always stands at the heart of revelation, thinking and investigating the truth of Christ from *within* the truth, not outside it: the Christian cannot leave Christ in order to build a bridge between revelation and nature, philosophy and theology. Christ himself *is* that bridge, or to use Balthasar's own language, Christ *is* the analogy between God and world, divine truth and finite truth. The burden that falls to the theologian is the tension that exists between this center in the revelation of Christ and the secular sciences, including philosophy. This tension is especially acute in the context of the God-World relationship precisely because Christ does not exist on the periphery of the world but at its very heart, at the very heart of Being.

¹¹⁴ Balthasar makes the case that the saints stand at the heart of the world in the beginning of his study of Theresa of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity (see, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 25). Yet the saints are not unaccompanied there at the heart. They are joined there by Christ who, even more than this, lies at the heart of being itself.

But in this tension is precisely where the saints live. Because the saints live lives “hidden away in Christ,” they never depart from Christ. Thus, “[w]hen they philosophize, they do so as Christians, which means as believers, as theologians... And this simply means that their thought is a function of their faith... Their thinking is an act that is ultimately performed in the service of their faith, of Christ’s revelation, which is its norm and guiding principle.”¹¹⁵ The content of theology, of all theologizing, is the revelation of Christ, and is “a prolongation of the message of revelation.”¹¹⁶

If the content of theology is the revelation of God in Christ, then theology’s form [*Gestalt*] must correspond to the unfolding of this revelation; theology’s form must correspond to that which it aims to exposit, namely, the life of Christ. Theology must therefore be obedient receptivity, dialogue, and love. Just as Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and Mary were receptive and obedient to the Word that came to them, thus enabling the disclosure of a fuller revelation (of the friendly God, of Israel, of *hesed*, of the universality of the gospel, of Christ himself), theology itself must receive and obey the Word: “True theology, the theology of the saints, with the central doctrines of revelation always in view, inquires, in a spirit of obedience and reverence.”¹¹⁷

The most appropriate form of theological knowing, then, will be the form of the saints. It will be dialogical; it will be prayer. Balthasar aims at a theology that corresponds to God himself. God is no mere object but is absolute Subject, on whose prior *theo-logos* the saints’ *theo-logoi* depend. All theology is in a constant relationship of prayer with its object. Anselm is here the perfect example: “I cannot seek you, if you

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 196.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Cf. *Prayer*, 170.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 196.

do not teach me how, nor find if you do not show yourself.”¹¹⁸ As Anselm himself knew well, “reason too was created for the sake of faith, nature for the sake of grace, and that both form, by their interconnection, a single revelation of the incomprehensible love of the Trinity.”¹¹⁹ The saints thus bequeath to theology a form — an aesthetic of receptive obedience and prayer: “Prayer is the *realistic* attitude in which the mystery must be approached: obedient faith, the ‘presuppositionless’, is the attitude where theology is concerned, because it corresponds to the *tabula rasa* of love, in which the heart awaits all and anticipates nothing. This attitude, which is that of prayer, is never superseded or outdistanced by the attitude demanded by knowledge.”¹²⁰

What this amounts to is that true theology is a continuous dialogue between Christ and Church, Bridegroom and Bride. “With revelation there is no such thing as an objective, uncommitted, scientific ‘objectivity’, but only a personal encounter of Word and faith, Christ and Church, in the mystery of the Cantic of Canticles.”¹²¹ Theology emerges out of the love that lies behind all dialogue — the rhythm of gift and receptivity. True theology is the dia-logical interplay of subject and object, hearer and Word, in love. This is the theological form the saints bequeath to the Church. True theology therefore has as its goal nothing but “bringing men and their whole existence, intellectual as well as spiritual, into closer relation with God.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Proslogion*, 1.8. See also Nicholas Lash, “Anselm Seeking” in *The Beginning and End of ‘Religion’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150-163.

¹¹⁹ “Theology and Sanctity,” 207.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Balthasar here offers a nice turn of phrase when he describes ancient theology as a “theology at prayer” versus the modern form of “theology at desk.”

¹²¹ “Theology and Sanctity,” 201.

¹²² Ibid.

Part of this theological task, this theology of the saints, is the development of an ontological account of truth that is shaped and determined by a distinctively theological form. This form is that of dialogue and relationality, gift and receptivity. It is the form of love.¹²³ More precisely, it is the form of Christ himself. It is to Balthasar's understanding of truth, as elaborated in the three volumes of his *Theo-Logic*, that we now turn.

¹²³ In this, Balthasar is resourcing a distinctly Augustinian-Dionysian trajectory, especially as manifested in the dogmatic spirituality of medieval monasticism. The close interweaving that Balthasar attempts between truth, knowledge, love, and prayer lies at the heart of the medieval contemplative life: "Love assumed a new significance in religious life. What contemplation had been for earlier mystics, love was in the new age. Indeed, contemplation came to be identified with love. Bernard of Clairvaux declared St. Gregory's axiom, *amor ipse notitia est* (love itself is a knowledge) to be the guiding principle of contemplative life" (Dupré, 35). This emphasis on contemplation and love will, through the Franciscan emphasis on the human flesh of Christ, grant materiality an intrinsic — indeed, Christological and sacramental — symbolism it had not had before. It is precisely their "spiritual devotion" to Christ that lead the medieval contemplatives to rethink how to see, know, and understand the world: "A merely literal [even scientific or idealistic] reading of nature would have fallen far short of a full understanding... Spiritual meaning resided in the cosmos itself" (36). The medieval saints were not consumed in a task of pursuing spiritual experiences but were rather embodying a new way of knowing the truth of the world *in light of* the truth of God, revealed in Christ: "Knowledge consisted in related one form of language to another form of language; in restoring the great, unbroken plain of words and things; in making everything speak" (Foucault, quoted in Dupré, 37). The task of this dissertation is to elaborate on the manner in which Balthasar's own thought embraces this theological, philosophical, and saintly style.

CHAPTER THREE

Truth and Love

Intellect and Love

“O world, as God has made it!/All is beauty/And knowing this, is love
and love is duty.”

— Robert Browning

One of the theological debates that lies in the background of Balthasar’s *Logic* is the relation between intellect and will in the knowing subject. This debate emerged chiefly from interpretations of Aquinas that claimed the intellect is superior to the will, and so truth is superior to love.¹ Balthasar finds this claim both theologically and philosophically unsatisfying and so develops what he calls a logic, and an epistemology, of love, which will eventually evolve into the subjective form of saintly knowing. In this logic, Balthasar endeavors not to supplant the ‘intellectualism’ of St. Thomas with voluntarism or fideism (let alone affectivism) but rather to demonstrate the fundamental mutuality of knowledge and love — namely, that understanding is an act of the *complete* self in and as the expressive, creative, and receptive act of the loving intellect.² For our

¹ What is ultimately at stake in this question is how one comes to know the God who is love. John’s gospel has Jesus speak of eternal life as “knowing [the Father], the only true God” (17:3); Paul speaks of knowing the love that surpasses all understanding (Ephesians 3:19). See also D.C. Schindler, “Towards a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge: On the Relation between Reason and Love in Aquinas and Balthasar” in *Modern Theology* vol. 22, no. 4 (2006), 577-607.

² Schindler suggests five theses for expositing Balthasar’s argument for the philosophical and theological primacy of love: 1) Love is the meaning of being; 2) Truth is simultaneously an object of intellect and will; 3) The locus of truth is the concrete *Gestalt*; 4) Mystery is convertible with truth; 5) Knowledge is essentially non-possessive. See *ibid.*, 588ff. Though this chapter does not follow Schindler’s taxonomy precisely, it does share with him the task of elucidating Balthasar’s account of truth as, at its heart, a philosophy of love. Balthasar’s philosophy of love is not merely a philosophy *about* love; it is, rather, a philosophy of truth *by means of* love. Such a philosophy interprets truth as gift, it comes to knowledge through creative receptivity, and it wills the perpetuity of the world’s mystery. These are the themes that both Schindler and the current chapter explore in unfolding Balthasar’s “non-possessive” epistemology. On this also see Pierre Rousselot, *L’intellettualismo di san Tommaso* (Milan: Vita e

purposes, we will follow the trajectory of this logic of love as Balthasar lays it out in his *Logic*. We do this in order to put forward the saint as the one who best *knows* the truth because she *loves* the truth in its most concrete form: the bodily flesh of Christ.

Cosmic and Anthropological Reductions

The first volume of Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* develops what might be called an epistemology of love. This epistemology counters two modernist reductions that he identifies as emerging from the failure of metaphysics and the rise of Cartesian epistemology.³ For Balthasar, the question of truth is ultimately the question of the God-World relationship — a question whose validity has been fundamentally called into question by the legacy of Cartesian rationalism and Kantian idealism.⁴ Balthasar attempts to re-engage this question in the wake of the rise of titanic Idealism — which, as we have seen, reduces Being to the Absolute I where thought conquers Being, and world is known only as “I.”⁵ Idealism's knowledge is titanically possessive, stripping knowledge of its reality, its givenness, and its mystery; it is the philosophical child of Babel. Balthasar fears that without a proper initiation into the irreducible *mystery* of

pensario, 2000). See also Rousselot's collection of essays entitled *Essays on Love and Knowledge*, trans. Andrew Tallon, Pol Vandavelde, and Alan Vincelle (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2008). From his collection see especially the essay “Intellectualism” (pp. 225-249).

³ “[Descartes'] thought began by transforming philosophy from a science of first things into an epistemological investigation of the first principles of knowledge...all being, insofar as it must be represented by the mind, comes to depend on a single metaphysical principle — the thinking substance” (Dupré, 87). See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), 110ff.

⁴ See Dupré, 80ff.

⁵ There is thus a genealogical line stretched from Descartes through Fichte: “Perceived by the mind alone means that a true understanding requires us to make abstraction from all passively received (through sense or imagination) qualities and ideally to reconstitute its nature through an active intellectual grasp. Here begins a development that reached its final conclusion in Fichte's conception of the self as a creative act. Goethe's variant on the beginning of the Fourth Gospel goes to the very heart of the modern project: *Im Anfang war die Tat* (In the beginning was the deed). Even as Faust, the subject produces its own identity. Some later thinkers declared the notion of a self to be no more than a function of its own activity. Already for Marx, the idea of a subject was a meaningless remnant of romanticism” (Dupré, 118-19).

Being, truth is threatened by a twofold reduction. This reduction can be either cosmological (what Balthasar calls a “cosmic monism”) or anthropological (an “anthropro-monism”), but both are deadly to the question of truth, that is, to an account of the world and its relation to God.⁶

The cosmological reduction arises in the development of “nature” as something distinct from “supernature.”⁷ Nature, according to this line of thought, exists in and for itself and is epistemologically accessible to autonomous rationality. What emerges is a distinction between a so-called “natural religion” and a “positive religion” (such as Christianity). For many of the religious thinkers of modernity, a bastardized version of Justin Martyr’s *logos spermatikos* gains prominence — the particularity of Christian truth draws all other religious truth (“religion” now being a generalized, sociological concept) into itself.⁸ Christianity “represents the concluding stage of ‘the phenomenon of revelation in general’.”⁹ Leibnizian philosophy then sets the stage for the cosmological reduction of Idealism (and German Romanticism) by absorbing Christianity into the cosmological totality of the monad. Herder, Hegel, and Drey are swift to follow. Thus the problem of the relationship between God and world is solved at the expense of both: a metaphysic of identity is ultimately the destruction of difference and thus of metaphysical

⁶ Balthasar’s solution to this question will ultimately be Christological — where “Christ and the paschal mysteries become the focal point of any contact between God and man.” The revelation of Christ will give the fullest account of the God-World relation, but one can only arrive at such a conclusion “in the fullness of time.”

⁷ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 15-63.

⁸ One can see this tendency even in the late medieval period. See especially Nicholas of Cusa, *De pace fidei*. For Balthasar’s discussion of this text, see his *Love Alone is Credible*, 15-19.

⁹ Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 29.

meaning. In this reduction, objective reality can only be objectively realized. The human subject plays an insignificant role within this scheme.¹⁰

The second reduction is anthropological and is, more often than not, the temptation of modernity. This reduction distorts the ancient anthropology of the human as the “microcosm” of the world and thus as the mediator between God and world. Enlightenment thought, especially as summed up in Kant, builds upon this ancient idea but, influenced by the development of the natural sciences, ends up making man into the author of the structure of the cosmos, “a cosmos he transcends through his reason.”¹¹ For Kant, “everything that is humanly knowable... is restricted to the synthesis of sensible intuition and concept,”¹² while anything lying beyond this phenomenal realm only serves as the practical possibility of human, ethical practice. This same tendency can be seen in Schleiermacher, who reduces religion to the human capacity *for* that religion — the universal experience of *Gefühl*, the feeling of absolute dependence. The meaning of the world, the meaning of the God-World relationship, can be utterly accounted for by some human capacity. Feuerbach’s “theology is anthropology”¹³ is not far away. For Balthasar, “the central presupposition of modernism, in a nutshell, is that every objective dogmatic proposition must be measured in terms of its suitability to the religious subject, in terms of its positive effects on and capacity to complete and fulfill that subject.”¹⁴

¹⁰ This flies in the face of Balthasar’s unrelenting claim that what is “objectively given must be subjectively received and appropriated.”

¹¹ *Love Alone*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, xxxvi. In an interesting twist, Balthasar will say that Feuerbach was, in a way, correct: theology *does* become anthropology insofar as God becomes man.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40. Modernity can be seen then as a radical interpretation of the Kierkegaardian claim that “truth is subjectivity.” Of course, Kierkegaard does not mean to strip reality of its objectivity, but rather argues that the objective world must encounter a living subject. This is a reaction against the Hegelian

Modernity's anthropology reduces Being to that which is suitable to the rational and moral needs of the human being. Balthasar fears that this leads to the annihilation of both the human and the world.¹⁵

For Balthasar, neither of these reductions is philosophically or theologically satisfactory. Neither adequately accounts for the mystery of Being. A third option is needed — one which maintains the integrity of both God and world, and that expresses the necessary rhythm of the objective gift and its subjective reception. This is what Balthasar calls the third way of love — the way of Jesus Christ, the way of the saints.¹⁶ It is only love that reveals and preserves both Being and individual beings.

For the current project, it is the anthropological reduction and its inherent nihilism that hovers in the background. According to Balthasar, the unrestrained divinization of the human person, via subjective reason, to a position above Being, indeed even above God, brings about a twofold consequence: the annihilation of the mysterious depth of Being (expressed most succinctly in the common saying, “A is nothing other than...”)¹⁷ and, inseparable from this, the annihilation of the human person as such. The person — the one who *should* be constituted by her receptivity of existence from the (now

triumph of absolute objectivity. In this way, Balthasar's project bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Kierkegaard. According to Balthasar, phenomenologists address “donation” over “being”, taking the “given” over “gift”. Christianity must instead advocate a “subjectivity of reception” via Kierkegaard: “to receive one must be rightly attuned, one must judge aright, desire aright, as Platonic, neoplatonic and Christian philosophy have always insisted.” Cf. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 42.

¹⁵ The consequence of this reduction is nihilism: “With this [reduction], metaphysics comes to an end and, at the same time, all metaphysical love. There remain at best the substitute forms of a love within the world and a love among men. And because the former must be increasingly dissolved within the latter, as man himself takes control of the world, for which a transcendental and evolutionistic philosophy furnishes the justification to salve his conscience; because he himself has the world in and beneath himself, there remains for him — like the last of his emergency rations — only love among men” (*GL* 5, 643). But even this love cannot remain for long. For without any metaphysical grounding, both the I and the Thou necessary for love are disconnected from any mooring in Being and existence itself becomes a mere phantom.

¹⁶ *Love Alone*, 12-13.

eliminated) depth of Being — is constituted by her striving after power. She is no longer a person. She can now be only a titan:¹⁷

Ever since Nietzsche [who is, for Balthasar, the perverse culmination of Kant], this hollowing out of the transcendentals has been justified by the degradation that man's freedom has been able to inflict upon them: falsehood, malice, ugliness, and the elevation of a violent dualism to the level of a first principle seem to dominate man's world so thoroughly that anyone who can look all of this in the face...must dismiss the idea that being is true, good, and beautiful as a hopeless illusion. Existence is governed by the will to power, which uses the transcendentals to its best advantage: truth, *pravda*, is what serves the interests of power, and so forth.¹⁸

It is no coincidence that Balthasar here ties metaphysics and anthropology together. The questions of Being and the human person must be posed together, especially as they bear on an account of truth: that which is known demands a knower. But they can be lost together as well. And when both *are* lost, there can no longer be truth.¹⁹ This, Balthasar fears, is what attends the loss of the saints.

Balthasar's account of truth therefore demands both an object and a subject existing in reciprocal, natural relationship.²⁰ There must be both something known and someone to do the knowing, a subject and an object. So indeed, the twofold question of

¹⁷ Cf. *TD* 2, 420-426 on Titanism. Etymologically, of course, the word "titan" means "those who strive."

¹⁸ *TL* 1, 10. It is especially interesting to note Balthasar's use of the word "pravda" to modify "truth." For Balthasar, truth in a world of the titans inevitably will become an ideological weapon of the will to power. He sees this in the Soviet newsletter *Pravda* (1912-1991), used as a propagandist communiqué during the revolts on 1917. Scattered throughout the *Logic* are vague critiques of the Sovietism and communism of which Balthasar was deeply suspicious. His language here ties the propagandist and ideological weaponizing of truth to the distortions of the world that are endemic to modernity's temptation to titanism.

¹⁹ This, Balthasar fears, is what has happened with the loss of the saints from theology. Knowledge has come to trump both love and being, the human person has been reduced to Mind. The saints then represent, for Balthasar, not a special or elite form of personhood or knowledge. They represent the true forms of each. The saint is the true person and her knowledge is true knowing.

²⁰ It is precisely this naturalness of relationship between subject and object that modernity has lost. The tendency of the idealist disposition is, ultimately, to make the object an extension of oneself.

Being and the human person, when considered under the transcendental of the True, must take on an epistemological dimension: truth is that which both *is* and *is known*.

The meeting place of these metaphysical and epistemological dimensions is, of course, the human person — the one who is constituted by receptivity, mission, obedience and love. The “metaphysical act” (the truth of Being) is an act of love and can therefore be properly known only by love.²¹ The task of this chapter is to explicate this claim through a thematic exploration of Balthasar’s *Theo-Logic I*, noting especially that text’s recourse to creative receptivity that is a disposition of love. Taken together, these two sides carry Balthasar’s exposition of truth to the “threshold”²² of the inner sanctum of his thought: the mystery of Christ who is himself the truth.

The Harmony of Truth and Knowledge

Unlike many of the epistemological theories of late modernity, Balthasar’s is not simply (or even primarily) a theory of the function of knowledge. It is rather a holistic²³

²¹ Knowledge, for Balthasar, is ontological. Knowledge is knowledge *of* something. This “something” is Being itself. Balthasar is indeed epistemologically confident, though perhaps *too* confident, if we are to accept Karen Kilby’s criticism: see Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2012), 147. He firmly believes that it is Being that is unveiled to the knower and that it is therefore possible for a human to have genuine knowledge of Being in its objectivity. In this, Balthasar shows himself to be a fairly close adherent to Thomistic realism. But Balthasar is not keen to develop a purely passive epistemology along the lines of Eckhart. He wants, like Thomas, the subject to have an active role in knowing. And so his epistemology will involve a clear mutuality between subject and object in the full act of knowing. It is from this mutuality between subject and object that Balthasar develops what this chapter will label a participative epistemology — the participation of the subject and object in and with each other *and* the participation of worldly truth in supernatural, divine truth. Both “types” of participation correspond to Balthasar’s metaphysical account of truth, but they also gesture forward to the saints. Knowledge, while certainly conceptual, is also decidedly dramatic. There is a dramatic disposition in every true knower; *knowing* means *being* a certain way (Cf. Peter Candler, *Manuduction*, 34). Knowing truly means *being* truly (Cf. *GL* 1, 99-101). If Being is love, then the knowledge of that Being is also love. Hence the saints are the true metaphysicians: it is lovers who truly know.

²² Cf. *Epilogue*, 41ff.

²³ I use “holistic” here, not in the sense of being comprehensive, but rather in the sense of drawing together a fuller picture of what truth consists.

vision of truth in its ontological and epistemological dimensions, one that situates epistemology within a larger framework of beauty, goodness, and love. Balthasar “approaches the question of the intellect...from a rather different point of departure, which recasts the terms of the problem in a fundamental way, and which in the end allows a view that integrates”²⁴ Being and knowledge, truth and love, into a seamless tapestry.

Grounding truth in love. For Balthasar, one cannot approach truth with a pre-determined, rationalistic framework that delimits its meaning. Such an approach will inevitably result in the constriction of truth, the annihilation of its mystery. If one’s epistemology can “solve” the mystery of truth, one can also “solve” (or, as the case has been, “eliminate”) the mystery of Being altogether.²⁵ This tendency is common among modern philosophers but Balthasar also sees it as the temptation of the neo-scholastic philosophy in which he was educated at Pullach. Any approach to the truth that reduces the latter to “mere theory,” and denies the participative dimension of knowledge — the decision for truth that springs from the love of truth — loses that truth. In the face of this kind of hyper-imperialist rationalism, Balthasar endeavors to let the mystery of truth stand forth in the luminosity of its freedom. By so doing, he allows both Being and knowledge be interpreted as acts of love.

Balthasar also rejects an irrational, or fideistic account of truth. His epistemology is ontological. Truth is not *merely* subjective; it cannot be limited to the self-expression of the knower. A truth that allows itself to be reduced to self-expression, that hides

²⁴ Schindler, “Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge,” 579.

²⁵ Cf. the genealogies in *GL* 5, 620ff. Also: Connor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

within an “arbitrary subjectivity or a world of personal taste”²⁶ is rightly charged with irrationalism. Balthasar stresses that Catholic philosophy “must overcome rationalism and irrationalism together or not at all.”²⁷ Knowledge, therefore, can be neither merely subjective nor merely objective. It must be, in the language of Balthasar’s appropriation of Thomism, creative (*intellectus agens*) and receptive (*intellectus passibilis*). For Balthasar, the operative harmony of the intellect emerges concretely in the form [*Gestalt*], the “being *for us*” of the object of knowledge.²⁸ A genuinely Catholic account of truth, Balthasar insists, must begin phenomenologically, in the place where we first encounter truth, with the “where” and the “how” of truth’s coming to us. This initial phenomenological approach to truth allows Balthasar to mediate between rationalism and irrationalism. Truth is *known*, but only because it is first *encountered*. Knowledge and love come together, or not at all.

For Balthasar, there is therefore a distinct parallel between the *thinker* and the *lover*. The lover is neither rationalistic nor fideistic about his beloved; indeed, his love is *supra-rational*. So too the thinker. Just as the lover’s first awakening to love draws him into a new life of loving — for indeed the lover “must live every day anew at the very origin of love and therein continue to probe and question it” — so too the thinker “must daily ask anew what truth is, although... this question is not the same as fruitless and destructive doubt.”²⁹ Balthasar’s *Theo-Logic* therefore attempts an account of truth’s *inexhaustibility*. Just as the lover never *comprehends* his beloved, no rationality can ever

²⁶ *TL* 1, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See Schindler, “Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge,” 594.

²⁹ *TL* 1, 25.

comprehend truth. Nor should knowledge ever desire to comprehend its object fully. Balthasar portrays knowledge as fundamentally *erotic*; it desires its object, yes, but it desires the object's mystery. As we shall discuss more fully below, the erotics of knowledge, like that of marital love, will the perpetual mystery of its object. The lover desires to receive his beloved ever anew; so too the knower, so that it might be struck again by the freshness of wonder and rapture. Knowledge, therefore, as a form of love, neither fideistic, insofar as it desires truly to *know*; nor rationalistic, insofar as refuses to *comprehend* its object, opting instead for the dazzlement of the object in her mystery. This is the operative form of Balthasar's epistemology, which shall be addressed more fully below.

Grounding knowledge in truth. Because Balthasar's epistemology is written under the transcendental of the true, it is necessarily tied to Being. Epistemology, as Balthasar conceives it, is never simply about the structures of the human act of knowing. It is instead the knowledge of something. This "something" is Being.³⁰ From the very beginning, then, Balthasar insists on the connection between ontology and epistemology, being and thought.³¹ He makes much of the word *Bewußtsein*, "consciousness."

³⁰ Balthasar rejects epistemological skepticism in no uncertain terms. Skepticism is unsatisfactory for Balthasar because it is *phenomenologically* untenable. Skepticism flies in the face of the "naive and unreflective" concept of truth that everyone has, at least until they are taught otherwise. This intuition of truth, common to all people, is that what appears, what is seen and known, is not a mere appearance, a phantasmic mimicry, dishonestly masquerading as Being. No, Balthasar insists that what appears *is* Being, and all people are intuitively, naively, aware of that. Every person is already familiar [*bekannt*] with Being, and "this familiarity of being is the innermost essence of truth" (Cf. *TL* 1, 37).

³¹ In this vein, Balthasar takes up a form of the Hegelian project. Like Hegel, Balthasar is concerned with the (re-)union of Being and knowledge and it is through the transcendental of the true that Balthasar sees that reunion occurring. There is a vital and ongoing interplay between ontology and epistemology throughout the *Theo-Logic*, but especially in the first volume; for indeed truth is both an ontological and an epistemological category. Truth involves the coming to awareness of the knowable reality of a thing. We must be clear here. Balthasar in no way is adopting the quest of absolute knowing that so beguiles Hegelian thought. The truth for Balthasar involves knowing *what is knowable*. As we shall see, this means more than anything that true knowledge is knowledge of the mystery of a thing. It is not an unlimited,

Bewußtsein is a compound word, consisting of *Bewußt* and *sein*. Consciousness, for Balthasar, means both “being conscious” and “being conscious” or “conscious being.” Balthasar argues that “[i]t is this being, then, that is immediately unveiled and present to consciousness. The thinking subject is always one that exists and recognizes that it does. In this way, it knows what being is.”³²

This immediately raises the issue of the relation between appearance and reality. For Balthasar, there cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between the two, but neither can the two have a merely nominal relation. He asserts (though, lamentably, without argument³³) that in consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), “being invades appearances.” The appearance is the way that Being, precisely as Being, is unveiled and apprehended.³⁴ All Being has the potential of being unveiled. There are not two “parts” of Being — the unveiled and the veiled. All Being is unveiled, but, paradoxically, it is unveiled as veiled. Being is always revealed and hidden at precisely the same time.³⁵

comprehensive and totalizing vision that solves the mystery of Being. It is rather a receptive, creative engagement or participation in that mystery.

³² *TL* 1, 37. Balthasar playfully appropriates Descartes, even as he undermines him, throughout the *Logic*. “We need only recall St. Augustine’s terse rejoinder to the man who doubt everything: At least the doubter is certain of his doubt, and, in being certain of his doubt, he is implicitly certain that he is thinking, and in being certain that he is thinking, he is certain that he exists” (36). Just as Augustine had to countered the skeptics in his *Contra academicos*, Balthasar counters the radical skepticism that grounds Descartes’ dogmatic epistemological certainty. The drive toward epistemological (and theological) mystery at the heart of *TL* 1 is, in many ways, a response to the legacy of Cartesianism.

³³ This is, as Kilby has pointed out, one of the decisive problems of Balthasar’s theological method. We will have opportunity to respond to this criticism later in the dissertation.

³⁴ Just as, metaphysically speaking, Being “noughts itself” in beings, here, epistemologically speaking, Being “noughts itself” in appearances.

³⁵ A concrete example of this might be seen in a marriage. Surely a man *knows* his wife, not comprehensively, but he knows her as the one who is always *more* than what he knows. He knows her truly when he knows that she is more than what he knows. This is also related to Plato’s negative thought: Socrates is the wisest man because he *knows* that he *does not know* (cf. Plato’s *aporia* of learning, and knowledge by way of recollection in *Meno*, 81D).

If this is true of Being, we have arrived at an initial description of its truth. Truth is the “unveiledness, uncoveredness, disclosedness, and unconcealment” of Being.³⁶ This is truth as *aletheia*.³⁷ Truth consists in the unveiling of Being: *being* appears and being *appears*.³⁸ According to Balthasar, it is the absolute property of Being to be truthful, that is, to be communicative by unveiling itself so as to be known.

This absolute property connotes a secondary, relative property that will prove essential for Balthasar’s conception of truth. This relative property is the existence of the subject *to whom* Being is unveiled and who recognizes Being *as such*. While it may be possible to imagine *a* being that is potentially, but not actually known, it is not possible to accept this for Being-as-such. If Being was unveiled only for itself, and not also for a conscious mind, it would remain locked up in itself, and not truly be unveiled.³⁹ So from the very beginning, truth, given with the nature of things, already demands a participatory epistemology.⁴⁰ This is part of the “dramatic personality,” the dialogicality, of

³⁶ *TL* 1, 37.

³⁷ This emphasis on *aletheia* again shows Heidegger’s influence on Balthasar. Yet Balthasar will go beyond Heidegger by emphasizing, not simply the Greek ideal of “unveiledness,” but also the Hebraic idea of truth as “fidelity.” Emphasizing the faithfulness of truth holds together the transcendentals of truth and goodness; both dimensions are necessary for Balthasar’s interpretation of truth as being co-extensive with love.

³⁸ We can see here the necessary groundwork for Balthasar’s theological aesthetics. The appearance of Being in its self-disclosure, in its *aletheia*, necessarily communicates itself as a form, an image which must be seen and, in this, perceived. A theological aesthetics is not an aesthetic embellishment of theological truth but the very possibility of this truth coming to be known. This is why, as I shall argue in the following chapter, the truth of God takes on a concrete form in Jesus Christ — the incarnation reveals (in fact *is*) the truth of all things. Or, to put it more radically (and accurately), the incarnation is nothing other than the truth of Being.

³⁹ This claim is a nascent form of Balthasarian dialogicality. His target here is Hegel’s dialectic in which the Other, which gives rise to the Concept’s coming to self-consciousness, is described in negative, antagonistic terms. Countering Hegel, Balthasar conceives of the Other as a positive relation, as that which lovingly bestows an identity to the “concept” through the rhythm of its receptivity and donation.

⁴⁰ Because of the finitude of human knowing, Balthasar’s understanding of truth already brushes up against the necessity of an eternal and transcendent knower. Thus, the human act of knowing — measuring — is a relative and temporal participation in God’s absolute and eternal measuring.

knowledge. It is axiomatic for Balthasar that Being is relational; it must always already be related to some self-consciousness.⁴¹

What Balthasar's account of truth as *aletheia* ultimately guarantees is a certain optimism that what is unveiled is, in fact, Being itself: "If being is really disclosed in its appearance, and if, in being disclosed, it can bear witness to itself, then all suspicion of mere seeming, illusion, or deception vanishes to make room for a certainty that reflects in consciousness the firmness, validity, and reliability of being. *The knowledge is genuine because the thing known is itself genuine.*"⁴² Thus to his previous definition of truth as unveiledness, Balthasar adds the attribute *emeth*, fidelity. As *emeth*, truth ends what Balthasar calls "a bad infinity" of epistemological uncertainty, suspicion, and conjecture because one can trust the validity (the fidelity) of that which is unveiled. For Balthasar, truth is the *faithful* unveiling of Being.⁴³

To elaborate his initial definition of truth as faithful unveiling, Balthasar makes recourse to the language of ecstasy and *eros*. Truth involves an objective opening of Being to that which is beyond itself. Truth as *aletheia*, as unconcealment, opens itself for the subject and ecstatically offers itself to the subject's knowledge. But it does not open

⁴¹ Confusingly, Balthasar suggests that this self-consciousness could be identical to the unveiled being itself. While this may be true within a Trinitarian logic, Balthasar does not offer a worldly analogy that reconciles his claim that self-consciousness may be the same as the unveiled being with his previous assertion that being must unveil itself to some other in order to be truly unveiled.

⁴² *TL* 1, 38. Emphasis added.

⁴³ Understanding truth as *emeth* also opens up a "good infinity," the limitless depth of Being's mystery: "this closure of uncertainty and its bad infinity is the un-closing and unsealing of a true infinity of fruitful possibilities and situations... Once being has become evident, this evidence immediately harbors the promise of further truth; it is a door, an entrance, a key" to a ongoing journey into further truth. Counter to many of the postmodern deconstructions of truth that senselessly equate discourse about truth with narrowness, restriction, dogmatism and oppression, for Balthasar, "Truth never imprisons or constricts the knower. No, truth is always an opening, not just to itself and in itself, but to further truth... It opens up the prospect of hitherto unknown territory" (*TL* 1, 39). We can see here that Balthasar does strive to avoid any form of Hegelian absolute knowing. Truth is always situated for Balthasar, and can only be received *subjectively*. Truth is thus the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity — their mutuality in the rhythmic interplay of gift-receptivity, dialogicality, love.

itself only as “this or that” *thing* but also as Being in general. At the same time, truth as *emeth* opens up the subject to the “invitation to entrust oneself to this promised manifestness, to follow the certitude that truth imparts, and to give oneself over to this movement, which is already underway.”⁴⁴ The ecstasy of truth thus indicates how it can be rationally *apprehensible* without being *comprehensible*: “the singular being becomes the place where we apprehend and penetrate the meaning and essence of a sample of ‘world’. But this specimen of the world is only a tiny excerpt of Being as a whole, which, while unveiled in principle in this bit of being, nonetheless remains transcendent and veiled in its totality... For this very reason, it awakens in the knower a[n erotic] yearning for *more*.”⁴⁵

The act of knowing therefore consists in bringing together these seemingly contrary experiences — that of *possessing* the object of knowledge in such a way that one has “the experience of being flooded by something that overflows knowledge in the heart of knowledge itself, or, to put it another way, the awareness of participating in something that is infinitely greater in itself than what comes to light in its disclosure.”⁴⁶ This sense of being flooded opens the subject up in receptivity to the ever greater disclosure of Being’s truth.

Objective and Subjective Mutuality

A participative epistemology must address the relation between subject and object, mediating between a strict objectivism and a reductive subjectivism. Yet much of modern epistemology after Kant sundered the natural and mutual relationship between

⁴⁴ *TL* 1, 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

subject and object,⁴⁷ pitting intellect and will against each other and setting the stage for the kind of titanic Idealism that Balthasar critiques. Balthasar, in contrast to those modern epistemologies, argues that both the subject and the object reach their “full potential” in the ecstatic extension of their boundaries, and their standing outside themselves *in* and *for* the other.⁴⁸ There is an ecstatic, dialogical, and therefore participatory character to the relationship between them. This subjective-objective polarity (along with its attendant rhythm of possession-grasping) forms the inner structure of human reason:

Rationality, taken in the narrower sense of the (in one way or another) conclusive disclosure of being in knowledge, requires, as its condition of possibility, the disclosure of being as a whole, which is anything but conclusive. The foreground, namely, the individual being susceptible of definition, becomes visible only against the background of being as such, which, though present to awareness, is infinite and, therefore, cannot be defined. Rationality, taken in its comprehensive sense, thus entails two things at once: certainty of [subjectively] possessing some being as it in fact is — within a[n objective] totality of being that, while disclosed in principle, *in concreto* always remains .⁴⁹

In the act of “possessing” Being in knowledge, the object is enclosed by the subject. But at precisely this moment of possession, the subject find herself “initiated” [*inittiert*] into the limitless realm of disclosed Being. Balthasar’s use of the term “initiated” is worth noting. Following the mystagogical imagery of his *Epilogue*, the

⁴⁷ Dupré analyzes this quite helpfully in *Passage to Modernity*, 60ff.

⁴⁸ For Balthasar, “the very act of appropriation is an act of expropriation: the mind, one might say, leaves its own home, its mother and father, in order to cleave to its object and become one with it... In a word, it is not only the will that represents the soul’s movement beyond itself, but reason, too, is *essentially ecstatic*” (Schindler, “Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge, 596). For a parallel of this kind of idea in Aquinas, see *ST I-II*, 28, 3. The difference between Aquinas and Balthasar on the ecstasy of reason (or the apprehensive power) is, according to Schindler, that Balthasar sees ecstasy of the normal operation of reason while Aquinas sees the ecstasy of reason in unique situations of “prophetic inspiration.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

knower who awakens to *particular* being (through, for example, the sight of her mother's smile) is initiated, drawn into, a perpetual unfolding of all Being.

This initiation consists of the subject's act of *measurement*. Intelligence measures objects — this is how they can be known. According to Balthasar, knowledge is possible only when an object is measured by a measuring subject. An object can be an object of knowledge only when it presents itself *as* an object, that is, as something that has already been measured, and not just potentially so. Measurement is what makes an object “this” rather than “that.” No object exists as a *pure* thing-in-itself but is itself always the recipient of a prior measurement by a subject.⁵⁰ Balthasar's epistemology thus turns on the fundamental mutuality, even relationality, of subject and object.

What this means in regard to truth, is that knowledge “happens” in two ways. First, it occurs through an *adaequatio intellectus et rei*: “when knowledge, by virtue of an ‘adequation’ to the thing as it really is, lets itself be determined and measured by the thing.”⁵¹ The object provides the decisive “measure” of the subject's knowledge. Yet if

⁵⁰ Of course, in making this claim, Balthasar gestures toward a necessary transcendent third beyond the polarity of subject and object: “For an object to be knowable, it must not only be measured in principle but also already measured in fact. Now, since the object is not measured by itself insofar as it *is* an object, and since the finite subject already presupposes that the object is in fact measured, it follows that the object's measure must lie in the hands of the infinite subject, God. A being that was not known by God could not be known by a finite subject, for the simple reason that it would not exist in the first place. But it would not exist because, being unknown by God, it would have no measure for its being and thus no truth. All things, therefore, stand completely unveiled before the divine knowledge, and by that same knowledge they are measured. Their truth lies with God, and whoever wants to know them must know them in their adequation to the mind of God. This does not mean that the finite subject has no immediate relation to the object, as if, in order to know the object, it had to make a detour via God. It does mean, however, that the knowability of the object stems from its being actually known by God and that he alone knows its full truth” (*TL* 1, 56). We will elaborate on this idea later in this chapter when we turn to the importance of *Gestalt* for Balthasar's epistemology.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41. Balthasar here is quite intentionally invoking the classic Scholastic maxim — *aedaequatio intellectus et rei* — in order to extend its meaning in the post-Kantian world. Balthasar is not attempting to supplant scholasticism with a “Balthasarian philosophy,” but rather is resourcing the tradition in a creative way. He endeavors to move beyond the impasse between enclosed and purely objective “realism” and the self-positing, world-creating “I” of Idealism through a creative, receptive, critical appropriation of the thought of the past.

Balthasar stopped here, the subject would be reduced to merely a passive recorder of objective facts. This does not do justice to subjectivity at all. Balthasar argues that subjectivity “in its full sense includes freedom and...creativity *ad extra*.”⁵² While the object always remains the measure of its own truth, it is the subject’s creative freedom that is the active agent of that measuring. In other words, the object offers itself as a *possible* object of knowledge that becomes an *actual* one through the creative agency of the subject. Further, because an object’s disclosure is meaningful only when it is disclosed to a subject, that subject’s “freedom and spontaneity include the ability, not only to apprehend truth, but also positively to bring it into being [*setzen*].”⁵³ And so Balthasar’s epistemology turns on the mutuality between subject and object. The two participate in each other, as we shall outline below, but this participation is of a decisively *dramatic* character for Balthasar: the subject receives and creatively *performs* objective truth.⁵⁴

The object. An epistemology such as Balthasar’s must consider the true nature of the object; it must not focus solely on the conditions of the object’s knowability. For Balthasar, the order of knowing must always correspond to the order of Being.⁵⁵ The type of ontology needed for a participatory, dramatic, epistemology must involve more than the projection of the structure of knowing upon the object; indeed, Being’s laws are

⁵² Ibid., 56.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ There is here, as everywhere in Balthasar, an analogy to divine truth. “Worldly knowledge, then, can be distinguished from God’s purely creative knowledge only if the measure of its truth is distributed between subject and object” (*TL* 1, 42).

⁵⁵ This will be crucial for our conclusion. If the truth of Being is the divine love as revealed in Christ, then the corresponding form of knowing will be a participation and performance of that divine love in Christ. Hence, the saints at prayer is Balthasar’s image of a genuine theo-logic.

not necessarily identical with those of knowledge. Objective Being demands an original analysis. And, perhaps unsurprisingly at this point, Balthasar's account of objective nature is one that is itself constituted by receptivity.

To understand the true nature of objective Being, we must return again to the theme of measurement. It is only when Being is unveiled in actuality that it is inwardly illumined and measured in fact. Only thus does it become an object that can offer itself *as* an object of knowledge. If Being is ever to be knowable to a subject, it must have always been measured already by the infinite Subject. This means, for Balthasar, that the truth of all created things lies primarily with God. God's "measurement", or his idea of the object, is that object's *eidos*. "Their truth lies with God, and whoever wants to know them must know them in their adequation to the mind of God."⁵⁶ Finite knowledge of the truth is an entering into, a participation in, God's own knowledge of that finite Being. We should take care not to misunderstand Balthasar at this point. He is not suggesting some sort of Idealist "absolute knowing" where the finite subject knows all things with some sort of divine, objective knowledge. No, Balthasar knows that truth is always "situated" in subjectivity and can only be known thereby. What he is saying, however, is that God's knowledge of Being, as its absolute source, serves as the *exemplar* of knowledge that determines every object and all of its relations.⁵⁷

Further, the divine eidetic plan for each object means that each object is a "living entelechy;" it is teleological and has a meaning [*Sinn*] beyond itself. Because the *eidos* of

⁵⁶ *TL* 1, 56. Of course, Balthasar's language of "adequation" here is not accidental but rather allies him with the Thomist tradition. On the Hebraic, Pauline, and Johannine roots of the divine *eidos* of creation, see Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life* (Burns and Oates Publishers, 1955).

⁵⁷ As we shall see in the next chapter, Balthasar's peculiar turn to exemplarism here introduces a decidedly Bonaventurian, Christological element into his religious epistemology.

the object lies hidden in God, Balthasar is able claim that the truth of the object always transcends its factual existence. This raises the important but complicated relation between the object's *appearance* (its showing itself forth in its existence) and its *essence* (what it is "in itself" — insofar as any object can be "in itself").⁵⁸ We shall address this issue below; in the meantime we must simply note that, for Balthasar, the truth of the object always is more, though not other than, its appearance:

And so we see before us a progressive, seamless transcendence of the truth of the object. On the first level, truth dwells within the object and holds the measure of its existence. Truth on this level expresses only what the object in fact is at any given moment. But, as a living entelechy, truth rises above the factual level to achieve the unity of a plan. Finally, this entelechy is itself transcended in an overarching plan knowable only to the providence that orders creatures in relation to one another. The mysterious center and summit of this providence is the total idea that God in his sovereign freedom has of an entity, by which he measures it and which he reveals to no other thing in its totality.⁵⁹

There are two points we must note here. The first is that there is no such thing as a "bare fact" insofar as no object is strictly identical to its factual existence. The object's eidetic transcendence is what grounds Balthasar's account of the mysteriousness of the object, and of Being. Because the fullness of the object lies solely in God and *not* even in the object itself, all things have a *fundamentally* mysterious quality to them. The second notable point follows on this. Because the object is mysterious, even unto itself, *all* knowledge of that object is an event of revelation, not just from the object, but also from its absolute, divine source. God himself presents the creature's idea (*eidos*) to that creature. The revelatory quality of knowledge means that the object itself is constituted by receptivity. Its openness and disponibility before its absolute measure defines it *as* an

⁵⁸ As Aquinas insists, "We cannot exhaust the essence of even a fly."

⁵⁹ *TL* 1, 58.

object. The object is not static, but is rather characterized by its ongoing receptivity of the unfolding communication of its eidetic plan from God. This allows Balthasar to conclude, perhaps surprisingly, that the object is *being* that, at its core, is *becoming* in the mind of God, insofar as it always receives itself anew from God.

Knowledge, then, consists in this: the subject must endeavor to know the relation of the object's immanent *morphe* (that is, through its appearance) to its transcendent *eidos*. But this is possible only if the subject endeavors to behold the object in, before, and with, God. In other words, knowledge occurs only in a double participation: that of the subject and the object in each other and of both in God.

The subject. Balthasar conceives of subjectivity as having two poles: the creative and the receptive. The intellect both receives truth (*intellectus passibilis*) and produces it (*intellectus agens*). Reason's functions are a "receptive, consenting self-abandonment [*Hingabe*]...and judgement."⁶⁰ Knowledge moves as the balanced arbitration of these two functions. Subjective knowing is therefore contemplative as *theoria* and creative as *poesis*, or, in Balthasarian language, as the aesthetic and the dramatic.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *TL* 1, 58.

⁶¹ It is interesting to note that Balthasar opts at this point for the "spiritual" language of *theoria*. What is unique about Balthasar's use of *theoria* throughout his work is that, rather than understanding it as the apex of the philosophical and Christian life, it is actually the beginning of both of these forms of life. Also noteworthy is that truth as "judgment," the subject of Kant's third critique, is important for Balthasar. He intentionally inverts Kant's scheme by putting judgment, both as an aspect of the true end of the beautiful, at the beginning rather than at the end of his philosophical and theological project. Lastly, it is worth noting that Balthasar's language of *Hingabe* is critical for both his philosophy and his theology of the saints. Indeed, it is *Hingabe* that forms the possibility of knowledge in his epistemology as well as being one of the chief characteristics of the saints. Both forms of *Hingabe*, the epistemological and the saintly, are, we shall see, possible because they share in the *Hingabe* or *kenosis* of the divine Logos.

Subjective knowledge begins, according to Balthasar, in self-consciousness.⁶² Self-consciousness is self-measurement. A being that measures itself is called a “subject.” This subject is full of light and transparent to itself. The subject has, in a word, self-consciousness. This is, as above, the coincidence of being and consciousness. This self-consciousness grants the subject access to the inner dimension of itself and to the outer dimension of Being. These two disclosures are identical:

If the disclosure of the subject’s inner dimension were primary, while the disclosure of the outer dimension of objects were merely posterior, the original measure with which the subject measured and judged things would be exclusively subjective. Because it would always be applying *itself* to things, it would never attain objective knowledge. If, conversely, the dimension of the world were disclosed before the subject’s own inner dimension, the subject would have no measuring stick to apply to objects, because this measuring stick has to be the full measurement of being. But the full measure of being entails self-consciousness. The coincidence of the two disclosures — that of the self and that of the world — guarantees the true objectivity both of the knowledge of the self and of the knowledge of the world.⁶³

It is a being’s self-consciousness that allows it to be open to that which is external and other than itself. Self-consciousness is the key to receptivity and vice versa. Receptivity, however, is not an abstract cognitive ability. It is rather a form of genuine hospitality, that is to say, an invitation of participation. There are a few significant consequences to Balthasar’s claim here. The first is that there is a clear correspondence between a being’s self-consciousness (or self-possession) and its ability to host that which is other than itself. Balthasar here adopts the language of interiority. A hospitable interiority is possible only through self-consciousness, the act of measuring one’s own being. It is this self-consciousness that allows one to recognize and receive the other *as*

⁶² We have already seen how Balthasar’s treatment of consciousness implies the harmonious mutuality of subject and object — “consciousness” *is* the awareness of Being.

⁶³ *TL* 1, 44.

other.⁶⁴ Plants and animals, though they are receptive to that which is outside of them, have no subjectivity and thus no ability to accept the other as other. The external world is not an object to them because they themselves are not subjects: “The world is unlocked in its objectivity only to man, because his self-consciousness gives him the measure of being.”⁶⁵ Only the human can know the world as the world.

The second thing of note is that this subjective receptivity involves a reciprocity with the object. It is not the case that the subject stands complete in itself and hosts the object as a stranger. The subject’s knowing is not *monological* but *dialogical*.⁶⁶ The subject’s knowledge is not an all-knowingness but an attitude of disponibility to the other, an openness to the other’s communication of itself. The subject may have the measure of Being but it does not have an all-encompassing, all-penetrating vision of Being in its totality.

All of Being is *potentially* unveiled and known, though not yet in actuality. There must exist in the subject a certain intellectual *poverty* and *humility* before the object, a surrender (*Hingabe*). The ontological poverty of the subject fuels her receptivity. This poverty indicates that truth cannot exist without the exchange between subject and object: “self-knowledge and the disclosure of the world are not just simultaneous but intrinsically inseparable.”⁶⁷ The self-consciousness that gives rise to subjectivity should not be

⁶⁴ Of course, as the dialogicians would insist, this interiority is itself a gift that arises objectively *from* the Thou. Balthasar would, on one level agree — his entire phenomenology of the mother’s face confirms this (Cf. *GL* 5, 613ff). But more primarily, the Thou from which the subject receives her interiority must be, for Balthasar, the divine I.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁶ The dialogicality of subjective knowing will be incredibly significant for Balthasar’s entire theology of truth. In fact, for Balthasar, knowledge, being, love, all reflect the transcendent, divine dialogicality between Father and Son. It is within this dialogue that all other dialogues exist.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

misunderstood as primordial self-preoccupation that only ventures outside itself *after* comprehending its own ego. No, it is rather the case that “one knows oneself simultaneously with actually being addressed by another’s truth. The subject receives the measure of being in the form of self-consciousness only insofar as another summons it to apply this measure to a truth not its own.”⁶⁸ The subject *comes to herself*, and hence to knowledge, only through her being addressed in the dialogue with the object.⁶⁹

According to Balthasar, subjectivity is never monadically at rest in itself. Subjectivity is *always already* ecstatic. It involves a genuine engagement with and participation in its objects. This is not a passive participation but rather the lively, dialogical participation of communication. It is dramatic participation that is from the beginning both receptive and creative.

It is at this point in his account of subjectivity that Balthasar most clearly articulates his thesis about the ontological nature of truth. He demonstrates how a study of the nature of knowledge leads inevitably to the fundamental mystery of knowledge, and of Being itself, and from there on to love. It is his emphasis on subjective receptivity that allows Balthasar to make the gradual reduction from self-consciousness to love. For him, receptivity is only possible if it is motivated by love. Indeed, as Balthasar will show, it is love alone that allows genuine knowledge.

Mutuality of subject and object. It is the natural, mutual relationship of subject and object that Balthasar seeks to reclaim by emphasizing the “ontological dimension” of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁹ We will note here that even the objectivity of the object is a form of subjectivity, insofar as the object, from its interiority, present itself to the knowing subject in the dialogue of self-presentation and donation.

truth: the illuminating subject that knows Being through itself. Balthasar conceives of the two poles of knowledge coming into fullness only through the ecstasy of their mutual indwelling and participation.⁷⁰ Each has a mission to and for the other; if either were to remain enclosed in itself, then knowledge could not actually occur. But Balthasar's unique contribution to this problem is that he articulates the meeting place of subject and object as "form," *Gestalt*. In this way, Balthasar attempts to bridge the gap between realism and idealism in his logic.

When it comes to the object, Balthasar resists any conception of straight objectivity that would render the realm of the object enclosed, self-sufficient, and divine. He conceives the object rather coming to itself in the space provided by the subject. The object is dramatic and the sensorium of the subject is the stage of its drama: "Without the subject's sensory space, [the object] would not be what it is; it would be incapable of fulfilling its *raison d'être*, the idea that it is supposed to embody."⁷¹ But why is the divine idea (*eidos*) of the object not sufficient for the object's coming to be? Why does the object need also a *finite* space in order to come into being? Balthasar distinguishes here between the object's "ontological truth" and the "truth of knowledge." The object's ontological truth resides within itself (or better said, it is hidden in God's idea of the object), whereas the truth of knowledge "consists solely in the subject's conformity to

⁷⁰ "The revelation of the object can occur only in the space provided by the subject. This space alone, in fact, has ready the creative light to draw from the object possibilities that it can no more unfold by itself than a seed can develop without sunlight. On the other hand, the revelation of the subject can occur only in an encounter with the object. Without the resistance of the object, it could never transform its possible light into actuality, just as sunlight becomes a brightness only when it enters into the medium of air. The subject's self-knowledge can reach its actuality only by taking a detour by way of the knowledge of another; only in going out of itself, in creatively serving the world, does the subject become aware of its purpose and, therefore, of its essence" (*TL* 1, 62).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

this already established [ontological] fact.”⁷² This raises once again the issue of “appearance” and “reality.” The object presents itself in the world through nothing other than its appearance — its self-offering to the subject. Once the appearance of the object has made its home in subjectivity, so to speak, that appearance may convey its “full ontological weight.”⁷³

Balthasar thus tries to mediate between what he calls a “naive realism” and “critical philosophy” — an idealism in the legacy of Kant. Realism often underestimates the ontological significance of appearance while critical philosophy often overlooks appearances altogether. The critical philosophy that Balthasar bemoans is such that parses out the roles of subjectivity and objectivity in the construction of an object of cognition. This, he fears, often results in a severe impoverishment of worldly truth, giving subjectivity little, if anything, to contribute to the object. The logic of this critical approach denies aspects of an object’s appearance deemed inessential to it (its secondary qualities like sound and color) and reduces its truth to “a few abstract, non-sensory concepts such as being-in-itself, substance, and so forth.” While this *does* resist a radical subjectivism, it ends up “reducing both epistemological and ontological truth to a bare minimum, with the result that the whole *expressive* field of the senses is lost for truth.”⁷⁴

It kills the form, and thus the beauty, of truth. We must instead understand the dramatic

⁷² *TL* 1, 63.

⁷³ “For it now comes to light that this appearance within the subject is the expressive field of the soul. A smiling face is not simply a dull reflection of inner joy but rather its embodiment, its communication, its formation, its liberation. In the same way, the appearance of the object is not a pale duplicate of its self-quieting essence but the necessary unfolding in which its inner plenitude becomes manifest for the first time” (*TL* 1, 65).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 66. Emphasis added. As we shall see, the specificity of truth’s *expression* is critical to Balthasar’s account. This is especially true when we get to his Christology, for he interprets Christ as eternal *expression* of the Father. The particularities of Christ’s *appearance* (his flesh, his Jewishness, even his deadness) are critical to the truth that Christ reveals.

nature of the object, that the object exists for the subject not as fullness to poverty, but in a relation of mutual fulfillment. The object realizes itself by means of the subject.

Balthasar thus conceives of understanding as *co-act*. Understanding is neither the object's impression on a passively receptive mind (a kind of empiricism) nor a unilateral act of the mind upon a passive object (as in idealism).

Mediating between these subjective and objective reductions is Balthasar's concept of *Gestalt*. It is the "intelligible manifestation" that is neither a purely subjective nor a purely objective accomplishment.⁷⁵ *Gestalt* is, rather, the knowable "third thing" between subject and object, the "fruit" of their mutual, ecstatic encounter. The subject rises up out of itself in a creative inhabitation of its object.⁷⁶ The knowable object is, in some way, "completed" by being known: no object exists for itself alone but always exists "for us." The knower's ecstatic indwelling (*conformitas*) with the object realizes the object's own nature. But at the same time, *Gestalt* is something more (or other) than the reality of the object known. *Gestalt* is the object's "being-for" the knower; it is Being's manifestation of itself in a particular, concrete form of appearance. But, just as in all appearances,⁷⁷ what appears always points beyond itself to some unseen, unknowable mysterious depth. *Gestalt* is, therefore, the home of both subject and object and the possibility of knowledge insofar as it is home to both the manifestation *and* the mystery of the object's truth.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Schindler, "Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge," 593.

⁷⁶ Cf. Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998).170ff on the counter-spatialization of the liturgy.

⁷⁷ See below, "Appearance" for an elaboration on this idea.

⁷⁸ Operative in the background here is the scholastic understanding that knowledge involves the abstraction from particulars toward the *quidditas* or universal "what-ness" of a thing. Aquinas, for example, will say that "the soul *first* apprehends its object intellectually, by abstracting the intelligible

The subject's participation in the object should therefore be conceived of as an *active receptivity*. The subject is, as we've said, not merely a passive receptacle for the object. The subject's receptivity is laborious. Knowledge is an act of service, an obedience and willed conformity to the object. Knowledge begins, not with ordering judgment, but with "the unannounced invasion of a motley jumble of objects that get thrown into the subject's unoccupied space."⁷⁹ The subject is expropriated⁸⁰ by the world, laboriously bent with the task of sifting, until it "grasps that the world is just as truly in itself." The subject's obedience gradually allows it to penetrate the appearance of the object, to discover the truth of the object *in* (not apart from) that appearance: "The subject learns to understand sensible words as an expression of an intelligible content, to read them as a signification and revelation of a sense that is immanent in the sign itself."⁸¹ The task of the subject is to become "cosmoform" — that is, to become *in-formed* more and more by the truth of the world.⁸² Objects enter into the subject who

species — the essence — of the thing, becoming 'intentionally' identical with it through the act of understanding... and thus quite literally 'internalizing' its intelligible form...insofar as 'the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter', some immaterial 'aspect' of it must be abstracted from it for such an adequation to be possible: this is the form, which is distinct from the object's matter and thus can be distinguished by the active power of the mind (active intellect) as an intelligible species... 'For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in existing: since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing' (Schindler, "Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge," 581). Aquinas here insists that what dwells immaterially in the intellect is the thing-in-itself, an idea that Kant will reject in favor of our "concept" of the thing-in-itself. Balthasar is attempting to mediate between the two approaches though he leans a bit more, though not uncritically, toward realism. See his emphasis on the situated-ness of truth in *TL* 1, 179ff.

⁷⁹ *TL* 1, 63.

⁸⁰ Interestingly, the idea of expropriation runs through Balthasar's account of the mystics and the saints as well. The mystic, he says, will always find herself "expropriated" from the Church — and this is precisely her mission *for* the Church. The mystic, like the subject, is expropriated by love so that she can see and know truth more fully. See *GL* 1, 410ff.

⁸¹ *TL* 1, 63.

⁸² Balthasar is influenced at this point by Maurice Blondel's idea of *conformitas*. For Blondel, truth comes, not through conformity to some kind of "objective reality" that is cold and impersonal. It comes

then gives them a determinative shape. But in the mutuality of this participation, the subject's intellect itself changes by being molded to conform more closely with the sea of objects that it carries within itself.

Knowledge is not therefore domination, or a will-to-power. It is rather the creative intellect of the subject (*intellectus agens*) as moderated by the receptive intellect (*intellectus passibilis*). The subject's self-forgetfulness and self-abandonment (*Hingabe*), allows her to receive the object. The epistemological subject willfully abandons herself for the sake of receiving the object. The *Hingabe* of love precedes knowledge.⁸³

Freedom and Mystery

The relationship between subject and object as outlined above presupposes an ontological root that underlies the mutual surrender of subject and object. This root is love: love must characterize the ecstasies of both subject and object, as well as their indwelling and participation, because, it is their mutual ecstatic participation that constitutes their natures as an act of freedom. Freedom is the central component of Balthasar's epistemological vision because it is the only possibility of love. Love presupposes freedom as the possibility of the ethical decision *for* an other. Freedom is

rather through conformity with the *givenness* of the object, with the "will-willing" and "will-willed." Blondel's is a philosophy that is very much in accord with the movement toward a personalist, agapeic interpretation of truth. Truth comes, not solely through the factuality of the object, but also attends and corresponds with the object's act of giving itself. For Blondel, this also means the *conformitas* between mind and life. Cf. Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2010), 149ff, and 311-312. One knows, according to Blondel, not through a mere act of intellection but through the unfolding of action in one's human life.

⁸³ "Accordingly, the knowing subject's fundamental attitude must be the posture that is required by the phenomenology itself: total, indifferent readiness to receive, which presupposes the exclusive desire to receive and reproduce the phenomenon as purely as possible." In this way, knowledge is "objective" — that is, it is *justice*: "inasmuch as with incorruptible honesty it acknowledges, and metes out to the object, what in fact is its due" (TL 1, 76).

only possible if both subject and object possess a certain *interiority* from which they make their loving offering to the world.

Freedom and Interiority

Balthasar wants to distinguish between a being's external appearance (*Erscheinungen*) in the realm of the subject's sensorium, and that which produces this appearance. In other words, Balthasar is broaching the problem common to all epistemology in the wake of Kant, namely the relationship between the appearance of a thing and the thing-in-itself.

The interiority of beings is precisely what defines them as spirit. It is the "more" that shines within and through appearance, and which preserves the mystery of the so-called thing-in-itself. Without interiority, every thing that exists could be made subject to the penetrating, comprehensive gaze of the natural sciences. But, as it stands, the natural sciences, in studying a thing's *phenomenal* appearance, can only get hints, suggestions, and intimations of the essence that is not directly available to sense perception.

Yet these intimations are just that. There is no dogmatic certainty, no encompassing vision, that comprehends the full reality of a thing. These intimations are always provisional hypotheses that can (and perhaps should) be superseded by fuller, richer conceptions that make better sense of the mystery of the thing-in-itself. Exact science "is no more and no less than a never-ending attempt to woo the core of the material world, which is not directly available to sense perception."⁸⁴

Balthasar identifies three particular "types" of interiority of created being: that of the vegetative, that of the animal, and that of the human being. Each of these has its own

⁸⁴ *TL* 1, 85.

“intimate-public-secret.” Each in its own way is permanently concealed while at the same time permanently divulged. Its appearance is the outward manifestation of its hidden essence, an essence that is revealed, divulged, unveiled only through freedom.⁸⁵

But the observer, the one who beholds this process, is aware that she has not penetrated the very heart of life through the outward manifestations of any particular life. She *perceives* that the possibilities of life are abundantly *greater* than what she has seen, even if these possibilities are not *other* than what she has beheld.⁸⁶ She recognizes that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the outward manifestation of the thing and its inner essence. The being of a thing is always more than what is on display, just as the truth of a painting is not exhausted when one beholds the collection of brushstrokes on canvas. For Balthasar, the depth of the thing radiates in and through the surface.⁸⁷

The meaning of an object “so utterly eludes exhaustive investigation that it can continue to engage inquirers until the end of time yet never ends up as a heap of unmysterious, completely surveyable facts.”⁸⁸ And yet, the knower recognizes that she beholds nothing more than “the primitive movement from an inexhaustible inside into an

⁸⁵ It may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that vegetive life has interiority. It is, after all, sub-rational; its essence is simple. It seems more plausible to say that the essential simplicity of vegetive life means that its meaning is obvious and indeed superficial — meaning that it is its appearance, that its essence lies open because it is a living life. As a living life, it manifests itself in its outward manifestations: “We see the development of the seed, as it breaks through the hard soil, unfolds, spreads out leaf by leaf, and finally brings forth the unexpected miracle of the blossom - perhaps the most eloquent word of unspeaking nature. We see how this complete form finally begins to decline and, at the very point where we suppose the end has come, surprises us with the gift of fruit and its lovely ambiguity: the ability to be consumed in the earth for the sake of new growth or in the mouth of higher beings for the sake of their nourishment. Seeing all of this, then, the knower cannot say that he has grasped nothing of the mystery of [its] life... The living being unveils itself by living its life: it unfolds this meaning stage by stage with an almost exaggerated obviousness. It displays nothing other than itself” (TL 1, 85).

⁸⁶ Balthasar is operating here with a distinctly *sacramental* logic, which will be explored more fully in subsequent chapters.

⁸⁷ See also David Bentley Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2004), 201ff.

⁸⁸ TL 1, 85.

always determinately formed outside. Things thereby show that they live their own life and that the point of their experience is not simply limited to being an object of some knowledge.”⁸⁹ They are rather “silent words” — *logoi* — things that rely on a subject to interpret and articulate their silent life to the world. The subject penetrates the intimacy of their interiority, to whatever extent is possible, and expresses it to the world.⁹⁰

Only the human is free in this created realm. Freedom in the human is that which lies between the spirit’s self-possession — its intimacy of being in its interiority — and its self-expression. The human has been bestowed with the ability to administer his own reality self-consciously. Because of this, man is the first creature that can speak both truth *and* untruth.⁹¹

In vegetative and animal life, truth consists in the relation between interior essence and exterior appearance. But in the human person, it is the subject herself who possesses the measure between itself and its expression. Balthasar asserts that “Being coincides with consciousness in self-consciousness, thus becoming its own object.”⁹² In

⁸⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁹⁰ The same movement of interiority applies to animal life as well, with the added complication that fundamentally changes epistemology: the animal is not object only but is also subject (at least in a limited sense). Knowledge can no longer be an act of a subject over and against an object. Rather it is an event that occurs between subjects, within a network of subjects and subjective images, or forms, of the world [*Weltbilder*]. This subjectivity deepens intimacy and interiority and it thrusts knowledge into a new rhythm of renunciation, self-giving, and receptivity. Bestial subjectivity, indeed subjectivity in general, is being-for-itself. This is the prerequisite for the free act of self-giving and self-disclosure. “Whoever has being-for-himself has, of course, the capacity to express himself outwardly, but he does not have the capacity to get rid of his essential solitude.” Subjectivity assumes the essential intimacy, indeed even solitude, of being. This is where a type of spiritual freedom enters the picture. For knowledge to be possible between subjects, one must renounce her self-enclosedness, give of herself to a willing, receptive other. Animals express themselves; their subjectivity participates in the exterior communication of themselves: in the dog’s wagging tail, in the tiger’s low growl, in the cat’s contented purring. Animals “have the freedom to express themselves outwardly in some form of audible or inaudible language. But they do not yet have the freedom to express themselves when and how they wish” (*TL* 1, 92).

⁹¹ This will be an important concept for Balthasar’s logical exposition of soteriology. What Christ heals is “the lie” that created Being embraces through Adam.

⁹² *TL* 1, 92.

a human, being reveals itself *to* itself in an illuminated self-consciousness. This revelation thus enables a sharing of that revelation to others. But the crucial change here is that this revelation is now an act of freedom. The human is predisposed to communication but not impelled by nature nor can be compelled by an other.

This freedom results in an “entirely new attitude” in knowledge. The human’s free manifestation of himself in exterior signs need not depend solely upon natural symbols. Rather, the subject may freely unveil himself genuinely without ever giving up himself utterly. The human unveils and veils himself in the same act of disclosure, being-for-himself and being-for-another at once. The subject’s relation between content and expression is not determined but free. The self-communication of the subject is not therefore merely an expression of the internal world but rather a *testimony* [*Zeugnis*], and its truth is *fidelity*. In humanity, the interior word is not forced outward in determinative forms. It emerges creatively, as disclosure and trust and, most importantly, as *free* surrender. It is freedom that is the condition of the possibility of *Hingabe*, of subjectivity that presents itself as an object. What occurs in exterior manifestation is a willful transference of being-for-itself to being-for-another. This is the spiritual freedom of humanity.

But of course humanity is not pure spirit. Man is also animal and, as such, bound to the rhythms of interiority of sub-spiritual creation. This is especially the case because man’s self-possession is not absolute and thus can never be absolute being-for-itself. Its self-knowledge is, quite literally, “essentially” lacking. The human spirit can know its existence and aspects of its quiddity, but its gaze cannot penetrate its own essence. Indeed, man is always a mystery unto himself. According to his phenomenology, the

human spirit remains ever bound to the “receptivity of a corporeal sensorium.” The human spirit exists together with human animality and together they are marked by a determinative receptivity. The spirit “comes to itself” in self-possession only through a logically prior dispossession in which the spirit rises up with and for another.

“Receptivity is thus like a deep, unclosable breach opened up in the closed circle of being-for-itself. Only by welcoming things from the outside and remaining open to them, only by being given over to the service of what is other than itself, can man’s spirit lay claim to being of its own.”⁹³ The human spirit finds itself as having always already been *addressed*, named, called out. Its interiority is a gift given and appropriated from without.

Mystery and Form

Balthasar now moves to consider mystery as it is encountered in concrete existence, in order to demonstrate that mystery is immanent to truth itself. He refuses to allow mystery to be reduced to a product of finitude. This would mean that mystery is only temporary, thus forces both knowledge and mystery into a zero-sum game: an increase in knowledge causes a decrease in mystery, and vice versa. Rather than this understanding of knowledge as an instrument for “solving” mystery, Balthasar looks to re-conceive knowledge as operating within mystery. Knowledge is for Balthasar an awareness of Being as mystery. This frees truth from being limited to mere fact and can instead be an outworking of love.

⁹³ Ibid., 98.

Appearance. Since he is considering concrete reality, Balthasar begins his analysis in the world of sensibility and images. It is in the image, that subject and object first meet. The image presents itself but its presentation is so obvious that it awakens in the subject a suspicion that there is a “more” beyond the image. Images in themselves are sheer superficiality. They bear no depth, no essence, and no interiority. They are inchoate, floating without fixity between Being and Non-being. Images are not nothing but they can hardly be said to be something either.

Yet the inessentiality of images never occurs to the subject’s natural consciousness. The subject finds herself cast amidst this sea of images. But the mind functions in such a way that it begins, perhaps without even noticing, to organize, interpret, exposit, categorize these images, imbuing them with meaning. Thus the image is always seen as a sign through which the interiority of the subject looks and penetrates the interiority of the object. The image hovers between subject and object. It is in the image that the two first meet, straining toward each other; the object is presenting itself, the subject by receiving and hosting the object’s appearance.

But here Balthasar identifies two dangers in determining the relation between image and truth. One danger is the assertion that truth occurs totally apart from the image and lies solely in the essential. According to this view, truth is nothing more than interiority; appearances evoke not truth, but only opinion. Balthasar identifies this mentality with rationalism and what he labels “idealist mysticism.” The goal of this error is to penetrate the essence of the object by bypassing the image entirely.⁹⁴ This negative mysticism tries to “clarify the images by dissolving them into a concept or immediate

⁹⁴ See Balthasar’s discussion of this in *TL* 1, 136-37.

intellectual intuition, as if the appearances were merely a mist that dissipates in the rising sun.”⁹⁵ In the end, this tendency renders appearance completely superfluous to knowledge and to truth.

The other danger is to fall to the opposite extreme in which truth is utterly isolated within the image. This is the tendency of empiricism and what Balthasar will call “mysticisms of immediacy.” This tendency stamps truth with the inessentiality of the image. It “foregoes any truth behind the appearances, in order to seek it immediately in the abundance and flow of the appearances themselves.”⁹⁶ The consequence of this, of course, is that truth is never substantial, and therefore never realized. Truth itself is simply a product of becoming.

Both of these tendencies result in empty mystery. “Both are aware that they are dealing with a mystery, but because the one seeks the truth in the concept-less image, whereas the other seeks it in the imageless concept, both arrive only at an empty mystery.”⁹⁷ This is a void that denies the subject its ecstasy, thrusting it back into itself. But it is not just the subject itself that is enclosed. The interiority of the object is itself engulfed entirely by the subject. Here is an “absolute I” that determines the world.⁹⁸ The subject is alone, having swallowed up the object and found only emptiness.

These mysticisms are also attempts at immediacy. They are erotic attempts to derive meaning and significance without a signifier. They attempt an apprehension

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Further, this empty mystery “understands its own subjectivity as the primordial source of all objectivity, at least to the extent that it transcends the world of images. Because these images themselves remain inessential, there is no need to waste time over where they come from and what they belong to. The only important point is that all the powers by which the subject brings order - the a priori forms of perception and the categorical forms of judging reason - come from its own inner store.”

(indeed, in most cases, a comprehension) of the verum, the true, in its immediacy. This is a denial of the world as it exists as mediator and signifier. As Balthasar's phenomenology of worldly Being has shown, every appearance discloses something beyond itself, yet this something more can manifest itself in no other way than through the mediation of that appearance. Idealist mysticism attempts to attain an immediate relation to the thing-in-itself solely through the machinations of thought. Empiricist mysticism strives after an immediacy of the image itself, forsaking any sort of meaning beyond that image. Both mysticisms reject mediation. In one way or another, each end up rejecting the concrete reality of the world as Balthasar has accounted for it in his phenomenology.

Expression. For Balthasar, the object's act of appearing is not incidental to its unveiling, but is indeed the very form of that object's self-expression — its standing out (*ex*) from itself. The appearance communicates the meaning and significance of the thing-in-itself (*Bedeutung*). It is when the image [*Bild*] of a thing and its sense [*Sinn*] come together that a symbol [*Sinnbild*] emerges.⁹⁹ This symbol “from now on transcends the sum of its parts.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ But there is perhaps something more going on here than even Balthasar's critique of epistemological immediacy. Michel de Certeau suggests the tantalizing possibility that modernist epistemology arises from modernity's inability to know *orantly*: “In this multifarious history of a ‘sacramental body’ in search of its ‘Church body, or of a visible ‘head’ in search of its ‘mystical’ members, one trait is of special interest in the question of the apparition of mystical science: the progressive concentration of the debates around *seeing*. Without this new focus, it would be impossible to understand how much was being instituted during that period [16th and 17th centuries] in the visual mode: the revolution in painting in the fifteenth century... and the invention of perspective; the cartographic encyclopedism of knowledge; the role of optics in modern scientificity; the theories of language as ‘painting’; the dialectics of the look and of representation; and so on. It was a real modification of man's experience: vision slowly invaded the previous domain of touch or of hearing. It transformed the very practice of knowledge and signs” (Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 89. Surely de Certeau's emphasis here on the visible is correct. The connection between visibility of empiricism is clear enough. But it is common even among the rationalists, especially Descartes, that champion of the science of optics. Yet what is most interesting is that Descartes' rationalism begin with a

No aspect of the [thing's] sense has remained behind the expression; everything that was meant to be expressed has found its form. The upshot is that precisely the perfection of the expression is a perfect mystery. Indeed, it is an essential mystery, which no interpretation can progressively approach or gradually clear up. Every time we encounter, it is whole and intact and resists all analysis. Here we begin to sense that mystery is an abiding property of truth itself. In the empty dialectic between being and appearance, the mystery was present only in the form of incomprehensibility, of opacity. Now it appears as a quality of transparent revelation.¹⁰¹

Truth, for Balthasar, is the opening of Being in willful self-disclosure *for* another.

This other is both subject and object, both I and Thou; truth includes a “transcendental relation of knowability for others.” This disclosure for another presupposes a threefold movement: 1) the ontological ground itself, that which discloses itself; 2) the appearance as that which is actually disclosed; 3) the movement itself of the ground into the appearance. This movement is an act, an expression, and a bestowal of participation of the appearance in the reality of its ground. This means that the appearance is not a second being alongside the ground but is in fact the appearance *of the ground*. But their strict identity is not possible. The movement between the two is the dynamic third that makes possible this polarity in Being. It is also this movement, which has no absolute beginning,¹⁰² in which Being measures itself and thus becomes light to itself; this

suspicion of the visible (how could he trust his senses?) but ended up with the visibility of reason, where the rational part of a man penetrates and beyond the thing in itself. These philosophies turn on the same theological problem of the mystical - that hard and fast dichotomy between the visible and the invisible. Because these philosophies simply assume this dichotomy, an unavoidable implication emerges: that there must a fundamental re-structuring of the relations between fact and meaning, between appearance and the thing-in-itself. The natural, signifying relation between appearance and thing is severed here, just as was the natural relation between subject and object. This philosophical dichotomy is the result of a corruption in the Christian mystical tradition, or as de Certeau says, an inability to hold together a “structural homology between the mystical knowledge of the *oratikos* and the [visible] ecclesiastical hierarchy” (90).

¹⁰⁰ TL 1, 141.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “...we must not imagine that being begins with a self-contained, not-yet-disclosed depth, which then, as a kind of afterthought, opens itself to the outside and, if it is so minded, goes out of itself into an

movement distinguishes dynamic Being-for-another from a static Being-in-itself. Being therefore *is* communication. For Balthasar, there is no deeper ontological ground than this communication, an utterly silent un-word that undergirds Being's self-expression:

The key implication of the identification of Being as self-communication is that the ground of Being cannot be justified any other way than in its self-communication. "Here the ground becomes bottomless. The ground of the communication is, in fact, nothing other than the communication itself, which is therefore groundless."¹⁰³ This groundlessness of the Good is the ground, so to speak, of the True. All truth goes to this "groundless ground" of the correspondence between appearance and ground in Being's self-communication. But because one cannot penetrate to any *mechanism* behind this communication, it is no longer possible to answer, or even *ask*, the question: "*why* there should be correspondence and luminosity, measure and light in the first place; why anything should have the goodness to give itself and to disclose itself to us in its being; why there should be truth in the first place." There simply is the truth of the Good, this inexplicable will-to-give, this insurmountable mystery of love. It is this groundless communication, giving, donation of Being that characterizes it as love. Thus, truth is nothing other than the mystery of Being interpreted as love:

Insofar as we consider the mystery of love as lying 'behind' the truth, we have to say that all truth is reducible to it, that truth derives its meaning as truth from it, and that, far from mastering and explaining it as mystery, truth must fall silent in humility before it. But insofar as the mystery indwells the truth itself, insofar as truth is a moment in the self-disclosure of being, the mystery is not something alien to truth. From this point of view, the mystery is not some irrational background from which truth emerges. Rather, truth itself irradiates mystery, and it is of the very essence of truth to manifest this radiant mystery through itself.¹⁰⁴

Truth therefore comes *in* the mystery, rather than the attempt to solve the mystery. It shows itself in the abundant translucence of the image — the image is the willful expression of the thing-in-itself. "Insofar as the image is a surface, it can, of course,

appearing surface. No: being does not get its depth until it becomes inwardly illumined, until it obtains an interior space, an intimate zone, until it passes over (or better: has always already passed over) from the superficiality of mere being-in-itself into the depth and interiority of being-for-itself" (TL 1, 218).

¹⁰³ TL 1, 223.

¹⁰⁴ TL 1, 223.

reveal the depth and can convey some notion of it. But it cannot itself be the depth.”¹⁰⁵

Like a painting, the expression, the appearance, offers a perspective that suggests a depth and significance beyond its own superficiality.

Signaling the aesthetic turn in Balthasar’s epistemology, we must return to his notion of *Gestalt*. The mind that can apprehend the truth of Being as it expresses itself in worldly images is more aesthetic than conceptual. “Though we might try to circumscribe, even to describe, the content these things express, we would never succeed in rendering it adequately. This expressive language is addressed primarily, not to conceptual thought, but to the kind of intelligence that perceptively reads the *Gestalt* of things.”¹⁰⁶ Knowledge is, as Goethe describes it, *form-reading*.¹⁰⁷ The knower *sees*, yes, but seeing truly is the perception of Being’s form *as it is revealed in the appearance* of beings, in the fruit of the meeting of subject and object in the *Gestalt*.¹⁰⁸ If Being’s manifestation of itself in an image is a movement from interiority to exteriority, then knowledge is a movement from the external to the internal by means of self-

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁷ On Balthasar’s reading of Goethe, see his *GL* 5, 339-407 and, perhaps more importantly, his dissertation, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele, Band I: Der deutsche Idealismus* (Salzburg-Leipzig: Verlag Anton Pustet, 1937), 407ff.

¹⁰⁸ “This, then, is how the aesthete lives and views the world. He correctly apprehends that there is such a thing as significance. Yet he falls into another, albeit more subtle, form of detaching the phenomenal image from the core of being as if it were a thing in its own right. Because the image world really shows on its surface the whole self-expressing depth, the aesthete believes that he can dispense with the depth itself. He does not see that the signifier stops being significant as soon as there is no longer anything here for it to signify. Yet again the world of images is isolated in itself. As a result, it is once more haunted by unreality. As soon as we cut off the living world of signification from the ontological root that sustains it, it withers and dies. The aesthetic life is therefore just as solitary as the sensory image that has not yet been elevated into spirit. By isolating the experience of beauty, the unreality and solitude of pure aesthetics eventually cause even its beautifying character to fade. When one tries to cultivate beauty in an abstract purity, it produces only surfeit and bitter *Weltschmerz*. And it does this, not only because it happens to be temporally fleeting, but because of its own essential, intrinsic properties” (*TL* 1, 144).

remembrance or a re-collection (*sich erinnert*).¹⁰⁹ The images themselves invite knowledge to this “searching movement,” of an increasing penetration into the heart of the appearance wherein lies its truth.

The metaphysical act of truth — its faithful unveiling — is thus conceived as an act of love, a *donatum* and an invitation, which is creatively received and known *by* love. We turn now to make explicit an assumption that has been operative in all the preceding: that knowledge is itself a metaphysical act of love.

Knowledge as Love

Balthasar’s epistemology has been criticized in some quarters for failing to be sufficiently philosophical. Victoria Harrison, for example, though she sees a great deal of potential in Balthasar’s thought for developing a distinctly religious epistemology, notes that the *Logic* fails to develop a constructive, systematic rationality as a supplement to Balthasar’s critique of Kantianism.¹¹⁰ But a “rationality” is not Balthasar’s task in the *Theo-Logic*. He sets out rather to develop a logic, a principle for understanding the ontological reality of Being interpreted as love. Whatever rationality emerges in the *Logic* can only be the begotten child of the nature of truth itself.

Instead of a systematic rationality, Balthasar articulates an ontological and an epistemic *disposition*, both of Being and of knowledge. This attitude is best exhibited in

¹⁰⁹ Walker’s translation of *sich erinnert* as “recollection” needs qualification. This recollection should by no means be limited to a purely Platonic sense. Operative here is a theological understanding of the world of images as vestiges of God. Knowledge is not a recollection of a primal but forgotten unity. It is rather a *re-collection*, a drawing together of those scattered expressions of the primordial Word and seeing in them their absolute source. It can only be, as we shall see below, Christological and pneumatological. This divine Source is not something the mind has access to in and of itself by recollection. It is rather something that is gradually disclosed in and through the images themselves. It understands images as images *of something*, or as *vestiges*. Knowledge as recollection is a gathering of all images *through* Christ and the Holy Spirit, into a higher, more unified *Weltenshaunung*, a mosaic of worldly truth that intimates the divine.

¹¹⁰ Harrison, “Putnam’s internal realism and von Balthasar’s religious epistemology,” 89.

the rhythm of donation-receptivity, the rhythm of dialogue, the form of love. In this rhythm, Being freely gives of itself, of its objective depths, to the subject, who receives it with fidelity and charity. As Balthasar will say, the knower knows through adoration. This attitude of adoration is one of openness to Being's revelation, receptivity, and creative participation. From this attitude emerges a faint glimpse of a possible account of knowledge that corresponds to the mystery of Being. The esotericism of Being's ever-excessive disclosure of itself in truth demands an epistemology that is an initiation into and union with the mystery of Being's truth.

To make sense of this, we must consider the ontological vision that Balthasar has presented. The image of Being that has emerged thus far is that being is co-extensive with love. If Schindler is correct that Balthasar is attempting to overcome the dichotomy between will and intellect, then by equating Being with love, he draws together the act of knowing and loving together into a single metaphysical act of truth.

It is possible, of course, even for a non-lover to perceive certain states of affairs accurately. But his intelligence resembles the vision of the nearsighted man: acute, even excessively so, in seeing details, it is incapable of surveying the broad prospects of truth [its *Gestalt*]. It is no accident that the devil is said to be smart and stupid at the same time. Because the full truth can be attained only in love, only the lover can have the real eye for it. He alone is ready to disclose himself truly and thus to bring to completion the movement in which the truth of being comes into existence. Moreover, he alone is able to respond selflessly when another confides in and opens up to him, perhaps seeks his help, questions him, or calls to him. In this way, the lover brings to completion the movement in which the truth, this time of knowledge, comes into existence. We therefore have good reason for saying that truth originates from love, that love is more original and more comprehensive than truth. Love is the ground that accounts for truth and enables it to be. And yet, we cannot say that love was on the scene before truth and that love can be conceived without truth. For the self-disclosure of being and knowing, whose primordial name is love, also directly and immediately bears the name of truth.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ *TL* 1, 112.

Love is not solely something that Being *does* but rather what Being *is*.¹¹² Love therefore has a logic of its own. Love, because it is co-extensive with Being, can be called the “transcendental of the transcendentals” — it is love that grounds beauty, goodness, and truth. Balthasar’s interpretation of Being with love means that the *truth* of Being is the reality of Being’s *good* gift in a particular, *beautiful* form. Here the transcendentals are interpreted as different moments in the ontological act of love.¹¹³

If Being is itself love — a conclusion whose importance for Balthasar’s thought cannot be over-estimated — then its logic is known most truly, most faithfully, through love. Love is therefore the most appropriate epistemological form because it corresponds to the nature of Being’s truth. Knowledge interpreted as love brings together subject and object in a natural relationship of creative receptivity; wills mystery and wonder;¹¹⁴ and opens up worldly being and worldly knowing toward its transcendent source and goal. Unpacking these three aspects of Balthasar’s epistemological push toward love will occupy us for the remainder of this chapter.

Unveiling, Mystery, Love

We have seen that the nature of truth is unveiledness, *aletheia*. When an object unveils itself to a subject, it truly unveils itself — its unveiling is an act of ontological

¹¹² See Schindler, “Toward a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge,” 590.

¹¹³ We can see a double movement in Balthasar’s account of the circumincession of the transcendentals. Being is Good and, according to the ancient principle of the Good’s self-diffusiveness, gives itself. But it gives itself by unveiling itself faithfully, and so Being is True. Being’s true act of self-disclosure comes in a particular form (*Gestalt*) and so Being is Beautiful. This is the transcendental presentation of Being. But such a presentation demands an “ethical” response. One comes to ethical response to Being by seeing the form, by responding dramatically to that form, and *precisely through that dramatic response*, understand the logic and truth of Being.

¹¹⁴ This is precisely Schindler’s concern with the traditional interpretation of Aquinas — that it makes knowledge and mystery natural antagonists. He sees Balthasar as a helpful resource in overcoming this tendency.

confession: “*this* is what I am.” This confession in externality is faithful to its hidden reality; truth’s unveiling is therefore an act of faith and fidelity. A thing’s disclosure of itself in its external appearance is also an act of vulnerability. The object makes itself defenseless; its disclosure must be met by the outstretched love of the subject who receives the vulnerable object with benevolence and mercy. But at precisely the same time, this unveiling is not absolute. The intimacy, the interiority, of being forms the boundary of each unveiling. Things are not only unveiled. There is a limit to their unveiling which emerges naturally within the real distinction of essence and existence. Attendant with every unveiling is a subsequent, and even greater, veiling. The hiddenness of the essence is always in excess of what can be unveiled in the appearance of a thing in existence. This limitation is of unveiling but not, however, of truth. For unveiling and veiling are not locked in the opposition of a zero-sum game. Veiling, rather, is an inherent property of unveiling. Or, to use Balthasar’s language, veiling is the *Gestalt* of unveiling. And it is only in this form that things can be objects of knowledge.

We are left then with a seeming paradox: truth is unveiled veiling [*als verhüllte enthüllt*]. But this paradox is not an antinomy. It is, rather, the natural conclusion of the appearance of Being. Thought, consciousness [*Bewußtsein*], is possible only because it is both being *conscious* and the *being* of consciousness. Balthasar’s epistemological optimism — that Being itself appears — is coupled to an intuition that there is something *more* than the appearance of the thing. Thought grasps at appearances, finds them lacking, and so sets off in its quest for the “more” intimated through those appearances. Here again is Balthasar’s erotics of knowledge. Yet, every bit of progress, every bit of new knowledge gained, diminishes neither the mystery of the object, nor the subject’s

desire for understanding. Thought's epistemic stance before such an inexhaustible wealth is *thaumazein*, wonder, at Being's truth — "hidden in plain sight."

Balthasar's account of knowledge begins with wonder. But wonder, as we have seen, is not only a characteristic of the beginning of knowledge, but is also an immanent characteristic of knowledge *per se*. The sense of mystery must permeate all knowledge. If mystery were only temporary, something that is solved with the acquisition of information, if mystery were able to be dispersed from Being by knowledge, then wonder would be satiated and knowledge would cease. Only something fundamentally and irreducibly endowed with mystery can stimulate wonder; and only mystery is worthy of the love that is the bedrock of truth.¹¹⁵

Balthasar employs the scholastic categories of act and potency for articulating the nature of subjective knowledge. The subject's knowledge can be neither pure act nor pure potency. Were it pure act, the subject would *anticipate* the actual reception of truth.¹¹⁶ This is precisely what it cannot do, because then truth would be nothing more than an innate idea, and knowledge would be the monologue of modernist representation.¹¹⁷ But neither can it be pure potency because the subject is already equipped with all of the active capacities that engage the forthcoming cognition.

Significantly, Balthasar adopts the language of the French spiritualist of the Grand Siècle, Jean Pierre de Caussade, to mediate between these two categories: the subject's

¹¹⁵ Boyer and Hall offer a helpful typology for understanding different forms of theological mystery. Mystery may be understood as 1) an intriguing puzzle; or as 2) revelational mystery. Balthasar is clearly developing an idea of revelational mystery — a mystery that is to be embraced rather than solved. His mystery is a "dimensional" one that is characterized by "an unclassifiable superabundance that transcends but does not invalidate rational exploration" Cf. Boyer and Hall, *The Mystery of God: Theology for Knowing the Unknowable* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 11ff.

¹¹⁶ Anticipation is also the root of Balthasar's understanding of sin, as we shall see in the next chapter.

¹¹⁷ See Candler, 22ff.

knowledge is an “active potency” or an “active passivity.” He also turns to his own spiritual master, St. Ignatius of Loyola and his teaching on *indiferencia*. This language ends up arbitrating the philosophical *impasse* Balthasar has reached: “The truth of another has to be received in the readiness [disponibility] of total indifference, which as such is pure potency. On the other hand, because this potency entails a capability for every cognition, it is a thoroughly active potency.”¹¹⁸ Crucially, and very much in line with Ignatian spirituality, Balthasar conceives of this active passivity as “a readiness to spring into action wherever the object’s self-display might send or employ it.”¹¹⁹ Indifference — that mediating disposition between potency and act — is thus a ready obedience to receive the object and creatively perform its truth.

This disposition of indifference, this active passivity, is situated in the subject alongside its self-determination and freedom. The seeming tension between passive receptivity on the one hand, and self-determination on the other, is resolved only in the freedom of love. It is the love of the subject that opens the subject up to receive and to be determined by another; her *ekstasis* arises from her love. The epistemological poverty of the subject does not resolve itself automatically by driving the subject out of itself toward another. Her poverty is a willful act of *kenosis*, an emptying and an opening up in indifference, in readiness, and in receptive openness to another’s truth. The subject’s *indiferencia* denies the possibility of a monological knowledge of “innate ideas” and instead opts for the way of love. Indeed, a non-receptive, monological knowledge “would prevent any true dialogue, wound courtesy, and make love impossible.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *TL* 1, 49.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

It is this love that safeguards the mystery of Being, and mysterious quality of knowledge. For this “metaphysical love” wills the mystery of its object so that it might receive that object ever afresh: “Love would gladly give up a great deal of what it knows if it could thereby receive it anew from the beloved; indeed, it would happily perform the miracle of unknowing the things that it knows in order to receive them anew as the gift of the beloved.”¹²¹ But this wish of love is answered by the very nature of truth as mystery. The epistemological disposition of the subject corresponds to the nature of the object known. The love of the subjective knower thus wills for Being to be precisely what it is — mystery. And indeed, for Being, its disclosure *is* its mystery.¹²²

But because the mystery of Being increases when it is known through receptivity, that is to say through love, one comes to a seeming paradox. Knowledge as love does make “authentic progress” in knowing a thing. But *in* every certainty looms an *ever greater* mystery, a perpetual “enlargement” of the field of truth. “The more of the truth the subject manages to master, the more the truth overmasters it.”¹²³ The subjective *indiferencia* before the disclosure of Being is not something that is eventually transcended, but rather a perpetual disposition before the mystery of Being.

¹²¹ *TL* 1, 49.

¹²² Balthasar’s transcendental interpretation of Being at this point safeguards truth from becoming finitized. Balthasar recognizes that a finitized truth is ultimately nihilistic. “If truth could be like this, then it would have already ceased being truth. It would have become finite, and this would suggest the possibility of attaining a standpoint that comprehended truth from above, a standpoint, then, that was beyond truth. But if it were beyond truth, then it would also obviously be outside of being, which is to say, in the middle of nothing. For this reason, the only view of being and of truth to be had from such a standpoint would be nihilistic, self-destructive, and self-contradictory. In particular, truth, which always presents itself as just a sample or a taste of a still transcendent truth, toward which it spurs and opens, would have deceived the knower with an appearance of infinity and, in so doing, proved itself to be untruth” (*TL* 1, 50). A finitized truth is truth as representation. This truth can easily be mapped and summarized. Representation has no room for mystery; instead it strives to tame it, to mechanize it, and to master it. This kind of truth, the truth that is the object of representative epistemology, occurs when Being is ruled and determined by thought.

¹²³ *TL* 1, 50.

In this account of the subject, Balthasar has followed a *reductio* from the self-consciousness that gives rise to subjectivity, and to a subjective receptivity that is the receptivity of love. This love corresponds to the mystery of its object that is unveiled to the loving subject precisely as veiled.¹²⁴

What then might be said of the creative, spontaneous intellect? For Balthasar, the *intellectus agens* is always at the service of the receptive intellect — receiving, but creatively determining, the object known. It is the spontaneous intellect that measures the object:

The process by which the subject first stands under the measure of things and subsequently measures both its own measure and the measure of things is the context in which the world and the self are formed simultaneously. Informed by the measures of things, the I consciously forms and measures them in relation to itself, thereby regaining its own measure and receiving inner structure and proportion. The subject, then, is like a statue under the external pressure of hammer strokes and, at the same time, like a formless mass that inwardly that inwardly crystallizes and structures itself... in other words, the *raison d'être* of knowledge has nothing to do with the will to power. The subject's task becomes creative only if it remains an emanation of the primary attitude imposed on the knowing subject on account of its receptive nature: readiness to serve the truth. Not dominion, but service is primary for knowledge.¹²⁵

Knowledge is an act of love precisely because Being itself is love. Because Being is wondrous and mysterious, knowledge of that truth will be characterized by wonder and the love of mystery. Being's truth demands a certain intellectual disposition; love is

¹²⁴ This means that we must characterize Balthasar's "love" in two ways. Because it is love that opens the subject up to another, that spurs the subject to give of itself as well as to host another within itself, we may see this love as *agapeic*. But because of the hiddenness, the ever more, that is revealed in the object's disclosure, we may characterize the subject's love as *erotic*.

¹²⁵ TL 1, 69-70. Balthasar continues: "Nor is striving for the satisfaction of the urge to know the first thing, because this urge awakens only after the disinterested exposition of the other's truth has already begun. The first lesson that existence teaches the subject is the lesson of self-abandonment [*Hingabe*], not domination in the pursuit of interest. And the second follows the first: Self-abandonment opens up more of the world and reaps a richer harvest of truth than self-interest, because the self-interested hear only what they want to hear, not what in fact is and is true."

captivated by wonder and wills the perpetual mystery of its object, not so that it will remain in ignorance, but that it can receive its gift ever anew.¹²⁶ Knowledge interpreted as love is, therefore, a kind of attunement to Being, a process of “being in-formed by the primal form or archetype (*Urbild*).”¹²⁷ One knows through the ecstatic receptivity and participation of love.

Balthasarian Knowledge as Love

As we have seen, one of the distinctive characteristics of Balthasar’s epistemology is the natural relationship and correspondence between subject and object:

In the object, the truth consisted in an increasing self-revelation, in which the revealer was always more, and always remained richer, than its revelation. But this movement is none other than the interior illumination of being, in which the object becomes a subject. Therefore, looking at things from the point of view of the subject, we can make a complementary observation: Behind the subject’s factual state of openness, there is a movement of self-opening; hence, behind the intellectual luminosity characterizing the subject as intelligence, there is an abiding will to the act of self-disclosure and to the state of being displayed... A being has meaning only if it has being-for-itself, but this being-for-itself is meaningful only if it possesses the movement of communication. What is more, being-for-oneself and communication are one and the same thing; together they constitute the one, indivisible illumination of being. But this implies that the meaning of being consists in love and that, in consequence, knowledge can be explained only by and for love.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ As Schindler notes, for Balthasar, “mystery and manifestation are in reality interdependent aspects of a single thing. Mystery thus acquires here a decidedly *positive* character: it is not the *withdrawal* of being from the illumination of reason, or simply that which, as exceeding the intellect, is not given to it. Rather, it is for Balthasar precisely the *givenness* of being that is mysterious, insofar as the generosity at the heart of the act of manifestation is the reason for the mystery. *Because* being does not hold itself back, but *appears*, it reveals itself as gloriously transcendent of the appearance — *in* the appearance” (“Toward of a Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge,” 596).

¹²⁷ See *GL* 1, 99ff.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

The object's disclosure and the knowing subject's willful receptivity are two forms of a single event of love; it is an ecstatic self-gift, a willful donation and acceptance.¹²⁹

For Balthasar, there is thus a natural relationship between truth and love. Love is not subsequent to knowledge or truth, but rather their living heart. It is the ground that accounts for truth and enables it to be. But this does not mean that love can exist apart from truth. Balthasar, in Augustinian fashion, conceives of love as vision; it is the way of seeing truth. It is the lover who can see the truth of being most clearly.¹³⁰ We should recall here what Balthasar has said about the task of philosophy: it is the willed desire to know *in* and *with* love: "The will to understand [the decision *for* the object] is love, and this is why no true and fruitful thinking is possible outside of love. But true love never makes blind; rather it gives the power to see."¹³¹ True knowledge is available to the one who "sees the form" of the whole. One thinks of Balthasar's famous jigsaw story: only by seeing the whole (i.e.: Being as love), does one understand its parts.¹³² This is why, as

¹²⁹ The subject's act of receptive love is caused by, not apart from, its creative spontaneity. "It requires no small exertion of the subject's spontaneity to bring it to the point of deciding once and for all to be nothing but receptivity. The subject gives up its own word in order to hear only the word of the thing in all its objectivity" (*TL* I, 113). This requires of the subject an attitude of disponibility before the object as well as a kenotic self-opening that can rise only from its *Hingabe*, its self-surrender to the object. The subject, in the act of knowledge, listens and surrenders its own truth for the sake of the object's truth.

¹³⁰ See, Josef Pieper, *Nur der Lebende singt* (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag AG, 1988). Part of Pieper's concern in this book is to associate aesthetics with a particular way of seeing. But Pieper insists that the contemplative vision cannot be separated from the contemplative (and artistic) life. Balthasar would be sympathetic with such a claim.

¹³¹ *TL* I, 209.

¹³² See Jacques Servais, "Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition," in David L. Schindler, ed., *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Group: Grand Rapids, 2008), 191: "Balthasar had a chalet in the village of Rigi, perched high in the Swiss Alps where he would spend vacations working, often with de Lubac. One evening, I and another — then young — Jesuit were there with them and, knowing Balthasar to be an aficionado of handmade puzzles, we set out to complete a particularly difficult one, with plenty of blue sky and no two pieces quite the same. As the evening drew on, so did our perplexity: we were puzzled by the heavens, divided out as they were into many tiny pieces on the table before us. Balthasar watched from a distance, tempted to help but holding back, while de Lubac began pacing beside us: perhaps a bit agitated because we were delaying the daily evening get-together. Finally, Balthasar walked up and joined us,

we shall see, the true knower is the saint — she who has surrendered herself over to the truth so that she can receive through her love.¹³³

This surrender and acceptance is the first act of knowledge and also an act of *faith* — a “self-abandoning confidence”¹³⁴ that receives the object in its mystery. “Faith attunes man to Being (*fides ex auditu*); it confers on man the ability to react precisely to this divine experiment, preparing him to be a violin that receives just this touch of the bow, to serve as material for just this house to be built, to provide the rhythm for just this verse being composed.”¹³⁵ The subject attunes herself to the object of knowledge in an act of obedience — a receptivity and a *poesis*: “In faith... man is at one and the same time artist and artifact.”¹³⁶ The faith of the subject is its act of receptive love for the object’s truth.

For Balthasar, this faith and love, holds together the poles of *aletheia* — the unveiling and the veiling. It demands possession and unveiling, as well as reverence and veiling. An image of this is again the relation between lover and beloved: “Suppose a lover thinks that he has known and surveyed as much of his beloved as there is to know; this conviction would be the infallible sign that his love had reached an end. Love would no longer be in movement; it would no longer be able to court the beloved; it would no

picking up a piece, and putting it into place, then the next, and the next, until the whole puzzle is finished, and in less than 10 minutes. We, quite frankly, would have been there for 10 hours.”

¹³³ This is not to suggest of course that true knowledge is available only to the saint. A non-lover certainly may perceive things accurately. But her vision is, apart from love, severely limited. “But his intelligence resembles the vision of the nearsighted man: acute, even excessively so, in seeing details, it is incapable of surveying the broad prospects of truth” (*TL* 1, 112).

¹³⁴ *TL* 1, 25.

¹³⁵ *GL* 1, 220.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

longer need surrender or help; it would no longer be capable of encounter.”¹³⁷ The analogy is apt. The love for the beloved leads to an increase in knowledge of her without ever *exhausting* the fullness of the beloved herself in her essence. The beloved is always both *known* and *unknown* by love.

The consequence of this is that the unveiling of knowledge is always penultimate.¹³⁸ There is a circle here: love wills mystery and mystery increases love. “The lovers must again and again lose their privileged view of the whole; they must enter into a sort of darkness, into a discouragement over the ever-greater mystery of the beloved, over their incapacity ever to resolve it.”¹³⁹ Of course, this “sort of darkness” that Balthasar references is not the absence but the excess of light. “In a loving being, there can be much mystery, but this mystery is light. In love, there is infinite depth, but no darkness.”¹⁴⁰

Knowledge, if it is love, is the reception of Being *as it offers itself*, that is, as the excess within and beyond appearance, as mystery. What this suggests is that knowledge is ultimately apophatic. Balthasar’s language notably shifts at this point from that of the Idealists to that of the mystics. It is the excessiveness of Being’s light that overwhelms the knower’s vision, yielding a “dazzling darkness” that radiates, not secrecy, but the super-abundance of disclosure.

This “luminous darkness” that the knower encounters in and as love must be properly understood. This excess is sheer positivity. Balthasar is not here making

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 210.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 211.

recourse to radically negative philosophies. Those are the descendants of the empty mysteries of rationalism and empiricism. His understanding of mystery is not one of absence or emptiness. Balthasar's apophatic epistemology is the path of the aesthetic and the ascetic — the rhythm of the embrace of images and their transcendence. His apophatic epistemology is the entering into the mystery by receiving it *as love through love*.¹⁴¹

Divine Participation

For Balthasar, worldly truth arises from the mutual indwelling of subject and object in each other through an ecstatic expression of love. But what has this to do with divine truth, with *theological* knowing, and, above all, the saints? In a rather abrupt transition at the end of *Theo-Logic I*, Balthasar turns to consider explicitly what has run implicit through his entire account thus far: that worldly truth and knowledge presuppose a divine ground condition of possibility.¹⁴²

As we have seen, finite subjectivity relies necessarily on the absolute measuring of God, on what Balthasar calls “the identity of thinking and being in God.”¹⁴³ Accordingly, Balthasar can conclude that God is implicitly known as this absolute measure in every act of consciousness and in every object. Here we see Balthasar's

¹⁴¹ On the necessity, as well as the limitation, of the apophatic in Christian thought, see *TL* 2, 90ff. Kilby criticizes Balthasar for not being properly apophatic (Kilby, 81). It is at this point that Kilby's failure to engage the *Logic* is most glaring. She misses Balthasar's most elaborate account of the apophatic. Most tellingly, his account of the apophatic occurs in the context of his *Logic*, indicating that a theologic is necessarily couched in mystery.

¹⁴² This is not to say that Balthasar is engaged in a Kantian epistemological project that treats God as a conceptual placeholder — the condition for the possibility of there being truth. Indeed, worldly truth only *is* because it participates in God *in truth* and not just *in concept*.

¹⁴³ In a sense, then, Hegel was correct that thought thinks being, *reciprocally*. But Hegel's mistake was twofold. First, he erred by elevating thought above being. More significantly, though, he triumphed thought over love (as we have also seen with Eckhart), failing to grasp both that love is the condition of the possibility of thought, *and* that being itself is most truthfully understood precisely *as love*.

interpretation of Aquinas' "*omnia cognoscentia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quodlibet cognito*."¹⁴⁴ God is not an object of knowledge but knowledge's transcendental presupposition. Balthasar here makes recourse to analogy. Insofar as the subject participates in the measure of infinite truth, it analogously shares in divine truth itself. But because the subject is not herself the infinitely measuring measure, there is an even greater dissimilarity from divine truth, which remains ever more veiled in its transcendence.¹⁴⁵ The subject's self-knowledge (*cogito ergo sum*) is possible only because the subject always finds itself within the act already being known (*cogitor ergo sum* — I am thought, therefore I am).¹⁴⁶

It is this participation that allows the subject to be the agent of the measuring of Being (that is to say, an agent of truth). And as the agent of the measuring of the object, the subject comes to an implicit knowledge of God as the absolute measure of Being. By following the active passivity of the subject's loving knowledge, Balthasar ends up at an epistemology in which subject and object do not participate only in each other but in which both participate in God.

What this opens up for Balthasar is an account of worldly knowledge, not just as love, but more specifically as *service*. This was already intimated in the subject's service on behalf of the object — completing it by making it known. But now all worldly truth is shown to be in service to the divine: "What appeared primarily as creatures' service of

¹⁴⁴ *De Veritate* 22.2.1. "God is implicitly known in all things."

¹⁴⁵ "The subject's act, then, necessarily displays an analogy to the divine subject, although this analogy can never become an identity. The more the knowing subject understands of the world and the truth it contains, the more it also understands that it is not God. Its knowledge of the truth can never transgress the limits of its starting point, namely, the subject's active-indifferent potency to any and every truth" (*TL* 1, 53).

¹⁴⁶ Balthasar derives this idea, though without credit, from Franz von Baader. See Ramon Betanzos, *Franz von Baader's Philosophy of Love* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999) for an account of von Baader's philosophy that arises from this idea.

and under one another...we now ground in a deeper service of God, which is the prior condition on which the intrinsic meaning of worldly truth rests.”¹⁴⁷

It is here that the knower begins to take on the characteristics of the saint as outlined above. Both knower and saint are described by Balthasar as lovers; but the saint’s love drives her into the world in mission and service. And at this point in his *Logic*, Balthasar insists that the “attitude of service is unconditionally primary in all knowledge — so much so that whoever cannot muster up the indifference and readiness to receive and conceived the object as it wishes to show and give itself lacks the most elementary prerequisite for objective knowledge.”¹⁴⁸ Balthasar here makes recourse to his distinctly Ignatian spiritual vocabulary to describe the true knower, drawing from ancient Christian wells a vision in which knowledge is a means toward love rather than vice versa, as it was in Eckhart.

Indeed, Balthasar’s thinly veiled critique of the Idealist legacy of Eckhart continues: truly objective knowledge is only possible via the *receptive* rather than the *appetitive* intellect. Balthasar sees the Idealist tradition as an untamed, titanic appetite for knowledge for the sole end of *my* own enrichment: “If this spontaneity were fundamentally about striving, this striving would inevitably be grounded in the subject’s dissatisfaction, so that the object striven for would be sought insofar as it could fulfill a need. The movement of striving would have its primary ground in the subject itself, and the object would be a means by which the subject pursued its own ends.”¹⁴⁹

We have returned then to the anthropological reduction with which this chapter

¹⁴⁷ *TL* 1, 256.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

began. A knowledge that emerges from the appetitive intellect would be a knowledge of titanic striving, a self-serving exploitation of the world of objects. It would indeed be the “Absolute I” of Fichte that Balthasar so feared; the I that consumes the world.

But Balthasar’s epistemology of love is “primarily receptive. It is not the knowledge-hungry subject that first prowls about in search of prey and then pounces upon the object; rather, it is the object that first displays itself as gift in the subject’s space, and, by so doing, enables it to do what it otherwise could not, namely, perform an act of knowing.”¹⁵⁰

This means that at the heart of Balthasar’s epistemology is a distinctive anthropology. As Balthasar puts it, the difficulties of self-serving knowledge can be avoided only by understanding “the most primitive attitude of the spiritual creature to be, not striving, but readiness to serve.”¹⁵¹ At the heart of Balthasar’s epistemology, then, is the anthropological form of the saint, whose very existence is constituted by her readiness to serve out of love.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 258.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Balthasar continues: “Only when we have acknowledged this primitive indifferent readiness can we grant the subject an actual will to know corresponding to its nature as an intellectual being and a creature of God. Only then can we cite the striving for knowledge as *one* element in a larger account of this luminous space in which the subject stands ready for the cognitive act...” (TL 1, 258). Note here Balthasar’s Ignatian language of “indifference” and “readiness.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“I am the Truth”

Christ and Truth

“But the meaning of creation remains unexplainable so long as the veil covers the eternal Image. This life would be nothing but destiny, this time only sorrow, all love but decay, if the pulse of Being did not throb in the eternal, triune Life.”

— Hans Urs von Balthasar

The truth of worldly being is enfolded into and participates in the truth of God. Unsurprisingly, Balthasar’s key for understanding this participatory relationship is his Christology. More unexpected, perhaps, is the critical role that the saints will play in this Christological exposition of truth. The Balthasarian rhythm of Christ and the saints will occupy our discussion for the remainder of this project. For Balthasar, it is Christ who expresses all truth in himself, and it is the saints who know and exposit this Christic truth through the Spirit.

And so, if the saints are the best expositors of truth, then we must make a transition to an explicitly *theological* account of truth, in which the finite truth of the previous chapter is situated within its properly infinite horizon. More specifically, we must concretize our ontological and epistemological speculation by turning to Christ as the interpreter of both God and world, and of the relationship between them. Many of the concerns of the previous chapter will be recapitulated here under a new light as Balthasar draws his ontological and epistemological questions into orbit around the central, startling proclamation of Christ: “I am the truth” (John 14:6). This particularly Johannine

identification of Christ with the truth is central for Balthasar.¹ For him, the mystery of Christ is the twofold revelation of 1) the triune God; and 2) of all things in relation to God.² In this way, Christ is the truth of both God and the world. *He* is the God-world relationship. For Balthasar, any account of truth is therefore a Christo-logic.

At the outset, however, we must ask why it is to *Christology* that Balthasar turns for his account of truth. The conclusion of the previous chapter suggested that worldly truth is only possible in its relation to God as the eternally measuring Subject. Why push his *Logic* beyond the abstract philosophical-religious *concept* of God in the direction of a seemingly logically implausible, *mythical* account of the descent of a god?

The answer is that Balthasar is not interested in positioning God as simply a “theoretical placeholder,” or the condition of the possibility of knowledge. Instead he insists that our awareness of the contingency of worldly truth, and the erotic epistemological drive that emerges from that contingency, pushes toward its necessary fulfillment in the *concrete* and *historical* act of God’s truth in Christ.

According to Balthasar, the distinction between relative, appearing beings and Being itself — “that which grounds and embraces all individual existent beings”³ — reveals the fundamental truth of creaturely Being “‘No, I am not [or: this thing is not] God; Yes, I need God as my beginning and my end.’ No relative being is Being, but none

¹ On Balthasar’s self-identification as a Johannine theologian, see *Our Task: A Report and a Plan* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1994), 35ff.

² See Aquinas’ account of *sacra doctrina* as the explication of just this reality. *ST I.1.7: Omnia autem pertractantur in sacra doctrina sub ratione Dei, vel quia sunt ipse Deus; vel quia habent ordinem ad Deum, ut ad principium et finem* [In sacred doctrine, all things are considered under the aspect of God, because they are God himself, or because they have God as their source and goal].

³ *Prayer*, 157.

is apart from Being, and each only exists in relation and as a pointer to Being.”⁴ This realization points toward divine Being though it cannot comprehend that Being.

Does this mean that humanity is driven by an ultimately hopeless quest for truth? Balthasar will insist that the human *eros* for truth need not despair of fulfillment: “There was only one way out of this impasse, namely, that infinite eternal Being should utter its own self in the form of a relative being. That in this epiphany and *parousia* it should become actually present and give an authoritative interpretation of itself. Then we could hear the infinite Word in the finite, and see the eternal, imageless archetype in the finite form.”⁵ Christ, then, is the full expression of truth that condescends to humanity, in order to make the truth known.

If we might play off of de Lubac, we can say that Christ reveals truth to itself. Balthasar’s is a Christology of *exposition* through *expression*. Our elaboration of this claim can be divided into two parts. The first examines what we might call Balthasar’s ontology of Christ — that Christ *is* the truth. The second part examines Christ’s mission of exposition — the manner in which his existence is itself an exposition of truth. Of course, for Balthasar, Christ’s identity and mission are co-extensive; Christ *is* what he *does* and vice versa.⁶ So we might describe the procedure in a different way. In the first part of this chapter, we examine what it means to say that Christ is the truth. In the second, we turn to see how Christ definitively reveals that the truth is love, and how the form of Christ’s existence *as* the truth is existence as dispossessing, kenotic, love. As

⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁵ Ibid. Significantly, what Christ reveals about Being is that it is not Being-for-itself (as we demonstrated in the previous chapter), but neither is it solely Being-for-another. It is now a *Being-together*.

⁶ See *TD* 3, 153ff.

both truth and love Christ reveals the inner heart of God and expositis the truth of the world.

Truth

There are three dimensions to Balthasar's theological account of truth. First, there is the truth of divine aseity [or, God *in se*]. Second, there is the truth of the world *in se*. Finally, there is the truth of the relation between the truth of God and that of the world.⁷ This section shall give an account of the way that Balthasar places the divine Son at the heart of each of these dimensions. As the truth of both God and world, the divine Son acts as the expression and exposition of each. And it is in the incarnate Christ, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Colossians 1:19), that these twin dimensions of truth meet in harmonious exchange.

The Truth of God

Balthasar's account of the truth of God is, on one level, deceptively simple: "God is love." This Johannine claim is decisive for Balthasar's *Logic*. Yet the way that Balthasar works out the implications of this statement in terms of his Christology ends up drawing all existence, all of creation, into this most fundamental of realities: that God *is as love*.

Balthasar claims that the determining characteristic of divinity is *Selbstübergabe*: the giving over of oneself.⁸ This is the heart of the Father. As the fount of divinity, the Father gives *himself* to the Son and the Spirit, whose reception of the Father "is enacted

⁷ Although we will, for the sake of discussion, parse out the "truth of God" as something set alongside of an autonomous "truth of the world," it should be clear that Balthasar does not hold to any sort of univocity of Being (nor of truth). The truth of God is the fundamental and absolute reality in which creaturely truth participates by grace.

⁸ This is an especially Ignatian idea, though it also has, as we saw in the second chapter, a legacy even in Eckhartian thought.

only in the mode of a return gift to the ‘Person’ who [principally] gives himself over, the Father.”⁹ The “fruitfulness” of the Father’s love involves handing himself over in a *kenosis* that begets the Son, and through the Son, breathes forth the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Thus the agents of divine *truth* — the Son who is the truth, and the Spirit of truth — are the offspring of Father’s loving gift of himself.

Regarding the Son’s agency *as* divine truth, Balthasar makes recourse to the explanatory principles of dialogicality that are central to his ontology and epistemology. If worldly truth involves the dialogicality between subject and object, how much moreso does this principle shine in the divine life?¹¹ The eternal Son is both the recipient of the Father’s word and the content of that word. Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer in John 17 is illustrative of the eternal I-Thou relationship between the eternal Son and the eternal Father — “a relation in which the Son turns to the Father in knowledge, love, adoration, and readiness for the Father’s very wish.”¹² It is the Son’s perfect receptivity of the Father’s address — characterized as it is by the Father’s self-giving that this address is also substantial begetting — that allows the Son fully and truly to image and express his

⁹ *TL* 2, 137.

¹⁰ “There is nothing fruitful in God other than the Father, who brings forth the Son and, with and through the Son, the Spirit. If one abstracts paternity from the hypostasis of the Father, all that is left over, says Bonaventure, is a mere generality, an empty word. And if one objects that the generator must be conceived as at least logically prior to the generated, this may be true notionally, ‘*sed non oportet praeintelligere eam (personam) actu distinctam*’.” Christ owes himself only to the Father, who is God, never to the Godhead that is supposedly fruitful in the Father” (*TL* 2, 131).

¹¹ The difference is that here is found, hidden in the loving mystery of divinity, the archetypal dialogue which creaturely dialogicality can only mirror. Balthasar is insistent that what we find in the Trinity is not just a transcendent example of natural metaphysics but rather their very source, archetype, and foundation. It is the Trinity that is the truth in which all other truths participate.

¹² *TL* 2, 126.

Father.¹³ Because the *Logos* is the image and expression of the Father, the truth of God is best understood as a *Logic*, or, more concretely, as a *Christo-logic*.

Triune Son. Balthasar's Christo-logic is irreducibly trinitarian. There is not, for Balthasar, a sphere of divine logic that belongs solely to the Logos. Those personal characteristics of the Logos — e.g., word, meaning, witness, expositor, expression — are fundamentally related to both the Father and the Spirit. The Son is always “from the Father” and “toward the Spirit.” As such, the Son is the mediator of the Godhead, not in the sense of a unilinear movement from Father to Spirit but as the expression of the rhythmic gift and receptivity of trinitarian love.¹⁴

If the Son is to be the expressive truth of the Godhead, then he must be love. His expressive truth must be grounded in his “whence” — the Father, the ground and source of the Godhead.¹⁵ But this divine “grounding” is neither that of a gnostic “silence” nor

¹³ Balthasar spends a considerable amount of time on the problem of “subsistent relations.” How can the processions of the divine mind of the Father be substantial? In his discussion, he highlights the solutions of Augustine and Anselm before ultimately settling with a decidedly Thomistic distinction between the processions and the relations. The relations between the divine hypostases are determined by their means of process, begetting and spiration. In this, Balthasar is saying nothing new. But his way of appropriating this tradition is twofold. First, he ties the processions to divine missions. It is the mission of the Son to proceed as the image and expressive truth of the Father. This mission will carry the Son into his earthly mission as Jesus Christ. It is the mission of the Spirit to exposit and carry on the truth that the Son expresses, illuminating it from within through the formation of the Church. As such the Spirit is truth and love.

¹⁴ We can note here Balthasar's interesting interpretation of Augustine. While for Augustine it is the Spirit that is generated as the love of the Father and the Son, Balthasar, drawing significantly on Bonaventure, conceives of the Son as the expression of trinitarian love and the Spirit as that love's perfection and exposition. Because of this focused on the “expressivity” of the Son, Balthasar will frequently speak of the Son's “procession” from the Father. While *processio* language is typically reserved by the tradition for the Spirit, Balthasar uses it far more than the language of “begetting.” This can most likely be explained as the consequence of Balthasar's emphasis in the *Logic* on the Son as the “Word” which proceeds as the eternal utterance of the Father. But Balthasar is also working within a particularly Alexandrian soteriological structure: the world proceeds from God (*processio*) and returns to God (*regressio*) and this movement mirrors that of the triune persons. Balthasar's interesting addition to this rhythm is his insistence that the *processio* occurs for the sake of a specific mission (*missio*) in both trinitarian and, subsequently, creaturely dimensions. See *TD* 5, 61ff.

¹⁵ That is to say, the Son is not generated by an abstract, “general” divine essence, but by the Person of the Father. This emphasis on the personality of the Son's generation wards off a potentially Hegelian

idealist “will.” It is instead the person of the “Father” — the one who gives of himself, expresses himself, in love. Love is the content of the Father’s expression. This expression is identical with the Son’s procession: “[W]hat the Logos manifests visibly of the Father is, once again, love in all its divine dimensions and, therefore, in all of the consequences for a possible free creation that follow from this love.”¹⁶ And so a divine logic which emerges from the Father, can only be a logic of love: “It expresses the love of the ground and the source that pours itself out in it, not only as an exterior form, but as the source’s inner essence.”¹⁷ The Son’s missional expressivity is possible because he receives himself from the Father’s love. He expresses the Father because he *is* the expression of the Father.

But the Son is not merely a passive recipient of the expressive will of his Father. Passive reception is not yet love, nor truth. Strict passive receptivity lacks both mission and creative obedience, two defining characteristics of the Son. Insofar as the Son proceeds eternally from the Father, his trinitarian mission is to co-represent the self-giving of the Father by, together with the Father, giving rise to the Spirit. “This means that the *Logos* has a ‘toward’ together with his ‘from’: the groundlessly loving production of the...Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ The rhythm of donation-reception now takes on a new element

interpretation of hypostatic generation. The divine processions are not subsequent “clarifications” of the one generic divinity, brought forth by some abstract, impersonal process but rather by an intentional and person act of love and freedom. See *TL* 2, 129-134. Balthasar’s language of *Unvordenklichkeit* is significant here. He insists that “*die unvordenklichkeit der Liebe* — “love cannot be pre-thought.” The Father’s generation of the Son and the Spirit is the result, neither of his reflexive thought, nor of his knowledge of himself (as would be the case in an Hegelian dialectic) but is, rather, nothing other than an act of his love. No thought, no reflection, no intra-divine process, can get behind the Father’s loving act of generation. The Father simply acts what he is: love.

¹⁶ *TL* 2, 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *TL* 2, 152. Balthasar is a thoroughgoing filioquist, though he is clear that it does not particularly matter whether the Son’s role in the generation of the Spirit is that of source or instrument, “from” or

— a second act of donation. The rhythm of trinitarian truth is, for Balthasar, being-for-another: donation-reception-donation. This is what Balthasar means by “God is love.”

The Son receives “from” the Father and gives what he has received “toward” the Spirit.

But the Son’s “toward” movement actually moves in two directions. On one hand, it moves in the current of the Father’s generating love — it moves ecstatically toward the Spirit. But at the same time, because the Son pours *himself* out in love, that is, as the “absolute love *per se*” that *is* the Father, the Son’s “toward” movement to the Spirit is also toward the Father — it is the Son’s act of obedience. “This movement constitutes the Logos’ entire being, inasmuch as his subsistence coincides entirely with what he owes objectively to the Father and, therefore also does subjectively.”¹⁹ In other words, because the Son has received all that he is objectively from the Father, his subjective action in co-generating the Spirit, is an action of loving obedience and offering of himself back to the Father.

This “from” and “toward” movement is constitutive of the Son’s divine being and his trinitarian mission. Within the Trinity, the Son *is* what he *does*, namely, imaging and expressing the absolute love of the Father through his relationship with the Father and the

“through.” Balthasar’s point is that the Son plays an active role in the Spirit’s generation as part of his divine vocation as the expression of the Father.

¹⁹ *TL* 2, 153. Here Balthasar attempts a synthesis of the Eastern and Western trinitarian “styles.”

Spirit.²⁰ The truth of the *Logos* rests, theologically, on the Father's generative act and the Spirit's ongoing exposition and perfection. The truth of the Son is a trinitarian truth.²¹

Expressio dei. For Balthasar, truth is the self-speaking of Being.²² Insofar as Balthasar conceives of God himself as Absolute Being, we should not be surprised to find him interpreting the eternal *Logos* linguistically, as the eternal *expressio Dei*, the self-speaking of divine Being. The Son's eternal, divine expressivity will be crucial for understanding his status as the archetype for the truth of the world. The difficulty here is that Balthasar spends little time developing his own account of the expressivity of the Son, opting instead for indirect discourse, drawing most especially on St. Bonaventure. But through Bonaventure Balthasar develops his own proposal for his theo-logic of divine expressivity.²³

²⁰ This same trinitarian structure can be seen in the economy of salvation. Salvation, Balthasar asserts, cannot be conceived of in Joachimite terms as a linear progression through the mutually exclusive ages of Father, Son, and Spirit. Rather, drawing on Gregory of Nyssa's tripartite unity of divine action, Balthasar insists that there is no historical Jesus that is not the trinitarian Jesus. Every action that Jesus does in his earthly ministry is "from" the Father and "toward" the Spirit. An example of this is Christ's *tetelestai* on the cross (John 19:30). This cry is a completion of his mission from the Father as well as movement toward the Spirit: "into your hands I commit my Spirit."

²¹ Balthasar's insistence that the truth of God is a trinitarian truth preserves Balthasar from the accusation of Christo-monism. Though Christ is central to Balthasar's entire thought, he is never separated out from the Father and the Spirit. It is in light of the trinitarian dimension of Balthasar's Christo-logic that the possibility — even the necessity — of the saints as the *spirit-ual* expositors of truth. This is in noted contrast to some of Balthasar's friendly critique of Barth. See *Theology of Karl Barth*, 326ff but especially his exposition of Guardini from 329-330.

²² See Balthasar's *Epilogue*, 77-86.

²³ The integrity of Balthasar's reading of the the patristic and medieval Fathers is contested. There is some suspicion that, because Balthasar approaches his sources as a theologian rather than a historian, he ends up using and exploiting their thought for his own agenda rather than giving an entirely fair account of their thought on its own terms. By making the Fathers respond to questions they themselves never asked, Balthasar risks forcing the Fathers into the mold of his own thought. I make no judgment on the validity of these concerns except to note that Balthasar writes quite explicitly as an *interpreter* of the Fathers; his account of *their* thought is not intended to be neutral to his own thought. Regardless of where one lands on the integrity of Balthasar's interpretations, we *can* say that Balthasar's reading of the Fathers is no mere historical reporting but betrays important contours of his own creative thought.

According to Balthasar, any account of the truth of the world must be grounded in the primordial order of divine logic. To think truly of the world is to think of it in relation to its divine source and goal. Creation is intelligible only in the light of the Trinity; indeed, as was discussed previously, a thing can only be known if it is measurable and, more importantly, already measured. Such a conception of knowledge points back to an eternal God who knows and measures all things and can do so because he created them. The possibility of the created world imaging and expressing God arises through the eternal expressivity of God through his eternal Word.

From Bonaventure, Balthasar derives twelve forms of worldly expression that serve as hints of their divine archetype,²⁴ He reduces these to three “decisive hints” of divine expressivity: “word, image, and Son.”²⁵ but it is as “Word” that the Second Person of the Trinity is most thoroughly expressive of divine truth. “Word” contains all this in itself and, in addition, brings in the concepts of expression and revelation.”²⁶ The divine Word, the *Logos* of the Father, is the truth of God precisely *as* the *Logos*. Through the Word, the entirety of God is expressed, or as Balthasar puts it: the *Logos* “is God as he is

²⁴ “But in his thought the believer does not only follow the principle that the highest possible must be thought of God; he is also guided by the multiple reference of the relationships of expression among creatures, which all point to an absolute relationship of expression... every creature proclaims the eternal process of generation, and this is expressed and represented by the twelve generations that we find in the creatures” (*GL* 2, 285). It’s not particularly clear how acceptable this analogical approach to understanding the Trinity is for Balthasar. Time and again, he claims that the doctrine of the Trinity is only known through revelation; it cannot be arrived at analogically. We may assume that his use of Bonaventure is, at this point, should not be uncritically equated with his own theological method. Instead, it is best to see Balthasar as mining Bonaventure’s thought for justification for his (Balthasar’s) Johannine emphasis on the Son as *Verbum Dei*.

²⁵ *GL* 2, 286: “However, these twelve forms of expression may be reduced in number. The first four deal with the elements, at a stage before organic life. Among the second four, the concept and the picture have a pre-eminence: the concept, as an inner word which is amplified in the outward word, and the picture, to which the type of knowledge that comes from the object may be related back. In the last four, which deal with organic reproduction, everything can be reduced to the perfect natural begetting, fatherhood.”

²⁶ *GL* 2, 286.

in being expressed.”²⁷ As such, the *Logos* is the “unsurpassable ‘resemblance’, ‘assimilation’, ‘correspondence’ and so ‘truth’.”²⁸ In other words, for Balthasar, the *Logos* is the truth of God because the Father has expressed himself utterly in and through him, both in the inner life of God and in the world.

It is as the *Logos* of the Father that the Son is, by nature and vocation, the expressivity of the Godhead. The Bonaventurian *expressio* that Balthasar draws upon is distinct from, for example, the *Verbum mentis* of St. Thomas. For Aquinas, the *Verbum mentis* is the decidedly “interior word” of the Father, in which the Father, who knows himself, speaks himself forth.²⁹ As such, the *Verbum* is “primarily the internal conception of the [divine] mind” of the Father.³⁰ The negative consequence of this is that it renders the external utterance of the divine word (*vox*) “dubious.” The mental word is not necessarily *logically* expressive, though it may yet be expressive *de facto*.³¹ In Bonaventure’s account of the *expressio*, on the other hand, the externalization of the Word is logically primary.

According to Balthasar, the Word’s expressivity is twofold. It is, on the one hand, *expressivus (ausdrücklich)*: an exact reproduction of that which it expresses — in this

²⁷ Ibid., 289.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ For Aquinas, the *Verbum mentis* is the highest of all of the Son’s names. It sums up all the others: Son, radiance, image, etc. See *ST* I.34.2: “[I]n the term *verbum* the same property is designated as in the term Son, for which reason Augustine says ‘he is called Son in the sense that he is called Word’... As a matter of fact, the Son’s generation — his personal property — is designated with various names that are attributed to him in order to express his perfection in a differentiated manner. Insofar as he is consubstantial with the Father, he is called ‘Son’, insofar as he is coeternal, ‘radiance’ (Hebrews 1:3), insofar as he is like him in all things, ‘Image’, insofar as he is generated in a purely intellectual manner, ‘Word’. For it was impossible to find a single name whereby all these things would be expressed simultaneously.”

³¹ In fact, Balthasar acknowledges precisely this in a footnote by indicating that for Aquinas the Word is expressive of both the Father and creatures: *unicum Verbum eius est expressivum non solum Patris sed etiam creaturarum*.

case, the Father. In the case of the Father and the Son, the relationship is one of perfect representation. *Expressio*, on the other hand, is far more of an active term, drawing attention to the *act* of expression — the “process of expressing.” It is the genius of Bonaventure, Balthasar claims, that the fact or content of the expression is “always understood and explained (so to speak) in the shadow” of the *expressio*.³² The content of the truth of God that the Word expresses is never separate from the form [*Gestalt*] of that expression — the form of love, especially as it is expressed in the dramatic life of Christ’s earthly drama.

As the *expressio* of the Father, the Word can also be the Son of the Father’s begetting love, in a way that the purely intellectual generation of the *Verbum mentis* does not easily allow. The Son is the fruitfulness, not of an abstract divine Being, but of the *Father* and his freely expressed love. The relationship between the Father and the Son, Begetter and Begotten, Speaker and Word, is fundamentally agapeic. Here we see Balthasar’s resistance to any theology that would privilege thought over love.³³ Worldly

³² *GL* 2, 287. Balthasar is here moving away from a static Christology of “nature” and toward a more dramatic account, emphasizing the action of Christ in the unfolding economy of salvation. See Mark A. McIntosh’s critical account of this uniquely Balthasarian interpretative strategy in *Christology from Within*. Balthasar’s “dramatic Christology” also underlies his interpretation of Maximus in *Cosmic Liturgy*, 256-270 especially.

³³ The privileging of thought or mind over love is, Balthasar fears, the first step of the road to the titanic Idealism of Fichte and Hegel. Balthasar sees this trend in certain medieval figures, especially Eckhart, but also in Aquinas: “We had earlier spoken of the treatises that interested Aquinas the most. Among these would *not* be the three central theological tractates: *De Deo Trino*, which gave Thomas an excellent formal training but which had no further role to play in shaping the course of his *Summa*; *De Christo*, which Thomas wrote with extraordinary care but introduced only after he had treated the whole of natural-supernatural ontology, epistemology and ethics in the *Tertia Pars*; and *De Ecclesia*, which never did have much of an impact, either on Thomas himself or on any other theologian of his time. But it is precisely these three subjects that are the central theme of theology! And in *this* sense they are theology’s *propria principia*, which formally and materially structures and dominates everything in it and upon which theology must continually reflect if it is to develop according to its own most intimate identity” (*Theology of Karl Barth*, 263).

thought and logic can only be properly situated in the overarching horizon of love if the divine logic, that is, the descending *Logos*, the begotten Son of the Father's love.³⁴

The Truth of the World

For Balthasar, creation's truth is best known in its participation in divine truth. It bears a similarity in analogy — in an ever greater dissimilarity to the truth of God, which affirms the difference, but not the absolute autonomy, of creation. This analogous truth is grounded in the positive otherness of the Son. The “otherness of creation, which is modeled on the archetypal otherness within God...[is] brought into a positive relationship to God.”³⁵ Precisely because the Son's relational otherness to the Father is *dialogical* rather than *dialectical*, the relationship is positively determined.³⁶ This intra-divine otherness creates an open space for the positivity of creation itself. It is precisely because

³⁴ Again, Balthasar sees this somewhat lacking in Aquinas: “In accordance with the Aristotelian way of thinking, Thomism emphasizes thinking from below up: it moves from the world of concrete experience and sensation, through abstraction, to universal concepts and a demonstration of the principles contained in them. Here again we have a methodology that is predominantly philosophical, whose use in theology is quite limited. For theology deals primarily with God, the *concretissimum*, from whom nothing can be abstracted. And insofar as theology deals with the revelation of this one, only and unique God in the world, its object is historical: ‘Sacred doctrine deals with singulars, such as the deeds of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the like’ (*ST I*, q 1, a 2 ad 2). The trouble is, of course, that this sentence stands as one of the initial objects to which Aquinas must later respond, and his answer shows little inclination to let these *singularia* be the main focus of theology: ‘Particulars do not affect the perfecting of what is intelligible.’ In short, in Thomas' *Summa* the particulars — that is, concrete events — were not allowed to stand as the chief object of theology. In his thought, they rather represent examples of God's eternal, supratemporal wisdom vouchsafed by God only because of our temporality. And sacred doctrine has for its primary focus this wisdom. That is why Aquinas was so interested in the general, suprahistorical essence (*quidditas*) of things, while the historical and actualist dimensions must step back. And so he focused on the lasting structure of the universe, in contrast to which the temporal nature of salvation history as standard-setting *singularia* recede into the background” (*Theology of Karl Barth*, 264). But as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, for Balthasar, thought cannot anticipate love. It can only respond to love, being caught up into its supra-logic. Love expressed eternally but dramatic, not thought or ahistorical abstraction, is the depth of all Being. Here again we see the root of Balthasar's critique of Idealism.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁶ “Such a relationship is beyond the imagination of any non-Christian religion (including Judaism and Islam), for wherever God (even in the person of Yahweh or Allah) can only be the One, it remains impossible to discover any satisfactory explanation of the Other. In these circumstances (which never truly occurred in Judaism and Islam) inevitably conceives the world, in its otherness and multiplicity, as a fall from the One, whose blessedness is only in itself” (*TL 2*, 181).

God is love that there can be *any* creation at all, let alone created Being that is constituted as love.

Trinitarian grounding. All of Balthasar's subsequent thought on truth and expressivity will be grounded on the central trinitarian logic addressed above. The truth of the created world — its mode of expressivity — is grounded and made possible by the expressivity of the eternal Word, "the grounding of the act of creation in the act of generation within the Godhead."³⁷ Balthasar ties the transcendental properties of created Being — oneness, truth, beauty, and goodness — to the trinitarian taxis of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All created being emerges from the trinitarian event of love. Each existent being has a unity that finds its source *ex alio* (its operative cause, the Father), a truth and knowability that finds its source in its *secundum aliud* (its model, the Logos), and its participative goodness according to its *propter aliud* (its final end, the Holy Spirit). Every created thing is this harmonious interplay of the qualities of being *ex alio*, *secundum aliud*, and *propter aliud* and, as such, reflects the triune God who himself exists as *ex se*, *secundum se*, and *propter se*.

Expressio mundi. Because the Son is the expressive truth of God, he is also the expressive truth of creation. Because the Father has expressed himself fully in the Son, he has given to the Son the fullness of his power and capacity: *dixit similitudinem suam, et per consequens expressit omnia quae potuit* [he has spoken his own likeness and consequentially has given expression to all that he could]. The Son is the *ars suprema*

³⁷ GL 2, 291. Balthasar continues: "To base the creation in the Trinity in this way avoids both the danger of subordinationalism which is found in the early Greek Fathers, because every appearance of locating the purpose of the generation of the Son in creation is avoided, and likewise the danger of an absorption of the natural order in the supernatural, because the natural order and the reason are unreservedly granted their relative independence."

[the highest art] because he is the *ars Patris* [the art of the Father]. According to Balthasar

[t]he Son is therefore not only the archetype, of which images are made in the world: *he is God as expression, that is, as truth*, and therefore he is the principle of the fact that the things in creation have been expressed and of the fact that they express themselves as created essences: '*ratio exprimendi est ipsius exemplaris*': the fact of being an expression (which belongs to the creature) comes from the original...All things are true and have the capacity to express themselves by virtue of the power of expression of that highest light', *i.e.*, of the Word.³⁸

The Son's expressive truth is his archetypality for everything that has been and will be created. He is the *secundum aliud*, the model and the form (*Gestalt*), of creation because he receives and reflects the Father's own creative love, bestowing it upon that which is other than himself.

If Christ is indeed the *Gestalt* of the Father's love and, precisely as such, the *Gestalt* of the world, then the epistemological shape of worldly knowing is laid open to the divine. Because the subject and object meet each other in the *Gestalt* of worldly knowing, Balthasar's Christological interpretation of the *Gestalt* is fundamentality transforms the concept. Every worldly *Gestalt* finds itself in relation to that of the eternal, creative Son as its source and archetype. Worldly knowing becomes necessarily *theological* in light of the Word's role as the Form of all forms.

But how is it that the Word plays this role? Drawing once again on Bonaventure, Balthasar advances two forms of the Son's exemplarism: divine and cosmic. First, as the expression of the Father, the Word is dispositive to the Father in every respect. His divine being is not just *from* the Father, it is *for* the Father. This "for-ness" is the dispossession of love. As divine *expressio*, the Word is also the *mundus archetypus*,

³⁸ *GL* 2, 290. Emphasis added.

the “expression par excellence”, the *expressio* of all things that come into being through him (John 1:3). Crucial for Balthasar, the dispositive Logos is “the mediating link between the supreme God and creation.”³⁹ Like many of the pre-Nicene Fathers, Balthasar emphasizes the *endiathetos* and *prophoros*, the internal and the external *Logos*, as this mediating link. The dispositive *Logos*’s mission is to bear the expression of God to the world, and of the world to God.⁴⁰

Here we must note a subtle but critical distinction that Balthasar makes. The Word is archetypal, not primarily because he is the absolute *content* of creation, but because he is absolute *expression*.⁴¹ His archetypality is less about him being cosmic “information,” a kind of divine cypher, and more about the form and character of his divine “existence” — his receptivity, obedience, and love. It is because the Son is the true expression of the Father *as* the agent of the Father’s creative love that he acts as the “archetypal originality [*ratio exemplandi*]” of all creation: “the Son, by being the expression of the Father, is at the same time *the* expression universally, *i.e.*, the expression of everything: ‘The Word expresses the Father as the primal cause which essentially underlies all things, and in this way explains and represents the generation of the Holy Spirit and its own generation and the generation of the foundations of the earth.’”⁴²

³⁹ *TL* 2, 168.

⁴⁰ As a consequence of this, the incarnate Christ is not conceived primarily as the “solution” to the problem of sin. Rather, the eternal Son was always intended to become incarnate precisely as the fulfillment of his divine mission to express the Father’s love. See Balthasar’s account of Irenaeus for more on this theme see *GL* 2, 70ff.

⁴¹ See *GL* 2, 293.

⁴² *GL* 2, 290. Here Balthasar is drawing from Bonaventure, *Hex.* 3, 7 (V 344ab). This also relates to our earlier discussion about the *eidos* of creation being found in God. The connection that Balthasar is making is that the creaturely *eidos* is intimately tied to the *Logos*.

The implication of this is that created beings are most truly themselves when they are found in the *arte aeterna* [the eternal art] which, for Balthasar, is the expressive *Logos* himself. Created beings receive their truth and their own expressivity from that “likeness which is the truth itself in its expressive power.”⁴³ The eternally expressive Word “knows better and says better” what every created thing wishes to say. This is the central thrust of Balthasar’s Bonaventurian appropriation: the emphasis on the downward movement of truth from God into the world, both in the act of creation *and* in the economy of salvation. Creaturely truth is given through the descending grace of the creative, free, divine sharing of the *Logos*.

For Balthasar, the Johannine claim that “through him [the *Logos*] all things were made” (John 1:4), is central to understanding the truth of both God and the world. For Balthasar, God’s truth is *parrhesia* — an openness and non-concealment, a “sincere self-communication and manifestation.”⁴⁴ This *parrhesia* is the eternal expression of the Father in the Son, which overflows out of the “native invisibility and unapproachability”⁴⁵ of his divinity and “shines forth” (Psalm 79:2) into creation through the Son. Drawing again on Bonaventure, Balthasar claims that every procession from the Father is either a begetting — the Son — or a consequence of this begetting. *In* the Son, the Father communicates and manifests himself. *Through* the Son, all finite being is

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Prayer*, 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

caught up in God's "will to expression."⁴⁶ What it expresses, in expressing itself in and through the Son, is the truth of God.⁴⁷

Worldly truth in the light of the Logos. The consequence of Balthasar's exemplarism is twofold. The first consequence is that the Logos becomes the ontological grounding of all created truth. This is Balthasar's "cosmification of the Logos," his emphasis on the immanent presence of God in the world. Here Balthasar locates himself within a well-established tradition, from the *logos spermatikos* of Justin Martyr, to the Maximian dialectic of the *Logos-logoi*, to Bonaventurian exemplarism. The "Word has been abroad" according to Balthasar; it underlies and expresses itself in and through the things it has made. There is no corner of creaturely being that remains untouched by the him.

This leads immediately to the second consequence of Balthasar's exemplarism. It bespeaks a symbolically rich world in which all the creaturely forms are, as the Areopagite might put it, "sacred veils" of the divine wisdom that is their foundation.⁴⁸ It is here that we see the theological fulfillment of worldly truth's necessary participation in God as indicated in the previous chapter. The cosmification of the *Logos* not only makes worldly truth possible, but also fundamentally reveals the world as the bearer of divine

⁴⁶ It is caught up in a double way: "first, in as much as the archetype in God is itself an expression, and second in so far as the individual being is the goal of a particular intention of expression on God's part, *expressissime* and *distinctissime* chosen to be as it is, and addressed by God with this intention. Thereby it is the destination of a particular act of God's condescension, of a *particular form of speech of the eternal Word*" (*GL* 2, 296).

⁴⁷ The works of Bonaventure from which Balthasar is drawing are especially *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* I and *Breviloquium* 8 (324a). See also Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 145ff.

⁴⁸ *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 121C. Balthasar's accounts of this theme, especially as it works out at the end of the medieval period with Cusa in *GL* 5, 205ff. For a Protestant attempt at reclaiming this tradition, see Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: Weaving a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2011).

truth. This will allow Balthasar to claim for his own theology what he claims for that of Dionysius: what he offers is not “an immanent ontology of creatureliness (a doctrine of the cosmos), but — because it is a matter of theology — a doctrine of the structure of the world conceived as having God completely and utterly as its goal, and indeed even as its *formal object*.”⁴⁹

Such a world should be understood in relation to the *Logos*, as characterized by a necessary, though positive, esotericism. The *Logos* is abroad but hidden, both under the signs of those things that are symbolically fitting for him and under that which is his opposite. All the world, then, becomes useful for coming to understand the one to whom it points. The exemplarism of the *Logos* fundamentally transforms the way the world is to be seen and understood. All worldly truth can be understood as the modulations of the one, true, divine *expressio*.⁵⁰

Emmanuel, the God-World Relation

Thus far, this chapter has been preoccupied with the eternal logic of the Son’s exemplarism. Yet, as Balthasar insists, the radical Christian claim is that the eternal expression of God did not remain a merely spiritual or a prophetic word but rather that *Verbum caro factum est*. Truth is not a universal, abstract concept that lies beyond the dramatic rhythms of history. The eternal truth of God becomes *flesh* — a “concrete, temporal, and frail human animal.”⁵¹ As such, the Son hands himself over utterly to the Father’s will in an ongoing act of perfect dispossession, surrender, and obedience.

⁴⁹ *GL* 2, 163. Emphasis added. God as the formal object of creation will be especially important in our characterization of the saint as the true philosopher in the next chapter.

⁵⁰ One can see a similar project in David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 281ff.

⁵¹ *Epilogue*, 102.

Christ's historical life dramatizes eternal truth. In the incarnation, and especially in his death, Christ reveals himself as the truth of the Triune God's self-giving love and mutual surrender and as the summation of all things that exist. It is in his existence specifically as flesh, as God-with-us, that Christ perfectly sums up in himself the truth of the God-World relation. This truth is the love that he himself is.

Logos-Sarx. According to Balthasar, the Word becomes flesh for two reasons: first, to restore what has been perverted and seduced from its proper end in God. Second, and more comprehensively, the Word becomes flesh, since the Son is the expression of the Father's eternal and eternally creative love, in order to fulfill the vocation of the entire created universe: to offer up its Being, its truth, in a doxological act of surrender and love.⁵² The enfleshed Word, as the truth of Being, expresses its created truth to the Father through his receptive obedience and surrender to the Father's love.⁵³

If Christ is to express the truth of created being, then his human existence must be one of radical finitude, which embraces the depth of creaturely fragility, even death. This emphasis on the contingency of Christic existence leads Balthasar to appropriate the early church's *Logos-Sarx* Christology. His emphasis on the fragility and temporality of *sarx* (or *caro*) is at the heart of his theology of Christ's death. In his death, Christ is revealed not as the tragic hero who can cope with suffering, but as the one who perfectly embodies the vocation of all created Being — to offer itself up in obedient surrender.⁵⁴ It

⁵² It is precisely creation's failure to do and to be as it is called that constitutes "sin" for Balthasar. Sin is "being-for-oneself" in spite of the call to self-abandonment. For Balthasar, Christ's mission is to offer through himself the obedience to the Father that creation itself owes and, in this way, both correcting *and* fulfilling created being.

⁵³ See Balthasar's summary of Christ's mission in *ET* 2, 124-125.

⁵⁴ Balthasar sees a foretaste of this difference between heroism as endurance and heroism as obedience in the transition between the Homeric and Virgilian epics. Odysseus' heroism is that of endurance. His

is in this act of surrender that Christ perfectly expresses the truth of created being and, by so doing, heals it. Balthasar therefore holds with many of the early Fathers, that “the flesh is the hinge of salvation.”⁵⁵

But why should the *flesh* — so weak, so limited — carry so much salvific weight? For Balthasar, the flesh of Christ is not something theology — nor philosophy, for that matter — can ever leave behind. His turn to *Logos-Sarx* Christology is part of his resistance to the spiritualizing or gnosticizing tendencies of philosophical Idealism. Against the Idealist tendency toward the universal at the expense of the particular and the historical (a problem Balthasar sees entrenched in every iteration of Hegelian dialectic), he emphasizes a radically particular and concrete account of truth. Truth is not an abstract, universal principle. For Christian thought, truth has a history, it bears the weight and particularity of flesh. By emphasizing the fleshly existence of Christ, Balthasar carries all speculative theorizing in the direction of the historical drama of Christ. It is precisely in the flesh that the drama of Christ’s historical divine person and the truth of the world meet.

Such a claim turns on Balthasar’s assumption, that humanity stands as the summit of creation with a vocation to sum up created Being. Here Balthasar develops a *meta-anthropology* that plays a critical role in his interpretation of the cosmic significance of Christ.⁵⁶ According to his meta-anthropological scheme, humanity has a twofold cosmic

glory (*kleōs*) arises from his struggle (*eris*). Aeneas, on the other hand, is driven less by glory than by love (as represented by his mother, Venus), and so his glory arises from his obedience and surrender to divine will, fate, and destiny. See Balthasar’s account in *GL* 4, 261ff. This notable transition prepares the way for, even as it is subverted by, the Christian emphasis on glory arising from that which appears most opposed to it — the obedient, but horrifying, death of the God-Man on a wooden pike.

⁵⁵ *Epilogue*, 99.

⁵⁶ See Martin Bieler, “Meta-anthropology and Christ: On the Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Communio*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1993), 129-146.

purpose. It is meant to be the summation of the cosmos and to represent, vicariously, the cosmos to God. It accomplishes this by virtue of its existence as the *microcosm* of the world. Man, Balthasar claims, “unites in itself all the elements of the universe in contracted form.”⁵⁷ Like John Scotus Eriugena before him, Balthasar argues that all created things are recapitulated in the dignity of the human. Man is the “knot” (*copulatio*) between the upper spiritual world and the lower physical world. The human is *tertius mundus... ratione medietatis*.⁵⁸

Humanity’s mediatory role in the cosmos — his being a “third world” between the spiritual and the material realms — is a function of his unique constitution as a “spirited animal.” One central aspect of humanity’s representation of the cosmos is the fragility of the flesh, seen most clearly in the unavoidable reality of death, and represents the entire rhythm of cosmic self-surrender. According to Balthasar, nature itself is a “sacrificial process” that gives itself materially to humanity. Man is by nature one who receives his being, not only from God’s breath, but also from the material world from which he is formed. Lower organisms “surrender” themselves to the higher, and thus become “the successive formations of matter [that] constitute the substratum of the delicate, naked, defenseless being who is thrust into the exposed middle of the world” — the *adam*. Nature is for Balthasar a “self-oblation for the sake of the end that was intended from the very beginning.”⁵⁹ All of nature is meant to find its fulfillment in

⁵⁷ *TL* 2, 226.

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that, though this idea is common among so many of the Fathers — notably in Balthasar’s hero Maximus, and also in Aquinas — it is through Eriugena that he develops this idea. Balthasar is fully aware of the pantheistic tendencies in Eriugena’s thought (Cf. *GL* 4, 343ff.) yet he also sees that Eriugena is unafraid of the “cosmification” of the human and the “anthrop-ification” of the cosmos in all its radicality. Though Eriugena pushes too far, Balthasar sees in him a helpful ally in overcoming the strict separation of nature and grace so prevalent in mid 20th century neo-scholasticism.

⁵⁹ *TL* 2, 229.

humanity; it is the special vocation of humanity to sum up the material cosmos and to hand it over (*tradere*) to the Father. But it is of course only through Jesus that humanity's mission is actually fulfilled: "It is only in this sacrificial shape that man would be both the embodiment of the universe as well as its dispositive opening to the 'loving sacrificial death' that occurs once for all when the Word of God becomes incarnate — the death that eucharistically fills up the cosmos with triune life."⁶⁰

This kind of language of metaphysical anthropology is important for Balthasar, though he is far more concerned to see humanity's cosmic mediation as emerging from being the dialogue partner of God. Drawing especially on Irenaeus, Balthasar insists that "[t]his dialogue unfolds steadily and gradually through the ages, so that man, who by himself is weak and 'in need of the glory of God', may partake of it and, as a 'living man', be 'to God's glory'. But 'God's life-communicating power is brought to perfection in weakness, that is, in the flesh.' For only as flesh is man really man."⁶¹ It is as a *dialogical* creature that humanity is the center of the cosmos.

Further, it is as a *dialogical* creature that man is not just a *person* but, more specifically, a *missional* person, this cosmic mediator. The human, by virtue of being ensouled flesh, holds together in his person the entire cosmos — things material and intelligible. As such, man is called to bear in himself the fullness of creaturely truth (as that which has surrendered itself into man) and, through his dialogical relation with God — Adam walked and talked with God in the cool of the garden — bear divine truth,

⁶⁰ TL 2, 229. The second part of this chapter will address this significant claim that Christ's surrender unto death fills up the universe with the life of God. The implications of such a claim will be significant for our next chapter: if the world has been fundamentally transformed, filled with the life of God in a way that it was not prior to Christ's death and resurrection, then our way of inhabiting and knowing that new world too must be remade. Epistemology must once again be seen an extension of ontology; knowing and being must once again be united.

⁶¹ TL 2, 228.

disclosed freely through the graced relationship with the Father. This mission of truth-bearing only comes in and through the being addressed by God, as a uniquely dialogical creature.

Through this meta-anthropology, Balthasar reflects back on the ontological claims we developed previously to demonstrate how the human (and ultimately Christ himself) is expressive of Being itself. He develops this connection in three ways. First, he returns to the idea that Being does not subsist in itself but surrenders itself in finite essences.⁶² Being divests itself in order to enable creaturely beings (whether intelligible or material) to come into existence. Being has a decidedly “chalice character” — it surrenders itself, making itself poor precisely as an expression of its fullness.

Second, this divestiture of Being in beings implies an unsurpassable unity among all things, connected to each other by means of a common enabling ground: “every being that becomes actual is rooted and communicates with all the others.”⁶³ Together, these two points are not competing first principles of Being but gesture toward the truth that all things come forth in the same creative act of divestiture, and are thus united by acts of *kenosis*, surrender, and love.

Third, the implications of this metaphysical summary highlight two decisive principles for theological anthropology. If man is the product of the sacrificial process of both Being and nature, that is, if he is constituted by receptivity on the natural level, then he must also be “dispositively open to...the self-surrender of the Son in the will of the

⁶² Being — both divine and created — is marked by the paradoxical juxtaposition of fullness and poverty. It is precisely in its poverty that Being’s fullness is revealed and vice versa. Balthasar inverts the well-known Platonic relationship between Eros and Wealth-Poverty. In the *Symposium*, Eros was the child of both Wealth and Poverty but for Balthasar’s Christian metaphysic, the “acts” of wealth and poverty are the offspring of divine eros, God’s love. In other words, love does not proceed from lack but from excess.

⁶³ *TL* 2, 229.

Father through the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴ The true disposition of man is a *potentia oboedientialis*: “Needless to say, what man sees nature living out unconsciously is something that he himself must freely and knowingly understand and appropriate.”⁶⁵ The consequence of this constitution and vocation, however, is that humanity also has a “terrible capacity” for titanic striving to be gods through their own strength and power. This striving is the root of sin and the root of the titanisms of German Idealism.

The immediate consequence of the preceding for Christology is that, by becoming human, that is, by taking on not just human nature but human *flesh*, the incarnate Christ takes on the vocation of the human. He does this in order to fulfill human vocation perfectly through his life, death, and resurrection. As the true and perfect human, Christ realizes humanity’s cosmic vocation in a way that humanity itself does not. As such, Christ realizes in himself, through the drama of his existence, the full truth of creaturely being: “And because the whole of the cosmos is indivisible from man, and because man himself emerged and developed from that same cosmos and is meant to rule over it as if it were but his own body writ large, the lordship of the enfleshed Son necessary becomes the lordship over the universe.”⁶⁶

How exactly does this lordship become reality? For Balthasar, the lordship of truth comes, not through an extrinsic imposition on creation, but from *within* — as creation’s own offering up of itself. This occurs through the archetypal and paradigmatic

⁶⁴ Ibid., 230.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Epilogue*, 102. It is important to distinguish between Balthasar’s point here and Descartes’ claim that humanity can be “masters and possessors” of nature. See Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, VI.62. The lordship that Balthasar describes is one characterized, as we saw above, by service, and of course, by love. His is not an exploitative lordship, but a proper governing, cultivating, and protecting. Humanity is charged to be the “shepherd” of created Being.

existence of Christ who, as the truth, reveals himself as a love that carries all truth within itself, accepting even the contradictions of the world, bearing them and transforming them. Creation offers itself up to God when God becomes creation, and surrenders itself as he surrenders himself. Here, at last, we come to the conclusion we have been anticipating: that Christ's truth is love.

Love

For Balthasar, there can be no sharp separation between an object's content and its form, but only through their union, can there be a valid expression of truth. We have already seen how Christ is the fullness of truth through his double nature as the content of the truth of God and the truth of the world, but we must now go a step farther. Christ's nature as the truth, as *content* of truth, must be *expressed* in a particular, concrete *form*. Balthasar is not content to stop his Christological discussion at the level of natures. Instead, he wishes to plunge into the depths of Christ's dramatic existence and discover there how the form of Christ's life serves as the expression of the truth of his nature. Balthasar points to the deeds of Christ's life — the miracles, yes, but most significantly his crucifixion and resurrection — as proof of his truth: "his entire human fate is intended as a lasting work stamped in the protological image of the Father working in him (John 5:19f)... *Thus Jesus' whole human existence becomes God's self-expression and self-surrender.*"⁶⁷ Through his existence, Christ reveals the truth of God in which all created truth participates.

This section also looks forward to next chapter by suggesting that Christ's archetypal, incarnate expressionism is the measure of all creation and thus the condition

⁶⁷ *Epilogue*, 90. Emphasis added.

of the possibility of all human knowing. In other words, Christ's existence, through which he expresses the truth of both God and creation, becomes the very location for the possibility of all knowledge. For Balthasar, God's eternal measuring does not occur solely in some heavenly sphere, apart from the lived history of Christ's human existence.⁶⁸ Such would lead in the direction of some sort of gnostic spiritualism. Rather, this measuring, the condition of the possibility of all human knowing, comes through the particular human existence of the God-Man. In this way, Balthasar holds that Christ is not just the goal of human knowing but also the way.

Kenosis

Balthasar's exposition of the Christ-form involves the existential working out of the Son's deeds of love through his kenotic acts. We can unpack Balthasar's account of Christ's kenotic existence under three main modes: Christ's receptivity, his poverty, and his self-abandonment and self-surrender (*Hingabe*). All three of these modes are expressive of the divine Son's eternal *kenosis*; they are expressive of his truth, the outworking of his eternal obedience. Together, these modes are all an expression of his mission and his identity: to express that the source of truth is in divine love. But this divine love is located in himself. This mission is grounded in the logic of his *kenosis*:

...if the kingship of the God who reveals himself as love comes to light precisely in the Son's humble obedience to the Father, then it is clear that this obedience is essentially love. It is certainly the paradigmatic attitude of love the creature must have before God's majesty, but far more than that, it is the radiant paradigm of divine love itself: precisely in — and *only* in — the *kenosis* of Christ, the *inner* mystery of God's love comes to light, the mystery of the God who 'is love' (1 John 4:8) in himself and therefore is 'triune.'⁶⁹

⁶⁸ We can note here the influence of Bonaventure's Franciscan emphasis on the historical body of Christ as the object of all spiritual contemplation.

⁶⁹ *Love Alone*, 87.

Kenosis, therefore, is the dominant expressive form of love. It is the form of the divine truth that walks the dusty roads of Galilee. It is the Son's kenotic existence that reveals that Being and love are co-extensive, that heaven and earth have met uniquely and transformatively in his divine person, and thus creates the possibility of knowledge of truth.

For Balthasar, Christ's kenotic existence accomplishes two things. First, it existentially expresses both divine and creaturely truth. In so doing, Christ's existence is the true *analogia entis* — the space where divine and creaturely truth meet. Second, Christ's kenotic existence creates space for the ongoing dramatic realization of his truth — the Christic form of love is the condition of the possibility of Balthasar's subsequent, saintly epistemology of love.⁷⁰

We may begin this investigation by adopting Johnston's taxonomy that identifies three kenotic "moments" that define the shape of the love that Christ reveals and which is his truth: 1) the triune self-giving love; 2) the act of creation; 3) Christ's flesh-taking and passion. These three moments together reveal the inner dynamic of love — the ecstasy and return, the donation and the unitive receptivity that Christ performs. This dynamic of love, as Johnson rightly notes, is not an incidental theological *addendum* to Balthasar's ontological and epistemological thought but instead is its inner form — "the very life and energy implicit at every moment in the theoretical metaphysical deductions on the one

⁷⁰ Cf. Johnson, 126: "In Christ a common space is made in which creation and Creator can meet; but it is a commonality secured not by being a point higher than both or outside of both in which they can meet as equals, but rather it is the space of the divine interiority making room within itself for the reality of created being."

hand and the practical encounter between persons (divine-divine as well as divine-human) on the other.”⁷¹

Triune kenosis. For Balthasar, as we have suggested earlier, there is a very real intra-trinitarian dynamic of love that he describes as a “first kenosis.” The trinitarian processions are the eternal form of this kenotic love. In generating the Son, the Father pours himself out absolutely, with no remainder. The Son’s eternal existence is determined and characterized by his absolute receptivity; his divine personhood arises only by receiving in himself the kenotic love of the Father. But in his timeless and perfect receptivity, the Son offers his entire existence back up to the Father — his receptivity is also at once perfect donation and surrender.

Balthasar’s insistence on this initial, trinitarian *kenosis* is his way of guarding against Eckhart’s erroneous elevation of knowledge over love in divine Being. For Balthasar, the Father’s outpouring of himself in begetting the Son is an act of love that surpasses the Father’s self-knowledge. If the Father’s generation of the Son were primarily an act of knowledge rather than of love, two errors are possible. The first error is to assume that the Father has generated the Son in order to gain knowledge of himself. This, Balthasar claims, would lead into a sort of Hegelian dialectic, where the original Concept must come to self-knowledge by positing an Other against itself. The second possible error is that the Father generates the Son as a result *of* his self-knowledge.⁷²

⁷¹ See Johnson, 128. Johnston also rightly notes the importance of Hamann for Balthasar’s thought on kenosis. Hamann, for Balthasar, is a tragic figure, in whom lay the possibility for a retrieval of a theology of beauty and glory — as a mediation between romanticism and the destructive tide of Kantianism. According to Balthasar, Hamann saw that the glory of God could only be revealed in that glory’s dramatic confrontation with the world of sin and death and so the glory of God is seen most truly in Christ’s suffering and death.

⁷² This is Eckhart’s error. See our previous discussion in Chapter 2, 65ff.

This would lead to an Arianism that reduces the Son to an exalted, but strictly passive, recipient of the Father's fullness. Neither of these alternatives are viable options for a theology of love of the sort that Balthasar proposes. Nor do they truly allow the Son to be the expressive image of the Father, insofar as they deprive the Son of the co-eternality that is central to a Christian doctrine of the Image. What the Son expresses and makes possible is knowledge of the truth of God — but this truth is not that of the Father's self-knowledge. The truth that the Son expresses is the *nature* of the Father as love. The Son reveals this truth by *being* this truth, that is, by being the eternally generated result of the Father's eternal love, his eternal *kenosis*, his self-abandonment [*Hingabe*] in begetting the Son.

In light of the trinitarian processions, Balthasar claims that love is the willingness to pour oneself out for another.⁷³ Moreover, the trinitarian processions also reveal the true meaning of personhood. The person is not, primarily, the one who exists as “being-for-itself” but is rather the one who images the the Trinity's “being-for-another.” This divine relationality is written into the constitution of all creaturely being that emerges out of this perfect and absolute love. In the Father's generation of the Son (and, of course, in the spiration of the Spirit), the Father reveals that love will be characterized by *kenosis* and self-giving. Or, to adopt Balthasar's Ignatian language: the trinitarian processions

⁷³ At this point, Balthasar is open to criticism for defaulting to circular reasoning. He adopts a certain definition of love for interpreting the trinitarian processions and then claims that the trinitarian processions determine what the nature of love is. Balthasar might respond to such a critique by gesturing to the example of Christ himself: “Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). We should pause to clarify. While our discussion of Balthasar's trifold *kenosis* has proceeded according to a logical ordering (Trinity, creation, incarnation), Balthasar would insist that this is decidedly *not* the proper ordering of theological knowledge. Theological knowledge of these kenotic moments begins, not with speculation into the inner life of the Trinity but rather in the concrete revelation of the life of Christ.

reveal that love is *indiferencia*, self-abandonment, and a willed surrender to the point of absolute poverty.⁷⁴

But divine poverty does not yield a void. God's poverty is always also fullness. What the Son has received in love he offers back in love: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Perhaps Christ's warning to the Rich Young Ruler, that whomever loses their life will save it (Matthew 16:25), is a truth grounded in the eternity of divine life: perhaps it is, as Johnson suggests, "a fundamental principle that undergirds all inner worldly rules."⁷⁵

The triune life and its inner-kenotic dynamic reveals that love is best articulated as "being-for-another" — the Father is eternally for the Son and the Spirit. "God is love" means that God is not just "for himself" but even for that which he creates as other than himself. The divine fullness expresses itself in willed, kenotic poverty that makes space for the created world. This trinitarian logic of kenotic love has significant implications for our understanding of the God-world relation. As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, the logic of creaturely truth pushes against its boundaries of finitude, and gestures, however hesitantly, toward the necessity of its participation in divine infinity. But how precisely is this participation possible if God is, as Balthasar will relentlessly insist, absolute wealth and fullness — the "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28)?⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Johnson describes this well: "Thus, all divine actions, *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*, insofar as they demonstrate the character of love, will demonstrate the character of abandonment, of emptiness" (158).

⁷⁵ Johnson, 158.

⁷⁶ Johnson points out that the problem of participation is a common one in nearly every form of Neo-Platonic thought, even in those Christianized forms of the type that Balthasar is attempting. The tendency of pagan Neo-Platonism is toward pantheism; Christianized forms tend to panentheism. While Balthasar does sometimes incline toward panentheism, he prefers to lean instead to the idea that the opening of a kenotic space for the creature which grants her a "porous" integrity, though not an absolute autonomy. The creature does indeed possess her being but she possesses it as a gift that exceeds her possessing (158).

His solution to this problem is to claim that the God who is “all in all” willfully chooses to limit himself in order to create a space of participation for created Being. God wills to surrender his “all” for the sake of the “other.” God willfully chooses, not to be anything less than infinite, but to be a *latent* presence in all reality: “But they [created beings] only attain freedom when the freedom-granting [*freilassende*] God recedes into a kind of latency; when he who can be absent from no place, assumes a certain incognito...”⁷⁷ Creation is thus in God, as we saw in the previous chapter; and through his willful *kenosis*, God is in creation.

The kenosis of creation. Thus Balthasar’s logic of creation runs something like this: the “selflessness” of trinitarian love grounds all things. “[T]his [trinitarian love] grounds a first form of *kenosis*, which lies in the creation (especially of free humanity), because the creator here hands over as it were a part of his freedom to the creature.”⁷⁸ As Balthasar will make clear in the first volume of the *Theo-Logic*, creation emerges out of the kenotic self-giving of the Trinity which is archetypal for that creation: “Its openness for the world portrays in it the fundamental behaviors [of creaturely existence]: reception and giving, service and creation, justice and love, which are all just different forms of self-giving.”⁷⁹ Creation is possible through the kenotic openness of divine fullness but in such a way that creation itself is fundamentally marked by, because it participates in, this selfsame logic of kenotic love.

⁷⁷ *Theodramatik* II, 248: “Raum für Freiheit aber erhalten sie nur, wenn der freilassende Gott in eine gewisse Latenz zurücktritt, wenn er, der von keinem Ort abwesend sein kann, ein gewisses Inkognito annimmt...” This idea of the divine *incognito* will be especially prevalent for the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁸ “...diese begründet eine erste Form von Kenose, die in der Schöpfung (zumal des freien Menschen) liegt, da der Schöpfer hier gleichsam einen Teil seiner Freiheit an das Geschöpf abgibt.” Quoted in Johnson, 152.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Johnson, 152.

The kenotic flesh. But how exactly is this discussion related to Balthasar's Christology? How is the kenotic gesture of divine love in creation associated with the eternal Son? We return here to Balthasar's notion of archetypality. The latent, immanent presence of God in all created being *is* the divine Son, the *Logos*, through whom and to whom creation is ordered. The Son is not just the archetypal truth of creation; he is also the agent of divine love that brings it into existence and undergirds it in both its distance from and nearness to the Father.

Because creation cannot be reduced to God or absorbed into God (either of these options would mean that the act of creation was not an act of love — for, if either were true, God would only be loving himself), it takes on a concrete reality of its own. But this reality is something it receives fully as a gift of love. This givenness and receptivity is an image of the Son, who is himself the first and true Image of God. Creation is a freely generated image of the truth that God is love by being made according to the image of the Son. But because it is divine love that makes space for creation, God's presence cannot be absent from it. His presence in the world is not simply that of latent archetypality; it also involves the “mythical” descent of God to the earth; the creator God of kenotic love is also *Emmanuel* — God with us.⁸⁰ The God of love is a God who descends to the creature rather than operating extrinsically in the world. In creation and covenant, God binds himself to the world, not out of obligation but out of love: “Firstly, in order for God to himself be love, life, eternal exchange in fullness, who does not need the world in order to have an other to be loved, in such a way that he, creating the world,

⁸⁰ Indeed, Balthasar's account of the Old Testament is oriented around the theme of the “descending God” who comes to his people in covenantal relationship. As Johnson helpfully summarizes, “God, in making promises to us, is by that very nature limiting Godself, choosing to be towards us in a certain respect, and not in just any respect whatsoever, not just according to any rules whatsoever... it is self-abasement when God promises to bestow divine blessings on the people if they obey” (150).

applies an entirely free act, in which he binds himself freely and without compulsion to the begun and to be accompanied work.”⁸¹

In light of this we may say that, for Balthasar, the Incarnation is not a “new” event in the life of God, but should be understood as the fulfillment of God’s consistent, loving engagement in and with the world. The Incarnation of the Word is the ontological realization of God’s loving engagement with creation, but it is also the dramatic expression and fulfillment of the kenotic love of the God who is perfect being-for-another.

We may thus return once again to Balthasar’s doctrine of *Verbum caro*, but interpret the flesh-taking as expressing the truth that love is the truest reality, that love itself is credible and, finally, that love is the path of understanding. This will connect all the previous threads of this project by elaborating on the metaphysical and epistemological centrality of the incarnate Christ. We shall exposit Balthasar’s account of this centrality by focusing on three chief characteristics of the Christic form of truth: receptivity, poverty, and obedience. In this way Christ becomes the meeting place of truth. This will lead us to our conclusion that the epistemological way into his that Christ opens through his existence, the way that corresponds to the form of his truth, is love as expressed as the dialogue of prayer.

Receptivity

In Christ’s existence we see the archetypal expression of all worldly forms of receptivity. The receptivity of Being finds its fulfillment in the existence of the God-Man, in whom all created things meet with God. For Balthasar, receptivity lies at the

⁸¹ *Theodramatik* II, 484, quoted in Johnson, 151. Emphasis added.

heart of Christ's mission of expression. To be a missional person (indeed to be a *person* at all) is to be characterized by receptivity. "No one can give himself as mission... where a person is entrusted with a substantial mission that summons him to put his very existence at its disposal, the person thus sent (*der Gesendete*) can, as a result, become (to a degree) identified with the mission (*Sendung*)."⁸² For Balthasar, Christ *is* what he *does*. That this is so is due to his perfect receptivity.

Balthasar's emphasis on Christic receptivity is grounded in his Johannine theology. Balthasar sees receptivity working itself throughout the gospel of John:

It is of his essence as Son to receive life (5:26), insight (3:11), spirit (3:34-35), word (3:34; 14:24), will (5:30), deed (6:9), doctrine (7:16), work (14:10) and glorification (8:54, 17:22, 24) from another, from the Father. He receives it, indeed, in such a way that he has it all *in himself* (5:26) and disposes of all that he receives as of his own (10:18, 28); yet never with any denial of that receiving, but affirming it always, eternally, as the ground of his very being.⁸³

In other words, Christ recapitulates in his existence the metaphysical rhythm of truth that we outlined in the previous chapter, by receiving in himself the truth of the Father and creatively appropriating it in his life.

For Christ, this rhythm of reception and appropriation is a cyclical act. His "having" is never separated from his "receiving." The receptivity that we examined in the previous chapter is thus shown to be but a reflection of the true Man, indeed of the God-Man himself: "The Son's form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity, is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father. It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his 'I,' his own inner

⁸² *TD* 3, 154.

⁸³ *Theology of History*, 30.

dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in a reciprocal giving.”⁸⁴

The implication of this is that Christ’s receptivity is not secondary to his person, but rather his constitutive element. His human receptivity is an expression of his trinitarian identity: “for the man Jesus, his hypostatic union with the Logos is not a religious entity, a theme in its own right; rather, the form of his human self-awareness is the *expression*, in terms of this world, of his eternal consciousness as Son.”⁸⁵ The receptivity that characterizes Jesus is the double expression of his divine person and his humanity. The historical drama of Jesus’ receptivity corresponds perfectly to his eternal reception of the Father as the divine Son. It is here that the historical temporality of Christ takes on a cosmic significance as the location of his ontological and theological *performance* of divine receptivity.

Christ, Balthasar insists, does not stand outside his own temporality and survey his history extrinsically, as if his history were a chess game laid out before an all-seeing eye. If his existence was simply the enactment of some extrinsically determined plan, then it could not be a dramatic event. There can be no struggle and thus no obedient receptivity unless his drama plays out, for itself, in history. Indeed, sin, as Balthasar conceives it, is *anticipation*, the attempt to step outside of the rhythm of historical receptivity. It is the attempt to *own* what one can only ever *receive*. It is, in fact, a violation of the rhythm of truth as we explored in the previous chapter — where truth is something one possesses at precisely the same moment that one surrenders it. The

⁸⁴ *Theology of History*, 30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

Christian claim that Christ “knew no sin” is not, for Balthasar, an abstract bit of arid theorizing. It is rather central to Christ’s perfect identification with truth *in the world*.

An extrinsically realized, ahistorical, non-dramatic performance would destroy the possibility of Christ’s receptivity, his faith and hope, and, ultimately, his love:

In its perfection, hope is simply the readiness of love to say yes to everything, to be available for everything, always open to the infinite, in the knowledge that God is always its greater good; faith is simply that disposition in the creature by which it makes an offering and a surrender of itself, and thus of all its own truth, all its own evidence, in a love which prefers God’s invariably greater truth to its own...But when hope and faith are open at this infinite angle, then both are, at heart, true modes of love, which death cannot destroy, nor even the supreme face-to-face vision can supersede.⁸⁶

The preceding implies that the incarnate existence of Christ cannot be other than an entirely original, historical event: “[t]he Incarnation is not the *n*th performance of a tragedy already lying in the archives of eternity.”⁸⁷ Nor is the Incarnation simply a symbolic retelling of a generic myth of Being. It is, Balthasar insists, *the* true event of history. Christ, insofar as he is both the incarnate Son of God and the divinized Son of Man, is the true center of history — he is true God, true man, and the truth of Being. His receptivity and obedience are not mere *examples* of but the true *archetypes* of truth. Here Balthasar casts off any possible vestiges of Hegelian logic — the fullest manifestation and expression of truth comes in the historically contingent, isolated particularity of a single human life.

Poverty. Christ’s receptivity creates a space for the drama of the obedience that he shows the Father. In his perfect receptivity, both in eternity and in the world, the Son

⁸⁶ *Theology of History*, 45. This is why there was not “some other way” to save the world apart from the cross.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

possesses the authority and glory of the Father. But divine love does not strive to possess or cling to what it has received. Love always wills to become poor through reckless prodigality, so that it can receive anew. The willful poverty that Christ adopts is a further expression of his kenotic existence.

And so for Balthasar one of the chief characteristics of the *Verbum caro* is his impoverishment. His poverty is seen, not only in his kenotic act of becoming flesh, but also with every renunciation of power, authority, and will throughout the course of his earthly existence. Because Christ resolves to be nothing in himself, his earthly poverty is a further unveiling of his perfect receptivity — rather than a titanic striving after power, he opts instead to be perfectly disposed to the Father’s will.⁸⁸ “Jesus is the bringer of salvation, equipped only to pass on what he has to others; for himself, he has nothing.”⁸⁹

Christ’s poverty is seen especially in the way he prays. His prayer is that of a beggar. It is extremely revealing that the prayer that Christ models — the Our Father — is “a beggar’s prayer from start to finish.”⁹⁰ Christ teaches a petitionary prayer rather than, say, a contemplative prayer.⁹¹ The relationship with the Father that Christ models through his prayer is not one of striving for mystical union. It is rather a prayer of desperate dependence on the Father. Rather than exercising his rightful authority by

⁸⁸ Just one of the reasons why Balthasar agrees with Maximus Confessor that Christ had no gnostic will. Cf. *Cosmic Liturgy*, 265.

⁸⁹ *GL* 7, 131. In this way, Christ’s existence is proleptically foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament: “if the word that the prophet possesses and the attitude of poverty of the *now* can become identical in their orientation toward the same ‘soon’ of God’s action, then we would possess a model (the content of which could not be filled out) for what the Incarnation of the Word is” (*GL* 7, 131).

⁹⁰ *GL* 7, 134. This line of interpretation has been more recently confirmed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 128ff.

⁹¹ And yet, Balthasar will insist, it does fall to the Christian to pray contemplatively. But this style of prayer is couched within a more fundamental child-like prayer of petition. Petitionary prayer is the fundamental acknowledgement of our impoverishment, contingency, and need. Contemplative prayer cannot act as a sanctified tower of Babel; all prayer begins and ends from the desperate need of creatureliness.

“turning these stones into bread,” he accepts his poverty and absolute dependence in his petition to “give us this day our daily bread.” His ontological poverty — his kenotic existence — is performed through the poverty of his earthly life: the Son of Man has no place to rest his head (Matthew 8:20). Christ’s existence is at every moment and in every respect in absolute dependence on the Father (Matthew 6:25).⁹²

This kind of radical poverty — ontological in the *kenosis* of the incarnation, and existential in Christ’s state of life — leads to his perfect solidarity with the poor of every form.⁹³ The tragic logic of this solidarity, Balthasar claims, is that it means Christ’s confrontation with the “powers and principalities” of un-truth and un-love that dominate the realm of the poor. The logic of Christ’s perfect receptivity leads to its tragic fulfillment in the crucifixion. It is on the cross that Christ’s perfect solidarity with the world most truly belongs to him: “because he now must really ‘be reckoned among those who have broke the law’ (Luke 22:37).”⁹⁴ Christ suffers and dies in perfect solidarity with the poorest of the poor, those who lived and died under the curse. He exists in absolute solidarity with created being in the incarnation and, in his poverty, with the poor of every form. The consequence of this solidarity, this absolute poverty, can be nothing other than the cross, and, beyond that, the absolute poverty of God-forsakenness in his descent to the dead.

⁹² By virtue of his particular mission of expressivity and his identity as the God-Man, the mediator between God and created being, Christ’s poverty is both representative and inclusive of all things. Christ represents the poverty of all created being by drawing that poverty into his own. Thus drawn, Being’s own poverty is transformed; it becomes, not absence or lack, but the fullness of love.

⁹³ Balthasar notes the way Christ acts in solidarity with all of the forms of the poor of ancient Palestine. Christ takes the side of the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1ff); children (Luke 18:15ff); the persecuted (Luke 6:22). The scandal of Christ’s solidarity expresses the Father’s perfect love for “those who have lost their way.” The “weakness” of the Father’s heart for the poor is made visible in the life of Christ. See *GL* 7, 137-138.

⁹⁴ *GL* 7, 138.

Christ thus draws together and sums up in himself the radical contingency of all created being, enfolding that ontological contingency into the free expression of his perfect receptivity. It is at this point that we see that, for Balthasar, Christ's radical receptivity is an expression of his perfect obedience to the Father. His obedience, his receptivity and solidarity with the poor, are all true expressions of his love that, at the apex of its expressivity, is *Hingabe* — a surrender, a self-abandonment that directly embraces its own contradiction on the cross and the descent into hell. Here, in its abandonment and surrender to the deformed mendacity of the world's sin, is Christ's life at its most truthful: "the transference of the one sent, who does not his own will, but the will only of the one who sent him (John 6:38), who does not speak from himself, and accordingly does not seek his own glory, [is] precisely for this reason 'true' (John 7:18)." ⁹⁵

Hingabe and obedience. What Christ has received, he has received from the Father, though not claiming himself as the sole possessor of the gifts given. Instead, he surrenders all that he has received, all that he *is*, back up to the Father in an act of abandonment (*Hingabe*). Christ's self-surrender expresses itself in his humiliation, revealing that the heart of his person, and hence the heart of divine Being, is absolute, self-giving love:

It is too good to be true: the mystery of being, revealed as absolute love, condescending to wash his creatures' feet, and even their souls, taking upon himself all the confusion and guilt, all the God-directed hatred, all the accusations showered upon him with cudgels, all the disbelief that arrogantly covers up what he had revealed, all the mocking hostility that once and for all nailed down his inconceivable movement of self-

⁹⁵ *GL* 7, 142.

abasement — in order to pardon his creature, before himself and the world.⁹⁶

Obedience to his mission to testify of the truth of the Father is part of the Son's vocation as the expressive Word of God. But this obedient expressivity in the world is bookended by two profound silences: that of the womb and that of the grave. It is in his quiet that the Word made flesh disposes himself to be the agent of the Father's will. As the Synoptic gospels make clear, the Word only breaks his theological silence after being addressed by his Fatherly Thou and commissioned in his baptism in the Jordan. Only then does he begin to speak, as an obedient response to his Father's will.⁹⁷

According to Balthasar, Christ's obedience is *traditio*, a handing over of himself to the Father's will in an act of trust, faith, and love. That is, Christ's obedience involves perfect surrender, absolute abandonment (*Gelassenheit*) of himself, and the utter impoverishment of his being. He wills to be poor and receive, not the fullness of the Father, but the cup of his Father's rejection. In abandoning himself, the Son is utterly abandoned. We have seen the centrality of this concept for his metaphysics and epistemology, and his spirituality; abandonment is the proper internal disposition of the soul before God. But it is in the drama of Christ's passion that we see the archetypal act of abandonment. Indeed, we see there the act that is the possibility of all other forms of abandonment.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Love Alone*, 102.

⁹⁷ On the theme of Christ's silence as his receptivity and self-abandonment see *GL* 7, 143ff. On Christ's silence before Pilate as a signal of his obedience and surrender, see *TL*, 87ff. Interestingly, Balthasar's negative theology is grounded precisely in this Christological silence. Negative theology for him is less an epistemological "unknowing" than it is a disposition of obedience and surrender before God.

⁹⁸ We might ask how the historically isolated event of Christ's particular life can be the condition of the possibility for events and forms of being that historically preceded it. How can Christ's life be the condition of the possibility of a cosmic principle that had already been occurring for countless years before the event of the incarnation? We must consider here Balthasar's claim that Christ is both the protological

Through his passion, the Word Made Flesh “abandons itself and dissolves itself.” His truthful expression becomes an un-word. Through his sacrificial act we encounter the paradox that lies at the heart of Christian belief: love is cursed, that which is holy has become sin, life has died, word has become un-word, form has become formlessness, truth has become lie. For Balthasar, this is the heart of Christian truth precisely because it is here, in his suffering, in his act of self-abandonment that results in his forsakenness by the Father, in his embrace of every contradiction, that Christ most perfectly expresses his love.

Contradiction

For Balthasar, it is Christ crucified, dead, and buried, that reveals the fullness of all truth. When the truth himself undergoes the contradiction of suffering and death — in the face of every logical and moral contradiction — that truth, by embracing and inhabiting its own contradiction, shows itself as self-giving love. This love does not annihilate or synthesize its contradiction along the lines of Hegelian dialectic. Instead, it demonstrates its perfect receptivity, not of life and of love, but of their exact opposite: death and curse.⁹⁹

and eschatological form and norm of history. Such an idea is found throughout his *Theology of History* and even in his account of Gregory of Nyssa. See his *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Marc Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 141ff. For another useful account of the logical priority of Christ as the “true Adam” see Conor Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get it Wrong* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2010), 378-379.

⁹⁹ “And because, being the Word pure and simple, he is also the truth pure and simple, the contradiction of him is also the untruth, the lie pure and simple. Etymologically *dia* means ‘apart’, ‘asunder’, so that contradiction, *dia-legein*, dialectic means the yawning abyss of sheer irreconcilability and enmity” (*TL* 2, 317). A Christo-logic cannot be a Hegelian dialectic and synthesis for the simple reason that the contradiction Christ undergoes by “becoming sin” is well beyond the possibility of synthesis and reconciliation. The contradiction of the lie cannot be sublated into a higher synthesis; it can only be healed from within.

For Balthasar, the abandonment that Christ undergoes on the cross results in the breaking apart of the unity of logic and love that the Son most fundamentally *is*. “Because every love is withheld from him, all he has left is pure ‘reasoning’, this ‘dreadful faculty’, pure logic, which (because love is lacking) is precisely ‘absurd’: ‘Thought can no longer keep up; nothing is logically conclusive.’ ... One is deprived, not only of thinking, but of speech itself...”¹⁰⁰ The unity of truth and love that is constitutive of Christ’s trinitarian being and human existence has led him to precisely this point of dereliction. This dereliction is at once the fullest expression of his truth as well as the un-making of his expressive form. The form of Christ’s truth and love, expressed through his obedience and abandonment, becomes *formlessness*: “The Son’s obedience even in death, even in hell, is his perfect identity in all contradiction.”¹⁰¹

And so what Christ undergoes is a series of contradictions, all of which are a piece of a more fundamental, universal contradiction, which becomes the bedrock of Christian logic, namely, that the fullest image of truth occurs when that truth becomes the lie.¹⁰² Only thus can every other contradiction be taken on and healed from within. This is the heart of Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday and, in many ways, the heart of all of Balthasar’s thought.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ TL 2, 358.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 354. He continues: “At no point in his life can one draw a boundary between love and mission, task and everyday existence, obedience and voluntariness, obedience and personal sphere, obedience and the assumption of the task. He made all this a unity, so that out of the unity of love [speaking trinitarianly] he must now endure the unity of abandonment. *It was his own rule that condemned him to death.*”

¹⁰² TL 2, 317ff.

¹⁰³ Even Balthasar’s critics note the centrality of his theology of Holy Saturday. See, for example, Alyssa Pitstick, *Light in the Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2007). See also Alyssa Lyra Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes, “Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy,” *First Things*,

The first contradiction that Christ himself takes on in his descent to the dead is the very possibility of hell itself. For Balthasar, hell is the “latrine” of sin — its essence is nothing substantial, but only the contradiction of truth. Hell exists only as the contradiction of the truth of Christ. Hell can only “be” insofar as it is the repository of everything that willfully counters the truth of Christ. It is lie, silence, hate. In a way, hell is a diabolical impossible possibility: “Hell is and at the same time is not.”¹⁰⁴

But Christ’s descent into hell is not just a descent into the dregs of sin but into death itself. The contradiction, the sin of hell, is the “sting” of death. In his descent, Christ demonstrates a perfect solidarity even with the accursed dead. This is the height — or perhaps more accurately, the depth — of his willed poverty. Contrary to what Balthasar calls excessively mythological depictions of the descent into hell in Orthodox iconography, Christ’s harrowing is not an active, triumphant charge into the depths but, rather the passive becoming like one of the dead.¹⁰⁵ God exists in solidarity with the dead in a new way; Christ’s descent is a sinking into the second death, into the “essence of the second death: that which is cursed by God in his definitive judgment sinks down to the place where it belongs. In this state, there is no time.”¹⁰⁶ The abyss of the second death is pure “hiatus,” the annihilation of time and Being. The abyss of the second death is what Balthasar calls the “second chaos” that is outside of the Father’s creation. This

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/10/balthasar-hell-and-heresy-an-exchange-38> (accessed May 1, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 351.

¹⁰⁵ *TL* 2, 347: “Holy Saturday is not Easter Sunday.” For Balthasar, Hans Holbein’s is the most accurate depiction of Holy Saturday. In Holbein’s haunting vision, Christ’s corpse lies bare and exposed to our vision. His body is bruised and broken; his fingers are frozen in *rigor mortis*; his eyes stare sightlessly into the Void that has become his only reality, even as it is a non-reality. Christ in his death is human, all too human — abandoned, forsaken, contradicted. And it is precisely *this* Christ that Balthasar sees as the crowning revelation of divine truth, beauty, and goodness.

¹⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1990), 50.

second death is sheer god-forsakenness. The truth — and the contradiction — of Holy Saturday is that God is forsaken by God.

Yet the perfection of Christ's solidarity with the poor occurs in the context of utter and absolute abandonment, in the context of hell in which, according to Balthasar, there is no community.¹⁰⁷ Hell is solitude. Here is another dimension of hell's contradiction, its ontological mendacity. The utter solitude of hell is the destruction of the love that is being-for-another. And since love and Being are convertible, hell is the utter annihilation of Being. Again we see how Balthasar can say that hell both is and is not — the impossible possibility.

If hell is indeed the annihilation of Being and love, it is also absolute atemporality. In hell every past and future completely disappears; its gate is always closed. Hell is "definitive and affords no prospect of escape on any side."¹⁰⁸ Its timelessness is the nihilistic counter to the *pleroma* of the eternity of the Trinity. One is the eternally reciprocal movement of love. The other is the frigid *stasis* of nothing.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *TL* 2, 349ff.

¹⁰⁸ Here Balthasar's thought is significantly influenced by the mystical theology of Adrienne von Speyr. Speyr's almost yearly participation in the *Triduum* yielded a number of theologically rich meditations on the "nature" of hell and of Christ's descent. According to Balthasar, Speyr would, on every Easter for many years, spiritually descend with Christ into death and there existentially know the utter Godforsakenness of Christ. In Balthasar's mind, her share in the *visio mortis* gave her a profound, almost "insider's view," into the nature of Holy Saturday. In fact, Balthasar's entire constructive argument about the anti-logic of Holy Saturday in *TL* 2 is an adoption and exposition of Speyr. For many commentators, this fact makes Balthasar's thought here immediately suspect. More often Balthasar's relationship with Speyr has been dismissed as irrelevant to understanding his thought. See, for example, Kevin Mongrain, *op.cit.*, and Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997). We do not have the space here to support or critique Balthasar's appropriation of Speyrian mystical insight. We can only note that Balthasar himself said that his theology was inseparable from that of Speyr. His theology of Holy Saturday is a perfect example of this dependence.

¹⁰⁹ Dante comes closest to capturing this understanding of hell. Hell is not fire; it is ice. Hell is static. There is no movement in Dante's deep hell. Satan is frozen in eternal misery, mouth agape and stuffed with the icy limbs of the traitors. Contrast this with the ever-wheeling heavenly spheres of Paradise, the spiraling dynamic of love, surrender, and doxology.

The atemporality of hell results in what we might call the “existential contradiction” of the dead Christ. The one who is the Word, the very expressivity of truth, becomes mute in the atemporality of hell. The dialogicality between Father and Son ceases for the dead, the abandoned, Christ. Stripped of his Father’s word, that is, stripped of himself, Christ becomes de-formed to the point of utter formlessness. Apart from his Father’s Thou, Christ ceases to be an I — his personhood is surrendered and he becomes “a pure impersonal ‘one.’”¹¹⁰ The person that is the meaning of all creation suffers as the one who is now absolute meaninglessness. As a dead man, Christ has “lost his Word-character.”¹¹¹ The one whose perfect obedience resulted in the kenotic silence of the womb now embraces the consummate silence of complete abandonment. But Christ has not just lost his Word-character. He has become accursed, the *un-word*, untruth. In being handed over (and handing himself over) to sin, Christ doesn’t just confront the contradiction of hell. He *becomes* that contradiction.

Healing the Lie. By becoming the lie, Christ takes on the fullness of the un-truth of estranged creation, its failure to bear faithfully the divine truth. He willingly takes on the reality of the formlessness of the lie that is not his own. He does this, not in order to sublate it extrinsically into a higher truth, but to heal it from within.

The healing of creation’s lie is possible because of Christ’s divine exemplarism. Because Christ exemplifies creation cosmically, he can represent it vicariously in his descent into utter forsakenness. Christ’s vicarious representation — itself a form of love, a literal “being-for-another” — explodes the ugly solitude of hell. Christ enters into the

¹¹⁰ *TL* 2, 350.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

abyss of forsaken solitude, bearing all of creation in the community of his flesh. The illogic of hell is confronted by the supremacy of the logic of self-giving love, and withers in the confrontation. Christ's death was the Father's "no" to all of that in creation that stands opposed to him, its un-truth. But because that "No" is represented vicariously in Christ's exemplary "Yes," the contradiction and antagonism is itself resolved.¹¹²

Through the presence of the one who is perfect truth, perfect obedience, and perfect love, the negativity and contradiction of the grave is overwhelmed, forgiven, graced, and healed.

What Christ's *descensus ad inferna* effects according to Balthasar is the taking into possession of that second chaos of death, that is, "everything that is contrary to God, of the entire object of divine eschatological judgment which here is grasped in that event in which it is cast down."¹¹³ Christ's unadulterated forsakenness is his "existential measure" of the depths of the inferno. It is not accidental that Balthasar uses the epistemological language of "measurement" to describe Christ's sounding of the depths of hell. By his measuring the second chaos of hell, there is now truly nothing in that has not been comprehended by God. God's measurement, his divine truth, encompasses all things — even its contradiction, having healed it from within. Through his existential presence in the *visio mortis* Christ is able, as Aquinas says, to "take possession" of death, Hades and hell.¹¹⁴ This ownership of hell means therefore that when he is raised by the Father (another passively act to parallel his passive, powerless descent), he brings all of hell with him. Through his ultimate, mortal *kenosis*, death itself comes to be

¹¹² *Prayer*, 55.

¹¹³ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 174.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, in *Symbolum Apostolorum Expositio*, a.5, (Rome: Marietti, 1954, vol. 2, pp. 204-205), a.5.

“circumscribed” by Christ.¹¹⁵ At the resurrection, Christ takes full possession of death and breaks its boundaries.

Christ’s obedience to the point of utter abandonment effects, in Maximian language, the healing of corrupted nature: the “descent to the tragic point in man, where sin, as opposition to God, has come into its own.”¹¹⁶ In his assumption of the fullness of creation, even to the point of identifying himself with its contradiction and mendacity in the Pit, Christ “exposed [himself] to contradiction for our sakes, in order to destroy the contradiction within his very self. ‘Not as I will, but as you will’... he does violence to his own will in order to subject it fully to the Father.”¹¹⁷ The exemplarism of Christ becomes a vicarious representation on behalf of creation. He takes every lie — all of which are rooted in creation’s resistance to the truth of love that manifests itself in Adam’s primordial disobedience — and, through his perfect archetypal obedience, overwhelms mendacity with truth. The Lie is not synthesized; it is healed. And indeed such a healing demanded that Christ take on hell itself, for “whatever is not assumed is not healed.” By assuming in himself the lie of creation, Christ has healed it utterly and absolutely:

And if the Lord brings the marks of his wounds into his victory and eternally remains the ‘Lamb as slain’, it is surely not in order to integrate the contradiction of sin and hell into his heaven. He does have the keys of death and the underworld in his power, but only as the victor over both.

¹¹⁵ Such a notion hinges on Christ being the “concrete-universal” and the sacrament of humanity. According to Gregory of Nyssa, by becoming a member of humanity, all of humanity became members of Christ’s body. As Balthasar explains it, “But insofar as Christ’s fulfillment was given the form of *kenosis* ‘in the fashion of our guilty nature, to make amends for our guilt’, the Son experienced not only the human situation as such but all those situations which lie between complete fulfillment and complete non-fulfillment” (*A Theology of History*, 67).

¹¹⁶ *Cosmic Liturgy*, 263.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

The Lamb is at the same time ‘the Lion of Judah’, whose victory gives him alone the power to open the book of the history of the cosmos.¹¹⁸

For Balthasar, Christ’s resurrection from the depths of contradiction and abandonment opens up a way from that diabolic abyss. Like Dante, Balthasar sees that Christ’s resurrection of the dead opens up the isolation of hell.¹¹⁹ From the depth, the pathway out of death has been opened. According to Gregory the Great: “Christ went down into the deepest abysses of the sea, when he went into the lowest hell, to fetch forth the souls of his elect. Before the redemption, the depth of the sea was a prison, not a way...But God made of this abyss a road.”¹²⁰

This road need not be construed narrowly, as solely the possibility of an afterlife in heaven rather than the grave. The resurrection is the breaking of the eschatological dawn; it is indeed the transfiguration of the world. The road that Christ cuts out of the Pit opens the possibility of entering into the full truth of the Trinity. Christ — as the truth — bears creation’s mendacity into the grave and back out of it, bearing it upwards, in the full rush of his resurrection glory, to the Father. The resurrection of the Truth transfigures all worldly truth. This is more than a mere restoration of Eden. The grace that Christ effects over all nature is its elevation and perfection.¹²¹ We must now turn to the theological — and indeed metaphysical and epistemological — significance of Christ’s resurrected ascension for our account of truth.

¹¹⁸ *TL* 2, 359.

¹¹⁹ Indeed, Balthasar also sees the resurrection as opening up the possibility of Purgatory. See *TL* 2, 355.

¹²⁰ Quoted in *Presence and Thought*, 145.

¹²¹ For indeed Balthasar will agree with Aquinas that grace does not destroy nature (as if Christ’s resurrection opens the possibility of a non-natural, quasi-gnostic spiritualist existence in heaven), but rather perfects it.

Truth in the Ascensio Christi

Through his Christology, Balthasar appropriates for himself the ancient Alexandrian rhythm of the world's *processio* from the Father through the Son and Spirit and its subsequent *regressio* to God through the redemptive work of the Son. Through Christ we have the "reentry of the creature into God."¹²² Such a reentry of creation into the divine life is made possible because "the cosmic struggle between the nature [truth] of God and the nature [truth] of the world took place within a single soul."¹²³ Here we come to the theological importance of the ascension for Balthasar's account of truth. For not only does the eternal truth of God descend, uniting in himself the fullness of divine and creaturely truth; not only does that incarnate truth descend into the depths of its own contradiction, but it also rises from that contradiction, both in the resurrection and, in its fulfilling movement, returns to the Father in the ascension. All created truth is thus summed up in Christ's flesh and drawn into the very life of God. Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension are intended to "achieve the redemption of all creation by drawing it step by step toward God."¹²⁴

Christ "reestablishes the continuity between heaven and earth and 'proves that heavenly and earthly beings join in a single festive dance, as they receive the gifts that come from God.'"¹²⁵ Christ unites worldly and divine truth in his person, ontologically, and restores their union existentially through his death, resurrection, and ascension. This

¹²² *Cosmic Liturgy*, 271.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. As Maximus will insist, "Christ brought his historic work of salvation to completion for our sakes and ascended along with the body he had assumed, he united heaven and earth through himself, corrected sensible creation with the intellectual, and so revealed the unity of creation in the very polarity of its elements" (*Ad Thalassium* 48: PG 90, 436A).

¹²⁵ Ibid., 273.

marks a fundamental transfiguration of creation and its truth. No longer does creaturely truth have an autonomy based on its estrangement from God; it now bears a porous integrity, an ontological density that is nonetheless open to its fulfillment in transcendence. As Balthasar describes it, creaturely truth has the Trinity as its formal truth, because it has been borne by the resurrected Christ into that reality. Once again, Eriugena is in the background: “For what he brings to completion in himself, he will do in all those who are made perfect. I do not say merely in all men, but in all physical creation too; for when God’s Word took human nature to himself, he excluded no created substance that he would not have taken up with him in that nature.”¹²⁶ And now, the redeemed creation exists under an open heaven whose light shines not only upon but within the world.¹²⁷

The truth of Being is revealed in the light of Christ’s eschatological dawn. Even created being is transfigured. In the ascension, Christ perfects the human person’s “eucharistic” vocation. By ascending (and subsequently sending the Holy Spirit), his earthly flesh is universalized and his truth commissioned to the world: “Christ’s body has become finally and definitively eucharistic, both since he suffered for all human sin and since the mode of being of this body has been assimilated to the trinitarian mode of being of the ascended Son: its being is not for itself but for the other.” The eucharistic reality of the ascended Christ opens up new vistas of truth in the “transfigured world.”¹²⁸ Instead of leaving the world behind, the ascension “was neither an apathetic nor an impassioned rejection of the world in order to embrace God alone; it was a farewell benediction

¹²⁶ Quoted in *TD* 5, 379.

¹²⁷ *TD* 5, 119.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 382.

looking toward a prompt return.”¹²⁹ The ascension “elevates and transforms creaturely forms of truth, “lifting them beyond their earthly, literal and prophetic categories into the realm of heaven, of the Spirit, and of fulfillment.” Balthasar’s christo-logic therefore meets its fulfillment in his interpretation of Christ as the *raptus* that carries the world back to the Father: the dual task of Christ as “the concrete expression of God and the *raptus* which carries this entire cosmos back to God, are both fulfilled in the Person of the Son. And this Person *is* the Father’s Word from all eternity, just as he is the original Idea *in which* the whole cosmos was conceived, founded and brought into being.”¹³⁰

Christ’s ascension is the fulfillment of his mission of truth and “causes the whole of creation to radiate with inner meaning”... “It is only ‘in Christ’ that things can attain their ultimate goal and meaning... even with mundane truth, it is the [divine] man who imparts meaning to things, helping them, through his whole existence, to achieve this intra-mundane truth.”¹³¹ The eschatological world takes on a truly *sacramental* character. It is drenched with divine meaning and significance, now truly the contemplative pathway to God with Christ. It has been caught up in the *regressio* of its truth —the archetypal, exemplary, incarnate, crucified, dead, buried, resurrected, and ascended Son.

This reshapes knowledge in the light of Christ. Truth and knowledge both exist in the eschaton as a “eucharistic permeability” of all subjects to one another — as love. If truth is love, it can only be known through love. This, for Balthasar is the basis of the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹³¹ Ibid., 64-65.

communio sanctorum.¹³² Through the ascension, Christ “united the heavenly spheres with the earth, thus proving ‘that all sensible creation is a unity in the intelligible order’ and is therefore a space for a renewed epistemology. For Balthasar, this new epistemology takes the form of *contemplation*, a knowing that sees the world in its proper relation to God. This yields a true *theo-logic*: a knowledge of God and all things in relation to God. “Our temporal life [and knowledge and truth] only has meaning within our eternal life [and knowledge and truth].”¹³³ Christ’s ascension guarantees the religious significance of worldly truth, its sacramental meaningfulness. He opens “the real path of contemplation” that stands in stark contrast to natural mysticisms that “are always in danger of losing both the world and God.”¹³⁴ A true christo-logic on the other hand is conceived as the divinization of the cosmos.¹³⁵ The relationship between Word and world is a personal one — created spirit comes to knowledge of truth through personal acts of knowing, through faith, contemplation, and prayer. These mark the fundamental act of thinking and being that is worthy of the eschaton.¹³⁶

Knowledge must also be caught up in the *raptus* of Christ, drawn step by step by Christ’s *regressio* to the Father. This *regressio* is for Balthasar the heart of both philosophical and theological truth. This is truth that the saints will unfold through the Holy Spirit: the conviction that Christ is the truth that pulses in the heart of Being. It is the saint who beholds Christ’s life, and is enraptured into it and says, with Bonaventure, *hic notitia est*. The saint is the one who, through the Holy Spirit, shares in Christ’s

¹³² Ibid., 383.

¹³³ *TD* 5, 113.

¹³⁴ *Prayer*, 54.

¹³⁵ *Cosmic Liturgy*, 274.

¹³⁶ See *GL* 2, 304ff.

kenosis, his impoverishment and his petition, and is thus lead along the contemplative path to truth — a path that is Christ himself.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ See *TD* 5, 111-112: “[A]t the same time he is visibly on his way back to heaven, taking his earthly body and his entire earthly fate with him. Yet, nullifying the distance between heaven and earth, he remains on earth, invisibly, to the end of time, thus in a more concrete manner than ever before (cf. Is 55:10-11), in order to promote the exchange between heaven and earth; indeed, he *is* this exchange.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Love Itself is Understanding

Spirit and the Saints

“You see how love is everything to you; love is your choice, your journey, your arrival; love is your dwelling and your blessedness. Love God, therefore, choose God; run, seize, possess, enjoy.”

— Hugh of St. Victor

For Balthasar, fact and knowing are two sides of the same transcendental coin: truth has both an objective and a subjective dimension. Thus far, we have been concerned with interpreting Balthasar’s “objective” truth of the nature of the God-World relation, as revealed, transformed, and sanctified by Christ. We now, at last, turn to the subjective dimension of truth, by turning to divine subjectivity himself: the Holy Spirit. Truth, according to Balthasar, is known and made known by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes knowers and lovers of truth; it is the Spirit who makes saints.

The preceding chapters have demonstrated how the truth of all things is most fundamentally love. But according to Balthasar, “the inner reality of love can be recognized only by love.”¹ This means, in light of the new creation effected by the full expression of truth by the *Verbum caro*, that there must be a new way of thinking that corresponds to the new world. What is needed is an epistemology of love. And so we arrive at last at the saints, those lovers of God whose existences embody and express this new way of knowing the truth — a knowledge that is not strictly noetic but, crucially, a *way of being*.

¹ *Love Alone*, 75.

Throughout this project we have used a slightly modified version of Balthasar's image of the cathedral for articulating the flow of his account of truth in his *Theo-Logic*. We began, in our third chapter, with Balthasar's phenomenology of worldly truth. This is the threshold of the cathedral, the procession from being outsiders toward being communicants. A phenomenology of the truth of the world draws us forward *toward* contemplation, *toward* the very Reality for which worldly truth strains beyond itself. This leads into the heart of the cathedral, to that mysterious altar upon which truth himself is revealed and given. It is here that we come to the realization that truth is the eucharistic self-abandonment of pure, gratuitous gift. In the One who calls himself the truth, all worldly truth takes on a new light. It becomes *sacramental* insofar as it shares in the truth of the one true Sacrament, the God-Man crucified. This mystery is the inner sanctum of all truth and so it should be no surprise that expositing this Christological mystery is the center of Balthasar's *Logic*.

This brings us to a crucial but oft-neglected liturgical moment, rich with theological significance for Balthasar: the dismissal. Having encountered and participated in the expressive, eucharistic truth of Christ, the communicant is dismissed, and sent back into the world "filled with grace and truth" (John 1:14). This is the crucial moment for interpreting Balthasar's *Theo-Logic* under the rubric of a theology of the saints. It is in the dismissal that those who have been united to the truth carry it back into the world, sent on mission. These commissioned people are saints — those sent out on specific, particular missions to exposit through their lives the truth they have received at the altar. For Balthasar, it is the saints who are the true theologians because their living "words about God" find their source in their spiritual participation in the truth of the

expressive Word himself. But the saints can only be thus because, though they depart from the inner sanctum of the cathedral, they never depart from the presence of Christ. They remain “in” Christ because, from him, they have received the Holy Spirit (John 20:22).² As they depart on their missions of expositing the truth that is Christ, they do so accompanied by the one whom Christ himself calls the “Spirit of Truth.” The saints go into the world as *pneumatakoï*, whose lives are filled with the Spirit of Truth, and are thus empowered to continue the truth of the incarnation through the sanctity of their lives. The saints know the truth of God in a characteristically “new” or “eschatological” way and so bequeath to the world a specific form of knowing and being. This is a new, decisively *theological* way of knowing. The saints represent an epistemology that is thoroughly Christological (and thus trinitarian and eschatological) and therefore fundamentally *agapeic*.

Because the metaphor for this final chapter is liturgical dismissal, we will find ourselves re-visiting many of the themes and ideas discussed in previous chapters, albeit seeing them in a new way. Indeed, for Balthasar, the splendor of the *Gestalt* of Christ shines throughout the world, transfiguring its truth.³ We will see the way Balthasar posits

² Such an interpretation of the liturgical dismissal fits Aquinas’ interpretation of the Mass as a “sending out.” The traditional dismissal, *Ite, missa est*, means for Aquinas “the priest sends (*mittit*) his prayers up to God...or else because Christ is the victim sent (*missa*) to us” (*ST* III.83.4). Christ is *sent* in the course of the Mass, and those who receive his Eucharist are caught up in his being sent through the Holy Spirit. And just as Christ was sent on the mission of truth in a mendacious world, and thus as a victim of it, so too are the saints sent by Christ and with Christ into the world. They do so within the context of the sending of the prayers to the Father. So the sending of prayer results in being sent.

³ We should note that, for Balthasar, the truth of God revealed in Christ has cosmic significance. But the crucial thing is that divine truth “transfigures” rather than “transforms” worldly truth. Just as the transfigured Christ was still himself — he did not take on a fundamentally different form because the disciples were still able to recognize him — so too the world. In the eschatological light of the truth of Christ, the world is transfigured and yet remains itself, perhaps even becoming *more truly* itself. Grace, after all, *perfects* nature rather than destroying it (even by means of a transformation or spiritual elevation).

the saints as those best equipped, through the Spirit, to exposit in the world its new creation and thus its truest truth.

The Spirit of Truth

The Need for Eschatological Re-imagining of the World and Knowledge

There is no worldly or human truth, no nature, that remains untouched by the splendor of Christ. There is nothing in creation that has not been transfigured by his presence. The consequence of such a theology of history means that creation, time, and history all must be re-imagined in the Taboric light of the resurrection dawn.⁴

Balthasar's re-imagining of the cosmos in the light of Christ is shaped by both a Bonaventurian theology of history and a Maximian view of the cosmic redemptive power of Christ. While the Maximian view will be considered later in this chapter, we can at the outset situate Balthasar's cosmic, eschatological imagination within the framework of Bonaventure's influential theology of history. In Bonaventure's scheme, history is divided into seven ages, the sixth of which is the "fullness of time" in which Christ is born. The seventh age is the eschatological "secret time" of the sabbath life of the Trinity. In his interpretation of Bonaventure's theology of history, Balthasar writes:

The axiom 'the seventh age runs alongside the sixth'...is characteristic: alongside the sixth age of the world, in which Christ is born and goes to heaven, the seventh age has already run its course. The sabbath of the world has already begun with the Ascension, and will last until the general resurrection; then is the dawn of the eighth day. Because through Christ

⁴ See *GL* 5, 119: "The Son overcame, and annihilated in himself, the whole of the distance [sinful contradiction] between heaven and earth: as true man, he is at the same time the likeness of the Father in God...Through him the redeemed live 'under an open heaven, since God has created heaven in the new earth, or the new earth in heaven. The risen Son is earth in heaven; his Eucharist is heaven on earth.'" Christ himself is the *theandric* one who does human things divinely, and divine things humanly (cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter IV*, 1072C); the eschatological creation images a similar kind of relationship.

heaven is now in principle open, mystical-eschatological contemplation and existence are already possible.⁵

Just as the incarnation bursts open the limits of human nature to carry the weight of the divine, so too does history open up to what transcends it. Creation and time themselves have become thin places where the eternal age draws close, breaking through, drawing common history into the eternal, divine life. For Balthasar, there is, in Christ, no such thing as a *historia pura*. All creation has tasted of its redemption and now groans for its fulfillment. All worldly truth, in the wake of truth himself, does not just gesture toward but actually participates in divine truth. Christ has re-established the possibility of metaphysics by reestablishing a sacramental ontology — by restoring to fallen, mendacious created being, its creaturely truth as a bearer of the presence of God.⁶

What then is this Christological metaphysics according to Balthasar? It is the fundamental rejection of what developed in the wake of Eckhart, especially as it has come to be expressed in German Idealism.⁷ One of Balthasar's chief tasks is to return to the cosmos its proper mediating role in truth by developing a *theological* cosmic aesthetic

⁵ *GL* 2, 273.

⁶ On the idea of a sacramental ontology, see Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ As we've articulated previously, the significant change that Eckhart effected in metaphysics is a sundering of the cosmic dimension of the God-World relation. For Eckhart, no longer is a relationship with God mediated through the cosmos. This effectively separates, even compartmentalizes, truth into exclusive categories: divine truth and worldly truth. The truth of the world can no longer bear the weight of the divine under a Christological or sacramental form. Nature is either identical and absorbed into or separated and lost to the divine. Either way, for Eckhart, grace effectively destroys nature. The task of the human being, then, is to achieve an "immediate contact" with God through an abstract and absolute knowledge — an idealist speculation — that is achieved apart from the world. This intellectualist triumph sets the stage for a titanic anthropology where knowledge becomes power, and power alone runs the world. Nietzsche haunts Eckhartian thought.

— with all its emphasis on the *Gestalt* of Christ — which grounds all subsequent knowing.⁸

For Balthasar, creation and its history form a tapestry of “sacred veils” through which we encounter the truth of God.⁹ Worldly truth “bumps into” divine truth, participating in it. But, going further, divine truth actually penetrates worldly truth in Christ and, by so doing, reveals worldly truth to itself.¹⁰ Christ has borne up the truth of God in his ascending movement, situating all truth in and with himself. This is but one aspect of Christ’s inauguration of the new creation. Nature itself is “charged with the grandeur of God.”¹¹ The language of creation hymns God through its created *theologoi*.¹²

⁸ It is just this kind of Christological tension between worldly and divine truth that plays out in the drama of contemplative prayer of the saints: “the apostles and saints are not daydreamers in flight from the world, living in a fairyland divorced from reality. The Acts of the Apostles is sober, serious reality in the midst of history, but the breath of the Holy Spirit breathes through it, blowing believers where he will; they must take him seriously as the principal actor as they make their calculations and decisions. That contemplation is realistic which seeks the reality of heaven, yet not by dissolving or allegorizing away the reality of earth. It endures and holds the tension between the two, which is ultimately a Christological tension. Ultimately the only thing strong enough to hold it is the bond between the two natures in Christ, i.e., only Jesus Christ can hold this tension; it is impossible for man per se and totally impossible for contemplation per se. Only a Christian contemplation can endure the tension and see heaven, concretely, in what is most concrete of earth” (*Prayer*, 291).

⁹ Indeed, the language of Genesis 1 seems to confirm just such an interpretation of the world as the “temple” of God. See, for example, Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2009); John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2009); G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2004).

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. See also the relevant sections of Joseph Ratzinger’s “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 159-163. Ratzinger notes that this pastoral constitution teaching that “On the basis of Christ this dares to present theology as anthropology and only becomes radically theological by including man [and, thus, creaturely truth] in discourse about God by way of Christ, thus manifesting the deepest unity of theology” (159).

¹¹ Note especially how Balthasar intentionally plays off of Hopkins’ great poem, “God’s Grandeur”: “Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.” See, *GL* 3, 390, for Balthasar’s take on Hopkins’ sacramental, poetic vision.

¹² There are several complicating factors to this statement. In one way, Balthasar is simply adopting a patristic chronology of redemption: paradise created, paradise lost, paradise regained. But Balthasar is also operating with a thick eschatology. His eschatology is not simply a “restoration” of what has been lost. Christ is not simply a solution to the problem of sin, nor is heaven a solution to earth. Balthasar’s vision is far more complex. The eschaton is both the healing and the elevation, perfection, and fulfillment of

We might best articulate the eschatological transfiguration of the cosmos as a reestablishment of the possibility of analogical knowledge. This is possible because Christ has, as we have seen, reestablished the *analogia entis* in himself.¹³ This transfiguration of the world in light of Christ demands a transfigured epistemology, one that knows and articulates the world as a gift of love, as a sacred veil, as a reflection of divine truth. This epistemology must be *contemplative* — one that receives and knows the world as mystery, that beholds the truth in and through the sacred veils. It must be *mystical* — one that receives and knows the world in and through union with God. It must ultimately be *love* — an epistemology in which the sterile dichotomy of “object” and “subject” is drawn into a relation of mutual exchange and celebration.

According to Balthasar, neither the philosopher nor the theologian can successfully hold worldly and divine truth together. It is the saint, whose speculation is love, whose existence is a theological and metaphysical act of love through the special missional charism of the Holy Spirit, who knows this transfigured world most truly.

Love is the “deepest mode of knowing”¹⁴ because the lover knows as a self-giving rather than self-seeking subject.¹⁵ If the cosmos — even God himself — is gift, *donum*, and if

creation. The “new” creation is the true creation just as Christ is not technically the “second” Adam (in a chronological sense) but the “true” Adam — the archetype of genuine humanity. The paradisiacal state of Eden is but an image, a metaphor, a sign, of what is to come. Balthasar’s eschatology may very well be that “paradise” is the Christian eschatological hope projected backwards in history.

¹³ Cf. D.L. Schindler, “Sanctity and the Intellectual Life” in *Communio* vol. 20, no. 4 (1993), 657-658: “[I]n Jesus Christ, God has assumed human nature — and indeed, in and through human nature, in some sense *all* of nature. Nature from the beginning finds its integrity and freedom (it’s “legitimate autonomy”) in obedience: in a relation of service to the Father, and thus in love. The consequence is twofold: nature maintains a wholeness or integrity proper to nature; and yet this wholeness is actualized always and everywhere (*de facto*) within a inner orientation to the order given in grace: and inner orientation, that is, to the Trinitarian God as revealed in Jesus Christ in and through Mary and the church by the Holy Spirit. Thus every created being in its depths exhibits an orientation toward and movement from God, and in this way “vestiges” or “images” God.”

¹⁴ NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

receptivity is the central image of ontology and epistemology, then love — the very rhythm of gift and receptivity — is the truest way of knowing God and the world.

A saintly epistemology of love is ultimately grounded in Christ. It is the theological outworking of the Christian confession that truth is not just a thing or an idea but is He Who Is made man in the incarnation. But Christ's truth — as the *analogia entis* — is open for ongoing dramatic realization. Balthasar's Christocentrism is not a christomonism. Christ's truth is open and offered to the Church and becomes the reality in which Christian existence is lived.¹⁶

Christic Truth and Spiritual Exposition

If the argument of the previous chapter is correct, then Christ, for Balthasar, stands as the summation and fulfillment of all truth. Christ is the truth of God and world in his human existence *as* the truth — the Incarnate One. But if Christ is the truth, why should our discussion not end with him? How can a discussion of truth move beyond the one who is that truth? Of course, in a way, our discussion has never occurred outside of Christ, who is both Beginning and End (Revelation 22:13), both protological and eschatological man. But according Balthasar, the *pleroma*, the fullness, of Christ is not a divine monologue, truth speaking itself for itself. It is, instead, an ongoing dialogue. This dialogicality is rooted in the trinitarian relation itself — the Son is the truth of God because he perfectly receives and thus *is* the Father's world. And this dialogicality

¹⁶ See Ratzinger, "On the Dignity of the Human Person": "Thus Christ no longer appears as a merely general form to which human existences are conformed. His exemplarity means the concrete summons to follow him, and this gives meaning to man's cross; it calls him to share in the "pro me" of Jesus Christ in a Christian "pro invicem" based on the "cum Christo"...Just as, from the point of view of the theology of the cross, the ontological idea takes concrete form in Christ, so also the ontological affirmation that by the incarnation all human reality, must now be understood as a statement concerning personal life. Its concrete meaning is the claim made on me and the consent to its being made on me by the "pro me" of Jesus Christ, and this expresses the concrete spiritual reality of the doctrine of the two natures" (161).

spirals out from the divine freedom of the dialogicality of love and gift in the relationship between Creator and creature.¹⁷ And this double-dialogicality, both intra- and inter-divine, leads directly into the drama of the God-Man.

The fullness of Christ — the historical drama of his identity and existence — is such that it creates space in itself for its own ongoing interpretation and dramatic realization. The responsibility for this interpretation and realization falls to the saints.¹⁸ Christ's action is both drama and improvisation:¹⁹ it is not a purely objective *datum*, that can be studied by a neutral observer, as in a laboratory.²⁰ It is through the Spirit that the saints are drawn into this dramatic participation in Christ's life and mission. It is the Spirit who "opens up" Christ's life and draws the Christian into it, to share it, indeed even to "complete" it.²¹

And yet the claim that Christ's drama is "completed" may seem odd, perhaps even unbiblical. What else, after all, could Christ's *tetelestai* mean except that Christ's

¹⁷ See, Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 916C.

¹⁸ "This alone shows the wholly personal relationship to Christ, for Christ is not a great super-ego into which the I-monads are organized, but a most individual human being who looks at me personally. His relation to me is not that of a great corporate personality. He enters into a person conversation of love; he has something to say to me alone, which no one else knows" (Ratzinger, "On the Dignity of the Human Person," 160).

¹⁹ For more on this theme, see Francis Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1990); and Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures: Interpretation through Living" in *The Furrow*, vol. 33, no. 8 (1982), 467-474. See also Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 19-26 for criticisms of Balthasar's treatment of drama and improvisation. We might draw a musical parallel here to illumine this idea. As a young pianist, Balthasar would practice musical "invention" — the creative building upon and expansion of a continuous musical foundation, the *cantus firmus*. The improvisation of the saints functions similarly. The saints elaborate and develop *in continuity with* the foundational truth of Christ.

²⁰ See Balthasar's critique of "scientific" and "critical" biblical scholarship in *GL* 1, 20ff. Balthasar is not rejecting critical scholarship as such. He is criticizing a non-dramatic reading of Scripture that fails to engage and involve the reader existentially. Such is his critique of all forms of theology and spirituality that restrict the possibility of the Christian's dramatic participation. As Balthasar will routinely insist: what is objectively given must be subjectively received.

²¹ See, *TL* 3, 21.

drama had indeed accomplished everything and needs no subsequent assistance? While Balthasar does insist that Christ accomplished the full will of the Father, he also insists quite adamantly on the Ignatian concept of mission, according to which, the missions of the saints are extensions and continuations of the fundamental mission of Christ. Considered under the rubric of truth, the missions of the saints are to express and exposit the eternal Word of truth and love spoken by the Son.²²

In fact, the truth of Christ is such that it actually demands subsequent articulation through the saints as a kind of extension of Christ's own historical life. Though Christ's existence was a limited spatio-temporal phenomenon, "the whole fullness of deity" dwelled bodily in him (Col. 2:9). The concrete individual who identifies himself with the truth is the one in whose particular individual existence "is hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). The truth that Christ *is* cannot be exhausted: "There is much more truth in Christ than in the Church's faith and much more truth in the Church's faith than in the formulated dogmas."²³ The boundless fullness of Christological truth could not be summed up in his one finite life but demands the ongoing exposition by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit, breathed by Christ upon his disciples (John 20: 22), who will guide Christ's followers into "all truth" (John 16:13). The Spirit does not teach a truth *beyond* or *other than* the truth of Christ but instead

²² This idea is also grounded in Balthasar's Johannine theology. See John 21:25: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." The saintly performance of Christ's truth is the implicit writing of those books.

²³ Ibid.

interprets the boundless fullness of the truth that Christ himself is. Infinite truth can and *must be* articulated in an infinite number of ways.²⁴

The Spirit accomplishes this ongoing interpretation in any number of ways. Balthasar rather neatly divides them into “subjective” and “objective” forms — the former being the experiential and existential and the latter being the ecclesial and the dogmatic.²⁵ But crucially, the main instrument of both of these forms is the saint through whom the Spirit effects its ongoing interpretation of the truth of Christ. It is the saint whose own theological existence dramatically inhabits that of Christ and, in so doing, interprets his truth through the Spirit.

The one who accomplishes this dramatic openness in Christ’s existence is the Spirit. For Balthasar, Christology is also pneumatology. The truth of Christ cannot be known fully by historical study (though of course, history is an important dimension of knowing Christ), nor even by a “scientific” theology.²⁶ Christ, Balthasar insists, is a form (*Gestalt*) that is graspable only through the Spirit: “[Christ] can never be understood as a mere brute fact: only the faith that is likewise permeated by the Spirit can grasp him as the ‘objective’ reality he is.”²⁷ Consequently, for Balthasar, *all* metaphysical, philosophical, and theological knowledge — our eschatological epistemology of love, embodied in the saints — depends upon the Holy Spirit.

²⁴ There is an important parallel here with the first volume of the *Logic*. In that volume, Balthasar developed the idea that the known object is completed by being known by a subject. This does not mean that the object was deficient but rather that part of its essence, its *mot juste* is to be known. Analogously, it is constitutive of Christ’s mission that it be shared and only thus does it realize to its proper *telos*.

²⁵ Of course, as we may presume given the argument of our third chapter, the subjective and objective dimensions of the Spirit’s interpretation exist together. The Spirit is subjective and objective together, all at the same time. The “objective” is never not also “subjective” and vice versa.

²⁶ As opposed to theology as a form of prayer. Such would be a theology of the “dead letter.” It is the Spirit, and knowledge through the Spirit, that gives life.

²⁷ *TD* 3, 27.

Balthasar's pneumatology is notoriously complex.²⁸ His account of the Spirit in the third volume of the *Logic*, however, focuses in on the “anonymity” of the Spirit in his divine mission, expositing the fullness of the divine truth of Christ. For Balthasar, the Spirit is never himself an *object* of theology but is rather the subjective *agent* of theology.²⁹ For Balthasar, the Spirit is the “unknown God” who casts his light upon the “known God” — the incarnate Christ — by “bringing out the latter’s significance as the Signifier, the Interpreter, of the invisible (and to that extent ‘unknown’) Father.”³⁰ For our purposes, we will focus on just three dimensions of this anonymous, expository activity (and hence identity) of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of *truth*, the Spirit of *Pentecost* and, lastly, the Spirit of *love*.

The Spirit of Truth

The Spirit’s relation to truth is most starkly revealed in Christ’s statement that the Spirit will lead the disciples “into all truth” (John 16:13). Juxtaposed with Christ’s earlier identification of himself with the truth, we have the basic structure of Balthasar’s pneumatology of truth: the Spirit perpetually expositis the truth of Christ and, having plumbed the depths of incarnate divine mystery, and knows it for himself. He makes that truth known through another act of participation. Knowers are drawn into the Spirit’s own subjective knowing and thus know *with* the Spirit.³¹ This is the heart of the Spirit’s

²⁸ See, for example, Randall Sachs, “Spirit and Life: The Pneumatology and Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar” (diss., Tübingen, 1982); and Jennifer Newsome Martin, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Press of Speculative Russian Religious Philosophy” (PhD diss., Notre Dame, 2012).

²⁹ “There is thus no theological ‘discourse *about* the Spirit, because the Spirit is primarily the divine *subject* of theology and of church life” *TL* 3, 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ Balthasar is playing here with the traditional formula of Christian prayer that prays “to” the Father, “through” the Son, “with” the Holy Spirit. In knowing and in prayer, the Spirit is the subjective agent with whom Christians join, caught up as they are in the rhythm of divine life. Also at play here is the

operation and, according to Balthasar, the essence of his role in a *theo-logic*. As Balthasar puts it, “If the truth that has appeared in Christ is infinite, since ‘in [him] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col 2:3), it will be impossible to come to an end in declaring this truth all down the ages.” The Spirit is the one who perpetually opens up the infinite depths of the form (*Gestalt*) of Christ.³²

Truth, then, in the light of the Spirit, involves a “making known” (John 1:18). He is thus the Spirit of Truth at various levels: “[He] utters the truth and can ‘witness’ to it because he knows it; and he knows it because he is internal to it, that is, internal to the relationship between the Father (who allows himself to be made known) and the Son (who makes him known).”³³ The Son has explicated the truth fully and completely through his life and, most especially, his death. But his truth is infinite and therefore must be continually explicated by the Spirit who comes, as promised, to lead into “all truth.” The Spirit is the one who makes known the Son by giving of himself to the Church. The Spirit becomes *the* way of knowing — or the way of *seeing* and *perceiving* — truth.³⁴

participatory theology of Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17: “May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (20-23). Believers are to share in the perichoretic love of Father and Son which is, for a filioquist like Balthasar, the Spirit. In all of these things, the Spirit is “anonymous”, appearing not as an object to be studied but as the knowing, loving, binding, unitive subject.

³² This is why, for Balthasar, Christian truth is irreducibly trinitarian: “Christian truth is trinitarian because Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son made man, incarnate through the Spirit and accompanied by the same Spirit through his life and work, and suffering, is revealed Word and hence ‘the truth’ (Jn 14:6) in that — unto death — he gives an adequate [*adäquat*] portrayal of the Father’s love” (*TL* 3, 23).

³³ *TL* 3, 70.

³⁴ See, *Spiritus Creator*, 100-107.

The Spirit of Pentecost

The “all truth” that the Spirit leads into encompasses, because it expositis the incarnate divine Son, the truth of the entire cosmos. Balthasar’s appropriates the ancient idea of the *logos spermatikos* and develops a corresponding doctrine of a *pneuma spermatikos*.³⁵ The Spirit is itself scattered abroad throughout created being as the “wisdom in the whole of creation (Prov. 8:22ff., Wis. 7:22).” It can be traced “right back to the creation of the world, in which God’s ‘spirit’, brooding over the chaos (together with God’s ‘word’), began to bring order to the world (Gen 1:1).” Indeed, “the whole of nature, in its life and constitution, remains dependent on the ‘spirit’ (the ‘expiration’) of God.”³⁶ The Spirit is breathed out (ex-spirated) by the Father and his Word over all of the creation, “accompanying” the *Logos* in his grounding and ordering of all worldly truth.³⁷ As with Christ, so too with the Spirit: there is no “purely profane” space, no absolutely profane truth. All truth belongs to the Spirit.

It is as this Spirit of truth, as the one who leads into *all* truth, that Balthasar understands the “Spirit of Pentecost,” who gathers the world’s every expression of truth together into a common, divine, revelatory word. This Pentecostal Spirit brings the words of the world’s truth into a harmonious— not a *synthetic*³⁸ — expression of that primordial Word, that primordial truth, the proclamation that being and love are co-extensive. The Spirit of Pentecost gathers every expression of worldly truth into a

³⁵ See his *Epilogue*, 7.

³⁶ This, and the previous quotes, are from *TL* 3, 64.

³⁷ On the *filioque*, see *TL* 3, 207ff. Balthasar is an unabashed filioqueist. Indeed, the filioque is determinative for the Spirit-Christology he develops in *TL* 3. It is the *filioque* that allows him to avoid difficulties ancient spirit christologies succumbed to.

³⁸ “Thus ‘all the truth’ does not mean a synthesis of a given number of individual truths but the one truth of the Son’s interpretation of God in the inexhaustible fullness of its concrete universality” (*TL* 3, 74).

common “language” that bears and testifies to the truth of God. In other words, the Spirit is the agent for bringing all worldly truth into conformity with Christ.³⁹ The Spirit is the one who draws the *logoi* of creation to the *Logos* and, therein, allows them to speak of God, to hymn their *theo-logoi*.⁴⁰ The disparate words of creation are gathered together *by* the Spirit, *in* the Spirit, into a genuinely *catholic* truth.⁴¹

This catholicity of truth must be thought of as a harmonization of truths and not as a synthesis, in which the details of particular truths are surrendered to an abstracted totality. Truth in the Spirit is *symphonic*.⁴² The Spirit does not absorb all worldly truths into a single homogenous word but rather draws all truths around a common center, the eternal Word that has spoken all other words into existence from the limitless depths of his divine truth.

Operative in the background of Balthasar’s account of the Pentecostal Spirit is a form of the classic *exitus-reditus* model. The Word of God—the *Logos*—has been spoken out into all creation, grounding, forming, shaping that creation. Now, through

³⁹ The entire Patristic practice of “spoiling the Egyptians” turns on this Pentecostal Spirit. Paul’s sermon on the Acropolis in Acts 17, drawing as it does on the Greek poets and philosophers, is a specific example of this Pentecostal language.

⁴⁰ One thinks of Psalm 19:1: “The heaven declare the glory of God.” See, Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 53-70 for a way of seeing the beauty and ratios of the world as a hymn to divine order. Caldecott’s book, though not a direct commentary on Balthasar, draws heavily on Balthasar’s understanding of truth, especially for developing what he calls the “poetic imagination (37ff).

⁴¹ Balthasar’s use of “catholic” throughout the *Logic* parallels that of his mentor, Henri de Lubac. Genuine catholicity consists, for both de Lubac and Balthasar, not in uniformity, but rather in the “gathering in around a common center.” See, de Lubac’s *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 14. In the context of our current discussion, the Spirit of Pentecost is the one who gathers all the words of creaturely truth together around their one central Word. He is thus the genuinely *catholic* Spirit.

⁴² See Balthasar’s *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987): “A bass trumpet is not the same as a piccolo; a cello is not a bassoon...[before Christ and the Spirit] each player plays to himself, while the audience take their seats and the conductor has not yet arrived...Before the Word of God became man, the world orchestra was ‘fiddling’ about without any plan: worldviews, religions, different concepts of the state, each one playing to itself” (7-8). After Christ, in the Spirit, such fiddling about is ordered in and around the cosmic plan, the exemplar, the truth now revealed in flesh.

the Spirit the words — the *logoi* — of creation gather again around that primal Word, drawn from fragmentation and discord into harmony and beauty.⁴³ The words of the creation, transformed by the Spirit, confess that their truth is also the truth of God: “Even the stones cry out” (Luke 19:40).

The Spirit of Love

All of the preceding activity of the Spirit is possible because he is, according to Balthasar, the Spirit of love. Crucially, it is *as* the Spirit of love that he is the Spirit of truth. It is within the context of the Spirit of love that the rest of this project shall operate. It is here that the final pieces of our thesis — that “love itself is understanding” — begin to fall into place.

Balthasar, coming from the Augustinian tradition that articulates the Spirit as the dynamic of love between Father and Son, will name the Spirit “love.” The Spirit subsists as the dynamic of love between the Father and the Son and, as such, denies that their relationship is antagonistic — like some kind of harsh dialectic between subject and object: “the Spirit is simultaneously the (objective) attesting of this love between Father and Son (as the third Person, dogma would say) *and* the inner fruit of this reciprocal (subjective) love; thus he can be called the Spirit of love of the Father and of the Son (Rom 8:9).”⁴⁴ This means that it is the Spirit who, as love, knows the “deep truth”: that God himself is love. The Spirit knows this *from within* the divine life of the Father’s loving begetting of the Son, the overflow of which “results” in the eternal spiration of the Spirit. The Spirit knows from within the reality of the divine love that Triune Being, and

⁴³ The scene Balthasar clearly has in mind is from Nicolas of Cusa’s *De pace fidei* where Christ gathers together all the great philosophers of the world, hears their confession of their doctrine and reconciles those teachings with himself. See Balthasar’s *Love Alone*, 12.

⁴⁴ *TL* 3, 74

its truth, is co-extensive with love. This is the eternal grounding of all love, truth, and knowledge. It is the Spirit who, as both the objective and subjective love of God, “searches out the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10). And so it is the Spirit — love itself — that understands the truth of God.⁴⁵

“Truth,” considered pneumatologically, is something different “from the imparting of information.” It is “a disclosure and surrender of what is one’s own *to* someone, which, if it is accepted, becomes a *movement into* someone. ‘Truth’ is simultaneously ‘grace’.”⁴⁶ For Balthasar, one does not attain truth in order to know more information *about* something. One learns rather in order to be drawn into that which is known, to be united to it, and transformed by it. *This* is what the Spirit of truth accomplishes as the Spirit of love: “he leads us from inner participation into inner participation.”⁴⁷

The Spirit is charged with this unitive mission because he dwells in and as the loving inner-dynamic of the Father-Son relationship. And it is precisely *this* truth in which the Spirit allows believers to participate.⁴⁸ What the Spirit does when he guides into “all truth” is, *through* the truth of the world, draw one into the relationship between the Father and the Son. Initiation into truth is thus, for Balthasar, an actual, spiritual

⁴⁵ There is another way of getting at Balthasar’s point. It is the eternal Son, incarnate as Jesus Christ, who *is* the truth of God. But, for Balthasar, this identity (that is, *mission*) is one that the Son eternally *receives* from the Father, perhaps even *through* the Spirit. We here meet a possible difficulty: how can Father and Spirit give rise to the Son *and yet* the Spirit is the love *between* Father and Son? Balthasar refuses to unravel this mystery, opting instead to return to the idea of *perichoresis* — that in the eternal dynamic of trinitarian love, especially the mutual *kenosis* among the divine Persons, love is the willingness both to *give* and to *receive* divine existence *at the exact same moment*. See, *TD* 3, 25ff.

⁴⁶ *TL* 3, 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Balthasar’s claim here is radically Johannine. See Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17. See also, David Crump, “Re-examining the Johannine Trinity: perichoresis or deification?” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2006), 395-412.

union with the triune God. Thus union comes not through some spurious, gnostic mysticism but through the Spirit's re-establishment, in Christ, of a sacramental ontology. It comes by attaining to God — to the divine truth — in the created world as it is created *through* Christ.⁴⁹ The Spirit leads back to the eternal truth made flesh in the Incarnation. The Spirit, then, “does not replace an *absent* Jesus, but on the contrary renders him present in a new way.”⁵⁰

Balthasar's pneumatology, as expressed in the *Logic*, is concerned, not with itself, but only with Christ. The Spirit's mission in the world is analogous to his inner-trinitarian identity. The Spirit is both objective and subjective, both the one who illuminates and *is* the illumination — who is visible as the “lighting up of objects” (most especially, Christ) *and* the one who “lights up the understanding” of the knower.⁵¹

As the *objective* Spirit, he lights up the object, making it knowable. For Balthasar, this objective “lighting up” occurs most especially through the institutional forms of the Church: liturgy, sacraments, canon law, and theology.⁵² As *subjective*, the Spirit is the one in and through whom we come to see, to contemplate, and to know

⁴⁹ This is Balthasar's interpretation of 1 John 5:21 and the admonition to “keep yourselves from idols.” Balthasar sees the “idols” as the attempt to move away from the world of history in favor of a gnostic spiritualization of truth. Most especially, Balthasar insists that a genuinely Christian account of truth cannot “move so much as a step away from the Incarnation” (*TL* 3, 78). See also Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001), 110-117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵¹ See *Republic* VI, 508a-e.

⁵² These are what Balthasar calls aspects of the Petrine character of the Church: the institutional structure and form. But the Petrine is not the full character of the Church. It also has a Johannine character — the loving and contemplative aspect — and the Marian — the bleeding heart of obedience and surrender. Only together do these three make up the Church. But Balthasar does prioritize the Johannine and the Marian for it was John and Mary who witnessed the glory of God in the dying Jesus. It is Peter who comes later, who safeguards and protects the fragile heart of Christian truth. Thus we have in Balthasar an admittedly existential heart to the Church that, though not apart from the institution, does carry a certain theological priority. See, *Razing the Bastions*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 40-41. For commentary on Balthasar's reading, see Antonio Sicari, “Mary, Peter and John: Figures of the Church” in *Communio*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1999), 189-207.

divine truth. He accomplishes this by illuminating the eyes and the mind, not with information, but with love. “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love” (I John 4:8).

Moreover, if “all the truth” is nothing other than the love that is made manifest in God and his revelation, this love that is lived out in act and being (“God is love”, 1 John 4:8, 16) must be implemented by those who inhabit the realm of truth, and implemented in both directions exemplified by the Son, namely, toward the Father and, coming from the Father, toward the world.⁵³

Indeed, for Balthasar, the Spirit is the form (*Gestalt*) of true knowing. The anonymity of the Spirit with which this section began, is his spiritual “facelessness.” The Spirit is “faceless,” not in the sense of lacking personal identity, but by being “disinterested” — which, as we have seen, is the grounding disposition of knowledge. *Indiferencia* is the condition of the possibility of the disponibility, receptivity, and obedience of all knowing and, not coincidentally, of saintliness. Thus, for Balthasar, the charisms of the Spirit grant the possibility of *theo-logic*.

The way the Spirit guides into all truth means that our knowledge must be both *noetically* and *existentially* realized. The Spirit’s guidance goes beyond “all mere theory” — even the Greek sense of *theoria*.⁵⁴ Spirit-ed knowledge is “action.” Thus Maurice Blondel re-emerges at the critical point in Balthasar’s *Logic*. Action, in the Blondelian sense, is “self-realizing existence.”⁵⁵ But Balthasar, going beyond Blondel, insists that this “action” must be conceived, through the Spirit, *Christologically*. “Christ — who is

⁵³ TL 3, 76. Here we can see Balthasar’s use of what I’ve labeled a “mystagogical” model of knowing. We are drawn from the world into the inner sanctum of divine mystery — with the Spirit, through Christ, to the Father — and then commissioned *in the same way* to the world.

⁵⁴ TL 3, 76.

⁵⁵ See, G.S. Worgul, “M. Blondel and the Problem of Mysticism” in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, vol. 61 (1985), 108.

the Father's 'action' — lives out this 'action' in detail."⁵⁶ And, thus for Balthasar, knowing consists in "discipleship — becoming, through the grace of the Spirit, like Christ."⁵⁷ Knowing becomes a *Christological mode of existence*. This, Balthasar insists, is the heart of Christ's High Priestly Prayer: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be *in us*, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

The truth known in and through the Spirit is not simply a broad assortment of information gathered together and processed through a system of intellectual categories. Objective truth can only be known *subjectively* by living in accordance with it. Knowledge, as Balthasar insists in his theological aesthetics, is a kind of attunement.⁵⁸ It is being "attuned" intellectually, yes, but also ontologically, existentially, and *spiritually* with that which is known. It is the Spirit who attunes through his illumination; he is the one who makes us *knowers* insofar as we are *lovers*.

This reinforces the centrality of holiness for the act of knowing. Since the Spirit's truth is nothing other than the truth of Christ, his guidance will be a kind of sanctification.⁵⁹ We know by being conformed and adequated to that truth. The Spirit draws into truth, which has the inner life of God as its heart, and there makes known by making holy; for indeed, the holy realm of God can be entered and inhabited only by those who are themselves holy... "Be holy, for I am holy." The saints, made holy by

⁵⁶ *Prayer*, 284-285.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

⁵⁸ *GL* 1, 91.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 117, for his account of the "intrinsic connection between holiness and *aggiornamento*."

their participation in the love of God, are permitted to enter and inhabit the realm of truth through the Holy Spirit.

From this emphasis on holiness, we find ourselves thrust toward that which lies at the heart of Balthasar's theology of the saints: prayer. According to Balthasar, the relation between Father and Son, the heart of all truth, "can only be one of prayer — be it adoration, thanksgiving, or intercession."⁶⁰ Thus the Spirit brings about the necessary holiness by teaching us the Son's prayer. Through the Spirit, we learn to pray with the Son: "Abba, Father." That this prayer is familiar and familial is no coincidence in Balthasar's mind. It reveals that, through the Spirit, the sanctified participate in that very familial dynamic of love between Father and Son. The Christian inhabits "all truth" through this prayer, "which expresses the fact that we are admitted to this realm as children adopted by the Father."⁶¹ It is through this Spirit-taught prayer that the saints are the Father's children. The saints come to awareness of the heart of all truth — that being is love — by receiving that love as the child receives it from her mother.⁶² Through the Spirit, the saint in prayer confesses herself as inhabiting the infinite truth of divine love:

It is only because we are thus the Father's children that God gives us a participation in things the mere servant cannot know, for the servant serves in the house only for a time, whereas the son 'continues for ever' (Jn 8:35). This 'continuing' is also an 'indwelling' and can also be applied to the Spirit himself...Again, by this same indwelling of the Spirit we are initiated into that indwelling whereby the Father and Son indwell the believer (Jn 14:23).⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 76. See also, Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5.

⁶² Indeed, given Balthasar's emphasis on the place of the saints in the Marian Church, it is from the sacramental "smile" of baptism that we find ourselves invited into the realm of truth which we then inhabit intentionally through prayer — the returning to that first invitation, that first mystery, that first grace of our existence. For more on this, see the following chapter.

⁶³ *TL* 3, 76.

This is the “all truth” into which the Spirit leads. One enters it, according to Balthasar, only through the Spirit — that is, through love himself. One does not enter this truth through philosophical contemplation, but as a lover, who receives and surrenders, who is loved and, in response, loves.

The crucial thing to note here is that, for Balthasar, the characteristics of the saint are exactly the same as that of the knower. Balthasar stitches together knowledge and holiness. But beyond this, saints are characterized throughout Balthasar’s work in the same way as Being and truth. More importantly, they are characterized in the same way (or, perhaps better: analogously) as divine truth and divine love. Through his doctrine of the subjective Spirit, Balthasar connects the saints to truth, thus to Being, and to God. But, in a crucial reversal of Eckhart, the saints are drawn to truth, not firstly through knowledge, but through love. The saints are the ones most attuned to truth because their lives conform to the fundamental character of Being and its truth as love. Because of their holiness, the saints are the most fitting knowers and expositors of truth. They are those who dwell within the love of God, within the Spirit; they “see the Form” and know it through the Spirit of love.

“Theology”

One last thing remains before we can address explicitly the way that the saints are the embodiment of this spirit-ed knowing. We must look at the way that Balthasar reinterprets the nature of theology itself in light of his account of truth.⁶⁴ If we recall our second chapter, we saw how Balthasar wants to reclaim for theology the integration of

⁶⁴ See Adrian Walker, “Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal” in *Communio* 32, no. 3 (2005), 517-540. Walker’s essay is an excellent foray into the theological significance of the Balthasarian emphasis on love. What is under-developed in Walker’s essay is the connection that Balthasar draws through Ignatius between theological love and the saints.

dogmatics and spirituality, of the intellectual and the livable, and of the “theology at desk” of the schools and the “kneeling theology” of the Church. The trajectory that we have followed since that opening chapter now gives us the resources for identifying in Balthasar three distinct but interrelated meanings of “theology.”⁶⁵

First and foremost, there is the *Theo-Logos*, the eternal Son, the Word of the Father. He is both the form and the content of the Father’s self-speaking. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. The Son is the one in whom and through whom all other *theologoumena* speak.

Second, there are the *logoi* of creation, those fundamental principles of all created being that, transfigured as they are through the incarnation and ascension, become *analogia*, images and reflections of the divine Word. Drawn back to their source in divine truth, they become confessions, even testimonies, of that truth. The *logoi* of creation, assumed by *Verbum caro*, become *theo-logoi*.

Third, there is *theo-logy* itself, the expositing work of the Holy Spirit, who actually effects the transfiguration of worldly *logoi* by drawing them back to the eternal Theologian. It is the Spirit who transfigures worldly truths into *theo-logoi* and, crucial for Balthasar, bequeaths to the Church a way of knowing them *as such*. This spirit-ed way of knowing — knowing by loving — is, for Balthasar, the heart of theology.

And so Balthasar would agree with the definition of theology (or *sacra doctrina*) put forward by Aquinas: theology is the study of God and all things in relation to God.⁶⁶ Balthasar’s account of the transcendental of the true pushes in this direction. Like

⁶⁵ The following typology is a play off of Balthasar’s reading of Areopagite thought. See his *GL* 2, 184ff.

⁶⁶ *ST* I.1.7.

Blondel before him, Balthasar has allowed worldly truth to “bump into” transcendence to reveal that there is no truth that is not also a *theologic*.⁶⁷ Theology, though necessarily dogmatic, is larger than dogmatics. Since theology involves the understanding of all things as they relate to God, it cannot be practiced outside of the God-world relation it purports to study. For Balthasar, there quite simply cannot be a theology outside of illuminating grace. This means that there is no such thing, for Balthasar, as a theologian who is not also a saint. Theology cannot be done apart from the loving union to truth himself through the Spirit.

This gives a renewed sense to the importance of saintly life. It is the concrete existence of the saint that serves as the scene in which and through which the truth of Christ is contemplated and revealed in the world. Insofar as the saint is identified with Christ, her life participates in the *theo-logic* that Christ’s himself is. Theology thus becomes a matter of the discipleship of life — seeing the glorious form of the truth of God in the prosaic and every day. Such a way of life is, again, a way of attunement — an existence that sees and perceives the light of God through the illumination of the Spirit. It is a life that is drawn into the *Gestalt* of Christ, which takes the exemplarism of his flesh with full seriousness: “Discipleship is made possible by the fact that Christ is fully human... It is at this point that [the contemplation of the humanity of Christ]...unavoidably begins to affect life. It affects my life... [and not only] my

⁶⁷ Critical to understanding Balthasar at this point is his stance in the ongoing debate concerning the proper relation between natural and supernatural realms. Balthasar’s well known refusal to allow a *natura pura* means that there is no such thing as something that is *not* “in relation to God.” There is, as we have endeavored to show, nothing that is not *theological*.

speculations, fantasies, my religious and theological daydreams, but my real life.”⁶⁸

Balthasar continues:

Christ’s perfect humanity is the efficacious sign revealing the Father, the language employed by the divine Word in hypostatic union in order to set forth the world of God to man. His humanity, in its totality, is made the vehicle of an even greater truth, an eternal and absolute truth. What an ineffable dignity this imparts to our nature! What a source of joy, penetrating even to the dreary corners of everyday life! Christianity is not only truth from heaven mediated through human communication: it is the truth of man. It is not an unreal make-believe composed of ritual and mere commandments which has its validity ‘somewhere or other’ — only not in prosaic everyday reality. Christianity *is* this everyday life as it is conceived by God and given to us.⁶⁹

The central point here is that, for Balthasar, theology is not practiced primarily in the ivory tower of speculative thought. Even theology’s dogmatic and speculative dimension occurs within the context of a life “hid with God in Christ” (Colossians 3:3). The true theologian is the saint who hears the word precisely by *being* a “doer” of the word (John 8:31-32; Titus 1:16), that is, by sharing in Christ’s life of truth. As Balthasar explains, “The life of the Son of earth is God’s free self-revelation [of his truth]; anyone who enters this sphere of radiance will find that his actions and his understanding become luminous with the same light.”⁷⁰ The life of the saint is illumined by the light of the Christ-form, the light that is the light of men (John 1:4). She “walks in the light” (John 12:35) and is thus made a child of the light herself (Matthew 5:14, Philippians 2:15). Her saintly life enters into the life of Jesus: her “contemplation of the divine love-mysteries in Christ must partake of the mysterious being of Christ himself: [she] too must be ‘light

⁶⁸ *Prayer*, 174-175.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

from light' and so be able to illuminate others."⁷¹ By her participation of the *Gestalt* of Christ, the saint herself becomes a form, an image and a testimony to the truth that God is love become flesh for us, a love that brings all worldly truth into harmony in a single, inspired hymn of praise.

The Saintly Form of Knowledge

For Balthasar, there are two aspects to his concept of saintly form, again playing off of but also transcending, the subject/object distinction. His concept of the subjectivity of the saints turns on the manner by which the saints come to contemplate, to know, and to understand truth. This is the central concern of this project: how does one properly know the truth? Balthasar's answer is clear: one knows as a saint knows.⁷² The objectivity of the saints, on the other hand, is concerned with the manner in which the saints make this truth known. Both of these are dimensions of the saints' mission. Their saintly mission, regardless of the individual particularities that characterize them, participates in Christ's own. They know the truth and make it known. The form of the saints is that of a "metaphysical Janus," whose face is turned both to God and to the world, drawing the two together through the grace of the Spirit of Truth.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 167. Balthasar continues, "Christian faith is a participation in Christ's vision, Christian hope a nestling in his trust and assurance, Christian love the outpouring of his love. Here we have the concrete, Christological and ecclesiological form of... the *analogia personalitatis*, the relationship between God and the creature and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the redeemed" (169).

⁷² This project's emphasis on the subjectivity of the saints is not meant as a minimizing of the importance of the objective, credible form of the truth that the saints present to the world. The purpose of the project is how Balthasar presents a vision of knowing that counters the dominant forms of rationalism and idealism that determine so much of modern thought. Because of this focus, this project has necessarily put far more emphasis on the saintly form of knowing than in the way others known through the saints. There is an entire other side of this project that will have to be addressed in the future.

⁷³ *Prayer*, 265. Balthasar says that humanity has a "Janus-destiny" that mirrors the Janus-nature of the God-Man. Humanity is created to be "toward Christ" specifically in this way: that in looking to the Father, we are driven into the world, and by looking to the world, we are drawn to the Father. This destiny, this mission, is to be "like Christ" precisely by being "in Christ."

Loving as Knowing

How, then, does the saint know? She knows by loving. But how is it that love can actually generate knowledge? We might understand love as a disposition, but can love be accurately described as an epistemology? Balthasar insists that it is because knowledge comes as a result of the union in love of subject and object in love. Love is unitive, it draws subject and object out of themselves and toward each other. Knowledge is the fruit of their union.⁷⁴ We have already gained as much from epistemology of chapter three. But this is no mere epistemological claim for Balthasar; it is a theological one.

An epistemology of love draws the believer toward union with *God*, the transcendent ground of subject and object, the eternal possibility of knowing. By knowing God — a knowledge only possible as love — one knows, in principle, the “inner truth” of all things. As St. Maximus Confessor puts it, “Just as straight lines which proceed from the center are seen as entirely undivided in that position, so the one who has been made worthy to be in God will recognize in himself with a certain simple and undivided knowledge all the preexisting principles of things.”⁷⁵ Or as Gregory the Great rhetorically asked, “What do they not see that see Him who sees all things?”⁷⁶

Love is truly knowledge because through love alone one receives and participates in the truth of all things by dwelling in their eternal source.⁷⁷ The epistemology of love

⁷⁴ “Fruitfulness” is a central theme for Balthasar’s theology of the Spirit, the saints, and love. Everything we shall consider from this point on should be understood as operating within the Balthasarian conception of fruitfulness.

⁷⁵ Maximus Confessor, *Centuries on Knowledge* 2.4.

⁷⁶ As quoted in Aquinas, *ST I*.92.3.

⁷⁷ See, David L. Schindler, “God and the End of Intelligence: Knowledge as Relationship” in *Communio*, vol. 26 (1999), 510-540. Schindler gives a thoroughly Balthasarian reading of the implications

that the saints represent emerges from the nuptial mystery of their union, through the Spirit, with the triune God. Knowing must be a love that wills its own ignorance, that wills to receive truth in its mystery, to receive it ever anew. Knowledge interpreted as love is a “learned ignorance,” a humility before truth that receives that truth as gift.⁷⁸ This is an intellectual disposition that stands in stark contrast with those titanic Idealisms that dominated the intellectual landscape of Balthasar’s day. Insisting on the necessity of the humility and furtiveness of love for all forms of knowledge, Balthasar writes:

It is not that reason is incapable of knowing anything: rather, it is precisely the beauty of Wisdom that seduces it to pride in knowing much, to satisfaction with the things of this world, and finally to a Faustian drive to experience: *cult homo cognoscere et cognate experiri et per consequent eis uniri* [man wishes to know, and to experience what he knows, and consequently to be united to what he knows], and therefore the nuptial mystery is perverted into an intellectual harlotry: It is a very great abomination, that the most beautiful daughter of the king (i.e.: wisdom) is offered to us as a bride, and we prefer to fornicate with a base servant-maid and resort to a prostitute.⁷⁹

The erotics of knowledge are, in the end, operations of the *Spirit* meant to draw the knower toward that nuptial union with that which she longs to know. It is love, as we saw in the first volume of the *Logic*, that spurs on knowledge. But it is also love that disciplines knowledge, trains it to pause, to receive truth as something that transcends the

of an epistemology that arises from a “relational anthropology” grounded in Christ. Schindler relies, as does Balthasar, on a thoroughly Chalcedonian Christology, for articulating the “anterior unity between faith and reason in the God of Jesus Christ, as the origin and end of both” (516). This is significantly different from the “mechanical relation” between the two in Descartes where “x and y [that is, faith and reason] each retain their integrity only from outside each other” (516). In the relation of love, Schindler insists with Balthasar, “we find a relation wherein the unity of the partners and the rightful distinctiveness of partners grow directly-intrinsically and not inversely-extrinsically in relation to each other. Each finds his or her integrity from inside and not outside their relationship. Married partners (in a genuine relationship!), for example, do not grow less but more free and autonomous as they deepen their unity” (516-517). See also Pope John Paul II, “The Sacramentality of Marriage” in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 330-332.

⁷⁸ See David. L. Schindler, “Is Truth Ugly? Moralism and the Convertibility of Being and Love” in *Communio*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2000), 701-728. See also, Adrian J. Walker, “‘Original Wholeness’: (Living) Nature Between God and Technê” in *Communio*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2011), 643-656.

⁷⁹ *GL* 2, 279.

capacity to be known. Love alone can receive the truth in its ontological fullness since Being itself is love.

Sainthood and thought. We have so far considered the connection that Balthasar sees between love and knowledge. The ordering of these two is important, especially in light of his critique of Eckhart, for whom knowledge was higher in God than love. Drawing directly from the Augustinian heritage, Balthasar re-establishes the ontological and theological priority of love over knowledge. One loves, and only thus does one know and understand the truth of the object known.⁸⁰ Love unites subject and object, not confusing them, but holding them together in loving, harmonious embrace.⁸¹

We must now turn to consider the two specific modes of saintly thought as Balthasar conceives them. The first is what we might call a “mystical theology” which is, as stated at the beginning of this project, a “spirituality that conveys a dogmatic attitude.” This is a way of reading the world theologically, in its relation to God, beholding and willing the mystery of the truth of this relation. The second is philosophical thought — the rational exploration of the logic of the world in its concrete existence.

The saint as mystical theologian. The saint is a mystical theologian, that is, a theologian of the mystery (*mystikos*) of divine truth as it is revealed in and through the symbols of the world. We have seen how Balthasar develops an account of truth in

⁸⁰ See, David L. Schindler, “Sanctity and the Intellectual Life” in *Communio*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1993), 652-672.

⁸¹ Balthasar makes no attempt to dissolve the inner tension between subject and object, heaven and earth, Creator and creature. But he does reinterpret these tensions so that they are not conceived as dialectical antagonisms but are rather symphonic harmonies — the beautiful balance and reciprocity of love. This is in many ways Balthasar’s significant appropriation of Platonic cosmology. See Johnson, 23-24.

which mystery is not a problem to be solved but the inner heart of truth's infinite depth. Mystical theology for Balthasar is an aesthetic mode of reading the world in the light of God. Mystical theology is the sight and perception of a form (*Gestalt*) that results in the enrapturing union of subject and object in the uprush of donation, reception, and love: "Only that which has form can snatch one up into a state of rapture."⁸² This is the vocation of the Beautiful: it is the form in which the truth approaches and enraptures its subject.

Balthasar's sacramental understanding of Beauty seeks to overcome the neo-scholastic separation between nature and grace, between the invisible and visible. For Balthasar, it is the "divinity of the Invisible" that "radiates in the visibleness of the Being of the world;"⁸³ the Beauty of the invisible Form, manifested in the beauty of visible forms. This manifestation of the invisible in the visible is the *Herrlichkeit*, the glory of the Lord. For Balthasar, the relationship between the form of the beautiful and earthly beauties is more dialogical and analogical than monological and univocal. It is dialogical insofar as Being manifests itself through visible forms and the visible forms "respond" by pointing *through themselves* back to Being.⁸⁴ The relationship is analogical because there is a connection and a comparison between the visible forms and the invisible Form.

Nature, by being the intentional work *of* a Creator, is intimately connected *to* that Creator; human existence, by having been assumed in the Incarnation, is intimately connected to the Son. But this connection is always asymmetrical. The two forms are not mirror images of each other. Rather, "everything which is said of God—his divinity,

⁸² *GL* 1, 32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ See Balthasar's account of this polarity between Being and beings in *Epilogue*, 55-57.

his eternal might and glory, his power as Creator—consistently underscores the ever greater difference between him and creatures.”⁸⁵ God and humanity do not stand on equal footing; man cannot peer over the wall of heaven on his own accord. Revelation must first *descend* to humanity. It is only by being open to perceiving the form of revelation that humanity can hope to see the Reality behind the analogy. It is through the form of divine truth, beauty, and goodness in the world that the saint knows God. By reading the world theophanically, the saint is a mystical theologian, knowing the mystery of divine truth present in the world from within.⁸⁶

Such a union occurs *within* the perceived form of revelation. For Balthasar, man can and must consciously take his stance before the form of revelation and its storehouse of mysteries: he must accustom himself to live within it, and he must attune his whole person to it. Both things, the ontic and the experiential dimensions, go together, and (as we have said in connection with the light of faith) this unity henceforth deepens the ‘in-

⁸⁵ *GL* 1, 431. This is also a reiteration of *Lateran IV*’s statement on the doctrine of the *analogia entis*: *maior dissimilitudo in tanta similitudine*. See also Pope Benedict XVI’s Regensburg address: “The faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason, there exists a real analogy, in which - as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated - unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as logos and, as logos, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf.” Benedict XVI, “http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html,” Vatican, http://document_URL_entry (accessed May 8, 2013).

⁸⁶ Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 63ff. See also Balthasar’s account of Hopkins in *GL* 3, 390ff. Hopkins’ poetry portrays the truth of the world, that “out of the glory of the Incarnate God there breaks forth the truest and most inward glory of forms both of natures and persons” (390). Indeed, “the mystery of God does not hold sway as something incomprehensible *behind* the forms of the world; rather, the divine Word was made flesh” (393). Hopkins, like Balthasar, emphasizes the mysterious of such a sacramental world: “Hopkins replied that mystery was not ‘an interesting uncertainty’ that held the mind only so long as one had not got to the bottom of it; he cited examples from the realm of the arts that prove that the delight — say of certain musical cadences — ‘is keenest when they are known and over’... For an understanding of the way the mystery of God takes form in the world, the concept of the sacramental is at hand, which certainly contains within itself the power of the ‘symbol’, while it goes far beyond it; the form of the image is a likeness to the primordial form in that it has the ‘stress’ of the latter in itself: *sacramenta continent quae significant*...The mystery of Christ is, on the one hand, of infinite depth, penetrating all the levels of being from flesh to spirit and beyond into the abyss of the Trinity; on the other, it is an infinitely dramatic event that in the kenotic descent into man and matter exalts and changes them, redeems and deifies them” (393-394).

formation' of the whole person, thereby allowing the aesthetic side of Christian experience truly to emerge. Before the beautiful—no, not really before but within the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.⁸⁷

It is specifically from within the Christ-form that the saint trembles before the magnitude of the revelation of divine truth and is “raptured” upwards into the presence of the Invisible God. The believer is enraptured when “in a transcending manner, [she] abandons [herself] to the gravitational pull of its love for God (*amor pondus*), and, borne by God’s grace, becomes perfected by the self-surrender to God of its loving faith.”⁸⁸ Here is Balthasar’s form of a baptized Platonic mystical *eros*.⁸⁹ Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Balthasar argues that the Divine is drawn out of himself out of *eros* for humanity into creation, revelation, and Incarnation and it is within the form of this revelation that the believer is enraptured, drawn like a magnet; human *eros* is drawn upwards by the descent of divine *eros*: “And the divine Eros also brings rapture, not allowing them that are touched by it to belong to themselves, but only to the objects of their love... not possessing a life of his own but the life of his Beloved...”⁹⁰ The form of revelation that is perceived so enraptures the believer up into intimate union with God that it is no longer the believer’s own life (this has been emptied through the *kenosis* of the self-will) but the life of God that dwells within him or her.⁹¹ To use Balthasar’s own

⁸⁷ *GL* 1, 151.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ See, Johnson, 23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹¹ “It is impossible to say where the natural perception of God in the world ceases and the supernatural, Christian perception begins, which presupposes a dogmatic knowledge. Faith is so deeply involved in flesh and blood (the Word indeed has become flesh), that the transfer of interpretation from sacramental signs to the indwelling grace of faith proceeds imperceptibly, ultimately indeed because the Christological... has been *understood* as the inner condition of the possibility of the whole natural order” (*GL* 3, 396-397).

construction: “The light of being stems from the object, which, revealing itself to the subject, draws it out beyond itself (otherwise it would not be faith) into the sphere of the object.”⁹² The saint as a mystical theologian is shaped into the form of Jesus Christ: “when Christ, who is your life, appears...” (Colossians 3:4). Thus does she read and understand the groundless mystery of the world as “charged with the grandeur of God,” and is drawn, through the world, to its source and goal in the divine life.⁹³

The saint as philosopher. It would seem natural, in a theological project such as this, to limit our understanding of the saints as lovers of God and as theologians. But were we to stop there we would fail to capture one of the more controversial elements of Balthasar’s understanding of truth. For him, the saints are not just theologians because they are lovers of God. Their love of God leads them into a love of wisdom; thus saints are philosophers. But herein lies Balthasar’s controversial claim: the saints are philosophers precisely because they are first theologians. Without theology, there is no philosophy.

It may seem strange to make this claim, especially since Balthasar says the exact opposite in the opening to *Theo-Logic I*: “Without philosophy, there is no theology.”⁹⁴ What accounts for this difference? Simply this: philosophy does, to a certain extent, “prepare the way” for theology, just as John prepared the way for Christ, for the one who “comes after me because he was before me” (John 1:30). Yet, according to Balthasar, “the great Christian thinkers are also on occasion great philosophers, only because they

⁹² Ibid., 181.

⁹³ See, *GL* 3, 391: “His constant efforts and schooling in reading the forms of nature is therefore not ‘aesthetic’ in the usual sense nor ‘mystical’ nor one-sidedly ‘exact and scientific’, but rather, it subsumes them all under the higher Christian law. It is, in a real sense, a ‘learning to read’.”

⁹⁴ *TL* 1, 29.

are theologians.”⁹⁵ And so we see the complexity of Balthasar’s view of the relationship between philosophy and theology. Philosophy *does* prepare the way for theology, but can do so only *because of* theology. Theology, for Balthasar, is the condition of possibility of philosophy. More precisely, it is the *subject* of theology, that is, God himself, that is the possibility of both theology and philosophy. Only by understanding the world *in relation to God* — theologically — does philosophy truly know the world. Balthasar might even be so bold as to say, playing off of Justin Martyr, that theology is the “true philosophy.”

Indeed, both saint and philosopher are concerned with knowing and expressing the truth of Being, though, arguably, from different perspectives.⁹⁶ Because the saints know this truth intimately, at least in its divine dimension, they are necessarily connected to philosophy. Balthasar’s own *discours de la méthode* comes in his essay “On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time,”⁹⁷ in which he works out the relation between philosophy and theology and concludes that it is only the saint who can be a true philosopher.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in our Time” in *Communio* vol. 20, no. 2 (1993), 154.

⁹⁶ At least, this is Balthasar’s understanding of philosophy. He probably would not recognize the non-speculative, analytic thrust of Anglo-America philosophy as being genuinely philosophical. For Balthasar, philosophy is the speculative study of being and existence. He would probably offer an exasperated sigh along with Blessed Pope John Paul II who, in his *Fides et Ratio*, bemoaned modern philosophy’s “lack of confidence in reason.” See, Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 14. See also Balthasar’s indictment of modern philosophy: “The result is that philosophy and theology lead increasingly separate lives. Philosophy dispenses with any sort of transcendence and, entrenched in the intra-worldly, quickly abandons all talk of undecodeable ‘ciphers’ or of ‘shepherding being,’ and contents itself more and more with varieties of a positivism à la Comte that dead-ends in sterile forms of functionalism, logicism, and linguistic analysis lacking any trace of truth as a transcendental property of being” (*TL* 1, 14).

⁹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time” in *Communio* vol. 20, no. 2 (147-187).

⁹⁸ See Adrian Walker, “On ‘Rephilosophizing’ Theology” in *Communio*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2004), 143-167. See especially Walker’s insistence that “precisely in order to think with the ‘mind’ of Christ, the theologian has to assume the guardianship of human wonder — to enter into it, remain in it, and cultivate it” (143).

He begins his exposition of philosophy by rooting the general relation of philosophy and theology in the ongoing debate on the relation between nature and grace.⁹⁹ As a creature, the human is a part of the *world* and therefore subordinate to the laws of creation and of reason. Thus, man may be a philosopher who studies the immanent logic of the world. But, like grace, divine truth is immanently present, through the Spirit, within this world, drawing the world to transcend itself and come under the rule of Christ. A catholic philosophy must mediate between these two truths by being “*in* the world but not *of* the world” (John 17:11, 16).

Balthasar identifies two unsatisfactory ways philosophy often attempts to overcome this dilemma. The first attempts an easy synthesis through the reckless adoption of secular philosophy (or its presuppositions). Balthasar sees this attitude at work in much of the Catholic fascination with German Idealism in his day.¹⁰⁰ The second is an ahistorical extrinsicism that hides within the dusty corridors of repristinated medieval thought, as Balthasar saw among the manualist neo-scholastics. Neither of these alternatives yields a satisfactorily catholic philosophy. A truly catholic philosophy must exist within the structures of worldly logic while at the same time transcending

⁹⁹ Vatican I granted the natural order and its areas of knowledge an autonomy in its attempt to offer a clear distinction between the order of nature and the order of grace: *duplex ordo cognitionis proprio objecto, propria methodo*. But this autonomy may be misinterpreted as placing Church authority and secular wisdom on an equal playing field where man must adjudicate between them: the anthropological totality in which divine revelation functions as partial element only (148). Christianity cannot accept this kind of subordination (either of grace to nature or theology to philosophy): “Even if nature has its own regular laws and reason its own evidential character, still these laws and evidential character can never appear as a final authority over against grace and faith. Their autonomies remain relative and stand as such always at the disposal of the final authority which belongs to the divine revelation, and to its plans and directives” (149).

¹⁰⁰ One can also hear Balthasar distancing himself from those accusations that would begin circulating about the *ressourcement* movement: that they were a second generation of modernists, advocating the adoption (once again, through Blondel) of secular philosophy in an attempt to relativize the timeless truth of Catholic dogma. See, Marvin R. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 70ff.

them, opening them to their transcendence, to the one who surpasses them because he was before them. Genuine philosophy does not occur outside of Christ, his cross and descent into hell. These events cast their long shadow both forward and backward over the history of philosophy, bursting open its parochial logical seams to bear even the faintest suggestion of that divine logic that is the truth of the world.

According to Balthasar, both philosophy and theology have the same formal object. Yet even their material objects end up overlapping. “But if philosophy primarily contemplates the Being of this world, in order to press forward from this to the boundary of absolute Being as *principium et finis*, while theology primarily begins with God’s self-utterance in the Logos — the two materially overlap. Supernatural light must necessarily also send its rays over onto the light of reason.”¹⁰¹ But a disciplinary isolationism between “philosophy” and “theology” is not an option for Balthasar. The two confront each other and, through that confrontation, come into their own. Theology *theologizes* philosophy in order for it to be more truly itself.

This confrontation has both a negative and a positive aspect. Negatively, no truth that opposes the light of faith can be true on the level of reason either. While philosophy and worldly Being do have *relative* autonomy from the supernatural, Balthasar is clear that there are not two different truths, nor two different schemas of truth.¹⁰² But he does not dwell on this negative aspect for long. He focuses instead far on the positive aspect of this confrontation, which is that “a reason which is illuminated by faith is able to know

¹⁰¹ “On the Task,” 151.

¹⁰² Balthasar resists all forms of the infamous “two-tier” scheme of the relationship between God and world, nature and grace, theology and philosophy. This also evokes the 13th century debate regarding the so-called radical Aristotelians — such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia — and their belief in a theory of “double truth.” See above for our summary of Balthasar’s critique of this debate.

things of the natural world which a reason lacking this light — indeed, a reason deprived of this light by sin and weakened and obscured in itself — will necessarily overlook, or will recognize only in a disfigured form.” Whether disfigured or fragmented, Balthasar is clear that philosophy’s understanding of Being needs theology in order for it to come to a fuller apprehension of truth.¹⁰³ But when studied in its concreteness, an account of worldly being cannot remain exclusively philosophical. It

cannot in the least be separated from the reality of revelation — viz. of the grace which has gone out into nature and of the faith which has been given to reason and has been demanded by reason — only this perspective demonstrates the total interweaving of both spheres and justifies speaking of Catholic philosophy. In the light of faith, both a pure nature and a pure reason appear as abstractions which indeed need not be false as such, but which lack any corresponding detached and separate reality in the concrete world-order.¹⁰⁴

In light of the preceding, we may say that, for Balthasar, *all* philosophy is a *theologic*, at least potentially so. It is the task of a catholic philosophy to spoil the Egyptians, to recognize non-Christian philosophical achievements in understanding truth as *veiled* theology. This spoiling of Egyptians involves two things: 1) breaking open foreign forms of thought; and 2) theologically transposing their elements.¹⁰⁵ This dual task can be accomplished by the Catholic philosopher only through a Christological hermeneutic of worldly truth.

If he is truly a Christian thinker, there is no other conclusive meaning which he can give to his thinking [than the truth of Christ]. But this produces in him a quite specific awareness of the truth. As a believer, he

¹⁰³ “On the Task,” 151. Theology, Balthasar insists, sees the whole in the fragment. This is part and parcel of theology’s uniquely aesthetic vocation to see the form that contemplates and interprets the fragments of truth that philosophy articulates. Philosophy, on the other hand, focuses quite intently on the fragment, because understanding that fragment of Being — the rational world — is philosophy’s particular vocation.

¹⁰⁴ “On the Task,” 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 154.

knows the word of the Lord, in which he himself calls himself the truth. He is the infinite truth as God, in his unity with the Father in the Holy Spirit; but in him, this infinite truth has appeared in the form of finite, worldly truth.¹⁰⁶

Infinite truth has been made worldly in Jesus Christ. It can no longer be considered an ungraspable *transcendentale*, but must be something attainable, yet always surpassing the created world and the created mind. Christ, the incarnate *Theologic*, descends upon worldly logic, penetrating it to its core, making himself present within it in a way that no philosophy can anticipate.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the *Logos* reveals worldly logic to itself:

[Learn] to locate the essence of truth in general in this unique mystery of the love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, and one is able now to see all other truth as only a reflection of this innermost kernel of truth — then one will also have grasped that, just as the archetype of the revealed truth, the Son, is true because he eternally opens himself to the infinite Father, then *a fortiori* all the finite truth of this world can establish itself as truth only by opening onto the mystery of God.

A genuinely catholic philosophy focuses on the rational study of worldly Being, but, just as worldly being participates in divine love, worldly logic participates in supernatural truth (the *Logos*), mirroring his absolute and eternal openness and receptivity. The logic that is the divine *Logos* opens worldly logic from the congealed *absoluta* which created “schools of thought” that contradict and exclude each other. A genuinely catholic theology is a gathering together of all things *in, around, and for* Christ.

This gathering together is not syncretism. A genuinely catholic philosophy does not attempt an artificial stitching together of various incompatible ideas. It attempts

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ We will recall that, for Balthasar, *die unvordekliche der Liebe*: “love cannot be anticipated by thought.”

instead their harmonization through a theological, or more specifically Christological and pneumatological, transposition: “[T]hey [Catholic philosophers] are so deeply convinced of the all-embracing authority of Christ not only over all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, but also over all the forms of creaturely truth, that they cannot rest until they have brought all these forms into the service of the one truth.”¹⁰⁸ This creative, Christological transposition, though conducted through the creative agency of the saintly philosopher, is effected by the Holy Spirit — that Spirit of Pentecost that makes “all words a single Word.” Drawn by the Holy Spirit, “the true Christian thinker will discern and probe everywhere in order to test everything and to be able to retain what is good.”¹⁰⁹ It is precisely here that philosophy belongs to the saints.

The spiritual dimension of this philosophical transposition demands a particular intellectual disposition:

[E]verything depends here on the disposition in which the synthesis is made: if the knowledge of the absoluteness of the truth of Christ stands at the abiding origin of such thought, and if the decision for him has been made with the entire purity of a loving soul, then it is legitimate and safe to adopt the intellectual mission to go out into all the world and to take captive all truth for Christ. “Test *everything* and retain what is good!” But “do not conform yourselves to the spirit of the world.”¹¹⁰

Balthasar concludes that the one who wants to accomplish this transposition, this genuinely catholic philosophy, must be a saint: “Thus the one who submits himself to this task ought to be a saint; and all the great figures who succeeded in the task were

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 158. We should note the Ignatian overtones of this passage. Balthasar adopts quite explicitly the Jesuit emphasis on the “discernment of spirits” for his project. Discernment is both a philosophical and theological task.

saints.”¹¹¹ It is the saint who practices the discernment of spirits that can best perceive the potential (that is, openness) of any philosophy to become *theologic*.

We have seen that Balthasar is concerned that all speculation, whether philosophical or theological, focuses on the concrete world as it *actually* is. This means that all genuine philosophizing is done from *within* the dynamic of the God-world relation, within the living *theo-logic* of the Trinity, God-for-us.

We see then that the lives of the saints — their spirituality, their prayer, their contemplative affections — serve as the proper form of speculative knowledge. In other words, the saint acts as a modality of knowledge, of the apprehension of the truth of God, found in the truth of the world. This is because, in addition to being theologians, the saints are also, as we have seen, philosophical lovers. For Balthasar, the love of wisdom is driven by a theological *eros*.¹¹² This intellectual erotic remains dissatisfied with any purely natural — *penultimate* — truth. Philosophical *eros* is discontent with worldly truth because it is a love that is fundamentally oriented to that which is ultimate. The saint is the one who also lives toward this ultimate truth, driven by her love to attain — or, better, to receive — that which is the fulfillment of her soul. “Wherever Catholic philosophy is alive, the *eros* of thought propels it outward, over the penultimate sphere of the objects of philosophical thought, into the sphere of the personal divine *Logos*.”¹¹³

The saintly philosopher, then, is the one whose love propels her contemplation of the world into the deep, abiding mystery of truth that lies at the heart of the world: the “fire of love” of the Father and Son, in which, all created being participates. The

¹¹¹ Ibid., 159.

¹¹² “On the Task,” 152. For Balthasar, this *eros* is held in common by both philosophy and theology.

¹¹³ Ibid., 154.

philosopher is only truly a philosopher when she is a saint, when she has made the decision of love for the object known, when she has handed herself over to the object out of a reverent obedience to her divine mission: to see, know, and make known the truth of God in and through the truth of the world. The genuine philosopher is the mystical theologian, who sees with a sacramental vision, and who knows through a disposition of creative receptivity, surrender, and obedience before God. For Balthasar, the true form of the philosopher and mystical theologian, the true metaphysician, is the saint.

Conclusion

This is as far as Balthasar goes in his *Theo-Logic* toward identifying a logic — that is, a structure of knowing — that arises from the saints. Yet despite its depth and complexity, it is remarkably incomplete. Balthasar's *Logic* gives his readers a mystagogical journey into the phenomenological, Christological, and pneumatological dimensions of truth and knowledge, yes. All of this reinforces the central thesis of the *Theo-Logic*: that Being, truth, and love are co-extensive, and are revealed objectively as such in Jesus Christ, and known subjectively by the saints through the Holy Spirit.

Yet a significant problem remains. Balthasar's saints do not pray. Though presented as lovers of God, as partakers in the divine nature, as those who know by loving, Balthasar fails to offer a concrete model of his theology of the saints, and its attendant epistemology of love, *precisely* because he dedicates little time in the *Theo-Logic* to prayer. If knowledge and love, and therefore logic, arise from *dialogue*, then the absence of the archetypal dialogue of prayer is scandalous indeed. Our final chapter shall develop this critique further and identify resources in Balthasar's wider *oeuvre* to address this significant deficiency in his *Logic*.

CHAPTER SIX

A Theology of the Saints?

Saints and Truth

“He who loves, sees.”

— C.S. Lewis

As stated at the beginning of this project and as developed hitherto, the central figure in Balthasar’s account of truth is the incarnate Christ, in whom the truth of God and the truth of the world are hypostatically united. Christ stands at the heart of Being, and acts as the mediating expression of truth. Christ speaks God’s word (which is himself) to the world and the world’s word to God. He is the eternal *expressio* of God and the protological and eschatological word of creation.¹

Christ is the infinite form (*Gestalt*) of truth revealed in the world. The Spirit makes saints as those who dwell within this infinite form and receive it, and thus understand it, *as* and *through* love. As lovers, that is, as inspired and in-formed by the Spirit of love, the saints know by loving Being, whose truth is the love of Father and Son. This love is the *eidos* (*Idee*) of all creaturely Being. This Idea is Christ, and thus dwells in the mystery of the life of God. The saints who know God thus understand even creaturely Being truly; they are the genuine theologians and philosophers, for they have apprehended the true *Gestalt* of creation. But they knew this, not primarily by wild speculations, but rather through a radical receptivity, surrender, and obedience to God to

¹ *Prayer*, 170ff. See also, *Presence and Thought*, 141.

lead to their conformity with Christ.² Any theology — such as Eckhart’s — or any philosophy — such as Idealism — that fails to acknowledge the ontological and epistemological priority of love, fails to give a faithful account (*emeth*) of Being as it is unveiled and makes itself known (*aletheia*) in and as Christ.

Thus are the saints critical, not just for the spirituality of the Church, but for genuine Catholic theological and philosophical understanding: “[T]he Christian vision has its truth and its manifestation in Jesus and, consequently, in the saints. It can be understood only from the perspective of Jesus and, consequently, of the saints.”³ There is in Balthasar no “truth abstracted from the world of persons — only truth that rests in the bosom of Trinitarian communication and so evolves out of a source in person life, in a conversation that is as awesome as it is tender.”⁴ The saints are those who have entered this awesome, tender conversation, drawn onto the bosom of triune expression and, from there, perceive the truth. The saints are those who embody an epistemology of love in the luminosity of the *Gestalt* of Christ; it is the saints who then become a form of knowing, a form of *being-in-relation* with the truth that nourishes the Church and the world.

The Critic and the Critique

Yet there is a notable *lacuna* in Balthasar’s work at precisely this point, as noted above. An consideration of the actual *lives* of the saints is rare in his work. Indeed, Balthasar’s writing on the saints tends to be systematic and intellectual rather

² See Victoria S. Harrison, “*Homo Orans*: Von Balthasar’s Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology” in *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 40 (1999), 289: “Thus, if the Idea lies within Christ, then it is to be found in Christ...In becoming conformed to Christ, the Christian has Christ formed within her.” The saint is thus conformed to Christ by adoration and becomes “impregnated with his likeness” and “conducts herself ‘everywhere in his manner’” (293, citing Balthasar’s interpretation of Elizabeth of the Trinity).

³ *GL* 3, 500.

⁴ *Ibid.*

than historical or even hagiographic.⁵ What Balthasar draws from the saints most often is their theological insight, their teaching about God and the world. Reference to their actual lives seems too infrequent for us to validate Balthasar's claim to be writing a theology of the saints.

It is this *lacuna* that gives Karen Kilby the opportunity to critique Balthasar's attempted reunion of theology and spirituality through the saints. We shall give a brief account of Kilby's critique, highlighting her three central criticisms: 1) Balthasar's elision of "sanctity" and "spirituality"; 2) his "all seeing eye" into the inner lives of the saints; and 3) the failure of Balthasar's theology to be properly "prayerful." We should note from the outset that Kilby offers an important and penetrating critique on this point of Balthasar's work. Balthasar's *Logic* does fail to make room for the type of prayerful theology he calls for.⁶ But as we shall show, he does provide resources for accomplishing the very thing at which he fails. But before we get there, we will consider Kilby's critique of the deficiency of Balthasar's "kneeling theology."⁷

⁵ Contrast his books on Maximus Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa (or indeed any of his extended essays in the second and third volumes of *Glory of the Lord*) with his *Two Sisters in the Spirit* and, more controversially, his study of Adrienne von Speyr. A suspicion may arise, and indeed has at least been suggested by Karen Kilby, that Balthasar's "Theology and Sanctity" may have been written more as an *apologia* for his use of Speyr's mystical insight than as a programmatic call for a return to the saints more generally. See, Kilby, 157-160. To be fair, after raising the claim for three pages, Kilby does temper her accusation by admitting in a single line that this may not be the most charitable reading of Balthasar's intentions.

⁶ This is especially ironic — not to mention problematic — considering that his "Theology and Sanctity" is written in response to the negative consequences of the separation between theology and spirituality for Christian *truth*. One would expect his systematic treatment of truth in his *Theo-Logic* to give more space to prayer, the central action of saintly, even human, existence.

⁷ Kilby's book by and large fails to give a thorough and sustainable critique. It is plagued by misunderstanding, over simplification, and a surprising neglect of certain sections of Balthasar's thought — the *Logic* is entirely missing from her account. Kilby, then, does not make a good critique of Balthasar *in general* but a few of her criticisms, especially those noted below, do land. But even those criticisms that are valid do not, I think, fundamentally undermine the integrity of Balthasar's project. Balthasar's corpus is finite — though it often appears otherwise! — and he was not able to bring all of the diverse threads

Kilby's criticism of Balthasar's spirituality focuses on the essay with which this project began, "Theology and Sanctity." Kilby points out what she deems to be a problematic elision in Balthasar's essay, namely, that he begins with an emphasis on "sanctity" — on the holiness of life — and then abruptly shifts to calling for a reunification of "theology" (considered as a theoretical, dogmatic endeavor) and "spirituality" (which Kilby defines as "reflection on the nature of the Christian life").⁸ Kilby identifies this as a shift of focus from the actual *life* of the saint to a focus on that saint's *thought*.

Which is it, then? Is Balthasar calling for the reunification of the holiness of *life* for proper theologizing or is he focusing instead on the content of saintly writings? Kilby suggests that Balthasar is calling more for a reintegration of dogmatic and spiritual *content* in contemporary theology. Perhaps he is gesturing to himself or to Adrienne von Speyr, justifying and endorsing their theological project. Both, after all, wrote both dogmatic *and* spiritual works throughout their lives.⁹ Even if not, Kilby insists that Balthasar's programmatic essay ends up getting lost in flights of abstraction (even *spiritual* abstraction) rather than being properly grounded in the concrete lives and practices of the holy ones.

together. But Balthasar leads a vast reservoir of resources behind for those who wish to take up his incomplete project and contribute to his theological and priestly legacy. It is one significant region of this reservoir that we shall consider in conclusion of this project.

⁸ See Kilby, 153.

⁹ Kilby even notes that "quite serious difficulties" would emerge if we were to take Balthasar's first claim seriously: "One might want to ask questions, for instance, about factors that have contributed at one period or another to the Church's official recognition of saints; one might want to ask in particular whether some of the great patristic theologians were in fact *anything but* edifying exemplars of the Christian life; one might wonder whether Balthasar's language of the saints living what they taught so 'directly' and 'naively' is not suggestive of a degree of romanticizing nostalgia" (154, fn. 11).

The difficulty of the easy separation that Kilby suggests here is that this kind of division between form and content is anathema to Balthasar. His idea of a theology of the saints cannot be reduced to a theology that talks about the kind of topics that the saints are interested in, as if “metaphysics” was meant only for dogmaticians and “prayer” only for saints. No, despite the difficulties of such a claim, we must acknowledge that Balthasar’s theology of the saints aims to be both the form and the content of genuine theology. A proper theology of the saints will draw together all the dimensions of truth — philosophical, theological, *and* spiritual. A theology of the saints is at least *meant to be* a metaphysical, aesthetic, and epistemological approach to truth: a way of *seeing* and *knowing* by *being* a particular way.

But how is Balthasar able to identify this receptive, obedient disposition as *the* saintly disposition? This takes us to Kilby’s second critique of Balthasar’s account. According to Kilby, Balthasar “makes some rather broad and confident assertions about the attitude of ‘the saints.’”¹⁰ And indeed Kilby is correct. Balthasar has a clear and definite vision of what saintly existence is like. He summarizes it quite succinctly in “Theology and Sanctity”:

The saints have always been on guard against such an attitude [of abstraction from historical revelation], and immersed themselves in the actual circumstances of the events of revelation. They desired to be present, when and where each thing happened. With Mary they sit at the feet of Jesus, hearing from his own mouth the words of revelation. They want to know what the Lord says to them, and nothing else. They do not want to stop listening, not for a single moment, to what is being revealed...their dealings are with God and him exclusively. Everything, even what they know already, they wish to hear from him, as if they had never heard it before. They wish to have the world explained anew,

¹⁰ Kilby, 157.

interpreted afresh, in the light of revelation... They are almost fanatically exclusivists, for they see this approach as the surest way to the universality and catholicity of the truth. They are not perturbed about how to reconcile the supernatural and natural orders, faith and reason, the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres, for they know that those whose standpoint is firmly fixed in Christ are relieved of concern for these.¹¹

Balthasar is explicit: *this* is what a saint is. But where does Balthasar derive this penetrating insight into the inner (and universal) disposition of the saints? Kilby considers two possibilities. Balthasar may be generalizing and extrapolating from the saints' own public description of their experiences. Kilby quickly dismisses this possibility.¹² She prefers instead to see Balthasar as uncritically relying on the mystical insight of Adrienne von Speyr. According to Balthasar's hagiographic account, one of Speyr's charisms was "insight into the prayer life of numerous saints."¹³ She could "put herself in the place of individual saints or other faithful in order to see and describe their prayer, their whole attitude before God, from this interior viewpoint."¹⁴ Kilby suggests that Balthasar's "all seeing eye" into the inner dispositions of the saints is derived from Speyr's mystically received revelation.

Kilby's suspicion here touches on the larger problem of Balthasar's theological relationship to Speyr.¹⁵ There is indeed room to question the integrity of Balthasar's reliance on her, especially for such central doctrinal *loci* as Holy Saturday

¹¹ Quoted in Kilby, 158.

¹² "In this case one might feel there is a certain intellectual sloppiness involved. Balthasar makes broad generalizations, offers few examples, and writes with a kind of incautious directness about the dispositions, feelings, and inner attitudes of the saints that one would never find in a historian" (158). Balthasar himself also rejected in no uncertain the psychological study of the "inner states" of mystical experiences and dispositions in "Understanding Christian Mysticism" (330).

¹³ *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Also quoted in Kilby, 158.

¹⁵ On this relatively unexplored topic, see Matthew Lewis Sutton, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr's Ecclesial Relationship" in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 94 (2012), 50-63.

and eschatology, both of which are significantly informed (if not outright determined) by Speyr's mystical thought. But Kilby neglects a less controversial, not to mention far more plausible, source for Balthasar's definition of saintly disposition: his own spiritual master, Ignatius of Loyola. As described at the beginning of this project, Ignatius provides the essential grammar of Balthasarian spirituality. It is primarily from Ignatius that Balthasar's emphasis on receptivity and obedience are derived. Perhaps then we can understand Speyr's mystical insight into the inner lives of the saints as situated within the larger context of Balthasar's Ignatian spirituality. If we take it thus, we may say that Speyr's revelations serve as experiential confirmation of what Ignatius himself had taught about the nature of holiness. Going even further, we can refer back to Balthasar's interpretation of the life of Christ as exemplifying this disposition of the saints. Insofar as the saints are related back to Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, their disposition is going to be the same as Christ. Indeed, how could the saints behave in a way other than according to the way of Christ? A saint whose disposition was not identical to that of Jesus Christ would not be a saint at all.

And so we might say that Kilby, though her suspicions are correct, asks the wrong question. The proper question is not "Which saints?" as if Balthasar were attempting historical expositions of *this* saint or *that*, but rather, "How do we perform the theological task *as* saints?"¹⁶ Balthasar is far less concerned with expositing the

¹⁶ Indeed, rather than a *veneration* of the saints of the kind Kilby seems to expect (and which an "ordinary" believer might be tempted to use as a way of avoiding her own call to holiness), Balthasar wants Christians to *join* with the saints: "If we were to venerate this mystery [of the bridal union between God and humanity], the saints would have no objection, so to speak, to being venerated or honored. We would join them in gazing at the point that fascinates them, the point toward which, in self-forgetfulness, they transcend themselves. Far more is at stake here than feeling safe and protected by a powerful helper and advocate, feeling gratitude that the saint exists and admiration at his generosity: what is at issue here is the

lives of specific saints and far more with expositing *saintly existence* as such, insofar as it participates in the life of Christ. “Sainthood” is a *way of being*. Of course, the canonized saints of the Church are a perfected example of the mode of being that Balthasar champions. But their very exemplarism presupposes the existence of a multitude of reflective images scattered throughout the world. For Balthasar, a saint is the one who loves God as Christ did: with a radical, dis-possessive obedience to the mission of knowing and expressing truth. His theology of the saints is decidedly *not* a theology based in a historical account of the saints as Kilby seems to expect. It is rather a *drama* of the saints. Balthasar develops his account of the saintly form as an invitation to his readers to participate *in* that form. His concern is less that of a historian and more of a priestly theologian; he desires to develop a theology that draws his readers themselves into the divine reality the saints express. Saintliness is a vocation, a calling. It is, again, a way of being that is open to all those who follow Christ.

But if saintliness is indeed dramatic, even ontological — a way of being — a theology of the saints will have to be metaphysical. What does this mean for the existential dimension of saintliness? Has Balthasar abstracted from the concrete lives of the saints into a metaphysical or epistemological principle? Perhaps Balthasar has

indivisibly theandric nature of the world, of which Christ is the radiant hub and the saints are those dedicated to him. Only in some such way as this can the veneration of ikons be justified: they refer not so much to the person depicted--Christ, angels, Mary, saints--as to the mystery that includes us, portrayed thus in archetypal situations and events. We look on from the periphery in veneration and lovingly draw near to them in prayer. For the rest, as far as the venerated saints themselves are concerned, we need not be surprised if they treat us with a certain element of humor. They will make light of the inevitable misunderstandings and, when we eventually see them face to face, refer us to the *Soli Deo Gloria*” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 89.

left the historical embodiment of truth behind in favor of an Idealist metaphysic in which the saints function merely as an instrument of epistemology.¹⁷

This is Kilby's final concern. For all of Balthasar's talk of writing a "kneeling theology" rather than a "theology at desk," she says it is "rare to find in Balthasar anything of the questing, wrestling, dialogical style of the classic works of theology in prayer of an Augustine or Anselm."¹⁸ And indeed Kilby is correct. Balthasar's works are not dialogical in their form or exposition in the same way as Augustine's *Confessions* or Anselm's *Proslogion*.¹⁹

Kilby goes on to say that the attitude we find in Balthasar's work is less that of one at prayer and more of that of a spiritual director, "speaking intimately, directly, confidently to his audience, working to bring them to the point of breaking down their barriers, of becoming open afresh to the gospel. Leading retreats seems in fact to have been a, if not the, staple activity of Balthasar's priestly ministry, and it is not

¹⁷ The preceding should have alleviated a bit of the thrust of this final critique. If Balthasar is presenting a saintly way of being as an invitation to us to be, to know, and to understand *as* saints, then there is of course a necessary degree of abstraction and simplification that must attend this. But this abstraction and simplification does not mean that he is reducing saintliness to a principle. Again, *Gestalt* is a central concept here. The historical and existential particularities of individual saints are images and reflections of a more general *Gestalt*. Balthasar would be surprised at being accused of imposing the centrality of receptivity, obedience, and surrender on the saints. He would, I believe, argue that this Ignatian interpretation of the saints is general enough to include all particularities of individual saints' lives.

¹⁸ Kilby, 160. Interestingly, Kilby points to Rahner's *Encounters with Silence* as embodying the dialogical characteristics of a kneeling theology that Balthasar's work lacks. Balthasar's theology is suspect for Kilby because it says too much and isn't properly agnostic. This is where Kilby's failure to engage Balthasar's *Logic* is especially problematic. For it is indeed in his account of truth that Balthasar develops his Christological apophatic theology, derived from the silence of Christ before Pilate (cf. *TL* 2, 90ff).

¹⁹ The exception to this general statement would be Balthasar's grand theological hymn, *The Heart of the World*, a text noticeably absent from Kilby's critique. Andrew Louth makes a compelling case that *Heart of the World* plays a central role in the Balthasarian corpus in his "The Place of *The Heart of the World* in Balthasar's Writing" in *Analogy of Beauty*, ed. John Riches (London: T&T Clark 1986). In fact, one could make a fairly compelling case that all of Balthasar's subsequent dogmatic work is a working out of the theology prayed and sung in this lengthy hymn.

hard to hear in some at least of his writings an extension of his activity.”²⁰ Prayer, Kilby argues, is fundamentally an ongoing dialogue between God and man. If this is true, then the seeming monologicality, and the confident speculations, of Balthasar’s thought would of course prevent us from affirming his as a kneeling theology at prayer.

We must say, by and large, that Kilby’s critique on this point is sound, although she perhaps does not make it as strongly as she should. Balthasar would agree with her thesis that prayer is, most fundamentally, dialogue. Indeed as we have seen, dialogicality is central to Balthasar’s idea of prayer, his idea of truth, his idea of the God-World relationship, even of the triune relations. By not adopting a dialogical style in his writing, he does not succeed in producing the type of kneeling theology for which he aims. But perhaps more scandalous is the ellision of the dialogicality of prayer from his account of truth in the *Theo-Logic*.

We therefore agree with Kilby that Balthasar does not give due attention to the particular, historical lives of the saints, even though he *does* give a way of reading those lives well. Indeed, despite his probable protestations, the lack of the *per accidens* of particular saintly lives does leave his theology of the saints too abstracted, and too theoretical, to be the re-integration of theology and spirituality at which he aims. His accounts of the saints are, for the most part, intellectual biographies or theological interpretations rather than expositions of their lives at prayer. Balthasar does not therefore fully achieve the task for which he set out.

²⁰ Ibid., 161. This is the heart of Kilby’s general criticism of Balthasar’s authorial voice. He writes assertions rather than arguments, demanding “a certain suspension of the argumentative and critical sides of one’s intellect” so as to allow acceptance of his authorial, directorial authority. Kilby believes Balthasar’s theology over-reaches, that he “presumes to know more than can be known” (161).

Yet this is not to say that his project is doomed to failure. Indeed, the remainder of this chapter shall endeavor to show how Balthasar *does* provide the resources for developing the kind of prayerful theology that truth demands. We shall draw especially on his early work, *Prayer*, to argue that one can use Balthasar to develop, perhaps not a theology *of* the saints, but rather a genuine theology *with* the saints that emerges from their historical lives as a theological exposition of truth by joining with the saints in their concrete practice of contemplative prayer.

The Performance of Prayer

The heart of the lives of the saints is prayer. If saints best know the truth, then it should come as no surprise that the act that most fundamentally constitutes their existence as saints — their communion with God — should be the goal that this project has been building toward. If saints know the truth of Being, then the central *action* of their lives will be the key to their thought. Indeed, if their love is their understanding of truth, then the form this love takes is the dialogue of prayer. Prayer is the dialogue between God and the person, which is at the same time, the dialogue of understanding between absolute truth and its knower.²¹ Thus prayer is *metaphysics in act*; it is the metaphysical act of love by which we receive and know the truth of God, world, and their relation. Balthasar is insistent that neither philosophy nor a rationally determined

²¹ In prayer, “the very same personal encounter is meant to take place as in the Lord’s earthly life. In holy scripture or some other grace filled medium...we have genuine mediation, just as, in the days of his flesh, the very air was the medium of communication between the mouth of the Son of Man and the ear of the person addressed” (*Prayer*, 83; quoted in Harrison, “*Homo Orans*,” 291).

theology can accomplish this kind of understanding. Christian contemplative prayer is, first and foremost, the act of “hearing the Word.”²²

A faithful account of truth, of the God-World relation, can only be found *in* the truth of that relation — in Christ.

Because philosophy does not possess Christ, it cannot provide the final *resolutio* which would bring us to the true origins, or at most it can do so *sempiternum*. Only one who knows the trinitarian mystery is a ‘true metaphysician’, only one who knows Christ has the true *ethics generalis*... On the other hand, whoever loves the Christian revelation loves philosophy also, through which he confirms the faith; but philosophy in itself is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — it remains ambivalent until it is polarized through true (that is to say, existential) theology.²³

This “true theology” is theology at prayer.²⁴ The one at prayer is the “true metaphysician,” who knows by loving, and by inhabiting the love of Christ through the Spirit. Prayer is a dialogical contemplation; it involves beholding the form of truth in its sacramental reality through the dialogical rhythm of gift and receptivity, that is, through hearing the Word of the Father echo in the words of the world by means of the Spirit of Pentecost.

²² Harrison, “*Homo Orans*,” 281. Harrison rightly points out that this contemplative “hearing” is not “passive receptivity” akin to that of Eckhart. It involves, rather, “an active response by the ‘listener’” (282). Indeed, Balthasar will even associate contemplative listening with the possession of faith: “Believing and hearing the word of God are one and the same. Faith is the power to transcend one’s own personal ‘truth’, merely human and of this world, and to attain the absolute truth of the God who unveils and offers himself to us, to let it be decisive in our regard and prevail. The person who believes, who declares himself a believer, thereby proclaims that he is ready to hear the word of God” (quoted in Harrison, 282).

²³ *GL* 2, 278.

²⁴ The true practice of theology is prayer because it is participation in the eternal theological act — the *expressio Dei*. Indeed, “theology and exegesis may border on prayer, but their pursuit is not necessarily prayer; or, at any rate, not explicitly. They can and should be accompanied with a disposition to worship in the depths of the soul...Indeed, the reader and student of Scripture may well — like St. Anselm and many other theologians who were also saints — enshrine and penetrate his reading and reflection with habitual adoration, and, in this way, bring a liturgical attitude to bear on the work of the mind” (*Prayer*, 94).

Prayer is metaphysical confession: “*this* is the truth of God and of the world.” But prayer makes this confession, not primarily through a series of logical postulates, but through an existential alignment of the self to this truth, to the *Logos* in whom all things “live, move, and have their being” (Romans 17:28). Prayer makes that confession by *being*, by performing, its truth — by *being* receptive, surrendering, obedient. For Balthasar, prayer is metaphysical confession because it is the form of the saint’s union with the Father in the Son and the Holy Spirit. “God’s word is the truth made known for our own sakes...[It is God’s] invitation to us to enter into the truth and abide there with *him*.”²⁵ For Balthasar, to pray is to be in Christ, to be in the one who is the burning heart of all truth, the living exegesis of the Father, and the true metaphysic of the world. And Christ’s life of truth is best conceived, according to Balthasar, as prayer.

Christ’s Truth as Prayer

We have already seen how the “all truth” that the Spirit leads into is the love between Father and Son. The form this love takes in the world is Christ’s perfect receptivity, surrender, and obedience. It is his prayer, especially that of Gethsemane, when he hands himself over completely to the will of the Father that fully reveals *his* truth, which is also the truth of all things. To understand Balthasar’s understanding of contemplative prayer, we must briefly re-consider his Christology under the rubric of prayer.

In his confrontation with the powers of sin, the Son, through his incarnate suffering and death, heals the mendacity of the world that stands in rebellion against God. Such healing effects a fundamental, eschatological, change in the truth of the world and

²⁵ Quoted in Harrison, “*Homo Orans*,” 285. Emphasis added.

our access to it. Christ restores the integrity of worldly truth through his resurrection and, through his ascension, opens a path of contemplation — knowledge of the truth — that is his own truth writ large throughout the cosmos.²⁶ In this way, Christ acts not only as the source and the content of truth, but also as the path of knowledge.²⁷ For Balthasar, Christ is the truth *and* the way *through* his life (John 14:6).

This Christic life, so Balthasar claims (and here lies the originality of his Christology), is best conceived as a triune life of prayer, as a perpetual dialogue with his Father through the Spirit. Understanding Christ's life as prayer involves identifying three defining dimensions of Balthasar's account of Christ's life: 1) the dialogicality of his existence; 2) the contemplative orientation of his life; 3) the absoluteness of his surrender in his prayer during his passion.²⁸

At the heart of prayer lies the dialogicality of the I-Thou relation. Christ lives within this relation, receiving his "I" from the Father's "Thou" at his baptism, and thus realizing in history his eternal receptivity. Christ lives always from his source in the Father, through the dialogicality of prayer. This is the heart of his lived faith: "And just as, in prayer, he returns to the truth of his existence — which is not his own truth, but God's — so he lives in faith by this truth."²⁹ The truth of his existence is his perfect dialogicality with the Father. Christ's sonship is a matter of nature, but it is also

²⁶ Again, Balthasar is giving his own unique spin on the classic doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*.

²⁷ See, Hugh of St. Victor, *De laude caritatis* IV: "We run to God on the path of God."

²⁸ Cf. *TD* 5, 122-123: "What is not difficult is the idea that the Son, as man, continues the eternal dialogue of prayer of the Divine Persons in heaven; it is not difficult to think of the eternal Word clothing himself in human words. And since Christ gives us a share in his own prayer, every word of the Lord is a prayer to the Father and a gift and a task for the Church."

²⁹ *Prayer*, 61.

existentially, dramatically realized through Christ's perpetual, prayerful communion with the Father in the Spirit.

Further, Christ, as the incarnate *expressio Dei*, realizes in himself the dialogue between God and world.³⁰ He is the Father's Word to the world, which *creates* that world. Through this divine and incarnate Word, the world itself can *hear* and *understand* the language of heaven, now translated into earthly language. But, more than this, and crucial for genuine prayer, through the incarnation, the world can now *respond* to the Word through the Spirit. "We cannot bypass that aspect of the incarnation which sees it as a concession on God's part to our hardness of hearing. God's language *has* become unmistakable for us in the life of Jesus."³¹

The perpetual, receptive dialogicality of his existence means that Christ exists with an unbroken awareness of the Father. Christ is the perfect contemplative. His contemplation is the basis of his obedient action: "the Son only *does* what he *sees* the Father doing" (John 5:19). His contemplative, prayerful life is the basis for his transformative obedience.³² The dialogicality and contemplative orientation of Christ's existence are the *articulate, expressive* forms of Christ's truth. They are, in Balthasar's language, *parrhesia*, the "shining forth" of Christ's truth in his prayer. According to Balthasar, Christ's *parrhesia* is identical with prayer.³³ His life is the absolute openness of world and heaven to each other. In Christ, heaven speaks to the creation, which offers

³⁰ "There was only one way out of this impasse, namely, that infinite eternal Being should utter its own self in the form of a relative being. That in this epiphany and *parousia* it should become actually present and give an authoritative interpretation of itself" (*Prayer*, 157).

³¹ *Prayer*, 269.

³² "Beyond Contemplation and Action?" in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 299ff.

³³ See especially *Prayer*, 46ff.

up its own obedient *Yes* to the Father in the cry of dereliction on the cross: “He is grace ascending just as much as grace descending; he is just as much creation’s highest response to the Father as he is the Father’s Word to creation.”³⁴

The perfect disponibility of Christ’s existence — his receptivity, *Hingabe*, obedience — radiates outward as the articulate offering of his prayer. Therefore, Christ’s entire existence is summed up by his prayer in Gethemane: “Yet not what I will but what you will” (Matthew 26:39). Christ’s radical disposal to the Father’s will is summarized in his handing over (*tradere*) of his life through his prayer. Even more radical than Gethemane, perhaps, are Christ’s final words from the cross: his “Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46) and his Johannine “*tetelestai*” (John 19:30), are the chief expressions of his self-abandonment. Following his “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*” — after his abandonment by the Father — these prayers perfect (and perfectly express) his obedience, surrender, and self-abandonment. For Balthasar, insofar as Christ’s life articulates openness, receptivity, self-abandonment, surrender, and obedience, his existence is best described as an act of prayer.

How does the saint hear the word (*Wort*) of the Word (*Ur-wort*), especially as it echoes out into the void of death as un-word? How does one come to know the truth that Christ expresses in his life, through his prayer? For Balthasar, it is precisely *in* Christ’s existence, his prayer, that the human person is revealed to himself. We hear the Word, we know the Word’s truth, because through the full existential flesh-taking in his incarnation, suffering, and death, we come to exist within the Word. “[T]he Word who became flesh takes us into himself, giving his own self as our mode of existence. Grace

³⁴ *Prayer*, 170.

has not imparted some general, vague, ‘supernatural elevation’ to us, but a participation in the personal existence of the eternal Word of God, who became ‘flesh’ like us so that we should become ‘spirit’ in him.”³⁵

Insofar as the human person comes to exist *in* Christ, Christ exists in him. Christ becomes, for Balthasar (drawing on Augustine) the inner teacher: “the truth of God which illuminates me interiorly... fundamentally different from my ‘psychic depths’, my archetypes, the categories, classifications and ideals which are most intimate to me.”³⁶ Christ’s prayer, in which he both expresses and exists *as* truth, becomes the mode of our own being and hence the mode of our knowing truth: “The Son’s contemplation is and remains the ontological framework within which all other valid Christian contemplation takes place.”³⁷ The way we exist and the way we know cannot be neatly distinguished for Balthasar. And so he will insist that, in the light of Christ, “prayer and worship are indispensable to the inner act of reason.”³⁸

For Balthasar, the Son is expositor of— which is to say, the *way to* — the Father, in whom resides the ultimate source, meaning, and end (*telos*) of worldly truth.³⁹ Christ is “the Father’s fragrance in the world. He is both ultimate and not ultimate. As God he is absolute; and yet, as absolute, relative: as the Son who is a relationship proceeding

³⁵ *Prayer*, 58. Balthasar interprets the mystical body of Christ (eucharistic and [therefore] ecclesial) as a literal participation in Christ’s existence. But he goes further by suggesting that the general mission of every human is to enter into this Christological participation. In other words, what the human is properly ordered to is not “grace” in an abstract sense but rather Christ himself. We participate in his death to share in his glory (Romans 8:17).

³⁶ *Prayer*, 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “Here is pure motion from the Father and back to the Father, in such a way that he leaves the Father every opportunity to speak to us, ultimately through the surrender of his Son and Word” *TD* 5, 122. See also Harrison, “*Homo Orans*,” 288-289.

from the Father and returning to him.”⁴⁰ This relationship is prayer — the “I” eternally receiving and expressing the “Thou” — is nowhere more fully than in his incarnate existence handed over in obedient surrender and abandonment. And it is within this prayer, both eternal and historical, cosmic and existential, that all persons find themselves, drawn ever on by truth toward truth, drawn by love toward love:

For the incarnation of the Word has brought about a reality which includes and sustains the individual, enabling him to perform the act of contemplation as worship, as obedience, and as understanding in faith. This arises, ultimately, from the very fact that the Absolute has appeared in the midst of human history, bound to humanity through conception, birth, life and death, linked to all generations — who are in turn profoundly affected a priori by this link, by God’s having appeared among them.⁴¹

And it is only now, in the wake of this Christological grounding, expressing, and transforming of truth, that we can return to the saints and charge laid upon the Church to continue the expressive mission of Christ, to know and testify that truth is love:

In this way the person who prays within the Church is already sharing, at the level of being, in the mysteries of the act of divine revelation. Not only may he behold these things from outside: he is privileged to experience them from within. He is privileged to understand that the Father’s self-revelation in the Son, through the Son’s descent into flesh, takes the form of a sacrifice of love in which the Son makes himself poor (2 Cor 8:9); through his total abandonment of himself the Son becomes an unmistakable sign of the origin and nature of divine love, which thus glorifies itself.⁴²

Theology as Prayer

Theology is the study of “God and all things in relation to God” and therefore encompasses the full range of objective themes that fall under the rubric of created Being

⁴⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁴¹ *Prayer*, 166.

⁴² Ibid., 170.

as it exists within the drama of the God-world relationship. Theology, insofar as it shares through the Spirit in the *theologoumena* of the eternal Son and the chorus of creation, is a “meditative clarification of [the] confession of faith in order to understand it and make it intelligible to others.”⁴³

This means that theology will quite rightly be a “rational discipline.” It is, after all, a *logic*. Balthasar does not overlook the value of careful, systematic theological thinking. He does, however, view such rational theology as inherently limited, as a mere fragment of a *theo-logic* concerned with unfolding the mystery of truth. The rational theologian — the theologian as we have come to think of her — is but a preparation for the saint. It is in the saint that the theologian comes to herself, for the saint theologizes as lover. The saint is the one who is caught up into the eternal dialogue of divine expression and love as it is revealed in the incarnation. The holiness of the saint arises, Balthasar insists, from taking the humanity of Christ seriously.⁴⁴ Contemplating the humanity of Christ, in which the fullness of God (and thus his truth) is pleased to dwell, the saint comes to know, that is, is *united* to that which she knows. She becomes holy by being bound to that which is holy; she knows the truth by inhabiting that truth. She is the one who shares in the divine dialogue of Christ through her own dialogue through Christ. The saint, the lover, beholds and knows the truth because she prays. This is why, in “Theology and Sanctity,” Balthasar insists that the way forward, the way to overcome the estrangement between dogmatics and spirituality, is by reclaiming the “continuous

⁴³ *TL* 3, 367.

⁴⁴ *Prayer*, 172.

dialogue between Bridegroom and bride.”⁴⁵ Theology itself, in light of the truth and the saints, must be re-imagined. Hence:

The “rational” theology, which did not begin with Thomas but always had to be put forward by the Fathers incidentally, so to speak, in order to defend the faith against heresy and which consists in illuminating and ordering faith’s inner textual unity (*sapientis est ordinare*), can be nothing other than an indispensable preliminary to a praying and confessing theology; “this abstract discourse cannot, however, be elevated into a paradigm or norm” for theology.⁴⁶

Balthasar will go on:

Intimacy with the Holy Spirit of truth thus cancels out the spectator’s uninvolved objectivity, with its external, critical attitude to the truth, and replaces it with an attitude which one can only describe as prayer. This prayer is total; it encompasses our beholding and our readiness to be beheld, our receiving and self-giving, our contemplating and our self-communication, in a single, undivided whole. In fact, *no other attitude but prayer is appropriate and (in a true sense) objective in the presence of eternal truth*. There is a speculative, theoretical approach in faith, in theology and in Christian life as a whole, and it is very necessary, but it can only be a constituent part of prayer’s totality and it *retains the essence of the whole from which it comes*. And while it is true that the believer, in “thinking” about divine truth, is inspired to further prayer, and that acts of the will (of surrender, of love, of trust) normally follow upon the acts of rational insight, it is also true that the reason would never be concerned with divine truth at all if it were not somehow aware, in a rudimentary and inchoate “experience,” of truth’s divine quality, of a kind of implicit attitude of prayer. This underlying prayer provides the only effective motivation for our own preoccupation with divine truth and with making it known to others.⁴⁷

The human person has, for Balthasar, an inherent, created desire for union with God: “our hearts are restless, Oh God, until they find rest in you.”⁴⁸ This drive (Balthasar

⁴⁵ “Theology and Sanctity,” 201.

⁴⁶ *TL* 3, 365.

⁴⁷ *Prayer*, 79-80. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* I.1.1. Harrison also develops this idea in “*Homo Orans*,” 293ff.

sometimes labels it “erotic”⁴⁹) is intellectual, spiritual, and bodily. We desire God with our whole selves; our entire person yearns for its fulfillment in union with God. And so the rational desire of the human for rational truth cannot be excluded from the theological endeavor. But this rational theology is but one dimension of Balthasar’s far broader reconceptualization of theology. Rational, systematic theology is situated within the larger context of an *orantic* theology — a theology at prayer. This is the way the saints theologize; this is how the truth is known by and expressed through them. In saintly prayer, dogmatics and life, intellectual and existential apprehension of truth, come together:

Contemplation is the acceptance of revealed truth by the believing, loving person (with all his faculties of intellect, will and sense); therefore the particular form this truth takes must shape and determine the way it is received. A knowledge of theology’s fundamental principles will promote such contemplation by shedding a clearer light on what the person is experiencing existentially; it will save him entering on circuitous and erroneous paths in prayer. Conversely, the person who is accustomed to pray will gratefully accept all the central insights that come to him from theology as an enrichment of his prayer.⁵⁰

A theology at prayer emerges from that first “call” of God to us, and our *inspired* “Abba, Father” reply.⁵¹ This is the beginning of the dialogue by which we find ourselves participating in the fiery inner dynamic of truth that Balthasar identifies as the love between Father and Son. Theology is practiced from within the life, and the prayer, of

⁴⁹ On the relation between “eros” and “agape” in theology, see Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 14-27.

⁵⁰ *Prayer*, 307.

⁵¹ Cf. Harrison, “*Homo Orans*,” 283-284: “God created human beings such that, to be truly themselves, they must contemplate Christ in prayer...von Balthasar interprets this in the light of the fulfillment of an individual’s nature...for von Balthasar, this ‘seeing and hearing God’ is, in fact, contemplative prayer. It follows that, on his view, this prayer is not something that human beings can just as well do without. Rather, it is precisely what they have been created for. Thus, without contemplative prayer a human being remains less than herself. [Balthasar] compares such an unfulfilled individual to a mere torso, a shadow of what she should be.”

God. It is this life that the Spirit makes known to believers by drawing them, through prayer, into the inner filial dynamic of God:

The person who prays not only stands before truth and contemplates it objectively; as John is fond of saying, he lives “in the truth” itself (Jn 17:17, 19; 1 Jn 2:21; 2 Jn 3, 4; 3 Jn 4), he “abides in the truth” (Jn 8:44), he is “of the truth” (Jn 18:37; 1 Jn 3:19). Hence the direct connection between “spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24), and “The Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 1 Jn 4:6). Praying within the truth that we must not start with a kind of aloofness, as if first of all we had to convince ourselves that the word of God which we are about to contemplate is the truth, in order to affirm it on the basis of our own insight. Rather, we start from this affirmation as something pre-existing from time immemorial; it is as if we had long since given up and abandoned everything which could mitigate against it. It means living by the knowledge that the truth (*which is the Spirit within us*) is more interior to us than we are to ourselves; that we have been predestined and chosen in god, in God’s authentic truth, prior to the foundation of the world, prior to our own existence, to be his holy, unspotted children.⁵²

Thus does Balthasar conclude, with Markus Barth, that “theology is the kind of thing that does not work without prayer.”⁵³ The consequence of this for Balthasar is quite radical: “nothing is worthy of theological reflection unless it can [also] be the subject of prayer.”⁵⁴ There can be no theology, and therefore no *Theo-Logic*, without prayer.

To unpack this orantic interpretation of theology, we must one final time to the theme of dialogicality. Balthasar’s relational ontology is grounded in the inner-trinitarian dialogicality of the relation of love between Father and Son in the Spirit. This dialogicality is the divine prayer from which all created words and dialogue emerge.⁵⁵

⁵² *Prayer*, 77-78.

⁵³ Quoted in *TL* 3, 358.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ It is Christ who, through the Spirit, transforms all inner-worldly words and dialogue into prayer. It is Christ who overcomes the oppositional dialectic between “I” and “Thou”, “subject” and “object”: “Only in Jesus Christ is it possible for the earthly dualism of language between a free ‘I’ and ‘thou’ to coincide with a prelinguistic or supralinguistic horizon encompassing both of them: namely, in a God who is simultaneously himself and his ‘Word’.” Jesus’ hypostatic identity as “utterance and horizon” is the objective focus of theology; it is the truth, the first Word, which all created words strain to articulate. But it

Prayer is thus for Balthasar the theological fulfillment of epistemological dialogicality; it is dialogue lifted to the level of everlasting love. The aspects of dialogue that we have previously examined, the trust and receptivity that make all dialogue possible, are here raised to the *nth* degree. Trust becomes faith and receptivity becomes surrender and obedience. Prayer consists, not simply in the mutuality of speech, but in the surrender, the handing over (*tradere*) of the self in an act of faith. Prayer is participation in Christological reality and is, therefore, true theological action.

Prayer, the language of the saints, is therefore the proper language of all theology. “Just as in Plato the most sublime and arcane things are uttered in the form of myth, in Christian theology they are uttered in the hymn of adoration.”⁵⁶ Theological reflection, if it is to speak truly of its content, must adopt an appropriately corresponding form: that of the saint who speaks of God in and through prayer, through hymns of love. This is the language of the Spirit. As Bernard of Clairvaux, not coincidentally placed by Dante in the ring of lovers, expresses it, “the illumination of this revelation that is carried out by the Holy Spirit is not only to give us knowledge but also to ignite our love... The Spirit’s doctrine does not provoke our curiosity but fans our love into flame.”⁵⁷

Prayer as Metaphysics in Act

Christ is the true Theologian, who reveals the truth by *being* the truth. All subsequent theology is done through the Spirit who leads into the infinite depths of

is the Spirit who “puts [this] objective light into man’s subjective core in the form of conversion, faith, and the imitation of God.”⁵⁴ The Spirit makes known the *pro nobis* of the divine mystery, that through Christ, the all the world has been transfigured, all worldly speech is filled with the divine, that inner dynamic of the dialogicality of understanding is prayer. For more on this idea of a relational metaphysic, see Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2012).

⁵⁶ *TL* 3, 366.

⁵⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica* 8, 5-6, quoted in *TL* 3, 366.

Christ's mysterious truth. Theology as a discipline, then, is best understood as a *doctrina spiritus*. Theology contemplates through the Spirit the truth which he has made known. But, as we have seen, the Spirit's mission is not simply to bring knowledge but to inflame love. Balthasar's move is to conflate these things: the saints know through love and love through knowledge. Only together do we arrive at a genuine model of how prayer is itself "metaphysics in act" — it is the act of love that *performs* the truth of Being by *inhabiting* the truth of Being, that is, Christ incarnate. The gift of the Spirit does not just allow the saint to speak *to* God or *about* God but allows the entrance "into God's personal dialogue" — through the Spirit into the eternal Speech, the eternal Word.⁵⁸

Prayer is metaphysics in act because it is the living participation in the fundamental metaphysical truth of the dialogue of love between Father and Son in the Spirit. Prayers enters into this reality by praying as Christ taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer.⁵⁹ But it also enters by praying *with* Christ, by participating in his prayerful expression of love and truth through his receptivity, obedience, and surrender.

Nowhere is prayer more truthful, more metaphysical, and more epistemological than at the Eucharist. According to Balthasar, the Eucharist is the performance of the full drama of truth. In it, heaven and earth meet in the form of the incarnate Christ. The truth of Christ is thus offered up to the Father by Christ, for whom the priest stands in, as sacrifice and to the world as gift. This gift is received and through it the union of heaven

⁵⁸ *TL* 3, 371.

⁵⁹ See, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 138. On the Our Father: "[Calling God, 'Father'] gives the concept of being God's children a dynamic quality: We are not ready-made children of God from the start, but we are meant to become so increasingly by growing more and more deeply in communion with Jesus. Our sonship turns out to be identical with following Christ. To name God as Father thus becomes a summons to us: to live as a 'child,' as a son or daughter. 'All that is mine is thine,' Jesus says in his high-priestly prayer to the Father, and the father says the same thing to the elder brother of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:31). The word *father* is an invitation to live from our awareness of this reality."

and earth realized. The truth that Being is tasted on the tongue and this tasting yields understanding, for, as we have seen, *sapere* becomes *sapientia*, tasting becomes wisdom.⁶⁰

It may be easy at this point to see the connection between prayer and love in receptivity, surrender, and obedience. But what does prayer have to do with the mind, with understanding, with epistemology? Just this:

Man is able, by his obedience, to make his mind a useful tool for the Holy Spirit; through obedience, pure contemplation guarantees the possibility of action, and only in this way can it be fully what God desires: something of benefit for all... Man must pray until his mind is so seized by the Spirit that, like a twin sister, it follows the Spirit wherever it is required.⁶¹

Prayer thus leads the mind. It is the proper form of the intellect. Contemplation is therefore the saintly form of knowing. Like all knowledge, contemplation begins in wonder.⁶² The drive to contemplate arises from the aesthetic shock that comes with the encounter with Being in its utter contingency and glorious non-necessity: “our astonishment at its ‘being there’ immediately moves on to our wonderment as it ‘being thus.’”⁶³ We are overwhelmed by the beauty of existence and are thus drawn into the wonder and the love that fuel prayer.⁶⁴ Beauty is the saint’s Virgil, bearing her forward from wonder to wonder toward the divine vision. But only when beauty and wonder have become love, when Virgil hands Dante over (*tradere*) to Beatrice, does the saint

⁶⁰ See, Angel Mendez, OP, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009). See also, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Libreria Editrice Vaticana (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 152-162.

⁶¹ *TL* 3, 375-76.

⁶² *Prayer*, 156.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁶⁴ This is the precise reason that Balthasar laments the loss of beauty from theology: for whoever is no longer enraptured by beauty, can no longer pray and will soon be unable to love. *GL* 1, 19.

behold the Love that is both height and depth, that, rather than being removed from the world, *move il sole e l'atre stelle*.

Through his account of truth, Balthasar resets the epistemological playing field so that he can articulate a truly theological way of knowing. The form of the saints is his way of doing this. The saints represent a way of truthfully being-in-the-world: prayerfully, doxologically, adoringly.⁶⁵ And so, for Balthasar, prayer is *attunement* [*Gestimmtheit*].⁶⁶ Prayer is attunement to the truth of God by and through the Spirit, participating in that truth. Prayer is being *in-formed* by the archetype of all truth. It is not simply a human act. It is Christ praying *through* the saint, insofar as the saint dwells in the life of Christ.⁶⁷ It is the act of surrender to Christ, one's self-abandonment to him through the Spirit. By surrendering to, and participating in, Christ's prayer, the saint is drawn into, and knows, the truth of all things. For Balthasar, knowledge of truth comes by *being in* Christ, through prayer, through the Spirit.

⁶⁵ Cf. Harrison, "*Homo Orans*," 292.

⁶⁶ *GL* 1, 99: "This 'being attuned' means that 'man is encompassed and determined [that is, measured] by God. In so far as it passes over into consciousness, this state of being determined by God will then be seen to be a sensorium that perceives divine things, a living commerce between God and man, a real *spiritual quating* of the two, or a 'tuning'... This 'tuning' is... the living process whereby the tuner (*der Bestimmende*) and the tuned (*der Bestimmte*) are made equal. To be so tuned means, then, that the relationship of a thing to its element has been raised to the level of actuality and effectiveness'... So man has been tuned by God's breath to reflect and express the attunedness of matter and spirit, nature and God... All this reaches its perfection in the Christian revelation of the Trinity: 'The Father appears as the force that draws us, Christ as the medium, and the Spirit in us is God's very tuning of us itself.'" This, Balthasar claims, is one of the essential themes of all Catholic spirituality (100).

⁶⁷ Here we see Balthasar's dependence on the poetry of Charles Péguy whose art, Balthasar claims, flow more and more toward "prayer without one ever being able to say precisely whether this prayer is a dialogue or a monologue on God's part. It is a dialogue with God... but one which is constantly developing into a monologue of God the Father, addressed without distinction to his Son, to the men he has created and to himself. It is a form of 'theology as Trinitarian conversation'... which could only be risked by a poet using a simple and popular style of utterance that avoids any show of sublimity and yet does not for a moment degenerate into 'mateyness' and false familiarity. Only faith in the Holy Spirit can allow God to speak in such a way: in a meditation not only on the basic relationship of creation (*analogia entis*, of the ever-greater unlikeness of God in contrast to the world), but also on the basic relationship of the gospel and its *analogia fidei* — of the ever-greater unlikeness of the divine-human person of Jesus in contrast to sinners" (*GL* 3, 506).

Prayer is not only a matter of the soul's journey to God, an increase of one's knowledge. Contemplation is the saintly way of knowing *for the purpose of* sharing in Christ's mission of healing the world. In prayer we see the saint in his poetic "Janus-destiny: he is called to order and fashion the world according to his nature with its unity of body and soul; but at the same time he must look up to the God who is beyond the world, who he is to fear and love" and hand over (*tradere*) that shaped world to him.⁶⁸

Contemplative knowledge is, for Balthasar, truly metaphysical, truly theological knowing. It is knowing the world through God and knowing God through the "sacred veils" of the world.⁶⁹ This contemplative knowing is the result of Christ who, "having dwelt among the forms of the world which are perceived by sense and intellect, returns to the Father, and in doing so he opens the real path of contemplation."⁷⁰ This is not a purely "negative or apophatic mysticism which seeks to encounter God beyond the world... God as Wholly Other... who can be neither conceived, nor beheld, nor comprehended."⁷¹ Contemplation is a genuine knowledge of truth, as translated by Christ into "the multiplicity of time/space aspects, into the eloquent language of human existence with its change, its growth, its strivings, undertakings, sufferings, its dying..."⁷²

⁶⁸ *Prayer*, 265.

⁶⁹ See, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Cosmic Hierarchy*, 121D. See also Balthasar's account in *GL* 2, 173ff.

⁷⁰ *Prayer*, 54. Thus contemplative prayer is the healing of Babel. Rather than attempting the ascent to God by our own means, we gratefully (that is, eucharistically) receive the *descending* God, who then *elevates* us — and the rest of creation — to the bosom of the Father. Thus Idealism's goal of achieving absolute knowledge of absolute Being is, in a sense, an appropriate impulse. This ascent, this union, is what humanity was created for. The downfall of Idealism is its titanism, its striving to achieve what can only be received.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.* And of course the task of the Pentecostal Spirit is to "gather all multiplicity into one" (*Prayer*, 74).

For Balthasar, contemplation is the eschatological form of knowing because it sees and receives the world in its transfigured reality. Contemplation sees the whole world “as co-creature, as a shared environment; it too becomes an object of prayerful contemplation.”⁷³ Contemplation sees the form in the fragment; it beholds the flesh with the spiritual senses.⁷⁴ This is, again, a Christological form of knowing. Christ is not, for Balthasar, an “isolated phenomenon” but the truth of all the world: “Just as he is inseparable from the world which he came to redeem, so the world cannot be separated from him in whom it ‘subsists’ and who thus provides its rationale.”⁷⁵

Prayer as Mission

Despite the possible reservation of some critics who think of prayer, especially contemplative prayer, as detached from action in the world, Balthasar insists that saintly existence and the life of prayer are decidedly active. We must not forget that the saints are characterized by *mission*. For Balthasar, knowledge, contemplation, are foundational for saintly mission in the world. Unlike the ancient tradition that sees contemplation (*theoria*) as the apex of the Christian life, Balthasar sees it as its *foundation*. This conclusion he, again, derives from the Johannine life of Christ. For Balthasar, as for

⁷³ *Prayer*, 63.

⁷⁴ Here again we can see the influence of Ignatius on Balthasar’s thought. In the *Exercises*, the participant is urged to sanctify the senses in order to contemplate the historical and divine action of Christ. For both Ignatius and Balthasar, divine truth is expressed, not apart from the world, but *in* the world and *through* that world. This is why mystical theology is such an important concept for Balthasar. The mystical theologian understands divine truth precisely *in* the world, under the “sacred veils” that both reveal and hide the divine. Cf. *Prayer*, 266ff. Incidentally, the saints also serve as this kind of “sensible” and “intelligible” object of contemplation. Saints “forge the word of God in an intelligible form which the senses can grasp, so that the people of God, whether synagogue or Church, may hear it through them” (*Prayer*, 249). This is the objective dimension of Balthasar’s theology of the saints of which the current project has not devoted much time. But we should not neglect to emphasize the importance of this objective dimension of the vocation of the saints, for it is through them that the truth of love is made known: “love alone is credible.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

John, the Son only *does* (acts) what he *sees* (contemplates) the Father doing (John 5:19).

Action follows contemplation; contemplation *commissions*.

What, then, is the saintly mission? It is, indeed, to join in the exposition of Christ's truth. The saints have a vocation to doxology, to glorifying God. But they also have a mission to the world: "To the extent that we who enjoy the peaceable grace of sonship, who have been addressed by the Word which is the Son, give the proper response of loving and living, we shall cause the whole creation to radiate with inner meaning...every creature will be given a share in the 'apocalyptic (i.e., manifest) truth.'"⁷⁶ Contemplation receives and imparts meaning to the world, raising it to its true vocation: to bear in it divine truth. Balthasar insists that

the Christian must not forget that the things of this world are also involved in the economy of salvation; they must not be thought of and dealt with in isolation from the truth of prayer. "For everything created by God is good, ... it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:5). Therefore a prayerful contemplation of the sanctifying word is called for, so that we may be able to use God's good creatures according to his mind. And however much, in doing so, all our human powers come into play, our use of creatures must always be "of the truth" and "in the truth", in an attitude of prayer which has become habitual, an attitude of reverent worship of the divine truth, in which all the world's truth, even the most profane, is rooted. Hence the admonition to prayer without ceasing (1 Thess 5:25).⁷⁷

Prayer is thus the "effective motivation for our own preoccupation with divine truth and with making it known to others."⁷⁸ It is the union of acts of thought and will: "in 'thinking' about divine truth, [the believer] is inspired to further prayer, and... acts of

⁷⁶ *Prayer*, 64. The "mysticism" of the saint's inner contemplation is "charismatic and missionary" (*Prayer*, 73).

⁷⁷ *Prayer*, 80.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

the will (of surrender, of trust, of love).”⁷⁹ Prayer is the speculative knowing of truth that comes only through the ecstasy of love — the stepping outside the self so as to be perfectly, but creatively, receptive. The ecstasy implicit in the act of knowledge is here perfected in the ecstasy of prayer, the inspired act of saintly love. We find here Balthasar’s re-imagined epistemology of love, where “[i]ntimacy with the Holy Spirit of truth thus cancels out the spectator’s uninvolved objectivity, with its external, critical attitude to the truth, and replaces it with an attitude” of prayer.⁸⁰

This is the contemplative, prayerful mission of the saints. All creation groans, waiting for its fulfillment in the revelation of the sons of God (Romans 8:22). Perhaps, in Balthasar’s scheme, the saints at prayer are these “sons of God” who share in the mission of God to bring all creation back to its primal truth — the infinite depth of triune love that is the source and the goal of all things. Thus through her prayer, the saint conforms to truth and thus becomes his image, and her life itself becomes a knowable form, an expression of the beauty, the goodness, and ultimately, the love that is the truth of all things.

Enlarging the Cathedrals

For this project, the focus has been on Balthasar’s account of truth and how it is co-extensive with, and thus known most truly by, love. But his philosophy and theology of truth cannot be separated from the question of the nature of the God-world relationship. They are the same question. For Balthasar, to ask about truth is to inquire into the way the truth of the world meets with and is fulfilled in the descending truth of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

God. To put it more concretely, to speak of truth is to speak of the God-world relationship; it is to speak of Christ.

Moreover, Balthasar's account of truth cannot be separated from his concern over the separation of philosophy, theology, and spirituality; the intellectual (philosopher and theologian) and the saint. For Balthasar, a faithful account of truth requires their reintegration. The intellectual, whether she be theologian or philosopher, if she wants to understand the truth of *Being*, must be a saint. She must be holy; her thought and her action must be adequated to that which she endeavors to know. To know that the truth is love, that Being is co-extensive with love, then one must know as a lover knows, through union and conformity with what is known. And so the saint knows by being drawn into, adoring and hymning, the infinite mystery of divine love:

God is love. This does not mean, of course, that his essence is substantial love, while his other infinite properties are dissolved into this love. There is an order here: love presupposes knowledge, while knowledge presupposes being. But the love that stands at the end of the sequence as the goal of its unfolding stands, in another perspective, at its beginning as the basic impulse underlying it. Eternity is a circulation in which beginning and end join in unity. By the same token, everything that has a ground, every truth claim that needs grounding, occurs within this order, but the order itself is sustained by the ultimate ground, which is love. To be sure, God is eternal truth and by this truth all other things are true and meaningful. But the very existence of truth, of eternal truth, is grounded in love. If the truth were ultimate in God, we could look into its abysses with open eyes. Our eyes might be blinded by so much light, but our yearning from truth would have free rein. But because love is ultimate, the seraphim cover their faces with their wings, for the mystery of eternal love is one whose superluminous night may be glorified only through adoration.⁸¹

⁸¹ *TL* 1, 272.

A Concrete Life

Here we might do what Balthasar himself does not and offer a concrete image of a life so lived. We might return to one of the figures that lay in the background of this project: the 20th century philosopher, Maurice Blondel. Though not a saint in any canonized list, Blondel's was a saintly life. He lived a life that, as a philosopher, was dedicated to understanding and articulating truth. But he conceived of this philosophical career as a *spiritual* vocation, that emerged *from* his life of prayer.

As a young student, Blondel would leave philosophical studies each afternoon in order to attend Adoration. His prayer there, before the presence of Truth in the Host, embodies Balthasar's image of the saint: "My God, I wish I were the good bread of the altar, over which you would pronounce the words of transubstantiation!"⁸² This internal change that Blondel desired, this mystical transformation that he saw in the Eucharist and which he longed for himself, was for the sake of mission through his philosophical vocation in the world: "My God, I want to bring to you here as often as possible a short moment of adoration, to offer myself to you here for the sake of those souls who, even in this school I attend, outrage you and bring mankind's curses upon you."⁸³

It was in the midst of such prayers of adoration that Blondel felt the call to pursue and develop a distinctly Catholic philosophy that unites thought, being and action within a system "that is no more 'separate' from or 'dependent' on Science than it is on positive Religion, and which — religious in its essence, but not by accident, prejudice or addition — may spontaneously coexist in our consciousness as in our life, with the most intrepid

⁸² Maurice Blondel, *Carnets intimes, Tome I: 1883-1894* (Paris: Cerf.), 41.19.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1:17.

Criticism and the most authentic Catholicism.”⁸⁴ This was the mission he received, and the task that he took on for the remainder of his life: to conceive of the world, and of thought itself, in the transfiguring light of divine truth. Indeed, all of Blondel’s subsequent thought can be understood as an outworking of that initial prayer for the transubstantiation. His life and his thought come to participate, as does the bread, in the living reality of divine truth.

Conclusion

Like the young Blondel, who ventured into the local chapel each day to behold and approach the Mystery of the Altar, we can return to our analogy of the cathedral as the fundamental, mystagogical shape of Balthasar’s account of truth. The initiatory movement of knowing the truth — phenomenological, Christological, pneumatological — corresponds to each of the volumes of the *Logic*, and, more importantly, to the *christic* existence of the saint: drawing near to Christ, being united to him, and being commissioned by him in the Spirit. We have used this cathedral imagery to structure this initiatory interpretation of the *Logic*, as an articulation of the spiritual *learning* how to see, how to perceive, and how to understand, the truth of God.

For Balthasar, the most fitting language of this doxology, that which knows by unknowing, which preserves mystery that lies hidden in every space in the cathedral, is prayer. Indeed, the cathedral itself as we have presented it is “the prayer of fleshly people, a glory, almost an impossibility, a miracle of prayer.”⁸⁵ Prayer, then, is integral

⁸⁴ Blondel, *Itinéraire philosophique de M. Blondel*, Coll. “La Neff,” no. 5 (Paris: Spes, 1966), 45.

⁸⁵ *GL* 3, 511.

to Balthasar's account of the God-world relationship. This relationship is the truth of Being, which is to say, it is Christ, the mediator between heaven and earth. But Christ and his truth are *dramatic*, and can be known truly only by being dwelt within, and thus *performed*. The mission of the saint is to participate in Christ and, by so doing, enlarge the cathedrals of his truth and his love. Prayer is the dramatic, existential, path *into* truth *by means of* truth: we run to God along the road of God; we come to Christ along the road of Christ; we pray through Christ's prayer. Thus prayer is, for Balthasar, the expressive language of the saint's drawing near to, being united with, and being commissioned by Christ in order to carry his truth in the world. Prayer is the heart of saintly existence; it is their modality of *being-in-the-world* that has been transfigured by Christ. It is metaphysics in act, the expressive language of Balthasar's account of truth, his epistemology of love: for God is love; and Being is co-extensive with love; and the truth of all things is love. And love itself is understanding.

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