The Form Love Takes in the World: On Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Contribution to Ethics

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology and Religious Studies
Of The Catholic University of America
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree
Doctor of Sacred Theology

By
Tobias John Nathe

Washington, D.C.

2012
While no one would claim Father Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88) to have been a moral theologian, least of all him, his work nevertheless provides a foundation for ethical discernment which distinguishes its adherents. Specifically, Balthasar’s faith-first methodology and his understanding of love as both co-extensive with being and possessing the inner form of a vow, adds new depth of insight to the gift character of things and their proper appropriation, not to mention one’s own mission in life. Being and action, for Balthasar, are to be reinterpreted in terms of the self-abandoning love of Jesus Christ, which finally indicates how everything reaches its fulfillment in the cosmic liturgy through the paradoxical surrender of its own prerogatives. In this way Balthasar’s perspective serves to bridge human action with the worship of the triune God.

After disclosing a number of tenets, such as the nuptiality and fruitfulness of being, which orient such a perspective on being and action in Part One of this dissertation, Part Two is meant to help the reader discern how he or she might apply Balthasar’s “fully Catholic” understanding when approaching various ethical questions. It does this by investigating Balthasar’s own, albeit limited, moral treatises, David L. Schindler’s “Balthasarian” work in three intra-Catholic moral debates, and my own analysis of Balthasar’s thought relative to a Catholic form of life and three models of the relation between theoretical and practical reason. The reader comes to learn how Balthasar’s understanding of the form love takes in the world contributes to ethics without being an ethics in the conventional sense.
This dissertation by Tobias John Nathe fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Moral Theology and Ethics approved by Rev. Brian V. Johnstone, C.Ss.R., S.T.D., as Director, and by William C. Mattison, III, Ph.D., and Nicholas J. Healy, Ph.D. as Readers.


William C. Mattison, III, Ph.D., Reader

Nicholas J. Healy, Ph.D., Reader
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations........................................................................................................... v
General Introduction.............................................................................................................1
Chapter by Chapter Analysis...............................................................................................13

## PART ONE

### Chapter One: Reintegrating Moral Theology in the Norm of Christ

Introduction..........................................................................................................................24
I.1 *Status Quaestionis* of Moral Theology: Integrating Origin, Worship, and Deed........30
I.2 Christopher Steck, S.J. and Melanie Barrett: Defining Parts of the Integrative Whole....36
I.3 *Love Alone Is Credible*: Propaedeutic for the Christian Difference in Being and Action...45
I.4 The Trinitarian-Christological-Ecclesial Form of Self-Abandoning Love ....................57
Conclusion............................................................................................................................66

### Chapter Two: Love is Co-extensive with Being

Introduction..........................................................................................................................69
II.1 The Convertibility of Being and Love............................................................................73
II.2 The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference......................................................82
(a.) First Distinction........................................................................................................83
(b.) Second Distinction....................................................................................................85
(c.) Third Distinction........................................................................................................87
(d.) Fourth Distinction......................................................................................................92
II.3 The Polarity of Being: Nuptiality and Fruitfulness ........................................................98
II.4 The Infinite Mystery of Being: Wonder and Worship...................................................109
Conclusion........................................................................................................................116

### Chapter Three: Love Has the Inner Form of a Vow

Introduction........................................................................................................................118
III.1 The Form Love Takes in the World: Call and Counsels.............................................122
III.2 Theo-Dramatic Action: Setting the Stage..................................................................132
III.3 Human Freedom in Three Integral Correspondences..............................................136
(a.) Form and Command...............................................................................................137
(b.) Choice and Commitment.........................................................................................143
(c.) Gift and Gratitude....................................................................................................150
III.4 The Saints and their Missions: Examples of Surrendering Love..............................157
Conclusion........................................................................................................................164
PART TWO

Chapter Four: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Moral Treatises

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 169
IV.1(a) Nuptiality and Fruitfulness: The Transmission of Human Life ......................... 170
IV.1(b) Nuptiality and Fruitfulness: Roles in the Church ................................... 178
IV.2 Poverty and the Natural Rights of Ownership ........................................... 185
IV.3 Secular Institutes, Catholic Action, and Communion .................................. 198
Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 211

Chapter Five: Balthasar’s Theology of Love in the Work of David L. Schindler

Introduction ....................................................................................................... 214
V.1 Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Influence on David L. Schindler .............................. 216
V.2 The Neo-Conservatism Debate .................................................................. 223
V.3 The ANT-OAR Debate .............................................................................. 247
V.4 The Theology of the Body Debate ............................................................ 261
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 270

Chapter Six: An Artistry of Love: Foundations and Proposals

Introduction .......................................................................................................... 273
VI.1 A Catholic Form of Life ............................................................................... 276
(a.) Integrates Origin, Worship, and Deed in Jesus Christ ............................... 278
(b.) Interpenetrates the Work-a-Day World ................................................. 286
(c.) Expresses a Logic Both Nuptial and Fruitful ......................................... 288
VI.2 Theoretical and Practical Reason: Unity-in-Distinction ............................. 293
(a.) Melina’s “Dynamic Model” ...................................................................... 296
(b.) Rhonheimer’s “Parallelism” and Crawford’s “Triune and Circumincessive” Model ................................................. 306
(c.) Concluding Remarks on Speculative and Practical Reasoning ................. 319
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 323

General Conclusion ......................................................................................... 326

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources: Hans Urs von Balthasar .......................................................... 332
Secondary Sources: Hans Urs von Balthasar ....................................................... 338
Other Sources .................................................................................................. 343
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Balthasar’s Trilogy:

GL1-7  The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics
Vol. 1  Seeing the Form
Vol. 2  Studies in the Theological Style: Clerical Styles
Vol. 3  Studies in the Theological Styles: Lay Styles
Vol. 4  The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity
Vol. 5  The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age
Vol. 6  Theology: The Old Covenant
Vol. 7  Theology: The New Covenant

HK, I-III.2.2  Herrlichkeit: Eine Theologische Ästhetik
Band I  Schau der Gestalt
Band II  Facher der Stile
  Teil 1  Klerikale Stile
  Teil 2  Laikale Stile
Band III. 1  Im Raum der Metaphysik
  Teil 1: Altertum
  Teil 2: Neuzeit
Band III. 2  Theologie
  Teil 1: Alter Bund
  Teil 2: Neuer Bund

TD1-5  Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory
Vol. 1  Prolegomena
Vol. 2  The Dramatis Personae: Man in God
Vol. 3  The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ
Vol. 4  The Action
Vol. 5  Last Act

TDK, I-IV  Theo-Dramatik
Band I  Prolegomena
Band II.1  Die Personen des Spiels: Teil 1: Der Mensch in Gott
Band II.2  Die Personen des Spiels: Teil 2: Die Personen in Christus
Band III  Die Handlung
Band IV  Das Endspiel
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (Cont’d)

Balthasar’s Trilogy (Cont’d):

TL1-3  Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory

Vol. 1  Truth of the World
Vol. 2  Truth of God
Vol. 3  The Spirit of Truth

TLK, I-III  Theologik

Band I  Wahrheit der Welt
Band II  Wahrheit Gottes
Band III  Der Geist der Wahrheit

Other Works by Balthasar:

CSL  The Christian State of Life
CS  Christlicher Stand
LAC  Love Alone is Credible
GNL  Glaubhaft ist Nur Liebe

“NP”  “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics”
“NS”  “Neun Sätze zu Christlichen Ethik”
“TS”  “Theology and Sanctity”
“TH”  “Theologie und Heiligkeit”

St. Thomas Aquinas:

ST  Summa Theologica
    Summa Theologiae
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Given the plethora of books and articles on Father Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), not to mention the personal commendations of the last two supreme pontiffs, the Swiss theologian’s influence on post-conciliar Catholic thought is well established and apparently growing. That his body of work shows erudition on such wide ranging topics as music, literature, poetry, and philosophy, in addition to theology, no doubt substantiates this

---

1 Balthasar’s original German prose will be cited alongside the English in this dissertation for the following major works: his trilogy (The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, and Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory), The Christian State of Life, Love Alone is Credible, “Theology and Sanctity,” and “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics.” See List of Abbreviations.


3 It is widely known that Balthasar was to be appointed a cardinal of the Church by Pope John Paul II but died shortly beforehand. Upon hearing the news, John Paul exclaimed, “All who knew the priest, von Balthasar, are shocked, and grieve over the loss of a great son of the Church, an outstanding man of theology and of the arts, who deserves a special place of honor in contemporary ecclesiastical and cultural life. It was my wish to acknowledge and to honor in a solemn fashion the merits he earned through his long and tireless labors as a spiritual teacher and as an esteemed scholar by naming him to the dignity of the cardinalate in the last Consistory.” Pope John Paul II, “Telegram from John Paul II,” June 30, 1988, accessed March 1, 2012, http://seeingtheform.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/funeral-eulogy-for-hans-urs-von-balthasar-delubac.pdf. Moreover, commenting on the centenary of Balthasar’s birth, Pope Benedict XVI remarked: “I had the joy of knowing and associating with this renowned Swiss theologian. I am convinced that his theological reflections preserve their freshness and profound relevance undiminished to this day and that they incite many others to penetrate ever further into the depths of the mystery of the faith, with such an authoritative guide leading them by the hand.” Pope Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Convention on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Birth of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” Communio: International Catholic Review, October 6, 2005, accessed February 12, 2012, http://www.communio-icr.com/articles/BenedictBalthasarCentenary.html.

4 See, for examples, Rodney A. Howsare and Larry S. Chapp’s, eds., How Balthasar Changed My Mind: Fifteen Scholars Reflect on the Meaning of Balthasar for Their Own Work (New York: Crossroad, 2008), and Sekundärliteratur H. U. von Balthasar more generally.
interest. Balthasar was indeed a man of many talents. No introduction to his thought is complete without mentioning Henri Cardinal de Lubac, S.J.’s judgment that his friend and devotee was “perhaps the most cultivated of his time.” Personal anecdotes of his towering intellect abound, such as, how he was able to recognize immediately how to solve a puzzle that de Lubac had been laboring over for some time, or of a friend coming upon Balthasar during his leisure time to discover him joyfully translating again. By Balthasar’s own testimony, he eventually rid himself of his entire music collection because he could now play it—in his mind and on the piano—from memory.

The lore would only continue if Balthasar was not also a controversial figure for many in the Church. He did, after all, leave the Society of Jesus to found a community with a married woman, in the pre-Vatican II era no less. And his theological writings, one of the

---

5 “Balthasar is without doubt one of the most prolific writers of our times. His bibliography includes eighty-five separate volumes, over five hundred articles and contributions to collected works, and nearly a hundred translations, not to mention numerous smaller pieces and the sixty volumes [he transcribed] of Adrienne von Speyr.” Peter Henrici, S.J., “A Sketch of Balthasar’s Life,” *Communio* 16 (1989): 335.


7 This tale was related to me by Hugh Kelly, a former postulate with the Jesuits and an admirer of both men.

8 This anecdote comes by way of Fr. Dennis McManus, the friend who encountered Balthasar translating during his leisure time. Fr. Aidan Nichols, O.P. tells that Balthasar was fluent in at least six languages with the capacity to translate from one to another with precision. See his Introduction to *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 1.


most prodigious outputs ever assembled, raise concerns for his use of metaphor and analogy, for his embrace of the *ressourcement* movement in Catholicism over against a calcified neoscholasticism, and in particular for his account of Christ’s suffering and descent into Hell.\textsuperscript{11}

What strikes the reader who draws from Balthasar’s thought is not only the depth of his analysis, his non-systematic eclectic style, and his familiarity with seemingly every important thinker to put pen to paper, but also his ability to portray a “kneeling theology,”\textsuperscript{12} a Christocentric theology of love applicable to every being in the cosmos, at every moment, in every situation. One is often reminded of his trenchant essay “Theology and Sanctity” when reading his work, for Balthasar’s writing attracts the reader in the manner of spiritual theology and yet it never leaves behind, in fact it often advances, the epistemological and metaphysical *logos* of the Catholic tradition.\textsuperscript{13} The reader is given to ponder the difference Christ makes for all of reality, from the substratum of *entia* to the heights of mystical sanctity. That Balthasar brings a holistic understanding to the various subdivisions in theology goes without mentioning.

What Balthasar’s theology is not, however, is anything typical of moral theology. He

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 181-210.
\end{itemize}
himself once said, “Ich habe keine Ethik.”14 Aside from “A [near literal] Word on Humanae Vitae” and his essay “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,” one would be inclined to believe him.15 There is in Balthasar’s vast writings no demonstrable virtue theory or moral action theory, not even a divine command ethics in the traditional sense.16 Of course Balthasar’s five-volume Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, an account of the “good” relative to his accounts of “beauty” in the seven-volume The Glory of the Lord and “truth” in his three-volume Theo-Logic,17 contains riches to plumb on matters ethical, but not in a manner easily applicable to the various questions and controversies which evolve in the moral arena. It would be difficult to find a moral theologian using portions of the Theo-Drama to supplement the arguments of his discipline. Clearly Balthasar’s ethical highlights do not lend themselves to a neatly categorized system of moral commendations and prohibitions.

That said, Balthasar does offer a theological world view which forms the Christian moral perspective in a particular way. A leading contention of this dissertation is that those

---

14 This was conveyed to me by Peter Casarella, the co-organizer of the annual session of the Hans Urs von Balthasar Society at the Catholic Theological Society of America who has taught on Balthasar and currently has a book project entitled, Von Balthasar: The Centrifugal Politics of Culture, in a personal conversation which included Fr. Edward Oakes, S.J. Interestingly, Oakes responded: “But Christopher Steck has proven him wrong.” Fr. Steck, S.J. has written a book on Balthasar entitled, The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2001).


16 This is a somewhat debatable point. Although he does not consider it “traditional,” Christopher Steck argues that Balthasar conveys a theological version of divine command ethics in his thought. See Steck, Ethical Thought of HUVB, 65.

17 The English translations of Balthasar’s masterful trilogy are published in 15 volumes as denoted above. In the original German, there are 10 volumes, but four of these have two parts. See http://www.johannes-verlag.de/. Both in the German and English, an epilogue accompanies the trilogy.
who approach theology in the manner he does often come to perceive ethical questions differently than those who do not. This comes especially into view when one considers the personal legacy Balthasar has left the Church. His influence on the moral life can be seen concretely in the Community of St. John (Johannes Gemeinschaft), a secular institute of consecrated members which he co-founded with the lay mystic Adrienne von Speyr, as alluded to above, as well as upon the Casa Balthasar, a house of discernment and formation for young men which provides “an Ignatian formation inspired by the figures and works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, S.J., and Adrienne von Speyr.”

Balthasar’s moral influence can be seen additionally through the writings of his publishing house, Johannes Verlag, the collection and publications of the Hans Urs von Balthasar-Stiftung (Foundation), but perhaps especially in Communio: International Catholic Review, a quarterly periodical which he co-founded with de Lubac, Ratzinger, Jean Daniélou, et al., which has in the last 20 years, through its North American edition, been engaged in a series of intra-Catholic moral debates.

It is a testament to Balthasar’s thought that the North American edition of Communio, published out of the offices of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage

---


19 See http://www.johannes-verlag.de/.


21 Archbishop Karol Wojtyla encouraged the founding of the Polish edition of Communio.

and Family at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., has as its four editors men who have dedicated a significant portion of their scholarly work to the writings of Balthasar. First and foremost among these is David L. Schindler, the so-called “American Balthasar.” As the chief editor of the North American edition since 1982, a former member of the Community of St. John, and the editor of two collections on Balthasar, Schindler is also the Provost and recently retired Dean of the Institute in the nation’s capital. This leads one to the conclusion that Balthasar’s life testament and writings have greatly influenced not only the community that he founded with von Speyr and such charisms as the Casa Balthasar in Rome, and finally not just the organizing elements of

---


24 Nicholas J. Healy, III, a current assistant professor at the John Paul II Institute and designated reader of this dissertation, wrote his own doctoral dissertation on Balthasar and has taught classes at the Institute on his thought. David C. (“D.C.”) Schindler, the son of David L. Schindler, also wrote his doctoral dissertation on Balthasar, has translated his work, and teaches on an adjunct basis at the Institute. Adrian Walker, translator into English of the third part of Balthasar’s trilogy, Theologik, is a consecrated member of the Community of St. John having previously lived at the Casa Balthasar in Rome; he has taught at the Institute as well. Led by David L. Schindler, this group has had a significant influence on the character and mission of the graduate school.

25 This is the nickname given him by Mark and Louise Zwick on the back flap of Schindler’s book, Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996). Schindler has conveyed in public that is not a description that he is particularly fond of.

26 Schindler, “We Love God in All that We Love,” interview by Emily Reilly, Inside the Vatican (April 2008): 76.


28 Many other contributors to this edition of Communio are additionally indebted to Balthasar’s work and have taught or currently teach at the Institute. In addition to those instructors noted in fn. 24 above, those who have published in Communio and also serve or have served on the faculty of the Institute include, David S. Crawford, Margaret Harper McCarthy, Fr. José Granados, D.C.J.M. and Fr. Antonio López, F.S.C.B. As of this printing, López has taken the place of Schindler as the newly appointed Dean of the Institute.
Johannes Verlag and the international journal Communio of which he was a frequent contributor to the German edition, but also the life and work of the D.C. Session of the Institute.\textsuperscript{29} It is compelling to note that Schindler and his Institute colleagues writing in Communio, whose thought we have the occasion to analyze in this work relative to Balthasar’s,\textsuperscript{30} often come to different conclusions on ethical questions than other Catholics who also accept the authority of the Church’s Magisterium. Why is this? Presumably Schindler, et al. have a different starting point, a distinct way of viewing the cosmos and man within it. This decisive perspective appears due in large part to Balthasar’s account of love.

As a brief introduction, Balthasar’s understanding of love is an expansive and intelligent one, going far beyond a simple attraction or delectable choice. Radiating from the God who brings all existence into reality through his Word, Balthasar claims that (1) “being and love are co-extensive.”\textsuperscript{31} Because this Word also becomes flesh, lives the evangelical counsels to perfection, and manifests the inner dynamic of love as obedience unto death for the sake of communion, Balthasar can also charge that (2) “every true love has the inner form of a vow”—consecrated poverty, chastity, and obedience, analogously understood.\textsuperscript{32} It

\textsuperscript{29} Unfortunately, what can be known with the certitude of personal experience as a graduate of the Institute and subscriber of Communio, as well as from the testimony of others, is not always translatable to a theological study such as this. At minimum, one who has been hired to teach at the Institute and has also written articles published in Communio can be known to be amenable to Balthasar’s thought.

\textsuperscript{30} A quick perusal of the bibliography of this work will reveal its Communio influence.


follows that every being or element of reality is metaphysically structured from within to give itself away completely and forever in the form of a vow, if only in its own order. To give an example of how this two-fold understanding of love might be articulated, I would suggest that a tree is ordered from within to share itself completely and forever by growing to a beauteous stature for others to delight in, by strengthening the soil which feeds it, by providing shade and/or fruit for the weary and hungry, and ultimately by relinquishing its own substance in the manner of firewood as the need arises. All trees, in a Balthasarian metaphysics or theological ontology, are created in love, through love, and for love as gifts at the disposal of another; they fully actualize themselves in a self-offering in the inner form of a vow.

Considering the subtleties involved in this two-fold understanding of love and its weight relative to dealing with reality through human action, it will be especially important for us to let Balthasar speak through every article of this investigation. If his thought is admirably conveyed, a cross-section of tenets will present themselves as highlights of his contribution to ethics. These intertwining characteristics of “Balthasarian” thought are not meant to be systematized, as he surely would not, but they are to be understood together, as forming a nexus of love which orients a particular (“Catholic”) moral perspective. They include but are not limited to: (a) a holistic vision of theology centered on the person of Christ not only as the end of man’s striving but also as the source and manner by which he accounts for all of his actions, (b) the intrinsic link between theology, spirituality, and morality, and, therefore, God, worship, and deed, (c) the integral place of the beauty of

obediential, surrendering love in one’s conception of being and action, (d) the importance of “seeing the form”\textsuperscript{33} of a thing \textit{in the above light} in order to consider it properly in ethical discourse, (e) the nuptiality and fruitfulness of being, (f) the priority of the evangelical counsels for all forms of life, (g) a stress on communal rather than individualistic living practices, (h) the decisive importance of thanksgiving and child-like wonder, (i) freedom’s ordination to a vow of love as a counter to disinterested liberty, (j) a general aversion to technology as a positive disruption of the gift-character of reality, (k) an emphasis on a contemplative-active mode of life, (l) the promotion of Catholic culture through deed and art, and (m) the self-abandonment required in remaining completely disponable to the dramatic mission the Lord entrusts oneself with.\textsuperscript{34} Together with Balthasar’s fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church and his critical dependence on the thought of the saints as “the authentic interpreters of the theo-drama,”\textsuperscript{35} these tenets are propaedeutic of his claim


\textsuperscript{34} Again, the reader should understand that this work will not attempt to identify these principles or others as comprising “Balthasar’s ethics.” Indeed, the nexus of love that the Swiss theologian conveys will be recalled somewhat differently in various parts of this work. The point is always to try see the whole in the parts. While a systematization of such tenets would perhaps bring clarity to this work, they would not do justice to Balthasar’s presentation of love and would thus inevitably misconstrue it by misidentifying its form (\textit{Gestalt}). \textit{Seeing the form}, i.e. the whole, is the first step in understanding being and action for Balthasar: “Our first principle must always be the indissolubility [wholeness] of form and second that such form is determined by many antecedent conditions.” \textit{GL1}, 26. “Immer ist die Unauflosbarkeit der Gestalt das erste, ihre Mitbedingtheit durch viele Voraussetzungen das zweite.” \textit{HK I}, 23. This of course requires patience and contemplation and wonder, but that is just the point he is making.

that, “the very structure of our ethics changes as we draw near to or away from love.”

As we shall see, these ethical markings and others of Balthasar can be teased out of his thought and life example, but since his work defies systematician, the reader has no recourse to a text of his where such principles are outlined in programmatic fashion. They do serve, however, as an implicit foundation for adjudicating being and action, for Balthasar and those who proscribe to them.

Now, others have considered Balthasar’s contribution to ethics, but arguably not in a way which seeks to identify, in the final analysis, how the full nexus of such tenets of love (the whole in the parts) might translate to particular cases in moral theology and ethics today. Among Balthasar’s many commentators, only two have written books on the direct subject of his ethical thought. Father Christopher Steck, S.J. argues that Balthasar conveys a divine command ethics compatible with a Catholic understanding of human flourishing, while Melanie Barrett attempts to develop a virtue theory from Balthasar’s writings which shows both similarities and differences with Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue theory. Steck’s and Barrett’s approaches, although significantly different from each other and not without considerable merit, both appear to consider Balthasar’s contribution to ethics at the level of what a person in his individual walk with the Lord might gain from such a perspective. By herein utilizing a decidedly more metaphysical approach to Balthasar’s work, I seek to

---


37 See Steck, Ethical Thought of HUVB.

indicate how the entire cosmos and the various structures of humanity, e.g. the economy, communal life, ecclesial roles, stem-cell research, technology, marriage, and the human body, are morally implicated from such a perspective as Balthasar’s. Of course such an investigation also lends insight into how a person’s individual walk or mission in Christ would be affected from a “Balthasarian” vantage point.

One might hesitate to embrace the method being employed here. While Balthasar may not disclose a thorough-going personal ethic in his vast corpus, even less does he illustrate a cosmological or social ethic. Balthasar is primarily concerned about conveying the importance of personal mission, to the point in fact of identifying a person as his mission.39 On at least one occasion he frowns upon the notion that a certain contrivance of social structures makes the difference when it comes to leading a life of holiness.40 Notwithstanding these points, deriving a moral perspective on various ethical questions would be very difficult if one’s attention was concentrated simply on how persons best live the individual missions God has called them to. Discerning one’s mission in life and thus how one’s personal call to love contributes to judging personal and communal behavior, as Balthasar would see it, means first understanding the whole of reality and man’s place within


it in a certain way: the way of a theologian-saint.\footnote{See “TS,” 206-9.} This is why the focus in this dissertation on Balthasar’s Christian metaphysics relative to his Christian anthropology, that is, on his understanding of the bearing of divine revelation on being and persons as such, and then on how such an understanding is received in certain specific moral arguments by those influenced by this line of thought, is a focus which should help the reader to encounter Balthasar’s contribution to ethics even on the level of moral action. The more holistic point of view, if you will, should help us to see the particular cases more accurately.

Concerning matters of structure, this work is divided into two parts, with three chapters in the first part and three chapters in the second. Part One deals explicitly with Balthasar’s speculative theology which, for him, is inclusive of a philosophy. This allows us to consider how his theological method locates moral theology and ethics within an all-encompassing Christological framework or norm (Ch. 1), how Christ’s love is co-extensive with being (Ch. 2), and finally how it comes to term in complete self-abandonment in binding communion (Ch. 3). This part of the dissertation is deliberately more expository than argumentative in structure. The point is to convey how Balthasar’s thought can serve as a foundation for ethics without being an ethics in the conventional sense. It is not to argue, at least in the first place, for the rightness of his positions. The task of Part One is simply to leave the reader with one holistic perspective, inclusive of such tenets as noted earlier, by which he can discern what might constitute a Balthasarian ethic in particular cases.

To help in this discernment, Part Two is of practical concern. It indicates how the theological import of Balthasar’s thought in Part One informs a sample of moral cases for
Balthasar (Ch. 4), for David L. Schindler (Ch. 5), and for me (Ch. 6). These examples are surely not exhaustive of the worldview that Balthasar provides the ethicist; they do not render superfluous those other aspects of Balthasar’s perspective as described in Part One which are not neatly identifiable herein. In fact, the reader is invited to draw his own analogies. These three chapters rather attempt to show, finally and concretely, how Balthasar’s theology of love can contribute to ethics without actually performing this work itself.  

42 The exceptions are those few cases presented by Balthasar himself, as identified in Chapter Four.

In conclusion on matters of structure, because Balthasar was not a moral theologian, every mention of applied ethics in Part One of this work risks the charge of eisegesis, so it can only be our project at various junctures in the first part to point to certain implications for ethics and leave the detailed applications to Part Two where a more thorough accounting can be made.

Chapter by Chapter Analysis

In a certain respect, Chapter One is a more specific introduction to the work as a whole. It concerns Balthasar’s Christological methodology as a source for the integration of moral theology within the other theological disciplines and, indeed, Christ as the source for the integration of all of reality. From Balthasar’s perspective, being and action find their bearing in the Christ-figure, the form of self-abandoning love ordered to communion that
simultaneously encourages contemplation of the triune God. The origin of faith and being (= God), worship, and deed thus reveal each other in Jesus and those who abide in his grace, for Balthasar. So Christ is the personal and universal norm for ethical action, writes Balthasar. As indicated herein, while Christopher Steck and Melanie Barrett realize this, they yet apply “some external theory” to Balthasar’s ethical thought to help systematize it. This work differs insofar as it makes no attempt to direct his thought into a particular category, for example, divine command ethics or virtue theory, however worthy or limiting that project may be, but rather endeavours to convey Balthasar’s theological enterprise on its own terms. The reader comes to learn that both cosmological and anthropological perspectives on reality, according to Balthasar, are but fragmentations of the meaning of being as conveyed by the eternal Logos in his earthly existence. In fact, aestheticism and personalism, as representative of these two methods and mutually expressive in love, both stand in need of the reinterpretation that the form of Christ’s existence brings to them, according to Balthasar. This chapter closes with an account of how Christ’s form of love corresponds not only to the Trinity, but also to the (Catholic) Church and its obedient, grace-filled members. Adherents to Catholicism, particularly the saints, are thus uniquely


44 “NP,” 82.

45 This is Barrett’s conclusion regarding both her work and that of Steck. See Barrett, Love’s Beauty, 191-2.

46 See LAC, 15-60.

47 Ibid., 52-6.
privileged to see the Christ-form and live it by participation in grace, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.48

Chapter Two focuses the lens of Balthasar’s work on being as such. In this way it presents something of the meaning love discloses to the *cosmological* perspective, as Balthasar has identified it.49 Love is indeed co-extensive with being, for Balthasar.50 The medieval axiom that being and good are convertible is deepened here in light of the eternal *Logos*’ self-abandonment to the Father’s will for the sake of bridging God and man, for he through whom all things are created and find their fulfillment (see Col 1:15-20) has been revealed in history not only as “good,” but also as the beauty of suffering love. The difference this makes in terms of assessing reality is disclosed for Balthasar in his famous “fourfold difference in being,”51 the terms of which are examined herein. An integral and significant aspect of this perspective is a view of created reality as both nuptial and fruitful. According to Balthasar, created being finds its fulfillment in a paradoxical “surrender” of its own powers through giving of itself for that which exists beyond it.52 We can therefore see with Balthasar that everything finds its identity and integration only relative to another and, moreover, a “third” beyond them, be it God as their source or the “fruit” which comes

---


49 See *LAC*, 15-30.


52 A tree, as noted above, would be one such example.
through their mutuality in difference. Such an understanding is integral to the reason why being cannot wholly be codified and categorized, for Balthasar, but is rather infinitely mysterious.53 The proper response to reality according to this heightened sense of its dignity is thus, for Balthasar, wonder leading to worship of its source.54 In this way, the chapter discloses a deeper sense of a thing’s form in consideration of how it reaches its finality, such that guarding and shepherding created things in the same spirit of loving surrender becomes all the more illustrative of how persons enter the dynamic of the cosmic liturgy and become saints.

Chapter Three focuses the lens of Balthasar’s theology of love still further, now with special emphasis on how it affects freely responding human beings. Here is disclosed something of the difference Christ’s love makes for the anthropological point of view, as Balthasar understands it.55 The chapter is framed by the importance Balthasar grants to the “Call of Christ” in each person’s life. Everyone is called to live, according to Balthasar, the spirit of the evangelical counsels—poverty, chastity, and obedience—according to whatever mission the Lord entrusts one with in baptism. This means, for the Swiss theologian, that “every genuine love is expressed . . . in the inner form of a vow”56 which obligates persons to


55 See LAC, 31-50.

give of themselves completely and forever to God and one another in a way particular to each person’s state in life. Christ’s own mission of obedient love, as the chief actor in the theo-drama of life, is the paradigmatic case, for Balthasar, of every Christian’s call to accept one’s grace-filled mission in disposable and ready love.\footnote{See Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ}, vol. 3 of \textit{Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory} (= \textit{TD3}), trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 41, \textit{inter alia}. \textit{Die Personen des Spiels: Die Personen in Christus}, Band II, Teil 2 der \textit{Theo-Dramatik} (= \textit{TDK II.2}) (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978), 37-50.} Drawing from our author, I articulate three correspondences—form and command, choice and commitment, and gift and gratitude—which help identify for him integral aspects of the Christian call in the expression of human action. Finally, the saints and their own missions are appealed to, for Balthasar considers them lodestars on the path to living the call of love in the mundane world. One can better see in their lives, the \textit{Gestalt} (figure, form, pattern) of the Lord. The chapter thus serves to illustrate how human persons fulfill themselves in action through the paradoxical, complete and forever, self-abandoning love of Jesus’ own life.

Chapter Four, as the first chapter of Part Two of this dissertation, begins the practical application of what has been revealed in Part One by appealing to Balthasar’s own specific ethical work, as limited as it is. Here four cases drawn from his corpus are brought to the fore: the transmission of human life, gender roles in the Church, the natural rights of ownership, and Balthasar’s own life example. With respect to the first two cases, contraception and the ministerial priesthood, there is, in Balthasar’s readiness to accept the Church’s teachings, a view to the theological dimensions of the questions. For Balthasar, the sexual relation is meant to mirror Christ’s complete self-offering to the Church in love, and so be fruitful. Likewise, the ministerial priesthood is meant to be exercised in nuptial
relation with the feminine-receptive Church-body, according to Balthasar, thus necessitating that men alone hold the sacerdotal role so that mutuality in difference may be preserved and spiritual fruit may be born. With respect to the natural rights of ownership, Balthasar’s deep appreciation for the spirit of poverty helps him identify the right to the common use of property as the primary natural right of ownership, even as he upholds, in ordinary circumstances, the right of the private owner to dispense of his goods as he sees fit. Finally, Balthasar’s personal promotion of secular institutes is recounted as a way of indicating how desirous he is of seeing the evangelical counsels embodied in the world. Catholic Action, which also attempts to bridge the clerical and lay states, receives some criticism from Balthasar for answering this charge without proper recourse to the uniqueness of lay freedom and mission. Moreover, Balthasar’s promotion of the journal, Communio, appears in intellectual form to serve the same aim as secular institutes, that is, to interpenetrate the secular with the divine. While these moral treatises of Balthasar have had to be teased out of his thought and life and do not, therefore, represent a systematic program of action for him, they nevertheless convey a consistent goal: to usher in God’s self-abandoning, fruitful communion of love in the practices of the mundane world.

Chapter Five is of crucial significance for this work as a whole, for in it appeal is made to David L. Schindler’s distinctive ethical thought as exemplifying how Balthasar’s theology of love might translate to controversial moral cases among Catholics faithful to the Magisterium of the Church. This allows the reader a view into three considerably different and highly contested issues in Catholic ethics today which show Balthasar’s influence on matters which he did not write on. They show how Balthasar’s work, although not itself
moral theology in the conventional sense, nevertheless provides a distinctive foundation for others to adopt in their own ethical thinking. After indicating the link between Balthasar and Schindler, our examples include the long-running neo-conservatism debate, the altered nuclear transfer and oocyte assisted reprogramming (ANT-OAR) dispute, and the theology of the body (TOB) online debate. Schindler shows in each of these disagreements a significant reliance on Balthasar’s metaphysics, particularly the importance of “seeing the form” of a thing well in order to adjudicate it rightly, and his notion that being is a gift apt for wonder. Balthasar provides for Schindler a self-identified “ontology of generosity” which supports his claim that created reality is constitutively related.58 These characteristics of being and love help orient Schindler’s moral perspective to a reliance on patient receptivity, fidelity to the Church, and frequent appeal to the saints and other holy personages as aids in the assessment of freedom’s application to the reality we live in.

Chapter Six is something of a bridge to the introductory work provided in Chapter One and therefore a bridge to the work as a whole, for here it is I who seek to indicate how Balthasar’s thought can be applied to specific issues in moral theology today. This I do by appeal to the integrated and holistic perspective that Balthasar provides to the ethicist in his focus on the Gestalt of Christ as the form love takes in the world. First mention is made of how Balthasar leads one to appropriate a Catholic form of life. Such a form of life integrates origin of faith and being, worship, and deed in Jesus Christ, interpenetrates the work-a-day world, and expresses a logic both nuptial and fruitful. It is this nuptial and fruitful logic that

Balthasar provides that I then consider, for the purposes of assessing moral action, relative to the relation between speculative and practical reasoning. To this end, I recount Msgr. Livio Melina’s “dynamic model” for moral action, as well as Fr. Martin Rhonheimer’s “parallelism” and David Crawford’s “triune and circumincessive” model. While arguing that Melina insufficiently attends, in a leading statement on moral choice, to the ontological-aestheticism that Balthasar provides, I also reject Rhonheimer’s “parallelism” as portraying nature and intention in dualistic terms. On the other hand, Crawford’s understanding that the relation between theoretical and practical reasoning is triune and circumincessive proves to be a helpful model for interpreting their inner dynamic from a Balthasarian perspective. I then recount in my own terms the difference love (agape) makes for the aesthete and the personalist, according to Balthasar’s line of reasoning, in order to show how the nuptial and fruitful logic that he provides clarifies the relation between speculative and practical reasoning and thus improves upon Melina’s and Rhonheimer’s positions, while upholding Crawford’s.

Finally, a word of caution. The reader will be careful to note that the present study is different in certain fundamental respects from many (theological) dissertations written today. Instead of focusing on one or two particular aspects of an author’s thought and bringing to bear all of the secondary literature on this relatively minor topic of examination, such as, a


few verses from the Bible or a select virtue according to one relevant author, the focus here is on attending to the whole of Balthasar’s contribution to ethics precisely because, according to Balthasar, only the whole or origin of anything is an adequate judge of what an individual part of that something is.62 Balthasar cannot be put into a box, as David L. Schindler has told me. As soon as one attempts to draw out a particular item of Balthasar’s thought and systematize it in order to show its applicability to something of interest, one simultaneously risks missing how he perceives it in the first place. Only the indivisible whole will allow the reader the advantage of understanding what Balthasar has to contribute to ethics (or any segment of thought).63 In other words, the material that Balthasar leaves the interpreter does not lend itself to a clearly stated thesis, demonstration, and proof.64 Balthasar’s method is aesthetic, and this is purposeful. To gain the insights of Balthasar’s thought, the reader must be willing to “put on his hat,” to “open the doors” of his own categorical thinking, and see for


63 The way of love “is indivisible, since we interpret and understand the form of Christian revelation either wholly in terms of the self-glorification of absolute love or else we simply fail to understand it. In this respect, Rousselot’s theory of the ‘eyes of faith’ was correct; either one sees it or one does not; but the power to see the glory of love requires at least a seed of supernatural love.” *LAC*, 60. “Der dritte Weg ist insofern unteilbar, als die Gestalt der christlichen Offenbarung entweder im ganzen als die Verherrlichung der absoluten Liebe durch sich selbst gelesen und verstanden wird, oder gar nicht. Darin hat Rousselots Theorie von den ‘Augen des Glaubens’ recht: entweder man sieht, oder man sieht nicht; zum Sehen der Liebescherrlichkeit aber ist eine (inchoativ-übernaturliche) Liebe gefordert.” *GNL*, 39.

64 That is, unless one were to apply the reader’s own “external theory” to systematize it, as noted above.
the first time how Balthasar sees. Such is why this dissertation follows the pattern of Balthasar’s thought by continually returning to the original source of inquiry: his Christological theology of love. With every venturing out, there must be, after a short while, a return home to reclaim the original insight, to see it again for the first time more deeply and broadly, lest one forget he is in a beautiful forest after all. This is something of how Balthasar has integrated spirituality or, better, the call of Christian discipleship, in and through his various investigations. Every tree, to follow the metaphor, showcases the forest; every new investigation showcases the original and wondrous insight that Jesus Christ’s love—as glorious and paradoxically poor as that is—is, for Balthasar, the only adequate measure for every human action. This love and its influence will take explaining, of course, but let us not forget its mission.

---

65 It should be clear from the beginning that despite legitimate questions regarding aspects of Balthasar’s thought, the present author makes no pretense to critically analyze those elements alongside Balthasar’s contribution to ethics, for such a balancing act would likely obfuscate what he has to offer for the well-being of the Christian moral conscience, our principal endeavor here. A presupposition of this work is that a certain man’s contribution is best captured by attempting to see things as he sees them, that is, with the eyes of love.

PART ONE
CHAPTER ONE  
*Reintegrating Moral Theology in the Norm of Christ*

**Introduction**

In December 1974, the International Theological Commission of the Roman Catholic Church took up the matter of fundamental ethics for the purpose of eliciting contributions from the wider theological community on a topic that had been largely confined to moral action theory interpreted philosophically. Among the contributors was Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss priest known at this time and until his passing in 1988 as a theologian of the *ressourcement* movement and, more particularly, the school of *communio* theology,¹ whose central contribution lay in theological aesthetics. Balthasar never made claims to be a moral theologian. His work for the commission, the essay “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,” is a rare find in the field of moral theology, for here is a work principally and directly about ethics which does not employ the virtues, moral action theory, divine command ethics or, even less, casuistry.² Instead, Balthasar sets the figure of Jesus Christ at the forefront of investigation and proceeds to assess the merits of ethical reflection, even

---


² See “NP,” 76-104. “NS,” 67-92. Balthasar’s application of the term “Christian ethics” or simply “ethics” rather than “moral theology” indicates his willingness to engage such philosophical schema as Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative and normative ethics when applying his Christocentric theology of love. The terms “moral theology,” “Christian ethics,” and “ethics” will therefore be employed somewhat interchangeably throughout this work. Likewise, “metaphysics” and “ontology,” which both refer to the study of being, will be applied synonymously in this work.
ethics historically prior to Jesus of Nazareth or otherwise outside of the Christian faith, according to the measure of “the norm” of Christ.  

The norm provided by Christ’s concrete existence is personal and, as such, universal, since he makes the Father’s love comprehensively and completely present to the world; he embraces all the differences between human beings and their ethical situations and unites all persons (in their uniqueness and freedom) in his own Person, having authority over them in the Holy Spirit of freedom in order to lead them all into the Father’s kingdom (original emphasis). 

Balthasar is charging that Christ’s life is effective, whether known or not, for every person that has ever lived or ever will live. Presumably he also wants Christ’s life to be affective for each individual so as to encourage one to live according to one’s divine call and mission, but Balthasar’s principal point is a metaphysical one: Christ “embraces all the differences

---

3 “NP,” 79. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. would evidently take exception with this claim. In his essay, “Ethics and the Search for God’s Will in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* (2000): 409-31, Oakes interprets “Balthasar’s ethic . . . [as] purely one of discipleship that is neither offered to, nor makes a claim on, those who are not believers or whose faith is so abstract that they feel no claim attached to it,” Ibid., 428. Angelo Cardinal Schola however refutes this conclusion in the following manner: “Here one must recognize that a Christological and anthropological concentration on moral theology like that which I have just explained in connection with Balthasar, does not in any way take away from the universality of ethics. On the contrary, it is in its very Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological rooting that ethics strikes the note of universality which is not purely formal. The false conviction that only natural ethics can be universal, and the pernicious (inasmuch as it is illogical) consequence that the Christocentric reference renders ethics particular or regionalized needs to be surpassed.” Schola, “Response to Professor Oakes,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 437. Schola’s argument is congruent with Balthasar’s theological anthropology and eschatology. Every one of us, irregardless of religious confession, is “predestined to become, in Christ, a son in the Son” (see Rom 8:28-30). Ibid., 435.

4 “NP,” 82. “Die Norm der konkreten Existenz Christi ist als personale zugleich universal, da seine Vergegenwärtigung der Liebe des Vaters für die Welt unüberbietbar hervorbringt und vollständig ist, deshalb alle Differenzen der Menschen und ihrer ethischen Situationen in sich einbirgt und alle Personen (mit ihrer Einmaligkeit und Freiheit) in seiner Person einigt, im heiligen Geist der Freiheit über sie waltet, um alle ins Reich des Vaters zu führen.” “NS,” 73. By “ethischen Situationen” Balthasar evidently means those circumstances, often distinct with regard to culture, era, personal age, and so on, in which human persons act out their moral lives.

between human beings and their ethical situations and unites all persons (in their uniqueness and freedom) in his own Person. . . .”

While Christocentric ethics is certainly not new to the landscape of moral reasoning in the Catholic tradition, Balthasar’s method renews and expands metaphysically on terrain that is often consigned, consciously or not, to an ancillary discussion after unaided reason has decided everything fundamental.6 For Balthasar, reserving theology to an addendum on the discussion of human morality is methodologically problematic.7 Theology tells us something about nature itself, about the core of its being. This is to say that Balthasar thinks the order of grace can positively influence the understanding of the order of nature; he thinks Christ makes a difference for ethics because Christ, as revelation’s manifestation of the triune-God and his love, first makes a difference for the world and for man.

This interpretation should not come as a surprise to those familiar with Balthasar’s written corpus because his thought is marked by Christocentrism. From the opening volume of The Glory of the Lord, the first of three sets of volumes in his defining trilogy, one learns


7 Historically speaking, dangers arose “when the philosophical propaedeutic came to be considered a fixed an unalterable basis, whose concepts, without the necessary transposition, were used as norms and criteria of the content of faith, and therefore stood in judgment over it. Teachers behaved as though man knew from the outset with some sort of finality what truth, goodness, being, light, love and faith were. It was though divine revelation on these realities had to accommodate itself to these fixed philosophical conceptual containers that admitted of no expansion.” “TS,” 186. “. . . wo die philosophische Propädeutik sich als eine fixe, endgültige Basis zu verstehen began, deren Begriffe ohne die notwendige Transposition zu Normen, Kriterien und damit zu Richtern über den Glaubensinhalt sich aufspielten. Als wisse der Mensch im voraus, noch bevor er hauf die Offenbarung gehört hat, in einer Art Endgültigkeit, was Wahrheit, was Gutheit, was Sein, was Leben, was Liebe, was Glaube ist. Als füge sich die Offenbarung Gottes über solche Wirklichkeiten in die fixen, nicht mehr zu weitenden Gefüße philosophischer Begrifflichkeit ein.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theologie und Heiligkeit (= “TH”),” in Verbum Caro, Skizzen zur Theologie I (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1990), 195-225.
that any essential determination of reality depends on the *Gestalt* (figure, form, pattern) of Christ who stands at the center of the cosmos, uniting time and eternity in his two natures. The norm of Christ’s existence should therefore guide one’s investigation into the truth of things, according to Balthasar, even if only in some analogous and indirect manner, so that the difference Christ’s “absolute love” makes may inform one’s reflections at every turn. What this means for philosophical inquiry is certainly different than what it means for theology properly speaking but, for Balthasar, philosophy is at root theological. Seeing philosophy as a theological enterprise, properly understood, does not suggest a simple identity between the two or the non-relevance of philosophy. Balthasar has his own philosophy. In fact, philosophy is *essential*, even for theology, according to Balthasar.

---

8 See *GL1*, 28-33.


13 *TLJ*, 7: “By its very nature, theological insight into God’s glory, goodness, and truth presupposes an *ontological*, and not merely formal or gnoseological, infrastructure of worldly being. Without philosophy, there could be no theology” (translator’s emphasis). “Theologische Erkenntnisse über Gottes Herrlichkeit, Güte, Wahrheit setzen naturgemäß eine nicht nur formalistische oder gnoseologische, sondern ontologische Struktur des weltlichen Seins voraus: ohne Philosophie keine Theologie.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Wahrheit der Welt*. Band I des Theologik (= *TLK* I), (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), VII. See also *TLJ*, 8: “In order to be a serious theologian, one must also, indeed, first, be a philosopher. . . .” *TLK I*, VIII: “Wenn Theologe ernsthaft nur sein kann, wer auch und zuvor Philosoph ist. . . .”
His point, rather, is that philosophical musings pertain also to theological truths, for the study of being and its transcendental properties is finally the study of their convergence point in God. For Balthasar, the cosmos and human reason with it is shaped by the divine *Logos* who becomes flesh, the one in whom and through whom all philosophy heretofore must be “transformed.”

Before Christ, all philosophy was always already theology. . . . Aristotle put it wonderfully; “The question of being must always be asked.” Then secondly, in Christianity there is the contribution of man, the created subject, to the understanding of the self-revealing God. Explicit theology gives rise to philosophy. Necessarily. The already existing philosophy of the ancients can serve as a help, but it must allow itself to be fully transformed.\(^\text{14}\)

This chapter sets the introductory framework for illustrating how Balthasar’s philosophically inclusive Christology illumines being and action, and thus serves to bridge moral theology and sanctity.\(^\text{15}\) It does this by assessing moral theology and ethics relative to the norm of Christ.\(^\text{16}\) We begin (§ I.1) with a necessarily brief overview of the current relative demarcation of moral theology from the other theological disciplines and their


\(^{15}\) This is the introductory or “global” take on his contribution, if you will. While ethics (and moral theology) is a science, whereas sanctity is a spiritual condition of persons, these can be bridged when the ethicist becomes holy through the exercise of his discipline due to the informative (if not always explicit) object of his study, namely, God in Jesus Christ. Balthasar traces an analogous link in his essay, “Theology and Sanctity.”

inherent ordination to holiness. Balthasar’s implied understanding that Jesus unites in his person *origin* from and in the Father, *worship*, and *deed*, is appealed to in order to locate for him the proper bridge between the moral life and holiness. The approaches of Servais Pinckaers and Benedict XVI are referenced in this regard to help distinguish Balthasar’s perspective and signal his contribution. The chapter proceeds (§ I.2) to a discussion of two major commentators on Balthasar’s ethical thought, Christopher Steck and Melanie Barrett, in an attempt to locate the differences in their approaches to that of the present author concerning the holistic norm of Christ. While both convey, through divine command ethics and virtue theory respectively, significant aspects of Balthasar’s ethical thought, it is my position that their attempts do not adequately convey the metaphysical import of his philosophy and theology and, with it, the capacity to discern differently substantive issues that arise in moral theology today. Their respective appeals to “some external theory”\(^\text{17}\) to systematize Balthasar’s thought are indicative of this limitation, in my judgment. The chapter next considers (§ I.3), in the programmatic way exhibited in Balthasar’s book, *Love Alone is Credible*, how Christ’s self-interpreting love makes a difference for being and action. Although the particulars will be exhibited in depth in the proceeding chapters of Part One, here at least the framework is set for discerning how the wondrous love of God in Jesus serves Balthasar in re-conceiving cosmology and anthropology, and, more precisely, aesthetics and personalism, according to a certain nuptial and fruitful logic. The chapter ends (§ I.4) with an exposition of the particular Catholic way Balthasar understands this Christological form of love as inclusively related to the Trinity and the Church. For

Balthasar, being Catholic and thinking in accord with the canonized saints and Magisterium of the Catholic Church aids one in uniting worship and deed in God, and thus integrating ethics in the norm of Christ.

§ I.1 Status Quaestionis of Moral Theology: Integrating Origin, Worship, and Deed

In his landmark post-conciliar text, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Dominican Father Servais Pinckaers (1925-2008) identifies and criticizes the modern split in theology between one field and another, particularly as it affects moral theology, his own discipline. Moral theologians have long enough focused their attention on the relation between liberty and law, he suggests, reducing the breadth and influence of the other sources of ethics, including Scripture and the Holy Spirit, to exterior glosses of a well-functioning whole. Pinckaers argues above all that we need to “reopen the lines of communication between Christian ethics and the Word of God [Scripture].” Later he remarks on the need to attend

---

18 3rd ed., trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995). As with any sustained pattern of thought in history, the origin of the relative isolation of moral theology from the other theological fields is not traceable to one common denominator. Balthasar himself locates this divisive trend in Christian theology emerging in the wake of the inclusion of Aristotle’s thought in such, not to dismiss the critical importance of Aristotle’s reasonableness on matters of speculative and practical theory, but to convey how easy it has henceforth become for theologians to let philosophy take a formal position in their work, to subalternate faith to reason and so discount the integral place of Jesus Christ’s defining love in theology. “TS,” 185-6. Others might trace the demarcation of theological fields to the mitigation of formal and final causality following William of Ockham, or to the Cartesian revolution in the modern era. Certainly the manualist tradition, beginning soon after the Council of Trent (1563) and ending, in practice if not always in principle, following the Second Vatican Council (1965), has been a factor in the isolation of morality from theology (*theo-logia*) as such. For historical accounts of the manualist tradition and its influence, see among others, Pinckaers, O.P., “The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology,” trans. Hugh Connolly, in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, eds. John Berkman and Craig Stevens (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2005), 369-71, and David S. Crawford, *Marriage and the Sequela Christi: A Study of Marriage as a State of Perfection in the Light of Henri De Lubac’s Theology of Nature and Grace* (Rome: Lateran University, 2004), 101-30.

to such sources of Christian ethics as “Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the Gospel law, and natural
law, which is rooted in freedom itself.”

Balthasar of course recognized the same problem of isolated fields in theology and
was especially aware of how it impinges on each theologian’s own sanctity. What is his
solution to the problem of the division between theological sciences? His solution is his
“source,” to use Pinckaer’s term, for Christian ethics and really all disciplines: Jesus Christ.

Christ’s concrete existence—his life, suffering, death and ultimate bodily
resurrection—surpasses all other systems of ethical norms. In the final
analysis it is the norm alone, which is itself the prototype of perfect obedience
to God the Father, that the moral conduct of Christians has to answer.

By attending to the source or origin of revelation, the Word of God become flesh,
Balthasar

20 Ibid., xxi.

21 “TS,” 181-210. As Balthasar relates it, before the wake of scholasticism and the specialization
of the sciences, including theology, theologians were often saints who saw their lives as reflections of their
theological enterprises (and vice versa). For Augustine, Anselm, Ignatius of Antioch, the Cappadocian
Fathers, Thomas, Bonaventure, et al., theology and sanctity were of one accord. To write well of God’s way
implied first living in God’s way, and living in God’s way was supplemented, driven from within, by
contemplating his life (theology). Balthasar concludes that the isolation of theological sciences is the central
reason why theologians are not commonly saints in the present age as they often were prior to the late Middle
Ages.

Auferstehen—hebt alle übrigen Systeme ethischer Normierung in sich auf; sittliches Handeln von Christen hat
sich im letzten nur vor dieser Norm zu verantworten, die selbst das Urbild des vollkommenen Gehorsams an
Gott den Vater darbietet.”

23 “For both [sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture], flowing from the same divine wellspring, in
certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God
inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the
word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors
in its full purity. . . .” (emphasis added). Second Vatican Council, Die verbun, Dogmatic constitution on divine
verbun_en.html, sec. 9. Since Christ is the Word of God become flesh, he stands at the origin of the Bible and
the other elements of the sacred deposit of faith.
thinks he has attended to the whole of reality (see Jn 1:1-3, 14; Col 1:15-20), and the whole of reality of course encompasses moral theology and ethics. While Pinckaers considers various elements of revelation and nature as “sources,” Balthasar places Christ alone, the historical manifestation of the triune God, in this position:

The original authority is possessed neither by the Bible (as the written “Word of God”) nor by the kerygma (as the living proclamation of the “Word of God”) nor by ecclesial office (as official representation of the “Word of God”): all three are “merely” word and thus not yet flesh. . . . The sole authority is the Son, who interprets the Father in the Holy Spirit as divine love. For it is only here, at the source of revelation, that authority (majesty) and love can—and necessarily do—coincide. 

Such is why in “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics” Balthasar describes Christ as “the formally universal norm of ethical action, applicable to everyone.” Indeed, Balthasar holds that Jesus in his life and mission imparts a Gestalt for ethical adoption according to the particular vocation of each individual person. This means that Christ “is also the personal and concrete norm, who, in virtue of his suffering for us and his eucharistic surrender of his


life for us (which imparts it to us-*per ipsum et in ipso*), empowers us inwardly to do the
Father’s will together with him (*cum ipso*).”  

While the form of Christ becomes interior to Christians by grace, explains Balthasar, it also must be “seen,” not simply proposed or logically deduced. To see or perceive the form of Christ, or begin to be enraptured by the Son of God made man and the glory he represents, leads to an “attunement,” writes Balthasar, an assimilation of Christ’s way of life which is forever dramatic and compelling. Proposing this as an idea in advance or logically deducing the same simply does not evoke the continuous reverence which alone, Balthasar believes, ingratiates attunement to Christ’s love.

Only in infinite reverence (Phil 2:12) can we participate in the saving work of God, whose absolute love towers infinitely above us—in the *maior dissimilitudo*. Leiturgia is inseparable from ethical conduct.  

For, Balthasar, no deed exists somehow abstracted from the Christological norm of Christ’s existence. Behavior in accord with this norm of love properly informs worship and *vice*
versa, both of which express union with God. In so many words Balthasar is indicating that in and through the worship of the living God, and only through such graced (anticipatory or sanctifying) adoration, does one attain the capacity to see the form of Jesus Christ and follow him in deed. Seeing the form of Christ well allows one to see reality well and this allows one to live well, in a Balthasarian framework.  

Balthasar’s Christocentric solution to the relative isolation of moral theology from the other theological disciplines is clarified and gains credibility in light of Pope Benedict XVI’s first and programmatic encyclical, Deus caritas est, which frames the question of moral theology today in a similar vein.  

Benedict writes,

By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: “God is love” (I Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.  

concrete norm of all ethical actions, we might receive the freedom to fulfill God’s will and live according to our nature as free children of the Father” (original emphasis). “NP,” 79. “Christliche Ethik muß von Jesus Christus aus entworfen werden, da dieser als der Sohn des Vaters den ganzen Willen Gottes (alles Gesollte) in der Welt erfüllt hat, und das ‘für uns’, damit wir aus ihm, der erfüllten konkreten Norm alles sittlichen Handelns, die Freiheit gewinnen, Gottes Willen zu erfüllen und unserer Bestimmung als freie Kinder des Vaters zu leben.” “NS,” 71.

33 We have a need, writes Balthasar, to “be confronted with the phenomenon of Christ and, therein, to learn to ‘see’ again. . . .” TLI, 20. “. . . vor das Phänomen Christi gestellt, wieder ‘sehen’ lernen. . . .” TLK I, XX.


By grounding the definition of love in the divine person of Jesus, that is, not *per se* in the affections of the human person as Saint Thomas Aquinas, nor by considering (from a phenomenological point of view) love as essentially “attraction,” as his immediate predecessor Pope John Paul II in his pre-papal work on the subject, Benedict specifies love just as Balthasar, according to its origin in God. This is not to say that Benedict’s and Balthasar’s “starting-point” neglects or discounts the integration of the passions and attractions in the shaping of love. Regarding Benedict, the quotation cited above is within a sustained reflection on the integration of *eros* and *agape*, just as Balthasar views their relation. Benedict’s and Balthasar’s intention is rather to illustrate that Christ perfectly realizes the ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ loves in his two natures; this is how Christ represents the “starting-point” for “life and love,” and thus all ethical situations, for them. Just like Balthasar, his friend and partner in the founding of the journal, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, then, Benedict appears particularly agreeable to the idea that origin of faith, *worship*, and *deed* are intrinsically related. Benedict writes just two paragraphs after the


38 Both Aquinas and Wojtyla of course held that God is love, but the point here is their respective definitions of love do not proceed from this basis.

39 *Deus caritas est*, 2-18.

40 See especially, *LAC*, 54.

41 See especially *LAC*, 107-23 on “Love as Deed” where Balthasar weaves together prayer, God in Christ, justification, ethics, and the saints.
above quotation, “Faith, worship and ethos are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God’s agape.” For Benedict and for Balthasar, one’s relation to God, the God who becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, is the principal determinant of one’s moral life. What one believes in and how one worships dynamically affects how one goes about judging between apparent and real goods and, of course, responding to these options accordingly. For Benedict and Balthasar, faith and worship are integral to the moral development of the human person at every stage.

§ 1.2 Christopher Steck, S.J. and Melanie Barrett: Defining Parts of the Integrative Whole

Let us now consider how two interpreters of Balthasar’s thought situate his contribution to ethics relative to the personal and universal norm of Christ in order to better distinguish my own approach. This should help clarify Balthasar’s more “global” contribution in uniting moral theology and sanctity by further situating the relevance of the norm of Christ in his ethical thought. For Balthasar:

Christ’s concrete existence—his life, suffering, death and ultimate bodily resurrection—surpasses all other systems of ethical norms. In the final analysis it is the norm alone, which is itself the prototype of perfect obedience to God the Father, that the moral conduct of Christians has to answer.43

42 Deus caritas est, 14.

If “the prototype of perfect obedience to God the Father” “surpasses all other systems of ethical norms,” is not Balthasar proposing a version of divine command ethics? This is the conclusion of Christopher Steck, who in the first released book on the ethical thought of Balthasar, makes the intriguing case that the man appointed to be a cardinal of the Catholic Church was a divine command ethicist of a stripe compatible with the Church’s understanding of human fulfillment.44 It is an interesting claim because, according to Steck’s own understanding, divine command theory stipulates that “the moral obligation confronting the individual depends in a substantive way on the divine will.”45 In other words, what God commands (by divine will) must be heeded because God has commanded it, not because it meets the measure of God’s law as previously discerned through Sacred Scripture or tradition or, even less, natural law (see Jer 31:33; Rom 2:15). It would seem then that Steck claims for Balthasar two positions which are incompatible if held together: (1) “[Balthasar] sounds the note of theological voluntarism”46 by frequently referencing the starkness of God’s commands in history and man’s need to obey them even when doing so would seem contrary to the laws that God otherwise authors, and (2) that despite this fidelity to an ethic which depends substantially on the divine will,47 Balthasar recognizes that all such divine

44 Steck, *Ethical Thought of HUVB*, 72.
45 Ibid., 2.
46 Ibid., 2. See also 4, 65 et al.
47 Ibid., 2.
commands, bestowed in innumerable personal calls or “invitations,” are nevertheless ordered to the authentic fulfillment of every human person. Steck’s argument depends substantially on the second part of Balthasar’s trilogy, the five-volume *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, which treats the “good” and is what many consider the closest Balthasar comes to an extended commentary on ethics. Even here, however, the Swiss theologian does not deal directly with ethical questions, but rather illustrates the drama of infinite and finite freedom which involves all human persons as so many actors on the stage of life with Christ, himself the principal actor in the Father’s drama, directed by the Holy Spirit. This is an important point because Steck claims that Balthasar’s essay, “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,” which includes his emphasis that Christ’s life is itself a metaphysical, personal and universal norm, as related above, is not reflective of the moral theory implied in Balthasar’s larger corpus. By setting the norm of Christ in apparent odds with perceiving the form of Christ and the drama of infinite and finite freedom, Steck’s claim that Balthasar advances a divine command ethics gains credibility.


49 Steck, *Ethical Thought of HUVB*, 72 passim.


51 *TD3*, 532-4 inter alia.

The murkiness with Steck’s reasoning here, however, is that Balthasar is purposely and directly intending a commentary on ethics in “Nine Propositions,” whereas he is not in these other texts.\(^{53}\) If they are to be contrasted at all, “Nine Propositions” would seem to hold the more principal path for Balthasar’s fundamental ethics.\(^{54}\)

Much needs to be accounted for in Steck’s groundbreaking study, especially regarding his central claim that Balthasar presents an “Ignatian reconfiguration of divine command ethics.”\(^{55}\) At present, however, it is necessary simply to relate how both he and Melanie Barrett (see below), in different ways, develop aspects of Balthasar’s thought (Steck re: command and Barrett re: virtue) that, however laudable in their own right, do not speak directly to the integrative whole, source, or norm of Balthasar’s ethics which arguably comprises his most noteworthy contribution to the field. As we saw above, it is in the personal and universal norm that one finds a direct link to the other theological disciplines, particularly spiritual theology, and, just as important, one also finds the applicability of Balthasar’s theological aesthetic to not just persons in their individual walks with the Lord as Steck and Barrett make note of, but the whole of reality as a ground for interpreting various

---

53 When Edward Oakes, S.J. met with Balthasar to discuss a possible dissertation topic on the ethical implications of Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar himself told him that “such a project was bound to be a failure from the outset!” Instead Balthasar referred him to the “one place” Oakes might find the theologian from Basel’s ethics reflected: “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics.” Oakes, “Ethics and the Search for God’s Will,” 410.


55 Steck, *Ethical Thought of HUVB*, 5.
issues that arise in ethics.\textsuperscript{56}

Briefly then, while it is certainly understandable that Steck sees Balthasar as possessing a divine command ethics due to the centrality he gives to obedience in the life of Christians, as well as his insistence on one’s personal “call,” “mission,” and “address” from God,\textsuperscript{57} a more metaphysical reading of Balthasar’s work locates all such “commands” in the Gestalt of Christ, as Steck himself does, but with a different conclusion: Christ’s existence, understood as both a personal (interior by grace) and universal (objective; non-arbitrary) norm, would seem to reformulate all identifiable commands in such a way as to negate the appeal to theological voluntarism and, with it, divine command ethics. In my judgment, Balthasar leaves the reader with a normative, divine (-human) form (philosophy-) theology with contributions to ethics,\textsuperscript{58} rather than a divine command ethics so-called.\textsuperscript{59}

Melanie Barrett, who follows Steck with just the second book published on Balthasar’s ethical thought, expresses a similar reserve with Steck’s divine command

\textsuperscript{56} The rest of the dissertation is in a way an elucidation of this fundamental point, but it is in Chapter Two that the metaphysical issues of this claim are discussed directly.

\textsuperscript{57} Steck, Ethical Thought of HUVB, 60. Given Balthasar’s unsystematic style, Steck is right to suggest that “there probably can be no definitive interpretation of his ethics.” Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{58} The designations of “human” and “philosophy” in this description of Balthasar’s divine form theology are necessary to safeguard against a simplistic, “top-down” understanding not centered on Christ’s existence.

\textsuperscript{59} In light of the importance of Steck’s argument and its capacity to highlight Balthasar’s thought as it applies to ethics, his positions will be considered more fully in Section III.3 to follow. It is certainly true that Balthasar has a place for the divine command in his theology, as does Karl Barth (see Karl Barth, The Doctrine of God, vol. 2, part 2 of Church Dogmatics, trans. Bromiley, Campbell, Wilson, McNab, Knight, and Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 512, 516, 518-19, 587 passim), his friend and interlocutor, but Balthasar’s use of command terminology is grounded in a theological metaphysics which, on my account, permits no voluntarism. On the integration of Balthasar’s normative ethics and natural law theory, see Russell Hittinger’s “Theology and Natural Law Theory,” Communio 17 (2000): 402-8 and Matthew Levering’s Biblical Natural Law: A Theocentric and Teleological Approach (New York: Oxford, 2008), 22-4 with relevant citations.
characterization. She writes:

[C]ertain aspects of Balthasar’s thought are neglected by placing it into a divine-command paradigm, even one carefully reconfigured to accommodate uniquely Balthasarian insights. In particular, the paradigm’s central preoccupation with the interplay between the divine will and human freedom makes it inattentive to questions of moral formation and unable to do justice to the central place of love in Balthasar’s overall theology.60

Barrett is correct to conclude that divine command theory presents a limitation for adjudicating the place of love in Balthasar’s work, so long as love is understood to be metaphysically normative in the manner described by Balthasar in “Nine Propositions.” For, it is only universal objectivity, which by definition negates the possibility of exemption from pre-determined rule or law, that can discredit voluntarism. Barrett’s further claim that divine command theory is “inattentive to questions of moral formation” is also true; Barrett relies on her own “construction” of virtue theory to develop this line of thought in Balthasar.61

Like Steck, Barrett first draws from Balthasar’s theological aesthetics to highlight the moral actor’s need to perceive the form of Christ in and through which shines his divine beauty (glory), the criterion of absolute love and freedom, and therefore the moral life.62 Also like Steck, Barrett succeeds in securing the importance of this step of Balthasar’s for an

individual or personal ethic. Barrett then introduces her central contribution to the


discussion, the need to develop a virtue theory from Balthasar’s work, with this telling statement:

[B]ecause Balthasar offers us a trajectory towards a moral theory, rather than a self-standing theory, we need to draw on some external theory if we wish to systematize Balthasar’s insights into a coherent ethical treatise.63

This clear delineation of the reason for her project, which appears much like Steck’s, distinguishes their approaches from the one provided in this dissertation.64 Again, the approach here makes no attempt to present a systematic ethical treatise by drawing on “some external theory,” however helpful (or reductive) that may be, but rather seeks to find, intra-Balthasar, a foundation for moral theology.

In support of her argument for the openness in Balthasar’s thought for the development of virtue ethics, Barrett cites the following remark from Balthasar, taken from “Nine Propositions”:

The distinctive ethical task laid upon man is that of ethicizing (ethizesthai) his entire spiritual-bodily nature; success is called virtue.65

This would seem an important point to insure Balthasar against the tenets of divine command

---

63 Barrett, Love’s Beauty, 191.
64 Although I agree with Barrett that Steck is also incorporating an “external theory” to systematize Balthasar’s thought (see Ibid., 191-2), this is evidently not his intention: “Since von Balthasar provides no systematic treatment of ethics, we must attempt to assemble a coherent theory of ethics out of his approaches to related concepts—e.g., human agency, anthropology, and freedom. The theory I present below is indicated in his writings, though never made explicit.” Steck, Ethical Thought of HUVB, 5.
ethics commonly understood, but because of the secondary and limited place Balthasar gives to the “ethical task laid upon man” in Christian discipleship, virtue theory cannot claim the position of the integrative source for moral development for Balthasar. Such is why it is unfortunate that Barrett concludes that next to divine command ethics the “missing pieces [in Balthasar’s ethical thought] could be accounted for within a framework of virtue ethics,” which she then describes in fitting terms as becoming a sort of person influenced by the beauty of self-surrendering love which Balthasar advances. Her conclusion is incorrect in part because it suggests that situating divine command theory within a virtue ethics framework could possibly capture Balthasar’s framework, that is, the integrative and normative form of Christ’s existence.

Indeed, Balthasar’s well-known claim that a person is his (theological) mission, accepted in grace, would seem to be the foundational requirement for any attempt to ethicize one’s “entire spiritual-bodily nature,” since persons and grace precede virtue. Drawing from Matthias Scheeben, Balthasar writes:

66 Livio Melina concurs: “It must be noted . . . that the key term in the Balthasarian proposal is not “virtue” but rather “norm.” Sharing in Christ’s Virtues, 126-7. Melina does not conclude, however, that normative ethics, in light of both Kant on the one hand and Aquinas on the other, can make a wholesale replacement of virtue ethics. Ibid., 127. Cf. Melina, “Christ and the Dynamism of Action,” 127.

67 See Barrett, Love’s Beauty, 195. Barrett explains: “By ‘virtue ethics’ I mean an ethical theory whose central question is not ‘is this action right?’ or ‘what should I do?’ but rather ‘who should I become?’” She clarifies and deepens her position by noting “the multi-faceted role of beauty [in Balthasar]; the metaphysical connection between beauty, truth and goodness; and the centrality of love. . . .” Ibid., 194.


Actual grace is more than just a (moral) ‘invitation and encouragement’ on the part of the object, nor is it a mere ‘physical impulsion’.” It is “a ‘fertilization’ immanent in the will’s deepest recesses—a forma, a spiritus, and a virtus voluntatis that proceeds from the ‘inside to the exterior’. Grace is an ‘ethico-genetic’ influence. . .70

This “Christology from within,” to borrow the title of Mark McIntosh’s book on Balthasar’s spiritual theology,71 allows Balthasar to make ethical claims without recourse to any commonly held ethical theory.72 He focuses on the Christ-form or the beauty of selfless love for reasons which go beyond acting well or becoming a certain kind of person taken abstractly. His theology, his message, remains with Jesus to engender humble discipleship right from the very reading,73 as a contemplative search which finds its Icon and remains with him to be enraptured onto a course of life not simply motivated and intellectually formed by Christ, but infused by him as Glory to glory to Glory. This point is illustrated by a return to an important text in “Nine Propositions” which identifies the link between worship and ethics:


71    McIntosh, Christology from Within: Spirituality and Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar.

72    Balthasar writes: “His [Christ’s] is the praxis; my part is to let him have his way in me, to consent, to say Yes down to the deepest recesses of my flesh.” Mary: The Church at the Source, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 163.

73    “[A] theology of beauty may be elaborated only in a beautiful manner. The particular nature of one’s subject-matter must be reflected first of all in the particular nature of one’s method.” GLI, 39. “[E]ine Theologie des Schönen darf nicht anders entwickelt werden als auf schöne Weise. An der Eigentümlichkeit der Methode schon muss die Eigentümlichkeit des Gegenstandes aufleuchten.” HK I, 36.
Only in infinite reverence (Phil 2:12) can we participate in the saving work of God, whose absolute love towers infinitely above us—in the *maior dissimilitudo*. Leiturgia is inseparable from ethical conduct.\(^7^4\)

In conclusion, although there are positive insights to garner by attempting to frame Balthasar’s thought in terms of “some external theory” like divine command ethics or virtue ethics, there is reason to believe that one could well lose sight of something just as (or more) important in the process, namely, *Balthasar’s perspective* which serves to integrate moral theology in theology and sanctity by measuring all deeds relative to Christ’s personal and universal norm of love. After all, are we not, by extracting and putting forward a “virtue ethics” to frame a certain conception of “divine command ethics,” once again taking certain component parts and defining them in terms of the whole in Christ?\(^7^5\)

§ I.3: *Love Alone Is Credible: Propaedeutic for the Christian Difference in Being and Action*

After stressing the importance of the norm of Christ’s existence for Balthasar’s contribution to ethics, including especially how it serves to bridge God, worship, and deed, and, thus, ethics and sanctity, it behooves us now to outline his position relative to two other approaches in history for assessing the impact of divine revelation for the world. This will help us see how Balthasar ascertains the meaning of being and action according to Christ’s


\(^7^5\) None of this is to say that there are not significant portions of Steck’s and Barrett’s works worth commending and, indeed, recommending for readership. Steck paves the way for future moral theologians to draw from in his erudite account of Balthasar’s theological aestheticism. Barrett also finds much insight in her recourse to virtue ethics and in the task of explaining Balthasar’s understanding relative to human flourishing.
own self-interpretive love. As such, it provides further bearings for moral assessment by linking metaphysics and ethics in the newness of Christ. By staying with Balthasar’s own theological methodology here, we should find a perspective wholly aligned with integrating moral theory in the norm of Christ.

Balthasar’s Christocentric perspective is perhaps best encapsulated in the slim volume entitled, *Love Alone is Credible (Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe)*, where he identifies and critiques (1) the “cosmological reduction” and (2) the “anthropological reduction,” before showing the relevance of his own method for determining the difference revelation makes: (3) Christ’s self-interpreting love.

(1) The “cosmological reduction,” evident especially in the thought of the Fathers of the Church and apparent up through the work of the schoolmen of the high Middle Ages, Balthasar tells us, refers to man’s conversion to God in Christ as the fulfillment of history

---

76 Balthasar, *LAC*, trans. David C. Schindler, 2004. Cf. Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). Balthasar contends that this work is “an elaboration of what I endeavored in my larger work *The Glory of the Lord*, that is, it will be a “theological aesthetic” in the twofold sense of a subjective theory of perception and a theory of the objective self-interpretation of divine glory; it will seek to show that this theological method . . . cannot but lay claim to the center of theology as the only valid approach, while the approaches founded on the cosmos or world history on the one hand, or on anthropology, on the other, can be presented as secondary and complimentary at best.” *LAC*, 11. “So wird diese Skisse auch die Absicht meines größeren Werkes ‘Herrlichkeit’ erläutern, einer ‘Theologischen Ästhetik’ im Doppelsinn einer subjektiven Wahrnehmungslehre und einer Lehre von der objektiven Selbstaussage der göttlichen Herrlichkeit; sie wird zeigen daß diese theologische Methode . . . vielmehr den Anspruch erheben muß, als einzig endgültige ins Zentrum der Theologie gestellt zu werden, während die kosmologisch-weltgeschichtliche und die anthropologische Verifizierung höchstens als sekundär ergänzende Gesichtspunkte auftreten dürfen.” *GNL*, 6. It is interesting to see the difference in D.C. Schindler’s newer translation here. While Dru makes a place for the legitimacy of each of the approaches and only confirms as erroneous the anthropological reduction (or “method” for him), D.C. Schindler’s translation is more literal and arguably more faithful to Balthasar, who himself designates the two “complimentary” approaches as inferior and ultimately invalid of themselves.

and the cosmos as created through the Logos.\textsuperscript{78} Those coming from a cosmological perspective, writes Balthasar, were able to see the intrinsic relation between nature and supernature, between philosophy-reason and faith-theology, as the intentional ordination of the creator God who sends his Son, the Logos-Word, to redeem the cosmos from its center.\textsuperscript{79} From this perspective, according to Balthasar, both history and the world are teaming with signs of God which finally come together in Jesus who unifies the fragments, so to speak, in his person.\textsuperscript{80}

Despite the evident profundity of the cosmological methodology, Balthasar sees a significant limitation (\textit{Reduktion}) in ascertaining the revelation of the God-man from the standpoint of the cosmos or history, that is, from the perspective of wisdom born principally of religious philosophy rather than childlike wonder in the face of God’s surprising, immeasurable gift to man in Christ.\textsuperscript{81} It is not as though the "cosmological reduction" does not provide necessary insights into the giftedness and intelligibility of creation, for Balthasar, necessary especially in light of the apparent relativism that marks moral decision making today. José Granados, D.C.J.M. in fact wonders if Balthasar speaks critically of this perspective because the way in which modern man tends to perceive the world as dumb, uninformed matter with little or no intelligibility and symbolism, appears for Balthasar to be too pervasive of a perspective now to propose the retrieval of the world-view of the ancients

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 78 Ibid., 15-30.
\item 79 Ibid.
\item 80 Ibid., esp. 15.
\item 81 Ibid., 9-10; cf. 56.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
as a realistic apologetic. Nevertheless, as will be indicated under (3) below, it is clear throughout *Love Alone is Credible* and indeed, throughout Balthasar’s corpus, that he believes Christ himself is the only adequate criterion for judging the Christian contribution to the world. A world or historical perspective on the newness of Christianity, according to Balthasar, can only show how Christ comes as the fulfillment of previously determined ideals (“human self-understanding in thinking”); it cannot lay claim, as Christ purportedly can, to the unexpected poverty of love, for Balthasar, indeed, to the wonder of the unparalleled acts of mercy and self-surrender that Christ evidences in his obedient love for his heavenly Father. The definition of love that thus arises from God’s self-revelation in Jesus must be seen to illumine and so modify the previously held notions of history and being, according to the Swiss theologian.

---


84 Reflection on the Gospel accounts testifies to the perceived newness of divine love embodied in Christ. Both Judas and Peter, for instance, fail to ascertain the meaning of Christ’s mission to give his life away. Indeed, Christ routinely upsets conventional wisdom by his mode of life and even his death, as the dominate reactions of the Pharisees attest. Any attempt to ascertain the specifically Christian would therefore, for Balthasar, have to explain how Christ is not simply a fulfillment, but also a surprise who invokes wonder and amazement, and who resets the terms for what it means to live in accord with God’s ways. On this point, see especially, Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*.

85 Christ is the center-point of history, for Balthasar. Christ exhibits the vertical dimension of history in his person as both past and future find their meaning in him. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).
(2) Now, when man’s conception of the natural realm begins to close in on itself, starting in the Renaissance and coming to a head in the period of the Enlightenment, Balthasar contends, the realm of the Almighty is increasingly understood as displaced from the cosmos, as existing exclusively on another plane. Revelation becomes measured by another way, “by the yardstick of [human] reason,” writes Balthasar. In this, the so-called “anthropological reduction,” man takes the place of Christ as the epiphany of the cosmic order. It is man’s inner life—his subjective experiences and aspirations (“human self-understanding in . . . living”)—which come to determine the scope of transcendental inquiry, relates Balthasar.

Next to the cosmological reduction, another was gradually taking shape, one that displaced the locus of verification from the increasingly demythologized cosmos (which was therefore becoming less of a rival to Christianity) to the human being, who recapitulated the entire world in himself. From the loss of the cosmological perspective, Balthasar indicates that man is


87 LAC, 32. “am Maßstab seiner Vernunft.” GNL, 20. This is a remark specifically about John Locke’s view of revelation, but it can be applied more generally to the anthropological reduction. Cf. LAC, 31-50.


89 LAC, 31.

inclined to ponder his own interior life and moral activity more intensely. “The confessional controversies and the disenchantment of the world cooperate to bring about the abrupt turn to a purely human and a predominantly ethical conception of religion,” he writes.\textsuperscript{91} While a “purely human and predominately ethical conception of religion” is itself inadequate, Balthasar still gleans a positive intuition from the “anthropological reduction.” He relates how this methodology culminates in Kant’s realization that human action is inherently transcendental and awe-inspiring.\textsuperscript{92}

When I act, I know that I cannot do so except by presupposing the categorical validity of a universal (“catholic”) norm, which absolutely transcends me as an empirical subject and which includes the idea of freedom, immortality, and divinity. Here, the unfathomable depths of human nature gape wide, and Kant stands before them in wonder.\textsuperscript{93}

If man is consciously aware of his actions, if he cannot determine himself freely relative to others (or the Other), there would be no morality or ethics, according to Balthasar.\textsuperscript{94}

In summary, whereas the “cosmological reduction” manifests the metaphysical realm which leads to the shaping of the question of the Christian difference in an objective and


\textsuperscript{92} \textit{LAC}, 33.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. “Handelnd weiß ich, daß ich nicht anders tätig sein kann als unter der Voraussetzung der kategorischen Geltung einer universalen (‘katholischen’) Norm, die mich als empirisches Subjekt schlechterdings übersteigt und in sich die Idee der Freiheit, der Unsterblichkeit und der Gottheit einschließt. Hier öffnen sich die unfählichen Tiefen der Menschennatur, vor denen Kant staunend steht. . . .” \textit{GNL}, 20.

\textsuperscript{94} See \textit{LAC}, 33-5. Of course the Fathers of the Church and the scholastics had already dealt with man’s interior life and morality in their own way. Ibid., 42-3. “Nevertheless,” writes Balthasar, “the tradition never set the criterion for the truth of revelation in the center of the pious human subject. . . .” Ibid., 43. “Indes ist doch nie im Ernst das Kriterium der Offenbarungswahrheit in die Mitte des frommen menschlichen Subjekts gelegt. . . .” \textit{GNL}, 27.
exterior way, the “anthropological reduction” showcases the ethical realm, answering the same question in a subjective and interior way, and thus giving evidence to those moments in human experience and acting which help identify the uniquely Christian. Even with the addition of the anthropological perspective in world history, however, in Balthasar’s view man is still left without an adequate measure for determining the Christian difference in being and action.

If the first [i.e. cosmological] approach bears the limitations of temporal history, the second [i.e. anthropological] also betrays a fundamental flaw, for neither the world as a whole nor man in particular can provide the measure for what God wishes to say to man in Christ. God’s word is unconditionally theological, or, better, theo-pragmatic: what God wishes to say to man is a deed on his behalf, a deed that interprets itself before man for his sake (and only therefore to him and in him). What we intend to say in this book is that it is credible only as love—specifically as God’s own love, the manifestation of which is the glory of God.

(3) As a mark of difference to the cosmological and anthropological “reductions,” Balthasar turns the point of interest and formative criteria away from either

---

95 Balthasar recounts the work, among others, of Joseph Maréchal, Max Scheler, Søren Kierkegaard, and Fyodor Dostoevsky in this regard. Each in their own way drew on subjective experience to elaborate the Christian difference. See LAC, 40-50.

96 Ibid., 9-10. “Ist der erste Versuch zeitgeschichtlich begrenzt, so ist der zweite systematisch verfehlt: was Gott in Christo dem Menschen sagen will, kann weder an der Welt im ganzen noch am Menschen im besonderen eine Normierung erhalten; es ist unbedingt theo-logisch, besser theo-pragmatisch: Tat Gottes auf den Menschen zu, Tat, die sich selber vor dem Menschen und für ihn (und so erst an ihm und in ihm) auslegt. Von dieser Tat soll nun ausgesagt werden, daß sie glaubhaft sei nur als Liebe: gemeint ist Gottes eigene Liebe, deren Erscheinung die der Herrlichkeit Gottes ist.” GNL, 5.

97 Karol Wojtyła defined these perspectives in a similar way in his pre-papal philosophical writings, especially in his collection of essays entitled Person and Community, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). See for example, the essay “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” 209-10, where Wojtyla contrasts the objectivist (cosmological) and subjectivist (anthropological) accounts of the human person. Wojtyla’s philosophical solution is to ground the understanding of the human person in the objective, metaphysical framework of his nature as a rational animal, while also taking due care to speak to what in fact defines him as irreducible relative to other persons, namely his subjectivity as a person.
the cosmos’ ordination to God (religious philosophy) or man’s inner striving (existentialism), to God’s self-interpreting love in the person of Jesus Christ (*theolog*ia).

This is what Balthasar calls "der dritte Weg der Liebek" or "the third way of love." What the Christian is able to accept on faith becomes, for Balthasar, the ever new determinant for understanding (cosmic) being and (human) acting in the first place. Authentic faith provides the means by which to assess both reality and moral living as they were first intended, as they were in the post-lapsarian state prior to Christ, and as they have now been redeemed in his blood.

Once the act of faith has been carried out as faith in the historical kerygma, it fulfills metaphysics [cf. cosmological reduction] and ethics [cf. anthropological reduction] even as it elevates them.

The criterion of Christ’s self-interpreting love does not eclipse the insights of the cosmological and anthropological perspectives, for Balthasar, it rather contextualizes them and grants them new meaning.

How then is Christ himself the criterion, the interpretive key, as it were, for the Christian difference? At times Balthasar uses a different marker point for the criterion.

---

who (uniquely) experiences himself acting together with others.

98 *LAC*, 51: “Neither religious philosophy nor existence can provide the criterion for the genuineness of Christianity.” “Kriterium der Echtheit des Christlichen kann weder die religiöse Philosophie noch die Existenz sein.” *GNL*, 33.

99 *LAC*, 51. *GNL*, 33. The cosmological and anthropological are the first and second ways respectively.

100 *LAC*, 51. “[D]er Glaube ergänzt überhöhend die Metaphysik und die Ethik, wenn er erst einmal als Glaube an das historische Kerygma vollzogen worden ist.” *GNL*, 33.

101 The cosmological and anthropological methodologies are not always wholly contained within themselves, of course. There is significant cross-over in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, for example.
Sometimes it is the Gospel,\textsuperscript{102} other times the saints,\textsuperscript{103} one’s personal mission,\textsuperscript{104} and so on. The reader should understand that (a) Balthasar is not a systematician seeking to constrain one to a single way of viewing this issue, (b) all of the elements just described converge in the newness of Christ; they are meant to be different ways of showcasing the infinite depth of Christ’s love as the one who reveals God’s difference for the world and for man in and through the Holy Spirit. So it is that Christ is the “sole” measure of the Christian difference, for Balthasar, because the difference he presents and the wonder he evokes in his life, death, descent into Hell, and resurrection cannot be conceived in advance or (ever) sufficiently categorized by means of speculation or experience.\textsuperscript{105} Christ remains immeasurable. Only in humble adoration, only in a spirit of docility to be directed by the figure of the God-man in all of his radicalism,\textsuperscript{106} Balthasar relates, can one begin to see where the Christian difference in being and action really lies; and this is only possible because Christ does the interpreting himself, according to Balthasar, through his Spirit, in the creation and redemption of the

\begin{flushright}

103 “The Gospel as Norm,” 293.

104 “NP,” 90.

105 Balthasar’s criticism of Karl Rahner’s method comes through on this point in \textit{The Moment of Christian Witness}, 146-9.

106 “[T]he inherent form of the Gospel requires that man follow Jesus by staking everything, with ultimate decisiveness, on the one card and abandoning the rest of the card game: ‘leaving everything’ without looking back, without laying down as a precondition a ‘synthesis’ between Jesus and saying farewell to those in one’s home, between Jesus and burying one’s father, or between Jesus and anything else at all. ‘To take one’s cross upon oneself means the same absolute preference to the holy will of God to all one’s own plans and preferences and affections: father, mother, child, field, etc. The criterion, the ‘canon’, is that one does not make a synthesis.’” Balthasar, “The Gospel as Norm,” 292.
\end{flushright}
world. It is Christ who measures the meaning of love at the root of being and action, Balthasar intimates. We must learn to see as He sees.

Two approaches suggest themselves for specifying in detail this “third way of love” Balthasar claims, namely personalism and aestheticism. The personalist approach accents the Thou (God) as greater than me in such a way that He cannot be mastered. In personalism, the other person, be it God or man, always remains a mystery which cannot be pre-determined or wholly categorized without missing essential aspects of his being. In this way love is secured, as I behold in wonder the face of the one before me, who acts upon me, and who I act together with. I sympathize with the other and love the other as he truly is.

The aesthetic approach, on the other hand, assesses reality beyond thought and action, beyond “me.” For Balthasar, beauty sets its own terms; it is disinterested. It strikes the observer as free and gratuitous and not under one’s control. Just as with personalism, love is discovered here as something freely given by someone perceived as mysterious and sovereign, according to Balthasar.

---

107 LAC, 54. Cf. “NP,” 79. This observation is central to McIntosh’s book, Christology from Within. McIntosh is keen to interpret Balthasar’s understanding of ethics as discipleship, and therefore as integrating spiritual and moral theology.


109 LAC, 52; cf. 44-6.


111 LAC, 53.

112 Ibid., 52-3.
The two approaches thus converge for the Swiss theologian:

[\text{W}]hatever we love—no matter how profoundly or superficially we may love it—always appears radiant with glory; and whatever is objectively perceived as glorious—no matter how profoundly or superficially we may experience it—does not penetrate into the onlooker except through the specificity of an eros.$^{113}$

Love appears to be the framework by which Balthasar sees a link between aestheticism and personalism, and, analogously, cosmology and anthropology, ontology and ethics, or being and action. What pertains to “ontological aestheticism” (my term) \textit{in love} is the perception of objective reality displaying itself freely and indifferently, which draws upon one’s eros to see it in its true profundity, according to Balthasar. Likewise, for Balthasar, what pertains to “personalist action” (my term) \textit{in love} is also the sovereign other, who evokes in me the desire (eros) to see him as he truly is. Note how Balthasar identifies these poles not in isolation, but in their mutuality. To understand one adequately is to understand the other in relation to it, and, more than that, to see how they converge precisely in a “third” (love) both within and beyond them. In short, the (natural) framework for perception Balthasar has in mind is both “nuptial” and “fruitful.”$^{114}$

Even as these poles converge, though, for Balthasar they are surpassed in Revelation when the divine \textit{Logos} descends to manifest and \textit{interpret himself as love}, that is, as agape,

---


and therein as the glory of the Father.\textsuperscript{115} God interprets himself as both \textit{love} (1 Jn 4:8, 16) and \textit{glory} (Jn 1:14), observes Balthasar, thus providing a quintessentially new (supernatural) framework which both fulfills and surpasses the former convergence.\textsuperscript{116}

If the fundamental word is not just ‘love’ but ‘divine love’, then the fundamental aesthetic word ‘glory’ must accompany it, since this word preserves the distance of the Wholly-Other within God’s self-manifestation as love, and absolutely prevents us from confusing this love with any other (even personal) love which claims to be absolute.\textsuperscript{117}

Balthasar defines his methodology as a “theological aesthetic.”\textsuperscript{118} It is a study, through perception, of the self-glorification of divine love.

Christian self-understanding (and therefore theology) can be interpreted neither in terms of a wisdom that surpasses the knowledge of the world’s religions through a divine utterance (\textit{ad majorem gnosim rerum divinarum}) nor in terms of man’s definitive achievement of personal and social fulfillment through revelation and redemption (\textit{ad majorem hominis perfectionem et progressum generis humani}), but solely in terms of the self-glorification of divine love: \textit{ad majorem Divini Amoris GLORIAM}.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{LAC}, 54.


\textsuperscript{119} \textit{LAC}, 10. “Christliches Selbstverständnis (und damit Theologie) ist weder auf ein das religiöse Weltwissen überhöhendes Weisheitswissen durch göttliche Kundgabe auslegbar (ad majorem gnosim rerum divinarum), noch auf den durch Offenbarung und Erlösung endgültig zu sich selbst kommen den persönlichen und sozialen Menschen (ad majorem hominis perfectionem et progressum generis humani), sondern einzig auf die Selbstverherrlichung der göttlichen Liebe: \textit{ad majorem Divini Amoris GLORIAM}.” \textit{GNL}, 5-6.
The plausibility of God’s love does not become apparent through any comparative reduction to what man has always already understood as love; rather, it is illuminated only by the self-interpreting revelation-form of love itself. And this form is so majestic that we are led to adore it from a reverent distance whenever we perceive it, even if it does not explicitly command us to do so.\textsuperscript{120}

If both the cosmological and anthropological reductions fail to ascertain the newness and hence difference of Christ’s love for being and action, and likewise aestheticism and personalism, which appear to be representative (although not exclusively) of these methodologies, also fail to do justice to the “self-interpreting revelation-form of love,” then it remains for us to unpack the content of this form, according to Balthasar. By doing this, we will have begun in earnest to identify the full nexus of love that Balthasar conveys throughout his corpus. We will have begun to show what Chapter Two with respect to being and Chapter Three with respect to action do more assiduously, that is, indicate the difference Christ’s love makes for the understanding of metaphysics and ethics in their convergence.

§ I.4 The Trinitarian-Christological-Ecclesial Form of Self-Abandoning Love

Indeed, simply conveying that Christ sets the terms for the Christian difference in his existence and that this can only be “seen” insofar as one incorporates the necessary grace into his life through true worship, still leaves unidentified what the Lord’s \textit{Gestalt} or Christ-form of love actually looks like for the ethicist. Perhaps it is best then to specify in some detail

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{LAC}, 56. “Die Plausibilität dieser Gottesliebe erhellt aus keiner vergleichenden Reduktion auf das, was der Mensch schon immer als Liebe gekannt hat, vielmehr einzig durch die sich selbst auslegende Offenbarungs-Gestalt der Liebe selber, an ihr aber so majestätisch, daß sie sich, ohne es ausdrücklich fordern zu müssen, dort, wo sie wahrgenommen wird, den Abstand der Anbetung erwirkt.” \textit{GNL}, 36.
what the word *Gestalt* means in itself, and in Balthasar’s usage,\(^{121}\) before identifying, for Balthasar, the Christ-form’s *inclusive relation* to the Trinity on the hand, and the Church on the other.\(^{122}\) This approach should provide the needed context for ascertaining in the remainder of Part One, being and action in their relativity in love, according to Balthasar.

*Gestalt*, literally “figure” in German, represents the splendor which lies “behind” its own structure, which is to say the life or integrating spirit of someone or something.\(^ {123}\) It is glory’s aesthetically perceivable mode of operation, if you will.\(^ {124}\) It acts as a *framework*, a *uniform perspective* for interpreting various facets of a given reality, as well as all that comes under the influence of the reality. The *Gestalt* or figure, form, or pattern of a business, taken generally, for example, is its phenomenological classification as a professional, efficiency-based, courteous and non-confrontational entity. The business, and each of the persons employed by the business when they are at work (and off work to a lessening degree) is determined in some manner by the business framework, by its *Gestalt*. When Balthasar speaks of *Gestalt* he is, in his own words, speaking of a “‘contracted’ representation of the Absolute, in so far as it too, in its restricted field, exceeds its parts, governs its members.

\(^{121}\) Balthasar owes much of the idea of perceiving the *Gestalt* as representative of the whole of a thing from the German literary giant and aesthete, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whom he often cites. Balthasar in fact says as much in his interview with Michael Albus in “Spirit and Fire,” 579-80, 583-4. On Balthasar’s definition of *Gestalt*, see *GL1*, 23-33.

\(^{122}\) This is the meaning of the dash marks in the title of this section: Trinitarian-Christological-Ecclesial. They are meant to be perceived together (in their mutuality-in-difference or unity-in-distinction), not in isolation, for Balthasar. The title of Balthasar’s article “Mary-Church-Office,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 193-8, shows this preference.

\(^{123}\) See *GL1*, 118.

\(^{124}\) “Form is by definition the expression of the interior; it therefore needs the exterior both as a protective shell as well as the medium for its own self-communication if it is to be an interior reality at all.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Christian Form,” in *Spirit and Institution*, vol. 4 of *Explorations in Theology*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 49.
This concept, inherited from Plato and Aristotle (as eidos and morphē), was at the heart of medieval ontology (as species and forma) and also of the nature doctrine of Herder (against Kant) and Goethe.”125 Balthasar applies the term to the perceivable whole of various things wherein such “intellectually perceivable Gestalten” relate “to that complete and perfect Being. . . .”126 He means this in the same sense in which “[a]ll instances of the real partake in [absolute] Gestalt in analogical degrees.”127

Now, the Gestalt of Christ, which radiates the “glory of the Lord,” is as manifested content, the eternal Son’s obedient love for his Father in the Spirit, a radical self-abandonment which receives all only to give all away for the sake of the other, no matter the cost. It is perceived as “an a priori Yes to whatever may come, whether it be the Cross or being plunged into absolute abandonment, or being forgotten, or utter uselessness and

125 Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Transcendentality and Gestalt,” Communio 11 (1984): 4. See also Michael Waldstein’s “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetics,” 13-27 in the same issue. Aidan Nichols, O.P. makes the following distinction: “Form creates Gestalt, a term Balthasar is using, not as a synonym for form [in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense] but as a name for the configuration(s) form sets up in immediate perception.” Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Theology beyond the Trilogy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 103. While Gestalt is certainly a configuration set up in immediate perception, it also communicates or mediates life in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense. See GL1, 22-3. According to my reading, it is both form and configuration, not one or the other.

126 Balthasar, “Transcendentality and Gestalt,” 6. Balthasar remarks: “Our first principle must always be the indissolubility [wholeness] of form and second that such form is determined by many antecedent conditions,” GL1, 26. “Immer ist die Unauflosbarkeit der Gestalt das erste, ihre Mitbedingtheit durch viele Voraussetzungen das zweite.” HK I, 23. D.C. Schindler’s claim that drama and Gestalt are, for Balthasar, “aspects of a single whole,” should not be misconstrued to indicate that Gestalt is not itself representative of “the whole.” Rather, it represents this whole precisely with respect to the dramatic aspect integral to it, such as the body-soul unity of a human person. See Schindler’s Dramatic Structure of Truth, 25 and Balthasar, GL1, 25 on form as though a body animated by spirit.

127 Balthasar, “Transcendentality and Gestalt,” 6. “If form is broken down into subdivisions and auxiliary parts for the sake of explanation, this is unfortunately a sign that the true form has not been perceived as such at all.” GL1, 26. “Immer ist die Unauflosbarkeit der Gestalt das erste, ihre Mitbedingtheit durch viele Voraussetzungen das zweite.” Löst man sie aber erklärungshalber in die Unterstufen und Hilfsteile auf, so ist dies leider ein Zeichen, dass man ihrer überhaupt nie ansichtig geworden ist.” HK I, 23-4.
meaninglessness.”

The Christ-form is also, for Balthasar, interestingly enough, a Marian form, because, as he understands it, Mary and the Church which springs from her has received Christ wholly into her body and life. The Son’s obedience to the Father in the Spirit has become Mary-Church’s obedience to Christ in the Spirit, all the way to the Cross. This is because the Christ-form is fundamentally a form of love open to anyone who participates in the life of God by grace. Indeed, Balthasar considers the glory of Christ to take on a Christian form as well, because by grace Christ “empowers us inwardly to do the Father’s will together with him (cum ipso).”

It is the Son’s Yes to the Father, the mother’s Yes to the angel because he carries God’s Word, the Church’s Yes, given in and with all her members, to her Lord’s sovereign will. . . . This love is ‘the mind of the Church’, which the Church possesses subjectively in relation to Christ, and therefore objectively as a norm for the mind of her members.

In sum, the norm of Christ which is meant for ethical attunement, for Balthasar, is a

---

128 LAC, 125. “[S]ie ist Jawort im voraus zu jedem, was immer es sein mag, und wäre es Kreuz und Versinken in die absolute Verslassenheit oder Vergessenheit oder Vergeblichkeit oder Unbedeutendheit.” GNL, 83.


governing spirit or life-form which radiates the Father’s love, through the Son, in the Spirit, as wedded to Mary-Church and, by divine adoption, enlivens the faithful. Here again, for Balthasar, a logic of mutuality-in-difference defines something (e.g. the Christ-form) relative to another in love.\textsuperscript{132} Indeed, the connection between the Trinity, Jesus, and the Church—specifically and universally the Catholic Church—is very strong in Balthasar.\textsuperscript{133} This is so much the case that Mary’s consent to the Spirit at the Annunciation is a reflection for him of the Son’s consent to the Father and, in this way, representative of the fundamental Christian ethical response.\textsuperscript{134} In Balthasar’s framework, the cosmos and man within it are intrinsically ordained or “called,” on analogical levels, to give themselves away (“the Cross,” “abandonment,” “uselessness,” “meaninglessness”) for the sake of complete immersion in the life of the Trinity, who is himself, communal, self-giving love.\textsuperscript{135} 

Echoing his companion in the founding of the Community of St. John, Adrienne von Speyr, Balthasar tells how this love originally “appears as formless. One must first of all

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item “[L]et us joyfully make the most of the . . . insight that we cannot have Christ without the Church! That she alone preserves his legacy and image, an image which she, the bride, bears the imprint and which the Bridegroom’s Spirit has shaped out of her faith. The reciprocity of the Christ-Church relationship is as indissoluble as that of the relationship between mother and child.” Balthasar, \textit{Mary: The Church at the Source}, 167. McIntosh describes the relation between Christ and his Church in Balthasar’s thought as one life under two different aspects. McIntosh, \textit{Christology from Within}, 132.

\item In contrast, the divine command paradigm would appear to reduce the trinitarian-christological-eclesial form of self-abandoning love to simply God’s command over against man, which he must then obey. There is no sense in divine command theory, commonly understood, of the communal love of the Trinity as a governing form, or indeed of the same selfless, \textit{agape} love being ordered from within for the sake of others and, if only in the eschaton, for communion. We say this irrespective of Steck’s significantly more nuanced account of Balthasar’s “Ignatian reconfiguration of divine command ethics.” Steck, \textit{Ethical Thought of HUVB}, 5.

\item Balthasar, \textit{Mary: The Church at the Source}, 165. “Mary is the principle of all Yes-saying, of all fruitful obedience \textit{as a person}. . . .” (original emphasis). Ibid., 175.

\item See especially Balthasar, \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, with appropriate references in Section II.4 to follow.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
endure this apparent formlessness, for love is unconditional assent to God’s will. . . .”\textsuperscript{136} Christian love should not then be considered as fundamentally “suffering,” or “sacrifice,” or “mysticism,” suggests Balthasar, for all of such qualifiers determine in advance (determine the form of) the response of the moral actor, when in fact Christ may be calling for a different form of love in the moment. One can see then how important patience and disposability and, of course, obedience, are for Balthasar’s fundamentally Christ-centered but also “Marian” ethics.\textsuperscript{137}

Nevertheless, while Mary’s “Yes” to the Holy Spirit represents the “catholic fundamental act”\textsuperscript{138} and serves as the basis for the Christian response both in terms of basic morality and growth in holiness, Balthasar’s fundamentally Catholic understanding of morality also includes the Petrine dimension of office.

\textit{[T]he Marian “handmaid” lives a life of pure service and thus has the same

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{136} LAC, 125. “[D]ann erscheint sie wie ein Formloses. . . . Man muß dieser scheinbaren Formlosigkeit zunächst standhalten, denn Liebe ist das unbegrenzte Einverständnsein mit Gottes Wille. . . .” GNL, 83. Balthasar’s indebtedness to Adrienne von Speyr, the mystic to whom he served as a spiritual director and transcriber, is well-known. In his own words: “Her work and mine are neither psychologically nor philologically to be separated: two halves a single whole, which has its center a unique foundation.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{My Work in Retrospect}, trans. Fr. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 89; cf. 105, 107.

\textsuperscript{137} In the words of von Speyr: “Above all, Mary’s assent is a grace. . . . In assenting, she renounces herself, makes herself nothing, in order to let God alone become active in her. She makes all the potentialities which constitute her nature accessible to his action, without her being able or wishing to overlook anything. She resolves to let God alone work; and yet, precisely by virtue of this resolution, she becomes cooperative. . . . No one has ever completely renounced everything of his own order in order to let God rule as did Mary; to no one, therefore, has God granted greater power of cooperation than to her. . . . [H]er fruitfulness is so unlimited only because the renunciation in her assent was also boundless. . . .” \textit{Handmaiden of the Lord}, trans. E.A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 8-9. Aidan Nichols has highlighted the theme of fruitfulness through disposability in Balthasar. See Nichols, O.P., \textit{Divine Fruitfulness}. See also Balthasar’s \textit{Epilogue}, where the author speaks of surrender as that which creates new beings (109) and cosmic fertility (110).

\textsuperscript{138} Balthasar, \textit{Mary: The Church at the Source}, 165.\end{footnote}
fundamental gestalt as the Petrine office.\textsuperscript{139}

So we see again how Balthasar perceives a complimentary, that is, nuptial logic as the basis for perceiving rightly any one thing. Indeed, for Balthasar,

A Church without office is a jellyfish, a mollusk. If one abstracts the Holy Spirit from the living christological form of the Church—\textit{aedificabo ecclesiam meum!}—everything becomes formless and ghostly. . . . Without office there is no dogma, no sacrament, no Church discipline. . . . All of the saints knew this; none of them tried to bypass the Church’s office in attaining holiness—this wondrous, selfless, and unreflective holiness that still allows one to exist as a personal, embodied mission and not as some kind of impersonal striving after nirvana. . . . Time and again the saint is proof of the rightness of the Church as she is.\textsuperscript{140}

However, John O’Donnell rightly contends that, for Balthasar, “[T]he masculine [Petrine] principle is always subordinate to the feminine [Marian] principle and exists that the Church might fulfill her feminine identity, namely her bridal response of love to her Lord.”\textsuperscript{141}

Balthasar’s indebtedness to the Catholic tradition in all of its parts: office, sacrament, Bible, and so on, comes fully into view as ground for the making of a saint.

The Church is primarily, not a sociological organization, but the living flesh of Christ that is fed by his Eucharist. It follows that the Church’s office and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.}, 174.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Cf. Balthasar, \textit{Mary: The Church at the Source}, 169: “The Church is a living body, and a body has a structure. Now, the Church’s structure is essentially her office, understood as a function for the sake of the organism. We totally miss the point when we disparage the structure of a living body with the term “institution”. The higher an organism is, the more developed and complex its organization. The rigid skeleton serves flexibility; the living flesh would be nothing but a shapeless mass without the body’s hard and tough parts.” See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church}, trans. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).
\end{itemize}
everything that goes with it—sacraments, tradition, the Bible, Church law and Church discipline, and so forth—is pneumatic. . . . The Christian should reflect for a moment: Are there any Christian goods he does not owe, directly or indirectly, to what he perhaps contemptuously dismisses as “institution” or the “establishment”? The real saints were all aware of this debt, and it is characteristic of them that they always remained in the organism of the Church, drew their life from her and added new organic tissue to her.  

Without elaborating at this juncture on the form of love expressed variously in the lives of the saints, as Balthasar understands it, it is sufficient to call to mind how his frequent recourse to their lives, as indicated even in the personages he chooses to write about, manifest his conclusion that the saintly form of life is integral to the perception of the Christ-form and, therefore, integral to seeing adequately the norm of ethics.

The claim here, finally, is that Balthasar presents a trinitarian-christological-ecclesial framework held in ready for moral theory which is not in the least neutral regarding the integral importance of Catholicism to moral action. Considering the necessary docility, the gratitude, and the obedience to the hierarchy of the Church (irrespective of the personal convenience and preference of the individual Christian), those who stand outside the Church do not know the Christ-form. The life of the saints is theology in practice, and the Christian should reflect: Do I really need this gift? Do I really want this gift? Is this gift mine? Does it belong to me, or does it belong to the Church? The Christian should not only have the gift of the concretissimum of obedience in the following of Christ, but to the extent that he is united with that Church, the Church is simultaneously given the gift of the Christian.
sinfulness of those officiating) that the form of love takes, as Balthasar perceives it, leaves little room for its adherents to express infidelity to the Church’s teachings on moral issues. Such a form of life also provides a reference point for all other Christians and those of goodwill seeking to live a life in joyful conformity with the truth of love, expressed and defined by Balthasar as Christ’s own loving obedience to his heavenly Father. Indeed, if such docile love were truly the mind of the Church’s members, one wonders to what extent Magisterial pronouncements on such debatable issues as abortion, contraception, the male-only priesthood, the definition of marriage, and so on, would still be “debatable” for those inclined to this docility. Perhaps Balthasar’s non-casuistic moral theology or, better, theology with moral implications, can here reach down to the particular cases by setting an influential (if not yet interpretive) framework. By redirecting the fundamental ethical questions of the day to the significance of the Christian’s moral response to Christ in the Church, one’s focus is redirected onto a life in conformity with Christ’s selflessness unto death in obedient, loving contemplation. Considered in this way, faith precedes critique and gives form to understanding the truth as entrusted to the Church through the Spirit (see Jn 14:15-17, 25-6; 15:26-7; 16:12-15).145

145 See CSL, 93: “It was only with the destruction of obedience that his [adam’s or man’s] powers appeared in their nakedness as ‘critical intellect’ and ‘freedom of will’. They had originally been intended to function as internal organs within faith, which is the form of obedient love.” CS, 74: “... erst als dieser zerbrach, traten sie nackt hervor, als ‘kritischer Verstand’ und ‘Freiheit des Willens’. Sie waren ursprünglich dazu bestimmt, innerhalb des Glaubens als der Form der gehorschenden Liebe so zu funktionieren wie innere Organe des Menschen.” This is not to say that casuistic moral theology is irrelevant or that no legitimate questions exist regarding current teachings or practices of the Church. It does however suggest an entirely different form of engagement with these topics than one which first abstracts from the implications of obedience (“the Cross, “abandonment,” “insignificance”) to consider propositions counterpoised to magisterial teachings as if on equal terms.
Conclusion

This chapter has sought to indicate how Balthasar’s philosophically-enhanced theology of love could be said to integrate ethics in the norm of Christ. By focusing on Jesus Christ and his triune-love, the source of Christian ethics and really all disciplines for Balthasar, the Swiss priest provides a path for the integration of origin, worship, and deed, thus linking moral theology and sanctity. Indeed, Balthasar has shown how theology, in particular, moral theology, is meant to always be an “act of adoration and prayer”\textsuperscript{146} which influences the personal actor in his moral discernment. The chapter reveals how Balthasar’s approach is integrative inasmuch as Christ’s existence provides both a “personal” and “universal” norm for ethical behavior.\textsuperscript{147} According to Balthasar, Christ is interior (cf. personal) to Christians by grace and the standard of his life is applicable to everyone (cf. universal), for, everyone will finally come under his judgment.

It therefore seems that moral theology comes properly into view, from Balthasar’s perspective, as an ecstatic element emerging from a larger, scripture based, systematic and traditional, spiritual theology.\textsuperscript{148} Indeed, his contribution to moral theory appears very much like the common, Christocentric and ecclesial theology he otherwise advances, only here “the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{146} Balthasar applies this reference to the theology of the saints. “TS,” 206. “Ihre Theologie ist wesentlich ein Akt der Anbetung und des Gebets.” “TH,” 222. It is clear for him that the the lives of the saints serve as interpretive keys, not exceptions, for theological investigation.
\item \textsuperscript{147} “NP,” 82.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Biblical theology comes into view from Balthasar’s perspective ecstatically from within spiritually based, systematic and traditional, moral theology. Spiritual theology comes into view for him from within a traditionally based, biblical and moral, systematic theology. In other words, no matter the ordering, the point is that, for Balthasar, all elements of theology are present within and carried by the ecstatic element or field which is focused on at any given point in time.
\end{itemize}
whole” comes to frame, as shall be examined in Part Two of this work, specific, ethical questions.\textsuperscript{149}

Moreover, although Christopher Steck and Melanie Barrett are able to glean valuable insights from Balthasar’s ethical thought, especially regarding personal ethics, their respective categorizations of his thought do not arguably discern the holistic framework which Balthasar’s theological aestheticism offers for interpreting specific moral issues, including social cases. To provide such a metaphysical basis, this chapter has examined two historical approaches for discerning the Christian difference in being and action, namely, the cosmological and anthropological reductions, relative to Balthasar’s Christocentric, “third way of love.”\textsuperscript{150} Through this analysis, Balthasar has indicated a profound correspondence or “nuptial” logic between cosmology and anthropology, and aestheticism and personalism, \textit{in love (eros)}. More than that, he has shown how these elements of being and action fall under the purview of divine love (\textit{agape}), and thus can only adequately be perceived in terms of Christ’s own existence.

Even before we introduce the next two chapters of this first part of the dissertation which should help to advance both the metaphysical and ethical logic of Balthasar’s Christological theology of love, then, the theologian from Basel has set a course for an interpretation of morality which is holistically grounded on the norm of Christ and his triune-

\textsuperscript{149} Balthasar writes, “[T]here is no other way to do theology except by repeatedly circling around what is, in fact, always the same totality looked at from different angles. To parcel up theology into isolated tracts is by definition to destroy it.” \textit{TLI}, 8. “[A]nders als in umkreisenden Wiederholungen des Je-Ganzen läßt sich ja Theologie überhaupt nicht betreiben, ihre Parzellierung in kontaktlose Einzeltraktate ist ihr sicherer Tod.” \textit{TLK I}, VIII.

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{LAC}, 51. “dritte Weg der Liebe” \textit{GNL}, 33.
ecclesial love, a love which, infused into Christians in the grace of baptism, admits in principle to no disobedience to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church on matters of faith and morals, perceives an integrative, “nuptial” logic between being and action which is validly discerned only in Christ’s self-interpretive love, and, which, as intelligible form, is expressed in the lives of the saints. We can further say that the saints have as their model in creaturely discipleship and, therefore for Balthasar, creaturely morality as such, the Blessed Virgin’s *fiat voluntas tua*.151

---

151 In the words of Jesus himself, “Not my will be yours be done” (Mt 26: 39, 42; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). “Christ’s attitude is the model for the Christian, for whom Christ, and no other, is the standard. The Christian [however] is, in the first place, Mary, who in contrast with Christ as God and man represents the unity of action and contemplation in a pure creature.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Action and Contemplation,” in *The Word Made Flesh*, vol. 1 of *Explorations of Theology*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 237.
CHAPTER TWO

Love is Co-extensive with Being

Introduction

After reflecting on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s integrative theological enterprise, signified here as Jesus Christ’s self-interpreting, self-abandoning love given over to the Church as Bridegroom to Bride for the eschatological communion of man and the cosmos in God, this chapter focuses more assiduously on Balthasar’s contention that the triune love manifested in the God-man, understood on analogical levels, is co-extensive with being. In this way this chapter continues the programmatic task outlined in Section I.3 above of showcasing the difference Christ’s self-interpretative love makes for the perception of the cosmos, that is, ontological aestheticism. By indicating in a substantive way how Christ’s surrendering love is identifiable with being itself, Balthasar is able to disclose how various beings (entia) fulfill themselves paradoxically through “giving themselves away” for the sake of another, as in the example of a tree providing firewood for the needy. To understand reality in this way is to suggest a heightened sense of the form and finality of things relative to ethical questions concerning their obfuscation and/or manipulation, as well as those

---

1 “Being and love are co-extensive.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Der Zugang zur Wirklichkeit Gottes,” in Mysterium Salutis, vol. II, ed. J. Feiner and M. Lohrer (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), 15-45; here, 17, as cited by Werner Löser, “Being Interpreted as Love: Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J., Communio 16 (1989): 475-6. Cf. Balthasar’s contribution to Wer ist Jesus von Nazareth für mich? 100 zeitgenössische Zeugnisse, ed. H. Spaemann (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 17 as cited by Löser, 483. Cf. also Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Warum ich noch ein Christ bin,” Zwei Plädoyers (Munich: Kösel, 1971), 52, cited by Löser, 490. I have chosen not to capitalize “being” in this work to avoid confusion with God’s unique being. Some of Balthasar’s translators render esse and esse commune as “Being” but others as simply “being,” as is done here. At times “being” will be italicized in order to distinguish it from its use as a verb. However, the quotations from translators provided here will present the case as it has been translated. Because Balthasar’s original writings are in German, “being” is capitalized therein just as all German nouns.
concerns, which, positively speaking, might disclose their participation in the cosmic liturgy through a like appropriation in love. In short, because Balthasar is speaking of being here, any additional criteria which can be discerned as co-extensive with it will necessarily imply a different bearing for its appropriation in moral action. It is the burden of this chapter to first show this link between love and being, for Balthasar, and further to identify various tenets which arise from this perspective of his.

This concentration on Balthasar’s metaphysics should differentiate this treatise from other extensive accounts of Balthasar’s ethical thought insofar as it provides a basis not simply for an individual ethic, but also for an ethic which appeals to all the varied structures of the world, for examples: the economy, stem-cell research, and the human body. Focusing on Balthasar’s metaphysics should embolden a certain theological intelligence better attuned to Christ’s way of seeing and assessing reality in particular moral cases. The claim here is that one’s individual ethos or, as Balthasar understands it, one’s personal mission, can be perceived more clearly when considered within the larger context of the Church’s and the cosmos’s own ordinations to love in the manner of Christ. Certainly a Christian imperative, for Balthasar, is to see and interpret reality as theologically gifted saints would in order to live and judge like them. ² Whereas Chapter Three to follow concerns the form love takes in the world, according to Balthasar, that is, the freely determined human response in love, this chapter entertains what this world first looks like from a Balthasarian perspective.³

The chapter begins with Werner Löser’s depiction of Balthasar’s proposal that “Being

² See especially “TS.”

³ How one concretely might assess particular moral cases from such a faith-enhanced perspective of being is a matter of personal judgment to be considered in Part Two, although certain pointers are evident also here.
and love are co-extensive” as the “one thing necessary” for the Swiss theologian.⁴ Indeed, Balthasar’s unique development of the medieval axiom, being and good are convertible, sets a distinctive tone to his Christological theology of love. Here love is understood as both absolute and intelligent, not principally or simply a passion, delectable choice, or an affective union between individual subjects. Love corresponds to the whole of reality as a “supra” formal principle just as being (esse) itself,⁵ for Balthasar, and thereby intelligibly informs things as image or vestige of the Trinity.⁶ It is consonant with Balthasar’s understanding of love that it exists at the root of the environment, political governance, work, the economy, communal life, and the human body.⁷ Love works through being, for Balthasar, as an objective gift and theological ground for the interpretation of various facets of reality, the morality due them and, in this expansive horizon, one’s personal mission.⁸

The chapter then increases its focus on the ontological question at hand with an in-depth analysis of Balthasar’s “fourfold difference” in being, itself a development of the “real distinction” in Saint Thomas’s work. A number of themes emerge from this analysis, including, the continual need for wonder in the face of being, the gift character of being, the requisite space for finite freedom to operate as love, the mutual dependence of beings, and indifference and poverty as necessary for the fruitfulness of reality as created by the triune-

---

⁴ Löser, 475-6.
⁵ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, “being is the most formal of all things.” ST, I, q. 7, a. 1.
⁶ See, for instance, GL5, 627.
⁷ In other words, Balthasar’s understanding of love has implications for social ethics, bioethics, and sexual ethics.
⁸ Needless to say, this gift is tri-personal.
God. Each of these points have a formative bearing on Balthasar’s contribution to moral theology and will thus be drawn upon in subsequent investigations of his ethics in the remainder of this work.

The chapter next concentrates on the intrinsic polarity that Balthasar finds in being. Just as Christ’s love exists only with respect to the theo-drama which involves both of his wills, divine and human, there is in Balthasar’s understanding of being an analogous convergence of opposites. The paradox of being indicates for Balthasar its unlimited and incomprehensible mystery; it evokes never-ending wonder and reverence for its source. Thus, the love at the root of being is for Balthasar a love finally ordered to worship—intellectual, ecclesial and sacramental, and in the service of others.

The chapter concludes with remarks on how fundamental moral theology stands to benefit from an understanding of the role love plays in Balthasar’s theology all through the cosmos and the various structures of humanity. Put decisively, Balthasar’s moral theology is no moralism. It is not an account of what should or should not be done based simply on notional laws and/or the spirituality that Christ models as a religious ideal. Rather, Balthasar’s theology indicates that at the very root of being is an invitation to be “real” by basing all decisions on love as Christ has revealed it. This is so, according to Balthasar’s reasoning, because both personal being and the being of everything one engages morally correspond in some analogous way with the precious and mysterious, self-abandoning communio love of Jesus. Being is engendered and governed and finds its fruition, on

9 Balthasar recognizes the polarity in being in distinct ways, such as giving-receiving, activity-passivity, contemplation-action, immanence-transcendence, theory-praxis, masculine-feminine, and so on.

10 Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 314 inter alia.
analogical levels, through God’s triune love personified in Christ. This is, for Balthasar, reality at its most dramatic and meaningful.

§ II.1 The Convertibility of Being and Love

“[F]or us, it is more important to get at all costs [to] a point from which we can see the essential matter, [rather] than to lay down orderly roads that lead to that point.” This statement of Balthasar’s from the preface to the final volume of *The Glory of the Lord* is a good reminder of his intellectual approach. Getting straight to the essence of a matter allows Balthasar to apply that newfound perspective, that “whole,” to the various parts or “roads” which point to it (rather than the other way around). Being (trans)fixed on an essential point also allows Balthasar to delve deeper into its meaning. This is why Werner Löser’s assertion that the interpretive key to Balthasar’s theology is his understanding that “Being and love are mutually convertible” is so noteworthy.

---

11 Stefan Oster continues in a line of thinkers who claim rightly that Ferdinand Ulrich (and to a lesser extent Erich Przywara and Gustav Siewerth) was profoundly influential in Balthasar’s understanding of the convertibility of being and love. “According to Balthasar, Ulrich’s philosophy, ‘like every other great creative achievement, moves at its ease in the company of all other great intuitions, precisely as a function of its own inseparable unity: It speaks as immediately with Thomas as it does with Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger. What is more, it has one great advantage over all other ontologies with which I am familiar: It stands in intimate contact with the mysteries of revelation, offers an access to them, and yet never abandons the strictly philosophical domain. In this sense, it abandons the baneful dualism between philosophy and theology, and it does so perhaps more successfully than ever before.’” Stefan Oster, “Thinking Love at the Heart of Things: The Metaphysics of Being as Love in the Work of Ferdinand Ulrich,” *Communio* 37 (2010): 660-1. Oster is quoting a letter of Balthasar’s to Ulrich, written on May 28, 1962.


13 This is not to say that Balthasar relies on an Aristotelian understanding of essence to determine the scope of his inquiries. The “essential matter” for Balthasar is never simply an abstracted essence; it also has to do with the historical bearing of existence.

14 Löser, 476.
Löser supports his claim by selecting various elements in Balthasar’s life and work which appear to convey the former Jesuit’s understanding of being and love. These elements include but are not limited to: Balthasar’s reflection that God’s deed on behalf of man can only be described as love,15 Balthasar’s personal application of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola which allowed him to experience God as sovereign and spontaneous in his love, thus cementing the notion, for Balthasar, that personal creatureliness calls for radical disponability,16 the influence of Hans Eibl who conveyed to Balthasar that being is self-diffusive and good and “therefore self-emerging and self-communicating,”17 and finally the doctrine of the analogy of being which Balthasar adopted with some modification from his former mentor Erich Przywara, S.J.18 As Löser understands it, “The formula of the analogy of Being, insofar as it is primarily a theological statement, means nothing more than the statement of the convertibility of Being and love.”19

While the reasoning that Löser offers here may not be convincing for a systematique

15 Ibid., 476. Cf. GNL, 5.
16 Löser, 480. Disponability or obediential availability is itself understood as love.
17 Ibid., 481.

19 Löser, 482. That the analogy of being is “primarily a theological statement” rests on the fact, according to Balthasar, that Jesus himself realizes the link between creature and Creator in his two natures. Balthasar, Theology of Karl Barth, 55. This implies that the essential form of Christ’s life, i.e. his love, is applicable to both creature and Creator taken analogously.
searching for clearly delineated syllogisms, his larger point appears to be that Balthasar sees God’s absolute love present in the world in a variety of ways, for example, in and through Christ’s life, through religious experience (see the *Spiritual Exercises* above), in the character of goodness which is itself convertible with being, and in creation by analogy since “God proves himself to be efficacious to the world in Christ.” In Balthasar’s own words,

[C]hristianity remains without analogy in the world; it rests not on an “idea” but on a fact—Jesus Christ. . . . On this fact depends whether we can dare to address Being as love and thus whether we can see everything that exists as worthy of love. This is a thought without which the countenance of the world would be scarcely endurable to us.21

It is only . . . in the innermost sanctum of the spirit that the deeper and higher light of the self-disclosing God can shine out of the light of Being. . . . Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty.22

Logically speaking, the truth of Balthasar’s being-love axiom depends not simply on his understanding of the intra-Trinitarian character of love expressed economically in Christ’s complete offering of himself—because the truth that *God is love* has already been emphatically revealed (1 Jn 4:8, 16) while the convertibility of being and love has not—it also depends on Balthasar’s understanding that being (*esse*) is the “most noble, the first and

---

20 Löser, 483.


most proper effect of God.”

For Balthasar, God creates esse “in order to release the essences [essentiae] from himself.”

So even though Balthasar affirms on the one hand that esse is an effect of God and so is not comparable to Him, it is by that same (cause-effect) measure an analogous reflection of the divine nature through which (or whom) all essences are brought into being. This nature, Scripture attests, is love. Just as Balthasar can affirm with the Catholic tradition that truth, beauty, and goodness, as reflected in worldly being, are realizable in the most profound and incomparable way in God, by divine revelation Balthasar can also affirm that love, which for him grounds the transcendentals just noted, must also be classifiable with being since it is identifiable with God. Of course it must be

---


24 Balthasar, Epilogue, 82. These essences would be primarily the transcendentals: beauty, truth, and goodness—behind which love stands.


26 Balthasar notes that the Fathers of the Church saw beauty as a transcendental of being (*GL1*, 38-9), while St. Thomas views beauty in conceptual distinction with the good, viz. in relation to the cognitive faculty (*GL4*, 400). However, Thomas speaks of beauty as a transcendental on at least one occasion, writes Balthasar, in his *Commentary on Dionysius’ De divinis nominibus*. Ibid., 401.


28 The transcendentals, for Balthasar, are the innermost qualities of being as such, in contrast to
emphasized how love is to be understood analogously, for Balthasar, relative to different levels of being: human, divine, inanimate, brute animalia, and so on.

Adrian J. Walker, whose essay “Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal,” corresponds in many ways to the first two chapters of this work, affirms Balthasar’s ontology of love as a proper development of St. Thomas’s “real distinction”.

How can being be said to be convertible with love? As Aquinas himself explains, the ratio entis as such is complex, inasmuch as it reflects the “real distinction” between esse and essence: the name ens, Thomas says, “is taken from the actus essendi,” even as it is the essence “according to which” every ens “is said to be [esse]” (Aquinas, Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate I, 1, c; italics added). By the same token, to understand the ratio entis is not just to grasp a self-contained quiddity, but to co-grasp the act of being that makes it, the quiddity, be denominable as ens in the first place. But this means, in turn, that, intrinsic to the ratio entis, there is a depth that is not in- or sub-determinate, but is rather the “hyper-determinate” (to borrow a term from Kenneth Schmitz) ground of being’s quidditative intelligibility. Balthasar, for his part, calls this inner depth or intrinsic ground of the ratio entis “love,” inasmuch as the creaturely actus essendi that accounts for it is a pure self-diffusion: “created esse itself is a similitude of the divine goodness” (ibid., XXII, 2, ad 2). So much so, in fact that created esse never had any “self” to diffuse in the first place, but is always already “selfless,” viz. Non-subsistent.

There is much to be gained from this explanation, including Balthasar’s insight into the

29 As Nicholas Healy notes, the term “distinctio realis” never actually appears in Aquinas’ work, but it is clear enough that he affirms the distinction by affirming the composition of esse and essence in created things. Healy, Eschatology of HUVB, 28-9. For Healy’s elaboration of the real distinction relative to Balthasar’s metaphysics, see Ibid., 26-53.

reciprocity of being, but it suffices for now to confirm his understanding that God is (self-diffusive) love (1 Jn 4:8, 16) and since “created esse itself is a similitude of the divine goodness,”31 then esse must be a similitude of divine love.32 In this sense Balthasar confirms the convertibility of being and love, not in univocal identity with divine love, but as a “similitude” which is co-extensive with created love. Where there is being there is love and vice versa.

Balthasar’s additional contention that divine beauty radiates the form of Christ’s love is also applicable to this discussion. As noted in Chapter One above, Balthasar sees an identity between divine beauty or glory and love, so much so that when he argues that beauty is a transcendental property of being,33 he is already speaking to his claim that “Being and love are co-extensive.”34 For, “[T]he true depth of divine glory is only manifest as suffering love.”35 If this is true, it stands to reason that creation, insofar as it displays the glory of God,

31 Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, XXII, 2, ad 2, as cited by Walker, “HUVB as a Master,” 533.

32 Walker continues, “Intrinsic to the ratio entis as such is something like a selfless being-given-away that, far from undermining the intelligibility of ens, actually founds it from within. We do not, of course, grasp the actus essendi apart from the concrete ens that “instantiates” it. We grasp it rather only insofar as the concrete ens displays to us its participated share in the richness of the actus essendi. But this display is in turn what the self-diffusion of esse “looks like” when it is “instantiated” in concrete ens as its subsistent supposit. For the concrete ens, which provides the “missing self” for esse’s self-diffusion, is, at the moment it does so, caught up into esse’s dynamic self-diffusion, and so exists in itself only to the extent that it also exists outside of itself, and vice versa, in a reciprocity of ecstasy and enstasy. Insofar as the resulting communion of entia, especially of personal entia, provides the selves required for self-diffusion that, to put it figuratively, created esse wants, but cannot give itself because of its non-subsistence, it is the full display and unfolding of the ratio entis in its character as love. Of course, the communio entium and personarum in its own turn needs the trans-personal universality of created esse in order to be more than a contingent collection of individuals; in order to be just that, a communion of persons that, as such, has ontological weight and value.” Ibid., 533, fn. 29.

33 GLI, 38-9.


simultaneously manifests, in analogical degrees, the gift of eternal love to suffer another, such as a tree which displays integral aspects of its meaning by strengthening the ground around it, providing shade, and/or in being cut down to warm the needy. Thus love is made manifest in the beauty of creation, for Balthasar. Presumably implications can be drawn from the other transcendentals as well.

Finally in this regard, Balthasar speaks of the identity of event and being. The event of God’s love made apparent in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection—a love which redeems the fallen—also serves to ground the existence of the world, according to Balthasar (cf. Col

---

36 One could argue that no tree in the pre-lapsarian state was meant to be cut down for firewood; therefore such an example is not integral to the meaning of treeness. The point here however is simply that every tree in a Balthasarian framework is meant for love or communion. A tree does not fulfill its nature by growing to a beauteous height and bearing fruit as if in a vacuum; it does this, integrally, for others. The particular historical expression of this love is negligible, hence the “or” above, yet in every expression there is a certain dying-to-self incumbent in being for others. For a tree, the “for others” is obviously non-rational, nevertheless, the analogy is applicable.

37 For example, one could say that in acknowledging the truth, which for St. Thomas involves the mind’s conformity to reality (ST, 1, q. 21, a. 2), one simultaneously affirms the being of the present reality and so loves it. Likewise, when we confirm the goodness of something, that the something is fulfilling, proportionate to one’s being, etc., we are simultaneously affirming the creativity of love, which, as Josef Pieper remarks, is essentially the affirmation that “It is good that you exist. . . .” Josef Pieper, Faith, Hope, Love, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 163-72.

38 This position, reflected in Theology of Karl Barth, 91, 116, 364-5, is drawn in contrast to Karl Barth’s understanding that God is (simply) event. Ibid., 63, 87. Cf. Nichols, Divine Fruitfulness, 81.
1:15-20; Rom 1:20). The Word through whom “all things were made” (Jn 1:3) “became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14), thereby establishing a link between the beings of this world and divine love. Being must not then be interpreted merely on the basis of its abstracted essences, for Balthasar, but also in light of the manifestation of concrete things in the course of history. According to Balthasar, this understanding was confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon when the Council Fathers affirmed that being (cf. nature) and event (cf. history) “belong together,” presumably by acknowledging that Christ’s human nature was the necessary means, the *instrumentum*, of historically embodied salvation. What has taken place in Christ’s life as a manifestation of absolute love indicates exactly what is at play in the foundation of created *esse*, Balthasar suggests, for Jesus *is* the eternal Word. Such is why the theologian from Basel can say, again owing to different analogical degrees, that “The subject ‘discovers’ Being only when the subject is discovered by Being.” Just as man discovers himself only in light of a history or event which involves him, a reality which is in a real sense “given” to him and self-disclosing, man finds his identity relative to being, being interpreted as self-communicating love.

Drawing from the above arguments, one can conclude that Balthasar’s theological point of departure is not simply that *God’s revelation* is credible only as love, it is also that


41 Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 81. “The *cogito ergo sum* in which the subject discovers the entire openness of the real in reflexive and free self-possession happens only when the subject is addressed by a reality that manifests itself through phenomenal images. That means that the reality of Being comes about in each case (in both aspects it is the same: as self-recognition through being recognized), not as its own possession, but as something given, bestowed.” Ibid., 81-2.
this love, this freely given, self-abandonment for the sake of communion, (supra) informs the 
intelligible structure of everything that exists. It follows that whatever Balthasar has to say 
about absolute love in his work—its indifference to predisposed desires and aptitudes, its 
other-centeredness, its free playfulness or inherent dynamism, its gift character, its 
fruitfulness, etc.—corresponds in some analogous way to the chair in which you are sitting, 
the grass in the lawn outside, the combustion engine of your car and the effort required to 
drive it from point A to point B without accident, the polyphony of an orchestra, the value of 
shame, and so on. An analysis of each of these matters may be trivial compared to other 
concerns of existence, but the first point of Balthasar’s metaphysics is to realize the radical 
universalism of his claim: love corresponds to every-thing.

It follows paradoxically that everything one can say about being (esse) itself 
necessarily corresponds in some way to the meaning of love. Love should therefore be 
considered for Balthasar inherently active and passive (or receptive), as manifesting its own 
meaning (immanence) while simultaneously pointing beyond itself (transcendence), as 
possessing the “space” to be actualized in the world by “another,” i.e. in a concrete thing (a 
third); its creativity depends on the reciprocal relation of subject and object, and so on.42 
Although Balthasar is not a systematician, each of these points is indicated at different 
 junctures in his work relative to being, which, considering his being-love axiom, logically 
implies a corresponding identification or similitude with love.43

42 Each of these characteristics of being can be identified in the “fourfold difference” which 
Balthasar explicates. See Section II.2 to follow.

43 Although our point here does not consider the relevance of this logic to the identification of 
divine love, it appears the analogy, not univocity of terms, applies here as well.
As mentioned in the previous chapter, Balthasar’s theological enterprise gains a certain credibility and relevance when the current pontiff of the Catholic Church affirms the principles of his thought in his own way. The following statement by Pope Benedict XVI is just such an affirmation of his theological compatriot’s conclusion that being and love are co-extensive:

The “name” of the Most Holy Trinity is in a certain way impressed upon everything that exists, because everything that exists, down to the least particle, is a being in relation, and thus God-relation shines forth, ultimately creative Love shines forth. All comes from love, tends toward love, and is moved by love, naturally, according to different grades of consciousness and freedom. The strongest proof that we are made in the image of the Trinity is this: only love makes us happy, because we live in relation, and we live to love and be loved. Using an analogy suggested by biology, we could say the human “genome” is profoundly imprinted with the Trinity, of God-Love.44

§ II.2 The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference45

Balthasar’s metaphysics finds perhaps its most trenchant expression in the fifth volume of The Glory of the Lord when after more than 600 pages he recalls the critical importance of wonder in philosophy and delineates his now famous “fourfold difference.”46


45 The title of this section is lifted from a section in GL5, 613-27, save for the last word “difference” (Differenz) which is rendered in the English translation as “distinction.” See HK III.1.2, 943. As D.C. Schindler, Jr. explains, it is important not to separate the distinctions, but rather understand with Balthasar that there is one fourfold difference in which the four distinctions are enfolded. “We should therefore try to avoid reading the distinctions as a linear series, one after the other,” writes Schindler. Dramatic Structure of Truth, 35 fn; cf. 31. Notwithstanding the essential unity of the distinctions, I have chosen to explicate the distinctions linearly in order to follow more closely Balthasar’s own work. Their integration is indicated throughout.

46 Editors of the North American edition of Communio: International Catholic Review, including Nicholas J. Healy, David C. Schindler, Jr., and Adrian Walker, have each brought Balthasar’s “fourfold difference” to bear on some aspect of their work. See Walker, “HUVB as a Master of Theological Renewal,”
“Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?” 47 This question pinpoints for Balthasar the axis upon which the proper apprehension of being rests. Before one attempts to describe being one should first ask this question, a question that is never wholly resolved because it is in the nature of being to “cause” wonder, Balthasar contends, to be wonderful. 48

This section attempts an essential summary of the four distinctions which serve to locate the wonder at “the miracle of Being,” for Balthasar, in order to give a framework for further advances he articulates in Christian metaphysics and its correspondence to fundamental moral theology. Even though aspects of these distinctions may appear superfluous to ethics, the relevance of the “fourfold difference” of being should become increasingly apparent as the chapter and the work proceed. Part Two of this dissertation especially indicates the practical relevance of the fourfold difference for ethics as its tenets are personally applied to certain cases.

(a.) First Distinction: In a theme traceable throughout his corpus, Balthasar describes the first encounter one (generally) has with reality by recalling a baby’s apprehension of being through his mother’s loving presence and warmth and, eventually, upon consciousness, her smile. 49

The experience of being granted entrance into a sheltering and encompassing


48 GL5, 613-5.
49 Ibid., 616.
world is one which for all incipient, developing and mature consciousness cannot be superseded. This first experience resonates in the child the idea of “being admitted” to a reality which supersedes him. “I could have not been,” the child intuits, “but I have been admitted.” This original experience is not simply first chronologically, conveys Balthasar, but also archetypically original for all human persons vis-à-vis the source of their being. This original sense of “miracle and play,” as Balthasar also refers to it, which comes in the midst of the loving environment in which a child is first nestled, is meant to be an experience that perdures all through one’s life and so continues to inform the person’s every perception of being as such. As this original experience unfolds, Balthasar relates, the knowledge arises that none of this reality to which I have entered depends simply on my mother or father or any other existent, but it also and more profoundly depends on something beyond these, something transcendent: the mystery of being. Even though Balthasar does not explicitly state it here, this appears to be the basis for his understanding that being is gift, a

---


51 *GL5*, 616. “Eingelassensein.” *HK III.1.2*, 946

52 Ibid., 614.


54 *GL5*, 616.

55 Ibid, 617.

56 See Ibid., 627, 636, 640. “For philosophy begins with the astonished realization that I am this particular individual in being and goes on to see all other existent entities together with me in being; that is, it begins with the sense of wonder that, astonishingly, I am ‘gifted’, the recipient of gifts.” *TD2*, 286. “Wenn die Philosophie mit dem Staunen darüber beginnt, daß ich als dieser Einzelne im Sein bin, und nachfolgend, daß alles übrige Seiende mit mir zusammen im Sein ist, mit der Verwunderung also über ein unfaßliches
transcendent gift which evokes not only wonder, but gratitude.57 Again, this fundamental experience is not meant to leave us, writes Balthasar, and it should find expression in every description of reality as such.58

(b.) Second Distinction:

But in so far as I am one existent among others, in so far as I am Spirit, I understand that all other existents stand in the same relation to Being as I do.59

The primal experience of wonder and gratitude in the presence of the gift of being inevitably leads to two new discoveries: (1) I am not alone among existents, even self-reflective individuals, but rather share in the same reality which supersedes all of us. This means, to use David L. Schindler’s oft repeated phrase, created being is “constitutively related.”60 My

Begabtwordensein. . . .” TDK II.1, 260. Cf. TD2, 285-91; TL3, 225-35. The theme of the gift of being arises again in the third distinction below; which, for Balthasar, includes the first two. See D.C. Schindler’s Dramatic Structure of Truth, 28-95, on “The Gift of Being Given,” and Healy’s Eschatology of HUJB, 53-81 on “Being as Gift.” As Healy states, “The original experience . . . is one of being given to oneself—and given for another—as gift.” “The World as Gift,” Communio 32 (2005): 397. While the “for” aspect does not become clear in Balthasar’s writing until the third distinction, it is no doubt revelatory of the original experience in principio. Cf. Balthasar, Epilogue, 48: “The [original] experience of reality is open to him, and he, too, at the same time is a being open from his very self to the whole” (emphasis added).

57 “[A]dmiring astonishment that does not slacken . . . corresponds to the dominance of the beautiful; while gratitude (that never “gets used to” the gift) corresponds to the dominance of the good.” Epilogue 84. See also Ibid., 61-2; TD2, 290-1. Indeed, Balthasar speaks of an indebtedness to this first experience: “[I] owe the fact of my being in the world” to a “love” which extends beyond my parents and surroundings. GL5, 617. Cf. HK III.1.2, 947. This allows us a reference point for exploring the relation between gift and gratitude in Section III.3 to follow.

58 GL5, 613-5.

59 Ibid., 618. “Als ein Seiendes unter Andern verstehe ich aber nun, sofern ich Geist bin, daß alle übrigen Seienden zum Sein im gleichen Verhältnis stehen wie ich.” HK III.1.2, 948. The translator’s capitalization of “Spirit” is not meant to imply the divine, but rather all spirits taken as a whole.

existence bears in some way upon all others and *vice versa*. (2) There exists a meaning and depth to *being* as such that existents, no matter how constitutively related, cannot exhaust. It is as though the child says, “There must still be something beyond me and my surroundings (beyond others) which continues to move my desire and evoke my wonder at reality which need not have been.”61 This latter point is the reason why David L. Schindler’s son, D.C. Schindler, classifies this distinction as “The difference of Being from beings,”62 though we must not forget the first point regarding the constitutive relation of beings either, as both have an important bearing on fundamental ethics. For instance, concerning the first point, no human act is exempt from influencing all other persons in some way insofar as the act takes on reality or has *being*.63 Balthasar leads us to understand that no “private” moral action is all-together private in the end; it has its influence on all of us.64 Concerning the second point, the transcendent character of being should influence our appropriation of all those beings who share by their very constitution in a mystery and wonderment beyond them. Every being is precious in its own way.

In anticipation of the critical third distinction, Balthasar tells how this wonder at being extends to “both sides of the ontological difference,” meaning it extends to both being

61 This is my own phrasing. Cf. GL5, 619.

62 D.C. Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 39. This is in juxtaposition to the third distinction, which D.C. Schindler concisely considers “The difference of beings from Being.” Ibid., 41.

63 “In reality, every being, every event, has significance, is laden with meaning, and is an expression and a sign pointing to something else.” *TL1*, 103. “Alles Seiende und alles Geschehende hat Bedeutung, ist sinngeladen, ist Ausdruck und Hinweis.” *TLK*, I, 108.

64 This is another way of intimating the effects of sharing in humanity, or the effects of sharing by grace in the Mystical Body of Christ. We were not created in isolation, nor are we redeemed or condemned in isolation, even though each person is judged individually. My virtue in some way affects the Church and humanity, just as do my moral failings.
as such, as noted above, as well as the concrete existents without which being (esse) is a mere abstraction. Balthasar’s point is to highlight not only the dependence of existents on being, but its “antithesis”: “the dependence of being on beings and thus [esse’s] non-substantiality.”

(c.) Third Distinction: The non-subistence of being (esse) means that being has no existence apart from those things that realize it in actuality. Incorporating the first two distinctions within itself, this third distinction Balthasar calls the “Ontological Difference” (Seinsdifferenz) between esse and ens. Being (esse) would remain an abstraction, a concept, only a name, if there were not any really existing things (ens) which “be.” Balthasar comments,

Precisely by virtue of this dependence (which Thomas, Hegel and Heidegger equally see) of Being upon its explication of in the existent (or in the human existent, which is to say man) it is impossible to attribute to Being the responsibility for the essential forms of entities in the world.

---


66 “Esse signicat aliquid completum et simplex, sed non subsistens.” Saint Thomas, De potentia I, I, as cited by Balthasar, Epilogue, 47.

67 GL5, 637; cf. 624-5. HK III.1.2, 965. Balthasar tells how the Ontological Difference is “not far removed from the Thomist distinctio realis [between essence and esse] in its systematic significance.” GL5, 624. “. . . die in ihrer systematischen Tragweite sich nicht wesentlich von der thomistischen distinctio realis entfernt. . . .” HK III.1.2, 954. Interestingly, D.C. Schindler regards the Ontological Difference as the fourfold difference. D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 35. Whereas Balthasar is clear that each latter distinction implies those former, he explicitly refers to the third as the “Ontological Difference” (Seinsdifferenz) and the fourth as the “God-world distinction” (Gott-Welt-Differenz) in the same sentence. GL5, 637. HK III.1.2, 965-6. God is of course subsisting esse, even as his being could be said to contain the “space” to permit receptivity, analogous to the non-subistence of created being.

68 GL5, 619; cf. 621. “Eben kraft dieser Angewiesenheit (die Thomas, Hegel und Heidegger gleicherweise sehen) des Seins auf seine Auslegung im Seinenden (bzw. im Da-seienden, im Menschen) ist es unmöglich, dem Sein die Verantwortung für die Wesensgestalten der Weltwesen zuzulasten.” HK III.1.2, 949.
According to Balthasar, without “the responsibility for the essential forms,” there is an “incomprehensible ‘freedom’ of Being itself, which plays indifferently over all things and is bound to nothing. . . .”69 The common theme of Christian or Ignatian indifference in Balthasar’s works finds an articulation here at the root of being, which is to say that he does not see indifference as a mere moral attitude which should precede the choice between limited goods. Rather, Balthasar identifies an absence or nihilism in being itself (esse commune),70 which is in a way held in ready to be realized by concrete things,71 hence its characteristic “indifference.”72 All “planning,” according to Balthasar, is on the side of the existent upon which lies the responsibility to realize or “shepherd” the form of its existence.73 Being contains an infinite “space,” if you will, for the human and cosmic

69 Ibid., 622. “. . . an nichts gebundene ‘Freiheit’ des Seins selbst damit noch keineswegs gekennzeichnet. . . .” HK III.1.2, 952.

70 GL5, 618. Cf. GL4, 404, 407. Although this is certainly not St. Thomas’s language, confirming as John Wippel does that esse commune is itself a logical category for Thomas (Wippel, 102, 111, 121, et al.), and that each created being (ens) is distinct from esse “in the way something concrete participates in something abstract,” (Wippel, 100), clearly indicates that esse commune is for Thomas a mere abstraction without existents in which it inheres. See Wippel, 107-8 for a discussion of the perfecting quality of existence over and above abstracted form. Cf. Armand Maurer, Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 99. For Thomas, “[E]verything composed of matter and form owes its perfection and goodness to its form. . . .” ST, I, q. 3, a. 2, and yet “[E]xistence [esse] is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing.” ST, I, q. 3, a. 4.

71 This is meant to imply a teleological priority of esse commune to entia, not a chronological one. The former Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger made a similar distinction in his debate with Walter Cardinal Kasper regarding the universal and the particular Church after being criticized by Kasper for first suggesting an ontological priority to the universal, when, in fact, there can be no universal without the particular. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church,” America, November 19, 2001, 10 and Walter Cardinal Kasper, “On the Church,” America, April 23-30, 2001, 13.


73 Ibid., 619, 627. “Planung” and “Hirt.” HK III.1.2, 949, 956. Balthasar’s language here is metaphorical; it is not meant to imply that all creatures have the freedom necessary to plan and shepherd, and yet there is for him also an analogous sense in which all creatures perform such activities through the expression (symbolism) of their historical being and movement.
response, according to Balthasar, even as its unlimited depth always presents itself as “more” (which makes it “free” and “indifferent”) than the conglomeration of existents could possibly realize.\footnote{GL5, 618-19, 622.} This “more” indicates, in turn, being’s inherent abundance or, for Balthasar, its \textit{glory}.\footnote{Ibid.}

\[\text{[I]n the same distance of letting be [see Indifferenz], Being can appear to us in its glory, for which the relation of expression is now only an image (although the most important one), in a glory which excels in a mysterious elevation all the beauty and order of the actual world, although the latter is equally a reflection and an indication of it; possessing a value so infinite and so fundamentally unsurpassable (capable at most of being unfolded) that all lordly ‘power’ (in the victory over the impotence of what is only possible), all light (in the victory over the darkness of nothingness), all ‘grace’ (in the infinite gift of participation) are gathered in it.}\footnote{\textit{HK III.1.2}, 952-3.} \footnote{Ibid., 623. “[I]m gleichen Abstand des Seinlassens kann uns das Sein auch in seiner Herrlichkeit aufgehen, für die das Ausdrucksverhältnis nur noch ein Gleichnis, obzwar das wichtigste, ist, in einer Herrlichkeit, die alle Schönheit und Ordnung der wirklichen Welt geheimnisvoll erhaben überragt, ob diese gleich ein Abstrahl und Hinweis auf sie ist; eines Wertes so unendlich und so grundsätzlich unübertreffbar (höchstens enfaltbar), daß darin alle herrschaftliche ‘Macht’ (im Sieg über die Ohnmacht des Nur-möglichen, alles ‘Licht’ (im Sieg über die Finsternis des Nichts), alle ‘Gnade’ (in unendlichem Teil-gewähren) versammelt sind.”}

Drawing these strands of thought together, one can conclude that Balthasar conveys in his third distinction of the miracle of being two essential marks: \textit{mutual dependence} and \textit{infinite glory}.\footnote{The glory of being is “infinite,” not because creation is infinite, but because the glory of being forever exceeds the capacity to exhaust it by means of its component parts. No matter how many existents, there will always be “more” to being.} Both of these characteristics of being logically depend on Balthasar’s understanding that the real distinction between \textit{esse} and essence becomes applicable metaphysically as the ontological difference between \textit{esse} and \textit{ens}, since essence is only
known in *ens*, i.e. in a concrete thing. This allows Balthasar to posit being’s non-subsistence, itself the metaphysical basis for the mutual dependence and infinite glory of being. Let us consider these essential marks.

*Mutual dependence:* For all of its grandeur, being (*esse*) is dependent on existents for its realization just as they depend on it to exist. This means that form, act, essence, and nature are all realized in existence by depending in some way on their *reception.* Receptivity (or *reciprocity* since the dependence goes both ways) is thus integral to the realization of being and creativity, for Balthasar, and it therefore holds a necessary and crucially important place in his metaphysics and fundamental moral theology. As with the mark of indifference in being, mentioned above, Balthasar’s frequent appeal to disponability, obedience, or Marian receptivity (taken as one) in his theology, finds here an expression at the root of being. Receptivity is therefore not a mere religious ideal for him but it is rather what enables one’s being to be realized according to its own structure or *logos.* It is not an ideal patterned simply off of God’s own reception as seen in Christ’s relation to his heavenly

---

78 See *GL5*, 624. Further elaboration on the ontological difference relative to Thomas’s real distinction may be garnered from Balthasar’s *GL4*, 393-407 and *Epilogue*, 47-50.

79 Of course St. Thomas had recognized being’s non-subsistence centuries before.

80 Being is the “actualizing support of natures.” *GL4*, 402-3. “. . . es das die Naturen unterfassend Durchwirklichende ist. . . .” *HK III.1.1*, 362

81 This becomes the lodestar for David L. Schindler’s claim that pure act contains within itself receptivity. See his “Norris Clark on Person.” For Schindler, receptivity is not a “second” or derivative act within God, but rather part in parcel of how pure act is to be understood in the first place. See Healy’s *Eschatology of HVB*, 72-6 for a good summary of the Schindler-Clarke debate. Considered theologically, being images the eternal love of God as Trinitarian and circumincessive. The Father anticipates the Son’s response in the very giving of himself and in this way expresses his own reciprocity.

Father, it is also rooted in being itself and is therefore an integral aspect of the realization and creativity of existents of any kind, but especially freely responding human persons.

*Infinite Glory:* On the other hand, being exceeds its parts, its existents, thereby causing wonder in the beholder as it shines forth as “power,” “light,” and “grace” or *gift.*

This too allows Balthasar to speak of being’s “freedom” and “indifference,” its “abundance” and “glory,” for even though it is realized in concrete things, *esse* can never wholly be captured. Because of being’s transcendent character, Balthasar is emphatic that worldly beauty not be confused with divine glory, yet even here an analogy is applicable. Because worldly being shares in *ipsum esse,* it reflects the divine glory at the source of reality. This is to say that, for Balthasar, the mystery of being is both infinite and discernible

---

83 A recent article by Michael Maria Waldstein, itself a response to David L. Schindler’s critique of his position in the article “The Embodied Person as Gift,” seems to beg the question whether beings of any kind are constitutively related, or rather just persons as “proper accidents” of their own essential constitution. See Waldstein, “Constitutive Relations: A Response to David L. Schindler,” *Communio* 37 (2010): 496-517, esp. 506-08. It would seem that Waldstein could benefit from further reflection on Balthasar’s “ontological difference” to understand Schindler’s position, irrespective of who is correct in the final analysis.

84 *GL5,* 623. “Macht,” “Licht,” and “Gnade.” *HK* III.1.2, 953. In a way, this is nothing more or less than a reiteration and deepening of the second point, discussed above, under the second distinction: being is greater than its existents.

85 Balthasar’s aesthetics is explicitly theological in character.

86 “Within this world, ‘expression’ remains a category of the ‘beautiful’ whose radiance and charm easily brings the word ‘glorious’ (*herrlich*) to our lips, but which can only inauthentically lay claim to the sense of ‘lordship’ (*herrschaftlich*) and ‘majesty’ (*ehr*) which inhere within it: in as much, that is, as the ‘ground’ of a living entity—be it a plant, animal or person—is always ‘more’ than what is projected on to the phenomenal surface, and this mysterious More can also be read in a mysterious manner from that surface, most supremely in the free spiritual being which, in expressing itself, remains the sovereign capacity (mendaciously) to conceal itself all the while.” *GL5,* 622. “‘Ausdruck’ bleibt inner weltlich eine Kategorie des ‘Schönen’, dessen Strahlkraft und Zaubermacht uns leicht das Wort ‘herrlich’ auf die Lippen legt, das aber das darin wesende ‘Herrschaftliche’ und ‘Hehre’ doch nur in uneigentlichem Sinne beanspruchen kann: sofern nämlich der ‘Grund’ eines lebenden Wesens – sie es Pflanze, Tier oder Mensch – immer ‘mehr’ ist, als was in die Erscheinungsfläche sich projiziert, und dieses geheimnisvolle Mehr auch geheimnisvoll an der Fläche mitabesbar wird, zumeist im freien geistigen Wesen, das, sich ausdrückend, souverän bleibt, sich dabei (lügen) zu verdecken.” *HK* III.1.2, 952.
by analogy in concrete things. “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). If this sounds much like the second point of the second distinction, noted above, that is because the third distinction contains the second (and first) within itself, for Balthasar; here we are looking at the same reality with deeper insight after considering the heightened value of concrete beings in their reception, a fact, according to Balthasar, which does not mitigate the value of being as such, but rather reveals its glory more emphatically.87

As this chapter and dissertation proceed, this inexhaustible mystery and glory of being, realized in some way all through reality, will be shown to provide a path upon which the moral theologian learns to see and thus respect more deeply the givenness of reality in all of its parts. False stewardship and/or the manipulation of reality through technological means becomes less appealing, at least in principle, under such a rubric of reverence for creation.

(d.) Fourth Distinction:

[T]he freedom of non-subsisting Being can be secured in its ‘glory’ in the face of all that exists only if it is grounded in a subsisting freedom of absolute Being, which is God. . . .88

Eventually the human subject comes to know that his existence and that of others cannot be

87 To collapse the distinction between esse and ens, Balthasar argues, would lead straightaway to the loss of glory as a metaphysical category. GL5, 621.

derived from the non-subsistent existence in which he and they participate, because the “responsible generation of forms” necessitates a subsistent, “conscious and free spirit” who can determine things freely. 89 This is how Balthasar comes, in philosophical categories, to God himself.

The dependence of being illustrated in Balthasar’s third distinction becomes discernible in his fourth distinction as the dependence of creatures on their Creator. 90 Creation itself indicates how existents reflect, as trace or image, God’s “ultimate freedom” to constitute things which need not have been. 91 Thus the wonder of the child in the face of being goes still deeper here as the child contemplates not simply his “admittance” to being and his dependence thereon, but also his own freedom, albeit limited and subservient, to constitute himself relative to his Creator. This is another way of indicating how being is inclusive of love, according to Balthasar, for without the freedom to wonder, listen, obey, create, and “play” in the space or non-identity between being (esse) and existent (ens), 92 and again between God and creature, there could be no giving and receiving, there could be no love.93 Indeed, in this fourth distinction one returns, at least in principle, to the discussion

---

89 GL5, 624. “[W]eil verantwortendes Auszeugen von Formen selbstbewußten freien Geist voraussetzen würde.” HK, III.1.2, 954. Balthasar does not mention how we know that the generation of forms is done responsibly instead of randomly as certain theories of evolution would attest. Perhaps he believes the child naturally intuits this from perceiving the various perfections of the world of being, and the idea that this could all instead be chance actually comes much later, most likely through exposure to false philosophies.

90 See GL5, 626.

91 Ibid., 625. “letzte Freiheit” HK, III.1.2, 954.

92 “Play,” we recall, is integral to the original experience for Balthasar. GL5, 617. “Dasein als Spiel.” HK, III.1.2, 947.

93 The paradox of being relative to existent and God relative to world preserves “space for love and also for that all-grounding awe which characterizes above all the love of the founders: Benedict, Francis and Ignatius… [Love] also permeates the first ontological attempts to construe Being and the existent itself as
One’s gaze must seek to penetrate beyond the Ontological Difference (which is not far removed from the Thomist *distinctio realis* in its systematic significance) to the distinction between God and the world, in which God is the sole sufficient ground for both Being and the existent in its possession of *form* [italics added].

Balthasar is intimating that it is God himself, which gives “supra” *form* to existents and therefore the cosmos in all of its parts. The form perceived in existents, described in Chapter One as Christ’s self-abandoning, triune-love for the sake of communion, is intelligent (or ordered intelligibly toward its fruition) and free, insofar as it “consents” on analogical levels to its own intelligible order of love.

The fundamental metaphysical act is love within the Ontological Difference (that is, the third distinction, which includes the first two within itself); the fundamental Christian act is love within the God-world distinction (that is, the fourth, which contains the first three within itself); in each case love means here the total human act which comprehends the totality of mind and body and, in particular, percipient intelligence. As metaphysical intelligence, it perceives the relations of the existent and Being which defies formulation and, as Christian intelligence, it perceives God’s free word of absolute love which

---

94 GL5, 624. “Durch die ontologische Differenez (die in ihrer systematischen Tragweite sich nicht wesentlich von der thomistischen distinctio realis entfernt) muß der Blick durchzudringen suchen auf die Differenz zwischen Gott und Welt, worin Gott der einzig zureichende Grund sowohl für das Sein wie für das Seiende in seiner Gestalthaftigkeit ist.” HK, III.1.2, 954.

95 The understanding of “consent” (*consensus*) as precisely that which frees is taken from Balthasar’s discussion of infinite and finite freedom in St. Bernard’s work. TD2, 231.
utters itself as a medium [dramatic structure, form] within this relation.  

In both the fundamental metaphysical act of love and the fundamental Christian act of love, as Balthasar describes them, love is that which draws on the intelligence of the human knower to gaze in wonder and reverence on a mystery which supersedes him.

Finally with respect to the fourth distinction, Balthasar describes how

God-given Being is both fullness and poverty at the same time: fullness as Being without limit, poverty modeled ultimately on God himself, because He knows no holding onto Himself, poverty in the act of Being which is given out, which as gift, delivers itself without defense (because here too it does not hold on to itself) to the finite entities. But equally the created entities are simultaneously fullness and poverty: fullness in the power to shelter and to tend (as ‘shepherd of Being’) the gift of the fullness of Being within themselves, however poor they may be on account of their own limitations. . . .

Because the glory of being, which of course reflects the glory of God, shines out beyond the existents in which it inheres, Balthasar can describe what was previously designated as simply “more” or “abundance,” as “fullness” with respect to the subsistent Godhead.

---

96 GL5, 637. “Der metaphysische Grundakt ist die Liebe innerhalb der Seinsdifferenz (also der dritten, die beiden ersten in sich schließenden Differenz); der christliche Grundakt ist die Liebe innerhalb der Gott-Welt-Differenz (also der vierten, die drei ersten in sich schließenden Differenz): Liebe bedeutet hier jedesmal den totalen Mensch-Akt, der sowohl die geistliehle Ganzheit wie insbesondere die vernehmende Vernunft in sich schließt. Als metaphysische Vernunft vernimmt sie das unformulierbare Verhältnis des Seienden und des Seins, als christliche Vernunft das in diesem Verhältnis als Medium sich aussprechende freie Gotteswort absoluter Liebe.” HK III.1.2, 965-6.


98 “(Being without this fullness is inconceivable; it would be only spectrally present in the first beginnings of thought), and yet this fullness can unfold absolutely only once: in God.” GL5, 626. “(Sein ohne
Paradoxically, this fullness is also “poor,” according to Balthasar, insofar as God gives of himself freely to the point of having held nothing back for Himself. God is fully subsistent and yet, insofar as he allows for the dynamism of existents in their freedom to share in his being by analogy and in his nature by grace, he is also poor.

In summary, it may be useful mnemonically to introduce Balthasar’s “fourfold difference” in the following manner: 1. I realize by my mother’s presence and smile that I am loved into being, that I am a gift, that I need not be. This original experience evokes a wonder that never dies. 2. In recognizing the world around me, I induce that others too must be gifts, that reality itself need not be but is. Being is glorious. 3. For all the wonderment of this reality beyond me, I realize that existence requires me and other things to substantiate it. In other words, no matter how wondrous being is in itself, it is open to and anticipates the response of the smallest entity. 4. I come to realize that this entire dynamic is grounded in God who as first cause freely determines being at every level.

Theologically explained, in and through the Father’s constituting of his Son he makes himself vulnerable and open to the Son’s loving response. In the Father’s constituting, he’s always-already making “space” for the Son in the Spirit. The logic of love as vulnerable and “poor,” as admitting “space,” is realizable in some way in the Trinity as a dynamism without

---

99 *GL5*, 627. “Armut” *HK III.1.2, 956*. The best indication of this occurs concretely in Christ’s human existence. Even here, however, there is an analogy applicable in the Godhead. The Father’s fullness exhibits “poverty” insofar as he allows for his Son’s response in the Spirit to determine in some way the meaning of his Fatherhood.

100 *GL5*, 626-7. One important theological expression of this is Christ’s divinity (fullness) vis-à-vis his human poverty.
change but also, according to Balthasar, in every aspect of created being; the space which difference provides is precisely, for Balthasar, what leads to the fruitfulness of a loving response.

“The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference,” the meaning of which extends beyond the section which bears its title in the fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord* to the theological analysis of the same in the proceeding sections “The Light of Being and Love” and “The Christian Contribution to Metaphysics,” signifies Balthasar’s earlier contention that the mystery of being is

> a mystery which in its nothingness and non-subsistence is shot through with the light of freedom of the creative principle, of unfathomable love.101

The unfathomable love which Balthasar identifies as the “creative principle” is surely, for him, the same love which Christ manifested in his earthly life, a love creative and fruitful in its very capacity to surrender itself for the sake of others. On the level of creaturely being (*esse*), then, the creative principle must be both giving, from its fullness, and receiving, from its poverty to let the thing itself (*ens*) participate in its own constitution. Of course all of this becomes clearer with a view to freely determining persons, but the principal point, for Balthasar, is that this giving and receiving (in surrender and creativity) occurs at all levels of being. What persons realize through loving action appeals to their very constitution as human *beings*.

---

§ II.3 The Polarity of Being: Nuptiality and Fruitfulness

Drawing especially from the work of Matthias Scheeben whom he considered “the greatest German theologian to-date since the time of Romanticism,” and St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, Balthasar employs nuptial imagery in his understanding of being and action. John O’Donnell contends that

sexual imagery is so important for Balthasar that he even says that the Church must avoid everything masculine (grasping, active, determining) in its relationship to God and to Christ, otherwise it falls into a type of homosexuality which perverts the fundamental nature of the God-man relationship.

The “masculine” character of “grasping, active, determining” as it relates to particular moral cases will be treated in Part Two of the present work; here it suffices to note that the nuptial relation of man and woman represents an analogue for Balthasar that provides a glimpse at both the triune God and its “most noble, the first and most proper effect,” that is, being as such.

[I]n the love between human beings a mystery already operative at the origin is foreshadowed, because the loving persons (in whom the all-encompassing Being of reality prevails) never close themselves off from one another. On the

---


104 O’Donnell, “The Form of His Theology,” 470. No citation from Balthasar’s work is given in O’Donnell’s text but he is no doubt drawing here from Balthasar’s essay, “A Word on ‘Humanae Vitae’.”

105 GL4, 404. “. . . es das Edelste ist, die erste und eigentlichschte Wirkung Gottes. . . .” HK III.1.1, 363.
contrary, they are open to the original mystery of Being in their (always conditioned) fruitfulness. The fruitfulness they share, rooted in nature (as when a child is conceived) indeed remains an important but still limited parable of this fruitfulness of love, which at the most archetypal level must have some inexpressible analogue within the divine identity.  

In general terms, the nuptial relation of man and woman represents for Balthasar two poles—an active donor and a receiver—which converge in their union and fruitfulness while retaining their singular irreducibility. In more subtle terms, however, even the active donor contains within himself the “space” which anticipates a response, thereby rendering him always-already receptive vis-à-vis the woman, not to mention vis-à-vis his Creator who constitutes him as a creature in the first place. The woman, for her part, is also active in her receptivity. She actively cooperates in the creation of the bond with her husband as well as in the fruitfulness of any children they may have, but this she does as a woman, as the constitutive receiver in the realization of their one flesh union. In short, the polarity which Balthasar finds between man and woman first proceeds from within each individual person. Balthasar indicates that this logic of polarity or asymmetry in union is not in the least reserved for man and woman either, but rather exemplifies what love is at its structural level—at the level of beings in relation to one another and, more fundamentally, within themselves (as created by Another).

The following citations from the Swiss theologian should set in relief his proclivity to see a mysterious and dynamic polarity in created being:

106 Balthasar, Epilogue, 47.
107 On the “space” for both subjects and objects, see Balthasar, Romano Guardini, 34.
108 On the “unity of opposites” in the created world, see Ibid., 28, 34.
Polarity means that the poles, even as they are in tension, exist strictly through each other. This is probably nowhere more conspicuous than in the polarity between essence and existence in finite being. The two poles cohere in an intimate unity that constitutes the irresolvable mystery of created being.109

Within this world, unity is only visible as the “fluidity of love”, as the inconclusive, incomprehensible convergence of opposites.110

In the world there is always a polarity . . . that binds active and passive together and forces both of them into a reciprocal giving and taking. . . . [T]his inner movement is the underlying rhythm of being in the world and is therefore also the precise place where God is present, where his incomprehensible otherness appears.111

Notice that a number of important themes emerge from Balthasar’s exposition of the interiority of created being which center on the same point, described in different ways: (1) intrinsic polarity as (2) reciprocal giving and taking (receiving) between active and passive elements within the same subject of being as (3) God’s place and therefore love’s place interior to (immanence) each subject of being simultaneous with God’s incomprehensible otherness beyond (transcendence) the same concrete being.112 Being has within itself, for Balthasar, the dramatic space for the reception of itself as a gift and the expression of itself as a gift for others.113 Thus when being becomes realized in a concrete something, when it subsists in God or in something created, it retains its immanent character as a communal

---


110 Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 86.

111 Ibid., 87.

112 Ibid., 81-91.

113 That every being expresses itself in beauty, see GL5, 622.
exchange of love. This occurs by analogy in the world, man, and God, because the analogy of being is, for Balthasar, also an analogy of love.\textsuperscript{114}

The polarity intrinsic to being has further implications for the human person, according to Balthasar. Once one admits of “the inconclusive, incomprehensible convergence of opposites,”\textsuperscript{115} in created being, such as activity-passivity, giving-receiving, and immanence-transcendence, one can recognize with Balthasar that the space opened up by infinite freedom for finite freedom’s loving response reveals that every value contains its opposite within itself.\textsuperscript{116} Poverty becomes rich in consent, virginity is nuptial in consent, obedience is freeing, mercy is just,\textsuperscript{117} and one’s disposability to \textit{whatever} God wills, which Christ manifests especially when the beauty of his form reaches “formlessness” (\textit{Ungestalt}) on the Cross, is precisely when God’s glory can manifest itself all the more.\textsuperscript{118}

Love is indeed the creative principle of the mystery of being, for Balthasar, insofar as God, who is love, communicates himself creatively through being as both presence and absence, as both fullness and poverty, as noted above. In terms of fundamental ethics, one

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Joseph Palakeel, drawing from M. Lochbrunner, makes this case in \textit{The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective} (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1995), esp. 110-1.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Balthasar, \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{116} “[W]hen Being is confronted as love the threat which infinity poses to finitude vanishes.” \textit{GLI}, 159. “[I]n der Begegnung des Seins als Liebe die Bedrohung der Endlichkeit durch das Unendliche geschwunden ist.” \textit{HK I}, 152.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Pope John Paul II expounded beautifully on this intrinsic polarity in his 1980 encyclical, \textit{Dives in misericordia}. To cite one example, “[J]ustice is based on love, flows from it, and tends towards it.” Encyclical letter on the rich mercy of God, Vatican Website, November 30, 1980, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia_en.html, sec. 7. Mercy and love are identified throughout the encyclical.
\item \textsuperscript{118} \textit{GLI}, 16. \textit{HK III.1.1}, 18.
\end{itemize}
should note that it is only through this “poverty” of being that existents can be created, for Balthasar, that a certain “fullness” or perfection in the composite being can obtain. Hence the reciprocity of being (esse) implies that creativity, which Balthasar otherwise describes as “fruitfulness,” only comes about morally in the paradoxical surrender of one’s claims in order to “make space” for the other to respond in freedom and love. The power which comes in powerlessness, as David L. Schindler describes it, is not simply for Balthasar a theological datum manifested archetypically in Mary’s humble assent to the angel’s annunciation; it finds its source at the root of being.

A fundamental moral implication of Balthasar’s reasoning here is that true creativity or fruitfulness comes about in all cultural and societal forums such as the human family and international peace making efforts, only through one’s presence and activities which simultaneously imbibe a spirit of poverty, the handing over of one’s prerogatives in order to witness to and realize the love which transcends both parties and, in some way, already binds


121 Balthasar alludes to these efforts in a passage in “Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,” in Liberation Theology in Latin America, trans. Erasmus Leiva, ed. James v. Schall, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 146, as cited by Stratford Caldecott, “The Social Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” Catholic Social Science Review 5 (2000): 185-6: “Today more than ever competent Christians should become active in the social, economic and political sectors of society, where one necessarily confronts hard contradictions and struggles, and where compromise always represents the best solution. . . . The evangelical ‘peacemaker’ has to set up shop precisely between employers and employees, political factions and economic interest groups. Only by the—dramatic!—collaboration of all will the structures be ‘converted’ from their ‘sinfulness’ and changed more effectively than by violent overthrows or brutal nationalizations behind which there are very often goals sought in utopian and unrealistic fashion.”
them together as creatures.  This surrender occurs not precisely or simply for the other, who after all may not know how to (or cannot) fashion a creative response, but for the Other, for the source and determinate of being who fashions in them an in-spiration of his creative, self-abandoning love while first accepting the free (non-determined) response of human surrender. The claim here, to echo Balthasar’s thought, is that which Jesus modeled in his loving surrender to his Father in the Spirit is a love analogous to that which pervades all creative expressions of beauty, goodness, and truth. “Surrender creates new beings. . . .” (original emphasis), writes Balthasar. Such is how the surrender of consecrated virgins, Balthasar contends, is not only fruitful spiritually, “but, following the example of Christ, also physical[ly].”

122 “In the end, difference, the “other than myself,” is always already overtaken by a third element within which I am able to note its otherness in the first place. Contraries, in fact, are not indifferent, but are always different for one another.” Balthasar, TL2, 33 (original text), as translated by D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 238. Cf. Adrian Walker’s translation in TL2, 35. “Im Realen ist die Differenz, das ‘Andere meiner selbst’ immer schon von einem Dritten überholt, innerhalb dessen ich dieses Anderssein allererst festellen kann. Die Gegensätze sind ja nicht indifferent, sondern je für einander anders.” TLK, II, 33. To clarify, describing something as different from something else presupposes there is some commonality between them from which they can differ in the first place, be it masculinity or femininity, human nature, or even simply created being. This other than ourselves is the “third element” which transcends both parties and orients their constitution and fruition. I become more fully myself as a man, for example, by becoming more manly. Because love is co-extensive with being, for Balthasar, he can convey that every difference presupposes the commonality of love, created and sustained by God as an outpouring of himself, to which all beings are likewise oriented.


124 Cf. TLI, 9.

125 Balthasar, Epilogue, 109. In his commentary on St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Balthasar came to see more deeply how strength of another kind proceeds from weakness. Two Sisters in the Spirit, 272.

126 Ibid., 110. This is evidently why such lives of surrender in the face of fateful opposition, such as Mahatma Gandhi’s and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, not to mention the lives of Jesus and the saints, actually bears fruit in the practical work-a-day world: peace is ushered in and numerous peoples take on a more magnanimous spirit of virtue as they become followers in the cause of freedom and love. Concerning the self-surrendering life of Jesus in particular, “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the
What has been described above becomes still clearer when one considers Balthasar’s account of the personal subject’s role in ascertaining the knowledge of a thing (object).127

[T]he raison d’être of knowledge has nothing to do with 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 in knowledge. Nor is striving for the satisfaction of the urge to know (*appetitus naturalis*) 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*]. And the second follows from the first: Self-abandonment opens up more of the world and reaps a richer harvest of truth than self-interest, because the self-interested only hear what they want to hear, not what in fact is and is true.128

Service or self-abandonment is foundational for the proper acquisition of knowledge, according to Balthasar, and not just that—the subject and object poles are oriented by this service to something beyond them, namely the revelation of truth. Even the object has something to give in this relationship toward the realization (fruitfulness) of a third thing, just deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them” (Lk 7:22; cf. Mt 11:5).


128 *TLI*, 70-1. “[D]er Sinn der Erkenntnis nichts zu tun hat mit einem Willen zur Macht. Denn schöpferisch wird der subjektive Auftrag nur dann sein, wenn er ein Ausfluß der primären Erkenntnishaltung bleibt, die dem Subjekt kraft seiner rezeptiven Natur aufgezwungen ist: der dienenden Bereitschaft zur Wahrheit. Nicht Beherrschung, sondern Dienst ist in der Erkenntnis das erste. Auch nicht das Streben nach der eigenen Befriedigung des Erkenntnisdranges (appetitus naturalis); denn dieser erwacht erst, nachdem die aufnehmende Funktion mit der interesselosen Darstellung fremder Wahrheit begonnen hat. Die erste Lektion, die das Dasein dem Subjekt erteilt, ist die der Hingabe, nicht der interessierten Bemächtigung, und die zweite folgt dieser ersten: daß Hingabe dem Subjekt mehr Welt eröffnet und mehr Wahrheit einbringt, als jede interessierte Haltung, in der man doch nur das vernimmt, was man selber gerne hört, und nicht das, was an sich ist und wahr ist.” *TLK*, I, 68-9. “[T]he 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.” *TLI*, 76. “Die Grundhaltung des erkennenden Subjekts kann demnach keine andere sein als die phänomenologisch geforderte einer vollen, indifferenter Aufnahmebereitschaft, die zunächst nichts anderes wünscht, als das Phänomen so rein wie möglich aufzunehmen und zu reproduzieren.” *TLK*, I, 74.
as the subject, in its own interior polarity, must remain true to its receptive nature.\(^{129}\)

Balthasar comments:

The subject has made the interiority of its perception available as a medium in which the object can unfold and display itself—in a way that would have been impossible to the object in itself alone. Nor is this all: the subject has offered the object its inmost spiritual sphere, that is to say, its most personal center, as a tool by means of which the object can not only display itself sensibly but also make itself intelligible in doing so.\(^{130}\)

The object in a way depends on the subject to reveal itself, to make itself known, even as the subject needs the object to know anything at all and discover the truth within and beyond it.

The subject is not a mere vessel or empty space; it too has intelligibility.

A subject, as a personal, free, and sovereign interiority, is far from being a mere *tabula rasa* on which one can ascribe whatever happens to come to mind. The fact is that this *tabula* is made of the most precious material in the world: spirit. Every impression left on it can have unforeseeable consequences that may affect even its personal life; it is impossible to touch the sensorium of a knowing subject without simultaneously touching its personal, spiritual core, because the existence of this sensorium is surrounded on all sides by this core.\(^{131}\)

Regarding our earlier discussion, Balthasar conveys here that both object and subject have

\(^{129}\) See *TL1*, 76.

\(^{130}\) *TL1*, 76. "Denn nicht nur hat das Subjekt dem Objekt seine inner Sphäre der Anschauung zur Verfügung gestellt, um sich darin auszubreiten und darzustellen – so darzustellen, wie es das Objekt in sich selber nicht vermocht hätte – es hat ihm weiterhin, um in dieser Darstellung auch verständlich zu werden, seine innerste Geistsphäre, sein Persönlichstes also, werkzeuglich dargeboten.” *TLK, I*, 75.

\(^{131}\) *TL1*, 76-7. “Ein Subjekt ist, als ein pesonaler, freier und souveräner Innenraum, weit entfernt, eine bloße “leere Tafel” zu sein, auf der man nach Belieben einschreiben kann, was einem einfällt. Diese Tafel besteht aus dem kostbarsten Material, das die Welt kennt: aus Geist. Jeder Eindruck, den man in ihm hinterläßt, kann unabsehbare Folgen in sein inneres persönliches Leben hinein haben, denn man kann an die Sinnlichkeit eines erkennenden Subjekts nicht rühren, ohne zugleich bis an seinen personalen, geistigen Kern, in dessen Sphäre seine Sinnlichkeit steht, heranzugelangen.” *TLK, I*, 75.
intelligibilities irreducibly their own and yet dependent on one another to come to fruition outside of themselves in truth, that is, in a third. This speaks to Balthasar’s understanding of nuptiality and fruitfulness at the heart of reality. In terms of ethics, including bioethics, the only manner of appropriating reality consistent with Balthasar’s logic here would be the attitude of service—not just to one’s neighbor, but to all of reality in its component parts, e.g. stem cells, the environment, the organization of one’s living room, etc.

Indeed, the paradoxical or nuptial paradigm which calls both parties beyond themselves to a “third,” finds a number of analogous expressions in Balthasar’s work owing to its universal claim on reality. It is present for him in the relation between esse and ens, between God and the world, between husband and wife (of course), between God and Israel,

132 See TL1, 76 and circa. Balthasar elaborates, “Neither ‘identity’ nor pure ‘difference’ can . . . express the structure of real worldly being. A logic constructed on the basis of such propositions (A = A; A ≠ B) is an abstract residue of the actual constitution of this being, and in that respect is at best a secondary aid to avoid missing within this relation the absolute demand for decision. In the end, difference, the ‘other than myself,’ is always already overtaken by a third element within which I am able to note its otherness in the first place. Contraries, in fact, are not indifferent, but are always different for one another.” TLK II, 33, as translated by D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 238. Cf. Adrian Walker’s translation in TL2, 35. “Weder ‘Identität’ noch bloß ‘Differenz’, so hat Blondel gezeigt, können die Struktur des realen Weltseins ausdrücken. Eine auf diesen Sätzen (A = A; A ≠ B) aufgebaute Logik ist ein abstraktes Restprodukt seiner wirklichen Verfaßtheit, und darin höchstens ein in seiner Stringenz sekundäres Hilfsmittel, um innerhalb des Relativen die unbedingte Entscheidungsforderung nicht zu verfehlen. Im Realen ist die Differenz, das ‘Andere meiner selbst’ immer schon von einem Dritten überholt, innerhalb dessen ich dieses Anderssein allererst festellen kann. Die Gegensätze sind ja nicht indifferent, sondern je füreinander anders.” TLK, I, 292.

133 “The attitude of service is unconditionally primary in all knowledge—so much so that whoever cannot muster up the indifference and the readiness to receive and conceive the object as it wishes to show and give itself lacks the most elementary prerequisite for objective knowledge.” TL1, 256. “Die Haltung des Dienstes ist so sehr die unbedingt erste in aller Erkenntnis, daß, wer die Indifferenz und die Bereitschaft nicht aufbringt, das Objekt so zu empfängen und aufzufassen, wie es sich selber zu geben und anzuzeigen wünscht, der elementarsten Voraussetzung subjektiver Erkenntnis ermagelt.” TLK, I, 292. The subject “must first learn to obey before it can command and make its own way in the world. Knowledge is, in the very act of its origination, service, because it begins when the subject, without being consulted, is conscripted into the world’s labor force and attains judgment only at the end” (original emphasis). TL1, 68. “Es muß zuerst gehorchen lernen, bevor es in der Welt herrschen und sich durchsetzen kann. Wissen ist im ersten Akt seiner Entstehung Dienst, weil es in der ungefragten Inanspruchnahme durch die Welt beginnt und im Urteil erst endet.” TLK, I, 65. Cf. Balthasar’s notion of shepherding being. GL5, 627.
God and the Church, Christ and the Church, subject and object, form and matter, the divine and human natures of Christ, between God the Father and God the Son, and so on.\textsuperscript{134} As the characteristic structure of love, for Balthasar, it is co-extensive with being.

Another important theme arises in the quotation above which should not, because of its moral implications, escape the notice of the reader. Since “every impression” of sensible objects have “unforeseen consequences,” for Balthasar, even on the personal life of the subject, it stands to reason that the subject should be especially mindful of his surroundings, his interactions, and even the “morally neutral” tools that he employs. The pivotal point here for those who follow Balthasar’s thought in this regard is that sensible objects are not inconsequential to the moral development of personal subjects because of the impressions they make irrespective of the intentions of the moral actors who engage them.\textsuperscript{135} For Balthasar, beauty and culture therefore have an indispensable place in the proper formation of persons and communities.\textsuperscript{136} Balthasar’s biography as an aficionado of music and literature, and even more as an excelled participant in these cultural forms, personally

\textsuperscript{134} One would be hard pressed to find such a complete list in Balthasar’s works all in one place, but \textit{GL I}, 111 indicates a beginning of sorts.

\textsuperscript{135} Having a big screen television in the middle of one’s living room, for example, affects in some way all of the persons who come in contact with it, notwithstanding the particular shows watched, the frequency they are seen, the age and intentions of the viewers, etc. Simply by occupying a space which would otherwise be occupied by a different sensible object(s) or nothing at all, the TV leaves a different sensible impression, an impression intelligibly ordered to conveying information and entertainment through a medium with mitigated receptivity. This is an important point for David L. Schindler who often employs such reasoning in his discussions with his philosophical adversaries. See Chapter Five to follow.

\textsuperscript{136} This is relevant even for the exposition of theology: “. . . since a theology of beauty may be elaborated only in a beautiful manner. The particular nature of one’s subject matter must be reflected first of all in the particular nature of one’s method.” \textit{GL I}, 39. “. . . denn eine Theologie des Schönen darf nicht anders entwickelt werden als auf schöne Weise. An der Eigentümlichkeit der Methode schon muss die Eigentümlichkeit des Gegenstandes aufleuchten.” \textit{HK I}, 36. Aidan Nichols contends that Balthasar tried “to transmit to posterity a Catholic culture wide and rich enough to serve as a basis for Christian life and mission as it ought to be.” \textit{Divine Fruitfulness}, 195.
demonstrates this position, as does his hesitancy to embrace certain advances in modern technology. Reacting at the end of his life to the positivism (read: non-paradoxical, non-nuptial, and unfruitful thought) of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and its effects on modern perception, scientific analysis, and the apparent unbridled advance of technology, Balthasar reserves some of his most dramatic and critical language:

The age of science has replaced the era of philosophy. The “exactness” of the physical sciences is held up as the model for the life sciences and the humanities. At the same time, the aim of science is seen, with fewer and fewer exceptions, to lie in controlling or “changing” whatever comes within its grasp. Science subordinates itself to technology and productivity.

The consequences of this restriction are tragic: we get precisely the opposite of what we bargained for: slavery, not freedom. For technology does not liberate but actually enslaves man on every level.

If his earlier writings had led to a cautionary or suspicious position on the progress of technology, by the late 1980s as the technological revolution gained speed, Balthasar evidently thought a more direct disparagement was in order. The relative point here is how technology, like positivism, tends to obfuscate the paradoxical unity and mystery of being which Balthasar sees as precisely that which encourages wonder, patience, and gratitude. According to Balthasar’s logic, such techne as cell phones, internet dating, and video games present a special challenge to the moral actor who must find a way to appropriate the “mutual dependence” and “infinite glory” of the esse of the technology even as it “hides” this created


138 Balthasar, Epilogue, 23. See TD2, 286-7 for further remarks against positivism.
intelligibility through its rather impersonal, easy and impatient, efficiency-based, veneer.\textsuperscript{139} In contrast, perceiving the language of forms in “the natural world” (\textit{der natürlichen Welt}), writes Balthasar, serves as training for perceiving by grace the forms of revelation.\textsuperscript{140} Knowing how Balthasar also applied his understanding of the forms of revelation, particularly the Christ-form, to his understanding of being, one can also see how the inverse of this claim would be true for him: the insights that revelation brings to nature, for example, man and his actions, technology obstructs.\textsuperscript{141}

\section*{§ II.4 The Infinite Mystery of Being: Wonder and Worship}

One of the more signatory claims of Balthasar’s metaphysics, which appeals to the loving manner in which one must assess created beings, is that the mystery of being does not dissolve when its truth is revealed; rather it is amplified.\textsuperscript{142}

\begin{quote}
[M]ystery is not some irrational background from which truth emerges. Rather, truth itself radiates mystery, and it is of the very essence of truth to manifest this radiant mystery through itself.\textsuperscript{143}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In the next section on the mystery of being we will learn of how beings “hide” in quite a different way, for Balthasar, that is, by pointing beyond themselves to their infinite “More” through an “unveiling” rather than through obfuscation.
\item One would of course not have to take such a negative position on technology and could still realize that technology promotes by its very character a certain darkening of perception and weakening of virtue through an obfuscation of the inherent “miracle of being.”
\item \textit{TLI}, 223. “... sie hebt sich von ihm nicht ab wie von einem irrationalen Hintergrund, sie
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushleft}
However far one advances in unveiling the profundity of reality by yielding to it in self-abandoning service, as Balthasar has indicated, one just so far must witness this reality’s paradoxical veiling or hiddenness.\textsuperscript{144} This is because the convergence of opposites in worldly being is grounded in the polarity of \textit{esse} and \textit{ens}, according to Balthasar.\textsuperscript{145} Just as a being \textit{appears} to the knower it simultaneously \textit{hides} as if to serve the higher truth of itself in \textit{esse} and in God.\textsuperscript{146} In “hiding” it better reveals what lies behind and beyond it: the infinite mystery of being as such and, analogously, being in God.

Within this world, ‘expression’ remains a category of the ‘beautiful’ whose radiance and charm easily brings the word ‘glorious’ (\textit{herrlich}) to our lips, but which can only inauthentically lay claim to the sense of ‘lordship’ (\textit{herrschaftlich}) and ‘majesty’ (\textit{hehr}) which inhere within it: in as much, that is, as the ‘ground’ of a living entity—be it a plant, animal or person—is always ‘more’ than what is projected on to the phenomenal surface, and this mysterious More can also be read in a mysterious manner from that surface, most supremely in the free spiritual being which, in expressing itself, remains the sovereign capacity (mendaciously) to \textit{conceal itself} all the while (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{147}

All beings essentially and increasingly appear as epiphanic: they are all

\textquote[All beings essentially and increasingly appear as epiphanic: they are all strahlt es aus, und es gehört mit zum Wesen der Wahrheit, daß sie dieses strahlende Geheimnis durch sich selbst offenbart.” \textit{TLK, I}, 253. Note how Adrian Walker translates \textit{Geheimnis} (“secret”) as “mystery” in this passage and section. Balthasar appears to use \textit{Mysterium} and \textit{Geheimnis} interchangeably.

\textsuperscript{144} See \textit{TL1}, 9.


\textsuperscript{146} On the simultaneity of appearance and hiddenness in being, see Ibid., 51-4.

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{GL5}, 622. “‘Ausdruck’ bleibt inner weltlich eine Kategorie des ‘Schönen’, dessen Strahlkraft und Zaubermacht uns leicht das Wort ‘herrlich’ auf die Lippen legt, das aber das darin wesende ‘Herrschaftliche’ und ‘Hehre’ doch nur in uneigentlichem Sinne beanspruchen kann: sofern nämlich der ‘Grund’ eines lebenden Wesens – sie es Pflanze, Tier oder Mensch – immer ‘mehr’ ist, als was in die Erscheinungsfläche sich projiziert, und dieses geheimnisvolle Mehr auch geheimnisvoll an der Fläche mitablesbar wird, zuhöchst im freien geistigen Wesen, das, sich ausdrückend, souverän bleibt, sich dabei (lügend) zu verdecken.” \textit{HK III.1.2}, 952.
inherently self-showing, self-giving, and self-expressing.148

It stands to reason that created beings are owed a certain awe and reverence in light of the precious mystery which they are.149

Now, as a theologian deeply immersed in the Church’s tradition and intellectually dependent on such holy and insightful personages as Saint Maximus the Confessor, Balthasar no doubt comes to much of his properly philosophical articulation of the mystery of being and love through Christian revelation. He in fact states that the real distinction between esse and essence, which grounds his metaphysical analysis of the ontological difference between esse and ens, is itself “the product of the Christian consciousness, which was the first to notice the relation between God the Creator and the radical contingency of the world.”150 All that has therefore been said above regarding being and beings, such as their inherent polarity, receptivity, glory, mutual dependence, fruitfulness, and even indifference, is for Balthasar realizable in some way in Jesus Christ and his relation to his heavenly Father in the Spirit—allogously, in Christ’s relationship with his spouse, the Church. More than that, all that has been said is, for Balthasar, realizable in Jesus himself, in his two natures. 151

148 Balthasar, Epilogue, 109. In light of the mystery of being, mechanisms which would replace rather than assist such epiphanic characteristics would seem all the more egregious.

149 A correlate to this understanding is the mysterious incommunicability of each human person who, in being discovered in love, paradoxically continues to be surprising and eventful in a still deeper way. See John F. Crosby, The Selfhood of the Human Person (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1996), 41-81. For lovers, the other is always just out of reach. The beloved could never be encapsulated in a pithy definition or even in a series of such.


151 “[T]he Christological formula [of Chalcedon] expands, for Maximus, into a fundamental law of metaphysics. Illuminated by the highest level of theological synthesis—the union of God and the world in Christ—Maximus searches out the traces of the developmental principles, of the conditions of possibility of this synthesis, and in the process discovers the formal structure of all created being, even the formal structure of the
Of all divine mysteries, the mystery of Christ is the most significant, because it teaches us how to situate every present or future perfection of every being, in every kind of intellectual investigation.  

With Maximus, Balthasar relates that the Incarnation, which includes for him the logic of self-surrender manifested in the Cross, is “the measure and the law of every kind of love in this world,” because every love finds its value relative to God, the same God who abandons himself for the sake of the world first in simply becoming like one of us and bridging the eternal divide.

As mentioned in Chapter One of this work, Balthasar’s Catholicism is not incidental to his evaluation of being and action. Perceiving the world (cosmos) such as it is, in its root meaning, can be advanced not only through an expansive and humble metaphysical outlook, but also for him through particular graces and expressions which Jesus extends to the members of his body, the Church. Foremost among these graces and expressions is the Eucharistic liturgy. Commenting on his beloved Maximus, Balthasar writes,

The liturgy is, for Maximus, more than a mere symbol; it is, in modern terms, an *opus operatum*, an effective transformation of the world into transfigured, divinized existence. For that reason, in Maximus’ view . . . the liturgy is ultimately always “cosmic liturgy”: a way of drawing the entire world into the relationship between the absolute and the contingent.” Ibid., 70; cf. 208. This is quite the opposite then of a “Christological narrowness” in the manner of Karl Barth because Balthasar sees the Christological form of love as so expansive and generous, if you will, as to allow for a kind of synthesis between God and the world which presupposes that the *world has something to offer* in the constitution of itself as the receiver and bearer of the Christological (-logos) movement toward the Father. In other words, man’s free expression in art and literature, for instance, is not determined in advance by Christ, and yet it is still able, through prayerful listening, to manifest Christ’s love.


hypostatic union because both world and liturgy share a christological foundation.\textsuperscript{154}

Maximus helps Balthasar draw from the wellspring of the liturgy in appropriating being, especially being as \textit{event}. Both the natural law and the positive law as revealed in Scripture find their fulfillment in the law of Christ, for them.\textsuperscript{155} Theological knowledge of the world is carried, not just by personal faith and intellection, but also through a heightened participation in the “flesh” of the Church, including the hierarchy and the sacraments.\textsuperscript{156} Balthasar is suggesting that through ecclesial obedience, frequent reception of the sacraments, prayer, and love, one comes to better understand the historical movement of being toward its realization while entering that same ascendant movement morally. Here is where, for Balthasar, mere admiration of creation passes over to worship for its Creator:

What is demanded of us now, as we stand before this pure grace, which no longer reveals beauty but rather glory, is not to admire and be enraptured. Now we must worship.\textsuperscript{157}

This is because God is in all things in the reciprocal relationship of transcendence and immanence, according to Balthasar.\textsuperscript{158} The mystery of being is finally the mystery of God himself in the world.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 322. Balthasar continues, “This is something new and original and must be regarded as Maximus’ own achievement.”
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 322-3. “[T]he eucharistic action recalls the whole providential history of God’s salvation…” Ibid., 323.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 323-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Balthasar, \textit{Epilogue}, 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Balthasar, \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 85-6.
\end{itemize}
It is the mystery of a supreme, self-contained simplicity, fully co-existing with the twofold, incomprehensible and, irreversible self-opening of this unity to both the world as a whole and the world in all its particulars.159

So it is that awe and reverence are fundamental to appropriating being (and action) rightly, for Balthasar.

[W]henever man no longer has a flair for the central mystery of being, whenever he has unlearned reverence, wonder, and adoration, whenever, having denied God, whose essence is always characterized by the wonderful, man also overlooks the wondrousness of every single created reality. If, on the other hand, man venerates the unfathomable mystery of God’s inner life, he will never overlook the reflected splendor of this property in God’s creaturely images.160

In a nod to our proceeding discussion in Chapter Three on the form love takes in the world, the “loving contemplation” which Balthasar describes as consuming the saints in the beatific vision161 is evidently the proper manner, analogically speaking, to appropriate being in any case, thus forming the integral human response of love for one’s neighbor as the witness to a love which both transcends and unites them.

[The Christian’s] duty is to experience the presence of absolute love, and himself to actualize it, and to make it visible, within his love for his neighbor. . . . The Christian love for our neighbor is therefore something quite distinct from a good and morally upright model for interpersonal conduct; it occurs always as the focal point, as the demonstration (Erweis) and realization

159 Ibid., 86.

160 TL, 82. “[W]o der Mensch kein Gespür mehr hat für das zentrale Geheimnis des Seins, wo er die Ehrfurcht, die Bewunderung und die Anbetung verlernt hat und im Zuge der Verleugnung Gottes, dessen Wesen die Eigenschaft des Wunders immer behält, auch das Wunderbare jedes einzelnen geschaffenen Seins übersieht. Solange er dagegen in Gott das unerforschliche Geheimnis einer Intimität verehrt, solange wird er in den geschöpflichen Abbildern Gottes den Abglanz dieser Eigenschaft nie übersehen.” TLK, I, 82.

(Vorweis) of a love which transcends man, and thus also as an indicator (Verweis) to that love which man cannot appropriate for himself as it has long since shown itself to him to be that which is ever greater than himself.\footnote{GL5, 649. “[The Christian’s] Amt ist, in der Nächstenliebe die Gegenwart der absoluten Liebe sowohl zu erfahren wie selbst zu verwirklichen und sichtbar zu machen. . . . Christliche Bruderliebe ist deshalb etwas völlig anderes als ein gutes sittliches Vorbild für zwischenmenschliches Benehmen; sie ereignet sich immerdar als die Sammlung in einem Brennpunkt, als der Erweis und Vorweis einer den Menschen selbst absolut übergreifenden Liebe, somit als der Verweis auf sie, die der Mensch nicht selber in Verwaltung nehmen kann, da sie als die immer-größere sich längst im voraus an ihm erwiesen hat.” HK, III.1.2, 977.}

Balthasar is indicating here that love for neighbor has to be a \textit{witness} to the absolute love which holds him in awe and reverence.\footnote{See Balthasar, \textit{The Moment of Christian Witness} and TL3, 242-9 on “Testimony” (Zeugnis). Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{Der Geist der Warheit}, Band III des Theologik (= TLK III), (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987), 224-30. For Balthasar, not only does the Son bear witness to the Father, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Son. TL3, 13.} Love for neighbor, from beginning to end, is not as much about self or neighbor, Balthasar conveys, as it is about demonstrating and realizing God’s love (the third) \textit{beyond} and \textit{within} self and neighbor.\footnote{On God’s love as the measure for one’s love of neighbor, see GL4, 11 and the following statement from Balthasar’s, \textit{Engagement with God}, 40: “[T]he significant factor in being a Christian is that he does all with reference to and in dependence on the ultimate source of his actions, through loving first and above all things, the God who loves us in Christ in order that he may then, by means of and together with love, turn his attention to the needs of those who are the object of the love of God.”} The saints, that is, the veritable highlighters of Christian discipleship for Balthasar,\footnote{Christ is himself the “rule” for life, not the “exception.” Balthasar, \textit{Theology of Karl Barth}, 375. This implies that the saints, who embody the Christ-form in their lives, are dramatic embodiments of this rule.} carry their (Catholic) worship, their awe and reverence and the grace which influences them, through to their relation with their neighbors, all the while witnessing to God’s absolute love which informs and transcends them both—just as it informs, in a different way, all of the structures of creation.
Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a retrieval of Balthasar’s perception of being to indicate a general perspective for assessing being in moral action. The central point here is that Christian love, modeled on Jesus’ own love for his heavenly Father and the world, is not for Balthasar a moralism abstracted from the constitution of each human being and imposed on him or her as if from the outside. Rather Christ’s love, as the eternal Word’s love through whom the world is brought into being and finds its fulfillment (Jn 1:1-3,10; Rom 8:19-23; Eph 1:9-12, 22; Col 1:15-20), constitutes created being in the manner of mutual dependence, nuptiality, giving and receiving, inherent mystery and glory, patient indifference and, ultimately, fruitfulness, according to the theologian from Basel. This he knows from both sides of the equation: from the human experience of reality which begins with the wonder of a child and from God’s self-disclosure in Jesus. For Balthasar, all of the structures of the world, insofar as they participate in esse commune, have “absolute love” at the core of their being tending them toward the good by nature. This is, for Balthasar, self-abandoning, “obedient” love ordered to communion in the triune-God.

166 This may be considered in the manner of St. Thomas’ description of “natural love.” ST, I-II, q. 26, a. 1. The Author of natural things in whom the apprehension of what is suitable for them exists, for St. Thomas, is for Balthasar God’s triune-love manifested in Jesus Christ. See CSL, 50-1: “As we know, Thomas, in speaking about this ‘natural’ love (amor Dei naturalis), does not distinguish between an order of ‘created’ nature (ordo naturae ‘creatae’) and an order of ‘elevated’ nature (ordo naturae ‘elevatae’). But, in point of fact, the completely selfless love that he considers natural to the creature owes its form and intensity to supernatural caritas, which was first proclaimed to us by revelation.” CS, 38-9: “Thomas, der einer solchen ‘natürlichen’ Liebe das Wort spricht (amor Dei naturalis), unterscheidet ja bekanntlich noch nicht zwischen einem ordo naturae ‘creatae’ und einem ordo naturae ‘elevatae’; die vollkommen selbstlose Gottesliebe, die er der Kreatur von Natur wegen zuschreibt, entlehnt ihre Form und Intensität im Grunde der übarnaturlichen Caritas, wie sie erst die Offenbarung gebracht hat.”

167 Obedience is put in quotation marks here to signify its analogous meaning for creatures without the spiritual faculties of intellect and will. For subhuman realities, there is still written within them a certain “obedience” to the formal and final causes of their nature owing to their natural appetites. They tend toward, love, or “obey” that which makes them be this thing and not another.
For moral purposes, this means that everything that is, every community, every society, every blade of grace or stem-cell—logically or structurally—has the inner disposition to be cared for and nurtured toward its completeness in the cosmic liturgy.\textsuperscript{168} In short, according to Balthasar, matter is to be known and cared for (“shepherded”) with a service marked by wonder, reverence, gratitude, heightened receptivity, and patient indifference owing to its character as both gift and mystery of infinite glory, and only in such a way that the order of things will not be tried or impeded in its movement back to God in the cosmic liturgy, but will rather be enhanced and encouraged in this ecstatic movement. For man this requires grace, Balthasar clearly indicates, the grace mediated by the Church which Jesus founded and infused with his Spirit. For the rest of the world upon which the Church casts its shadow, a sense of the sacred is called for, its immanence and transcendence reflected upon. So it is that love is not just co-extensive with being, for Balthasar, it is also the only proper manner to appropriate being.

Of course many others in the Christian tradition could very well be operating from a perspective which incorporates the elements noted here which situate Balthasar’s theological, ontological aestheticism, but this just proves the point that Balthasar’s “newness” is really meant to be nothing more than a fully Catholic perspective on reality, embodied by the saints. In Part Two we will have the occasion to see how this perspective is nevertheless distinguishable among Catholics faithful to the Magisterium, some of whom intentionally ground such tenets of love in their ethical analysis, and others who, apparently, do not.

\textsuperscript{168} This is true even if, on some level, this requires the being’s “self-abandoning death” before its purpose has been fulfilled, such as a tree cut down for firewood, to use our previous example.
CHAPTER THREE

Love Has the Inner Form of a Vow

Introduction

Now that we have considered in Chapter One how Hans Urs von Balthasar’s “third way of love” is different methodologically from both the “cosmological” and “anthropological” approaches, and then considered in Chapter Two the implications of this faith perspective for the cosmos since love is co-extensive with being, for Balthasar, this chapter examines especially the difference Balthasar’s Christological perspective makes for human freedom (cf. the anthropological method). If Balthasar’s nuptial logic is valid, then both being and action need to be understood together in terms of one ordination to love as Christ loves. We recall that Christ’s embodiment of love, the norm of his existence, is the “source” of Christian ethics and really all disciplines, for Balthasar. He does not start with natural law, personalism, virtue theory, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a historical approach to Scripture, or anything else unless he sees it immediately in terms of Christ’s loving obedience. Balthasar looks at all questions first in terms of the newness of Christ’s self-surrendering love ordered to heavenly communion and lets that perspective inform his understanding of the reality before him.

---

1 This is not to say that here we recall the anthropological reduction described in Love Alone is Credible and contrast it systematically with Balthasar’s way of love. That was already done in Chapter One, at least in the fashion of Balthasar himself. Here we continue the work of Balthasar’s corpus as whole to exemplify the meaning of Christ’s love for man in his own drama.

2 Besides Pope Benedict XVI, as noted in Deus caritas est, 12, perhaps the best representative of such a Christocentric perspective contemporaneous with Balthasar is Karl Barth, the Reformed theologian whom he spoke often with and in fact wrote a book on. Barth’s Christology, however, is considerably different on the matters of the analogy of being and the evangelical counsels, not to mention the specifically Catholic elements such as the hierarchy and the sacraments. See Balthasar, Theology of Karl Barth.
So how is this love defined? From the preceding chapters we learned that Christ’s existence helps Balthasar understand love to be both giving and receptive, fruitful, indifferent to prerogatives, humbly obedient, ordered to (Catholic Christian) worship, and so forth; now we shall examine how all of these traits find their substantial determination and form in the total self-offering of personal consecration. Balthasar’s understanding of the evangelical counsels—poverty, chastity, and obedience—as the form love takes in the world, irrespective of one’s state or mission, should help deepen the discourse on love introduced in the previous chapters and so further clarify the framework or holistic perspective by which he and those who adhere to such an understanding assess human activities.\(^3\) The central claim here is that Christ’s manner of life as fundamentally poor, chaste, and obedient, signifies for Balthasar an offering at once total and forever. This understanding of love epitomizes for him the measure of all loves and, hence, all meritorious behavior.\(^4\)

While such a signification may not seem especially noteworthy for Catholic moral theology, indeed, Pope John Paul II also thought the evangelical counsels were applicable to everyone,\(^5\) because Balthasar’s methodology starts from such a faith perspective and

\(^3\) This is not just verifiable in Jesus Christ, nor simply in those who have professed the evangelical counsels in religious and/or consecrated life, but also in all of the saints who have held nothing back for God.


\(^5\) *See Veritatis splendor*, Encyclical letter on the splendor of truth, August 6, 1993 (Boston:
incorporates his metaphysical claim that love is co-extensive with being, his account of the Christian imperative to love completely and forever as Jesus loves (Jn 13:34) is both applicable to all of the structures of the world—e.g. community life, peacemaking efforts, business practice, ecology, etc.—and especially compelling to persons. In other words, Balthasar’s methodology of faith allows for what may seem to be nothing more than a fully developed Catholic understanding of love to come rushing forward and made applicable to all the questions of the world from the beginning of an inquiry, when a hermeneutic of another kind is by definition, since Christ is the “source” of Revelation, for Balthasar, to adjudicate the same questions from a more limited perspective. Surely another hermeneutic would for Catholics and other Christians make appeal to Christ and his love eventually, but Balthasar’s point is that only once the terms have been set in a reductive way. As such, the reader gets here a deeper intimation of the difference, for Balthasar, that Christ’s self-interpretative love makes at all stages for human persons relative to their own missions in life, as well as the difference his love makes for all of the practical decisions one has to make on a daily basis.

After establishing that Christian love and perfection can only be realized in radical

Pauline Books & Media, 1993), sec. 16-21. Cf. John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, Post-Synodal apostolic exhortation on the consecrated life and its mission in the world, Vatican Website, March 25, 1996, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata_en.html, sec. 3: “[T]he consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it ‘manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling’ and the striving of the whole Church as Bride towards union with her one Spouse” (original emphasis). See also Ibid., sec. 29-30. To say that John Paul II developed this line of thought to the same extent as Balthasar, however, would be inaccurate. Balthasar wrote on the subject with great depth and frequency long before the papal writings noted above. See especially Balthasar’s: *CSL* and *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels: The Church’s Mission in the World*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. with D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), a posthumous compilation on the subject. In fact, given John Paul II’s appraisal that Balthasar was “an outstanding man of theology” (“Telegram from John Paul II”), it may be that he was influenced by Balthasar in this regard.
adherence to the spirit of the evangelical counsels, for Balthasar, the chapter proceeds to a discussion of such vowed love relative to personal freedom. Here appeal is made to Balthasar’s understanding of the theo-drama between God and man. Man’s activities on the stage of life with Christ, the principal actor in the Father’s drama, directed by the Holy Spirit, means that all appeals to human nature and action, from Balthasar’s perspective, need to account for the fact that being is an event for him, and so each man has his own particular role or mission to play precisely in a drama and not in a vacuum where the moral theologian can remain satisfied with universal theorizing.

The chapter continues the discussion of man’s finite freedom relative to God’s infinite freedom by considering three relations identifiable in Balthasar’s theological discourse: form and command, choice and commitment, and gift and gratitude. Christopher Steck, S.J.’s claim that Balthasar is a divine command theorist of a sort will be treated here more fully, as well as the character of good and freeing choices as pledges of love, for Balthasar, and finally how one’s being and life occurrences are always meant to be accepted as gifts to be grateful for, especially relative to those things that bind oneself in love.

Lastly the chapter draws on Balthasar’s frequent appeals to the saints, the living interpreters of the form love takes in the world, for here one can better see how God entrusts a beautiful mission of service to each person on the stage of life and the varied ways that freedom can be exercised relative to God’s call of ecclesial obedience. For Balthasar, this means being a contemplative in action like Jesus, given over at all times to self-surrender for the sake of loving communion.

It is therefore the task of this chapter to firstly make a detailed demonstration of what
it means to say that love has the inner form of a vow, for Balthasar, and further to indicate for him its hallmarks relative to human freedom, as well its best interpreters. This will help the reader to know where to turn when considering his own ethical questions. While it is not yet the place to see, in a developed way, how such a (philosophically inclusive) theological perspective might apply to specific cases, certain pointers to the task of Part Two will be indicated throughout this chapter to assist the reader in his own discernment.

§ III.1 The Form Love Takes in the World: Call and Counsels

Any summary perusal of Balthasar’s theological writings will show the influence of the founder of the Jesuits, Saint Ignatius of Loyola (†1566), upon him. From Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, which the former Jesuit translated and lectured on numerous times, Balthasar gained pivotal insights into discerning the “Call of Christ” in one’s life, a call given in the grace of baptism which permeates every aspect of one’s being. For Balthasar, as for Ignatius, realizing one’s baptismal promises means following Jesus down a particular path toward the “perfection of love” owing to an informed decision to live in either the

---

6 We begin by recalling the full applicability of the counsels, for Balthasar, to further inculcate this Christocentric perspective of his in the mind of the reader. It may be worth repeating that Balthasar’s contribution to ethics is rarely direct, it is rather formative of a perspective for others to adopt in their own way.

7 CSL, 10.


9 TD3, 263. This call must nevertheless be realized in mission for someone to become, in Balthasar’s eyes, a person.

“state of election” or the “state of the commandments.” The state of election, otherwise known as the state of the evangelical counsels, is the state entered upon by professing the vows of poverty, chastity (virginity or celibacy), and obedience. The state of the commandments, contrariwise, is the state of obedience, not to a spiritual superior as in the vow of obedience just noted, but more basically to the commandments conveyed in public revelation. The state of the counsels presupposes the state of the commandments; no one is called to consecrated life who is not first obliged to follow God’s commandments. For this and other reasons, consecrated life has been regarded in the Catholic tradition as a “special” and “higher” state. Balthasar considers the counsels the very “expression” of perfect love, no doubt because its inherent logic places all prerogatives in life—wealth, sensible desires,

---

11 See CSL, 9-21; 162-72 passim.

12 The proceeding articulation of Balthasar’s position will make clear that the inverse of this claim is also true, that is, the commandments, in a different sense, presuppose the counsels.

13 The central reason is because consecration implies giving oneself directly to God according to the most radical of means, unlike marriage which denotes that such self-giving is mediated through another, and not by such radical notions of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Magisterium has stated firmly: “If anyone says that the married state is to be preferred to (anteponendum) the state of virginity or celibacy, and that it is not better and happier to remain in virginity or celibacy than to be united in matrimony [cf. Matt. 19:11f; 1 Cor. 7:25f; 28:40]: let him be anathema.” Council of Trent, Session XXIV, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony, can 10, November 11,1563, as recorded in Heinrich Joseph Dominik Denzinger’s The Sources of Catholic Dogma, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 13th ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), 279. See also ST, II-II, q. 152, a. 3-4; Pius XII, Sacra virginitas, Encyclical letter on consecrated virginity, Vatican Website, March 10, 1954, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25031954_sacra-virginitas_en.html.; John Paul II, Familiaris consortio, Apostolic exhortation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, November 22, 1981 (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1981), sec. 16; John Paul II, Vita consecrata, 32, and CSL, 249.

14 Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 66. As will be seen as the argument proceeds, the state of commandments for Balthasar can only lead to the perfection of love to the extent that it is informed by this “higher” state, only not as “state” but rather as “spirit,” the spirit of the evangelical counsels. See Ibid., 63. Because the states are intimately related, even the lay state would seem to express perfect love when lived true to form. See CSL, 248-9. See also Crawford, Marriage and the Sequela Christi.
freedom—at God’s disposal. It accounts for a total self-offering.\textsuperscript{15}

The Swiss priest maintains, however, that \textit{either} Christian path, if chosen and sustained in Christian indifference or self-abandonment to God’s manifest will, leads to the perfection of love to which all persons are called.\textsuperscript{16} This is because disponability to God’s will is in the \textit{sine qua non} for Balthasar in any state, in any endeavor.\textsuperscript{17} In his own words, “the question of one’s state of life is utterly secondary” to the will to “order everything—truly everything—to perfect Christian love.”\textsuperscript{18} To meet the standard of Christian perfection one must not only renounce one’s claim on sensual pleasures before receiving only what the Lord has prepared for oneself,\textsuperscript{19} for Balthasar one must also renounce, \textit{a priori}, all preferences of living, such as the state of the counsels or the state of commandments.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[15] Recalling the description of St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Thomas considers the religious state a personal “holocaust.” \textit{ST}, II-II, q. 186, a. 6.
  \item[16] CSL, 9-10. “[B]oth states live by the same love: the love of Christ, which is the paradigm of every love.” Ibid., 248. “[L]eben beide Stände von der gleichen Liebe: der Liebe Christi, die das Paradigma jeglicher Liebe bleibt.” CS, 201. The call to perfect love in Christ would therefore seem comprehensive of all redeeming virtue and intrinsic to any further articulation of the Christian way of life, for Balthasar, just as the norm of Christ. The call of Christ in fact establishes this Christian norm or form within the baptized.
  \item[17] This theme was considered earlier with particular reference to Balthasar’s understanding of Mary’s \textit{fiat voluntas tua}, as aided by his relationship with the mystic, Adrienne von Speyr, who also emphasized disponability or Christian indifference. It is telling that Balthasar considers St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s desire for suffering to mature into abandonment or indifference in her later years. Balthasar, \textit{Two Sisters in the Spirit}, 313. For Balthasar, surrender or abandonment to God is the highest of human acts, Ibid., 322. It is a trust synonymous with active indifference. Ibid., 323. “Readiness, then (Ignatius calls it \textit{indiferencia}), is the highest ethical/religious accomplishment of man: it is the active readiness of the Spirit, of the whole man, not to resist God.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Beyond Action and Contemplation,” in \textit{Spirit and Institution}, 299-307, vol. 4 of \textit{Explorations of Theology}, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 305.
  \item[19] “[S]eek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [lesser] things shall be yours as well,” Mt 7:33; cf. Mk 10:29-30; Lk 18:29-30.
  \item[20] CSL, 187-8. Because the consecrated life is deemed to be higher and the so-called “state of perfection,” St. Ignatius of Loyola can say “Without doubt, it requires more obvious signs to determine that God’s will would have us remain in a state of life that demands only the observance of the commandments than
Making sense of the “Call of Christ” is indeed something of a leitmotif in Balthasar’s written corpus, manifested especially in his translation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, in the book *The Christian State of Life*, and in a volume of his essays compiled posthumously, *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels: The Church’s Mission in the World*.21 It is in these latter two works that Balthasar regards the pervasiveness of the “spirit” of the evangelical counsels in every Christian’s call to follow Jesus Christ to the Cross (and beyond) in self-abandoning love. This of course speaks to the influence of the counsels within and over those who choose to follow simply the commandments, according to Balthasar, such as those who marry in the Church. Two quotations from *The Laity and the Life of the Counsels* suffice to introduce this central meaning for him:

The ‘spirit’ of the evangelical counsels is quite simply the spirit of the Church; the one who lives with the mind of the Church lives with the mind of agape. . . .

[I]t is logical that the spirit of the counsels should permeate the entire life of the Church, rising up from the roots; even when Christians have possessions, determine themselves, marry, they must do so in the spirit of self-renouncing love: they must possess as if they had no possessions, dispose as if only God were disposing, be married as though they were not married (1 Cor 7:29-31).23
It may seem ironic that the call to perfect love, which can be achieved in either state, is synonymous with the call to the spirit of the evangelical counsels, for Balthasar, but this is because the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience is precisely that which manifests self-abandoning love for him. Indeed, Balthasar’s notion that “the state of election is *forma sui et totius*” (the form of itself and of the whole), allows one to see how he perceives the form of Christ’s life manifested in all true loves.

The content of every genuine love is expressed in this act of self-surrender that places at God’s disposal and surrenders to him all one possesses as a votive offering in the inner form of a vow. By its very nature [love] contains in itself both the content and the form of the vows, to which it gives a constantly new expression.

Note that “every genuine love” takes the “inner form of a vow,” for Balthasar, that it is of the “very nature” of love in both “content” and “form” to surrender itself in a permanent way. This means, again, that love is finally ordered to give itself away completely and forever, for Balthasar, so as not to hold anything back for itself. It follows that even a kind

---

24 “The more closely human love resembles God’s love, the more it forgets and surrenders itself in order to assume the inner form of poverty, chastity and obedience, the more divine will be its fruit: a fruit that surpasses all human fecundity or expectation.” *CSL*, 248. “Je mehr aber die Liebe eines Menschen der göttlichen gleicht, je mehr sie also sich selber vergißt und aufgibt, um innerlich die Gestalt von Armut, Jungfräulichkeit und Gehorsam anzunehmen, um so mehr wird auch die Frucht dieser Liebe eine göttliche sein: eine Frucht über alle menschliche Fruchtbarkeit und menschliche Vermutung hinaus.” *CS*, 201.


27 *CSL*, 64. “... sie enthält die Gelübde inhaltlich wie formal in sich als ihr Wesen und als deren immer neuen Ausdruck.” *CS*, 50.
word, a simple hug, a gesture of patience for the sake of another—all of these acts of love and more, if they be genuine, have to be ordered to a full gift-of-self as neither mitigated by will or by duration, according to Balthasar. If one takes seriously Balthasar’s claim advanced in the preceding chapter, that love is co-extensive with being, then one would have to agree that the spirit of the counsels must inform the entire cosmos, considered on analogous levels. All of this means that the counsels are at the root of creaturely love in response, for Balthasar, rendering their heeding a triumph for the individual person and, more profoundly, as gathering up in a mystical sense the structures of creatureliness (ecclesiastical, political, economic, agricultural, and so on) in such a way as to infuse them with the spirit of love.

Now, the relevance of this particular stance of Balthasar’s for the moral life should not be underestimated. As mentioned above, the spirit of the counsels is meant to inform the personal decision of the baptized to enter the state of the election or continue following simply the commandments, for Balthasar, either of which will color one’s future moral activities. Because the spirit of the counsels is synonymous with the “spirit of the Church,” according to Balthasar, the counsels cannot be separated from the singular call of Christ to give one’s life over to him in any state or, for that matter, in any action insofar as all acts are

28 One could find here a certain rebuke to contraceptive sex as a putative form of love. Because contraception implies withholding the generative faculty in an activity ordered by nature to generation, it follows that one or both parties is contra (against) the entire gift-of-self, which is, for Balthasar, love.


30 Here we are retracing the main lines of Balthasar’s reflections in Cosmic Liturgy, especially 85-6, 140, 156, and 322.
meant to be acts of love. Thus the counsels are really united, Balthasar suggests, in the
fundamental disposition to love in the manner of Christ.

There are not really three counsels, but one—to one form of life: nor are there
really three vows, but only one—to vow oneself to the crucified form of love,
as to the one and only form of life. At baptism, all Christians are ‘planted’
into this form of life (Rom. 6. 3f); but the form of Christ in the form of the
‘counseled’—forma servi (Phil. 2. 7; cf: Matt 20, 27-28)—becomes a fruitful,
formative forma gregis (an example to the flock) (1 Peter 5. 3), a forma
omnibus credentibus (an example to all that believe) (1 Thess. 1. 7), and comes
to represent the form of Christ for the Church and the world; and this ‘serving’
love ‘ministers’ to both forms. . . .31

The counsels provide for the Swiss priest the basis for how a Christian acts in the
world, allowing all to perceive such an evangelical witness and some to benefit directly from
it. Evangelical obedience, which stands at the forefront of the counsels for Balthasar as the
fulfillment of disponability to God’s will, is not in the first place a spiritual intimation in the
here and now which compels one to submit,32 then, but rather a whole form of life patterned
from the consecrated lives of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is they who, for
Balthasar, universalize ethics.33 The vowed life as so defined “obligates everyone:”

31 Balthasar, Love Alone, 110. “So gibt es eigentlich nicht drei Räte, sondern den Rat zu einer
Lebensform, und entsprechend darin nicht drei Gelübde, sondern das ein Sich-Ein-geloben in die Kreuzgestalt
der Liebe als der einzigen, all durchwaltenden Lebensform. Alle Christen sind durch die Taufe dieser
Lebensform eingestiftet (Rom 6, 3f.), aber in der ‘geratenen’ Form wird die Form Christi – als ‘forma servi’
(Phil 2, 7; vgl. Mt 20, 27-28) – zur fruchtbar prägenden ‘forma gregis’ (1 Petr 5, 3) und ‘form omnibus
credentibus’ (1 Thess 1, 7), zur Form als Repräsentation der Christusform für Kirche und Welt, und so, als
Dienstliebe ministeriell zum verschwindenden Sauerteig in beides hinein.” GNL, 90-1.

32 This is in contrast to divine command ethics, commonly understood.

33 In Section I.4 above, the universality of the Christ-form was considered together with Mary’s
the Source, 165, 175. See also Crawford, “Consecration and Human Action,” where Crawford, following
Balthasar, highlights the indispensable role and universal applicability of the the consent of the Son of God to
his Heavenly Father, as well as Mary’s “yes” to the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation.
According to the universal teaching of the Church (which only follows the Gospel here), perfection consists in Christian love, which is not a counsel but rather a commandment that obligates everyone and is therefore capable of being fulfilled substantially by everyone. . . .34

Balthasar is of course drawing his arguments regarding the counsels from the Gospel account of the rich young man who comes to Jesus bearing testimony that he follows the commandments as Moses has related them. Jesus says to him, “If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me” (Mt 19:21). If this is what it means to be perfect, then love requires the disponability enlisted in the evangelical counsels; such is why the state of living the counsels is commonly referred to as the state of perfection. But if all are called to “Be perfect as my Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48), then in some way every person is called to live the counsels as integral to obeying Christ’s command to love as he has loved us (Jn 13:34; 15:12-14).35 This is why Balthasar, and later John Paul II, could say that the counsels are meant for everyone.36 Balthasar thus notes that although the expression of the counsels is normally associated with an “external act of leaving all things” (original emphasis),37

This picture changes as soon as the center of gravity within the state of the counsels shifts to the inner personal consecration. For now the married layman, too, receives a genuine, intrinsic connection to the meaning and substance of the counsels. It thus becomes clear what it means to tell him that

34 Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 158.
35 For insightful developments of this and other related themes from Balthasar’s work, especially pertaining to the moral life, see Crawford’s work as cited in fn. 4 of this chapter.
36 See John Paul II, Veritatis splendor, 16-21.
37 Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 169.
the counsels are meant for everyone and that everyone must observe them, either literally or in the spirit (1 Cor 7:29-31).  

As it stands, then, marriage, which Balthasar regards as the fulfillment of the state of commandments, is \textit{ordered to the life of the counsels} from which it receives, in the innermost penetration of the basic Christian call, its form of self-giving love.  

So it is, writes Balthasar, that the new commandment of Christ to love as he has loved us is the canon for every Christian love, including marital love and fidelity. Indeed, it is only because Christ bestowed anew from above upon the mystery of physical fecundity the infinitely deeper mystery of the \textit{spiritual fecundity of faith, hope and love and, with it, the spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience} that marriage can be raised within the Christian Church to the dignity of a sacrament. It can be so only by sharing in the spirit of Christ on the Cross (original emphasis).  

\begin{itemize}
\item 38 Ibid., 158.
\item 39 CSL, 249.
\item 40 Ibid., 205.
\item 41 Ibid., 244.  
\end{itemize}
Notice that Balthasar considers the spirit of the counsels to be the very measure of divine fruitfulness.

The more closely human love resembles God’s love, the more it forgets and surrenders itself in order to assume the inner form of poverty, chastity and obedience, the more divine will be its fruit: a fruit that surpasses all human fecundity or expectation.\(^{42}\)

With this understanding of the counsels Balthasar attests to the all-inclusive ground of love, as he perceives it, a foundation which indicates where the traits of love disclosed in the previous chapters—indifference, receptivity, the ordering to worship, self-giving, the virtues, etc.—find their integration and their fruitfulness.\(^{43}\) The more one is disponible to God’s ways (often at work in one’s neighbor), Balthasar implies, the more the Spirit can enter in and form one according to the norm of Christ’s “vowed” existence, the only norm which obligates Christians, for Balthasar,\(^ {44}\) and presumably the only one which bears divine fruit.\(^ {45}\)

\(^{42}\) CSL, 248. “Je mehr aber die Liebe eines Menschen der göttlichen gleicht, je mehr sie also sich selber vergißt und aufgibt, um innerlich die Gestalt von Armut, Jungfräulichkeit und Gehorsam anzunehmen, um so mehr wird auch die Frucht dieser Liebe eine göttliche sein: eine Frucht über alle menschliche Fruchtbarkeit und menschliche Vermutung hinaus.” CS, 201.

\(^{43}\) At times Balthasar will make clear that he perceives indifference as surrender to God, and thus identifiable with the spirit of the counsels. For example: “Indifference and self-annihilation in the Eucharist, as in religious life, are both functions of the one love and the source of Christian fruitfulness.” Balthasar, Two Sisters in the Spirit, 167.

\(^{44}\) See “NP,” 82.

\(^{45}\) Although Balthasar does not appear to apply his understanding of the spirit of the counsels to social forms of existence in his writings, save for the Church herself, her ecclesial communities, and Christian marriage and family life, his understanding of the Christological norm as the only applicable norm for ethics, as well as his understanding of the convertibility of being and love, indicate that even the most secular of life forms can be measured adequately only according to the spirit of the counsels. In some way, for example, a business must be seen as a work fundamentally at the disposal of love, in created love, and for creative love, to follow Balthasar’s logic. In this light, a business operates according to its deepest integrity only if it bears the mark of the poor, chaste, and obedient—vowed consecration, analogously understood.
§ III.2 Theo-Dramatic Action: Setting the Stage

It is in the Theo-Drama, the five-volume series (in English) concerning the “good,” that Balthasar offers perhaps his most original work, certainly the one most commonly referred to for ethical reflection. Here God the Father is presented as the Author of the drama, his Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth—the Actor, while the Holy Spirit portrays the Director through an historical “inversion” with the eternal Son. Every creaturally person—human, angelic, and demonic—is an actor on the stage with Christ, for Balthasar, although Christ remains forever the “chief” actor. This is where Balthasar sees the theodrama of infinite freedom and finite freedom unfolding. Just as Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered and thereby became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9), so too is man’s freedom realized, according to Balthasar, in consent to God’s will as revealed in Christ’s existence—itself encountered through the Church and

46 One need only turn to the work of Christopher Steck and Melanie Barrett to verify this point, although they both also rely heavily on the seven-volume, The Glory of the Lord, which concerns divine beauty. See also Aidan Nichols, O.P., No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

47 TD3, 532-4, etc. On the “inversion” of the second and third persons of the Trinity, see TD3, 183-90. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, leads (was led: ανήχηθη) or drives (έκβαλε) the second person of the Trinity into the desert (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12; cf. Lk 4:1-2), for instance. Cf. Balthasar, “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” 143.

48 This becomes clear in Balthasar’s discourse on angels and demons, who although cannot be said to have a central role in the God-man drama, they nevertheless play a part. TD3, 465-501. Balthasar is however hesitant to confirm that demons are theological persons, for he defines persons in terms of their Christocentric missions. Ibid., 496.


50 On freedom as consent, see TD2, 231.
one’s neighbor, particularly those with whom one share’s life in community, according to Balthasar. The realization of freedom is of course directed internally by the Holy Spirit by means of grace, for him. The movement of the Spirit within is not coercive, though, and neither is the stage upon which the human person acts out his life, blank or empty, according to Balthasar. Rather, as Balthasar describes it, God opens up a space for the human actor to perform the role which has been entrusted to him in freedom, a role or mission motivated and guided by Christ’s existence as typified and realized in Scripture, holy tradition, the sacraments, and so on, which allows man to glorify God and, in so doing, become more truly himself. In this way Balthasar explicates the trajectory of human freedom and action

51 “When a human being becomes a person, theologically, by being given a unique vocation and mission, he is simultaneously de-privatized, socialized, made into a locus and a bearer of community.” TD3, 271. “Ein menschliches Geistsubjekt wird, indem es theologisch durch einmalige Berufung und Sendung zur Person wird, gleichzeitig entprivatisiert, sozialisiert, zu einem Raum und Träger von Gemeinschaft gemacht.” TDK II.2, 249. “[T]his social dimension of the person must have a basis in the structure of the creaturely conscious subject.” TD3, 272. “[M]üß diese soziale Dimension der Person ein Fundament in der Struktur der geschöpflichen Geistsubjekte besitzen.” TDK II.2, 249. One’s mission is for community, according to Balthasar. Ibid., 272-3. Indeed, Balthasar’s life as the co-founder with Adrienne von Speyr of the Community of St. John and the co-founder of the scholarly journal, Communio: International Catholic Review, are testaments to the importance he places on community.

52 Concerning the space God allows for the finite creature: “Instruction is given in the realm thus opened-up in connection with the exemplary idea [of love]” TD2, 273. “. . . umwaltende exemplarische Idee. Auf sie ergeht im offenen Raum Weisung.” TDK II.1, 248. In other words, this space is “not simply the void but the realm of infinite freedom and hence himself.” TD2, 273. “. . . nicht einfach die Leere, sondern den Raum unendlicher Freiheit, somit sich selbst. . . .” TDK II.1, 248. This understanding would be in contrast to the interpretation of another great Catholic thinker of Balthasar’s era, Dietrich von Hildebrand, who stipulates that a child is born “unwritten and ‘blank’” instead of written by God with the intelligibility of love or, to use Balthasar’s language, cast in a particular role which is determined in part by Christ’s existence, the child’s parents, his community, etc. See von Hildebrand, The Nature of Love, trans. John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), 198.

53 TD2, 341.

54 Man has to determine and realize himself, according to Balthasar, and yet he does this through the personal role that God has already given him. TD2, 341. See also 343-4 which has clear parallels with the Vatican II text most often cited by John Paul II, Gaudium et spes, Pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world, Vatican Website, December 7, 1965, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-
through a drama which signifies each individual person’s meaning and purpose relative to the
God who constitutes him as an actor on the stage of life.

This means that, if we want to ask about man’s “essence”, we can do so only
in the midst of his dramatic performance of existence. There is no other
anthropology but the dramatic.55

One is reminded here of Balthasar’s understanding of being as event, for the
assessment of the essence of a thing is, for Balthasar, concomitant with an evaluation of
where that being fits in the divine plan and, as it pertains to humanity, what particular role or
mission God has called that personal being to respond to in the spirit of the counsels.56 This
understanding would seem critical to a just evaluation of human action, from a Balthasarian
perspective, for the signification of human action cannot be removed from the signification
of man’s essence, as action follows being.57 In short, a person’s acts gain value or eternal
merit, according to Balthasar’s reasoning, precisely to the extent that they participate in said

spes_en.html, sec. 22: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take
on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the
final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and
makes his supreme calling clear.”

55     TD2, 335. “Das besagt, daß wir den Menschen nur mitten im Vollzug seiner dramatischen
Existenz nach seinem ‘Wesen’ fragen können. Es gibt keine andere Anthropologie als eine dramatische.” TDK,
II.1, 306. The relation between being and anthropology in Balthasar’s thought has been described as a “meta-
anthropology” which allows us to understand how both poles of the relation are influenced in some way by each
other. See D. C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 259-349 and Martin Bieler, “Meta-anthropology and
Christology.” Schindler calls the “fundamental principle” of Balthasar’s meta-anthropology, “man sums up and
surpasses the world.” Dramatic Structure of Truth, 262.

56     “[T]he creature sees its origin in this abyss of freedom and not primarily or adequately in a
divine idea that possesses an independent existence in God, independent (wholly or relatively) from his
freedom.” TD2, 397. “Auf diesen Abgrund von Freiheit sieht sich fortan die Kreatur als auf ihr Wovonher
verwiesen und nicht primär und hinreichend auf eine göttliche Idee, die in Gott ein von seiner Freiheit (ganz
oder relativ) unabhängiges Dasein besitzt.” TDK, II.1, 364.

57     This is to recall the Aristotelian-Thomistic axiom: agitur sequitur esse.
actor’s mission relative to the Author, Actor, and Director of the theo-drama or, to put it differently, relative to the *Gestalt* of Christ since the figure of Christ is, according to Balthasar, “liquefied” by the Holy Spirit through the infusion of grace.\(^{58}\) It would seem then that a human act could be adequately determined just, for Balthasar, only by adjudicating the act relative to the mission of the person who performs the act as well as those with whom he is acting.\(^{59}\) Balthasar’s existential reading of human action in the theo-drama depends philosophically on the third of his fourfold difference in being (“the dependence of being on beings”),\(^{60}\) which illustrates again that being in general, act, and form depend in a certain way on existents (here persons) to realize them in reality. The point then, to follow Balthasar’s logic, is that human action is properly conceived only within the personal theo-drama which Christ’s existence shows to be one of self-surrendering love ordered to communion. It is an understanding that fills moral norm theory with Christ’s inclusive mission such that no Christian imperative, indeed, no action, can be adequately conceived without (explicit or implicit) recourse to the form of Christ’s love.\(^{61}\)

---


59 See Balthasar’s book *Romano Guardini: Reform from the Source*, for clear examples of both his and Guardini’s tendencies to see universals in particulars. None of this is to suggest that Balthasar’s reasoning as it applies to moral action theory would not have to be located relative to the rest of the tradition and tested through case studies. For an introduction to the topic, see *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1751 and John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 78-9. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 18, a. 3 on circumstances relative to the object of an act.

60 GL5, 619. “die Angewiesenheit des Seins auf Daseiendes.” *HK III.1.2*, 949.

61 Balthasar describes Christ as “the concrete categorical imperative . . . the formally universal norm of ethical action, applicable to everyone.” “NP,” 79. “Christus ist der konkrete katagorische Imperativ . . . formal-universal Norm sittlichen Handelns ist, die auf alle angewendet werden kann. . . .” “NS,” 71. The first rendition of Immanuel Kant’s “categorical imperative” states that one should “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” Kant, *Grounding for the*
§ III.3 Human Freedom in Three Integral Correspondences

Another rather obvious implication of the dramatic structure of human nature, as Balthasar presents it, is the meaning of human freedom, specifically the relation of human freedom relative to the theo-drama we have just described. While Balthasar speaks on many occasions of the realization of finite freedom in infinite freedom, a deeper examination of this theme yields insights into the interplay between the notions of form and command, between choice and commitment, and between gift and gratitude—all essential marks of the form love takes in the world for him. An investigation of these three related themes, teased out of Balthasar’s thought, should help to elucidate his understanding of the spirit of the counsels as a gift at once total and forever, and thus help explain his contention that “love has

---

*Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed., trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 30. Rather than dismissing an understanding of divine (universal) law, Balthasar shows how Christ’s existence fulfills it: “First, the impersonal nomos . . . is replaced by the living and personal Lord, whose service (which is both personal and ecclesial, polis-like) is liberating, the service of a free man. Second, this freedom is related to this same Lord’s love, in such a way that the person who has been set free can only respond in kind: he can only render his service of love according to the measure of love he has received.” *TD2*, 198. “[E]inmal die Ersetzung des unpersönlichen Nomos . . . durch den lebendig-personalen Herrn, dessen Dienst (eine gleichpersonal und kirchlicher, als polis-ähnlicher) der befreiende, der Dienst eines Freien ist; sodann der Bezug dieser Freiheit auf die Liebe dieses Herrn, die auch vom Befreiten nur gemäß dem Maß dieser Liebe, als Liebes-Dienst beantwortet werden kann.” *TDK II.1*, 178-9. See Steck, *Ethical Thought of HUVB*, 177, fn. 72.

---

62 “Insofar as freedom is autexousion (and never ceases to be such) and at the same time is an infinite movement toward its own origin in God, finite freedom (qua finite) only fulfills itself within infinite freedom.” *TD2*, 236. “Sofern die Freiheit autexousion ist (und nie aufhört, es zu sein), und zugleich unendliche Bewegung zu ihrem eigenen Ursprung in Gott ist, erfüllt sich endliche Freiheit als endliche nur in der unendlichen.” *TDK II.1*, 214. “[F]inite freedom can only exist as participation in infinite freedom, as a result of the latter being immanent in it and transcendent beyond it; finite freedom can only realize itself in and with infinite freedom.” *TD2*, 272. “[E]ndliche Freiheit nur sein kann als Teilnahme an der unendlichen, durch ihre Immanenz in dieser und durch deren Transzendenz über ihr, so daß sie, sich verwirklichend, es nur mit und in der unendlichen kann.” *TDK II.1*, 248. Infinite freedom offers “citizenship” (*Heimatrecht*) in its home, in God, for finite freedom to realize itself. *TD2*, 313. *TDK II.1*, 285. “[T]he ‘image of God’ in the creature consists decisively in its autexousion, in the created mirroring of uncreated freedom.” *TD2*, 397. “[D]ie entscheidende Gottabbildlichkeit der Kreatur in ihrem autexousion, in der geschaffenen Abspiegelung der ungeschaffenen Freiheit. . .” *TDK II.1*, 364. Human fulfillment can only occur “within the sphere of God’s freedom.” *TD3*, 20. “. . . im Raum der Freiheit Gottes. . .” *TDK II.2*, 19.
(a.) Form and Command: As drawn upon at length in Chapter One above, Balthasar considers the form of Christ’s existence to be both a personal and universal norm obligatory for everyone. According to Balthasar, the Gestalt of the Lord or Christ-form must be continuously perceived and received in the order of grace for people to live out the Christian calling in general and, more particularly, their own personal missions relative to infinite freedom. The essential traits of the Christ-form have been disclosed as the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience, for Balthasar. That being true, because Balthasar places such an emphasis on the event character of being, even and especially with respect to human nature, while also stressing obedience as the principal mark of Christian living, we must consider again Christopher Steck’s proposal that Balthasar is a divine command ethicist of a particular sort. The conception of the relation of form and command in Balthasar’s thought that results from this exposition sets a (divine-human) framework for considering the relations of choice and commitment as well as gift and gratitude in his thought, and, as a result, helps us see how Balthasar situates vowed love relative to human freedom.

As noted earlier, Steck confirms that divine command ethics is a form of theological voluntarism. The divine command ethicist understands God to act free (voluntarily) of the laws portrayed in revelation and inscribed in nature. That said, Steck does not mean to

63 “Our first principle must always be the indissolubility of form, and our second the fact that such form is determined by many antecedent conditions.” GLI, 26. “Immer ist die Unauflösbarkeit der Gestalt das erste, ihre Mitbedingtheit durch viele Voraussetzungen das zweite.” HK I, 23.

64 Steck, Ethical Thought of HVB, 2, 4, 65, et al.
insinuate that Balthasar’s ethical thought is incompatible with (all forms of) natural law and human fulfillment. Rather, Steck makes a distinction between philosophical representations of divine command ethics and theological ones. This distinction being critical for his argument that Balthasar expresses an “Ignatian reconfiguration of divine command ethics,” it is worth quoting Steck’s passage in full:

As a philosophical theory, divine command ethics holds to some form of theological voluntarism, that is, that the good in some nontrivial way depends on the divine will. But in its theological versions divine command ethics often involves both something more and something less than philosophical versions. Its theological forms include something more in that they clothe obedience in religious piety, reverent affections, and, ultimately, Christian faith. But theologies that support divine command ethics can also be something less. They do not necessarily commit themselves (as do philosophical versions) to the theoretical position that the ultimate ground of moral goodness lies in divine willing and not in the divine intellect. Instead these theological versions embody something akin to a “spirituality” of divine command ethics in which the commanding presence of God plays a central role in the life of the Christian. The explicit vertical reference of the human response, that is, its intentional responsiveness to the divine, is an essential part of Christian action for these versions even if they rely primarily on a consideration of creaturely goods to determine the content of morality. This minimal, but I think nontrivial, sense of divine command ethics is consonant even with some forms of natural law. Christians follow natural law principles with an affective attitude of obedience to God’s sovereignty.

Even though Steck’s description of theological forms of divine command ethics is broad enough to include normative criteria in apparent odds with its own philosophical claims, and although Steck cites here no examples of these versions to lend support to his

65 Ibid., 5.
66 Ibid., 65.
67 Steck of course implies this himself in the above quotation, but one can also see the difference between his account of theological versions of divine command ethics and the classic example posed by
argument, his reasoning cannot be easily dismissed. There are instances in Balthasar’s work in which he places the divine command *at the center* of the Christian moral life:

> It is not just a question of what we are accustomed to call the ‘moral life’ or life in accordance with ‘Christian precepts’, but rather of that burning centre, the focus and vindication of all moral conduct which divorced from the centre so easily hardens and degenerates into pharisaism. What is at stake is that ever living contact with the God who speaks to us in his Word, whose “eyes like a flame of fire” (Apoc. I. 14) transpierce and purify us, whose *command exerts renewed obedience*, and instructs us in such a way that we seem till now to have known nothing at all, whose power sends us forth anew to our mission in the world (my emphasis).

Similar passages from Balthasar confirm his understanding that the Holy Spirit, and not man, directs the grand theo-drama which involves them both.69

Truly the moral life could never be a pre-managed affair, for Balthasar, something that someone could draw up on his own while utilizing Christ as an inspirational tool for an otherwise autonomous human striving. Such is why Balthasar avoids discussing the moral life first from the perspective of human nature or experience as in the so-called “anthropological reduction.”70 He starts instead with God in Jesus Christ and makes his

---


69 Steck’s work confirms this. See especially Steck, *Ethical Thought of HUVB*, 177-8, fn. 72 and 74.

70 *LAC*, 31-50.
understanding thematic from this perspective. For Balthasar, one has to be continuously astounded by the miracle of Jesus in his embodiment of self-sacrificing love in order to allow him to set the terms for one’s decision-making. Without the understanding that the beauty of God’s love in Christ dictates the rhythm of ethical living, Balthasar fears that one will tend to think of himself as his own master, setting his own parameters for life. As the Swiss theologian understands revelation, this will not do.

We have to renounce what is our own, since this encumbers the space in us to which God’s Word lays claim. The Word itself has a combative character: as “sword” and “fire”, its special properties, it has to conquer in us the place without which it could not continue. On that account, it seems to us, so long as we are in this world, to come rather from without than from within, to be “heard” rather than “beheld”. . . .71

Nevertheless, the seeming exteriority of the Word in its various manifestations is not, in Balthasar’s final analysis, so exterior after all.

And yet “even here [in this world] we have no need to hear the Word in such wise that it sounds alien in our ears, instead of being what is most our own, most intimate and close, my truth as the truth about me and my own truth; the Word that reveals me and gives me to myself.”72

[F]or the Church’s precepts are intended to lead the believer out of the alienation of sin to his true identity and freedom, whereas they can (and often must) seem hard and legalistic to those who are imperfect, just as the Father’s will seemed to the Crucified.73

71 Balthasar, Prayer, 21.

72 Ibid., 21.

In other terms, God’s Word in its various manifestations will often seem alien to a person’s sensibilities, but in fact the Word is precisely what enables persons to truly become themselves according to the universal norm of Christ’ existence.\footnote{See \textit{Gaudium et spes}, 22.} The apparent, harsh exteriority but peaceful interiority of the Word indicates that the form of Christ’s existence, as the quintessential measure of love, for Balthasar, itself informs any commands of God to the human conscience. As such, divine commands are subordinate and yet integrative to the dramatic form of Christ’s glory, for him.\footnote{“The point at which following can become imitation, that of ‘having the same mind as Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5), is the heart and the total of all Christian ethics as summarized by Mathew in the Sermon on the Mount. It runs through all the individual commandments, not to develop them in a material sense but to bring them under the permanent Christian form, which is nothing less than Christ’s own personal way of thinking.” Balthasar, “Office in the Church,” 103.} In keeping with Balthasar’s reasoning, their relation may be considered “nuptial,” that is, implicit of one another and mutually disclosing in their distinctiveness. Form and command would seem to converge in the ever wondrous love of Christ, for Balthasar.\footnote{Concerning “The Dramatic Christ-Form,” see Steck, \textit{Ethics of HVB}, 54-8.}

In conclusion, Steck’s reasoning has shown that Balthasar wishes to avoid any \textit{a priori} limiting of God’s movement in history by fashioning an all-for-one ethic that places man at its point of departure rather than God. Balthasar indicates this limitation by calling to mind, as Sacred Scripture has foretold, the personal mission each of us is given in Christ. But he also shows how the divine form, the form of love as the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience, is there from the beginning in Christ and just so far interior to Christians by grace. In other words, Balthasar resolves the tension between indicating how God calls each person
in history to a particular mission and at times will even humble him by the brilliance of his Word, by the love-glory of a passion scene, by a movement of the conscience so direct it clearly is not man-made—with the universal norm of Christian love entrusted to the sons and daughters of God. The tension is resolved when the command is seen as striking one from the “outside” in history, reorienting one’s life and necessarily so, but always-already according to the pattern of Crucified love bestowed in baptism and available, in some preliminary way, to all human beings as persons apt to receive sanctifying grace.\(^7\)

That Balthasar’s understanding of the divine prerogative makes use of rather than displaces and blunts man’s own natural inclinations and choices, can be seen in the following two excerpts from his writings:

*Man’s whole constitution is unconditionally (necessitate naturalis inclinationis: de Ver 22, 5) predisposed toward goodness as it reveals itself in a light of transcendence (synderesis, primal conscience). He tends toward it in some way even in the sensual parts of his spirited-directed nature* (original emphasis).\(^8\)

What man makes of his natural gifts depends entirely on the mission that God has designed for him and that, in the last analysis, proceeds directly from God. Just as God infused into all men the calling to love and bestowed on them by his grace both the goal and the strength to attain it, so he placed each of them

---

77 Another way of stating the same thing, perhaps more closely aligned to Balthasar’s own manner of phrasing things, is to say that the tension between the command and the form of love are never resolved, but rather sustained in polarity as indicative of the polarity of being. This way of viewing the problem indicates that both the divine command and the divine form forever have “teeth” and that one is inclusive of the other. We must however bear in mind the subservient role of the command vis-à-vis the universal form or norm of Christ, for Balthasar. God’s form of love is present in Christ even without an historically placed divine command to the individual conscience, but never the other way around.

78 “NP,” 96. “Dem transzendenten aufleuchtenden Guten ist der Mensch in seiner ganzen Verfasstheit un-bedingt (necessitate naturalis inclinationis: de Ver 22.5) zugestaltet (synderesis, Ur-Gewissen); auch in seinen sinnlichen Teilen seines vom Geist durchherrschten Wesens bestehen Geneigt-heiten dazu.” “NS,” 86. To echo St. Thomas, Balthasar indicates that every free decision proceeds from a view of the choice under the aspect of the good. *TD2*, 225.
in a particular state of life that represents for the individual the situation and the form in which he is to strive to fulfill his calling. Thus every life contains a center that is eccentric—that is, outside itself. Around this center each person must order and make use of his natural gifts. That is the concrete form in which he will fulfill his calling to love, and this fulfillment will be his service.79

This leads us to consider the meaning and importance of human choice for Balthasar,80 particularly as it relates to what is often seen as its opposite and counterweight: commitment.81

(b.) Choice and Commitment: Balthasar’s fidelity to Ignatius of Loyola leads him to assign a great deal of importance to human choice from an “elevated position of


80 Drawing from St. Thomas the notion that finite freedom is not to be confused with the spontaneity of infinite freedom, Balthasar maintains that judgments and choices are operable in this life. TD2, 224-5.

81 Although commitments of various sorts are entertained in and through choices, as the following segment illustrates, there is a way in which commitments also exist “beyond choice” insofar as one fully committed to a particular person or endeavor need not reaffirm that commitment by willful choice in every moment; rather, he or she may simply “abide” in this commitment and act in accord with it through unprompted, reflexive activities. See David C. Schindler’s article “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects,” Communio 29 (2002): 618-53. Schindler wrote his doctoral dissertation on Balthasar’s understanding of the interplay between truth and freedom, which was later published in book form as Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation. As Balthasar states, “When we live at the innermost core of love, we no longer choose. Our choice lies behind us and has not changed from the time we first came to know love.” CSL, 30. “Wer im Kern der Liebe lebt, wählt nicht; seine Wahl ist hinter ihm; er hat von jeher, solange er die Liebe gekannt hat, gewählt . . .” CS, 21. Personal freedom can thus be realized through prior commitments to all manner of necessity, for Balthasar, even those which a person does not freely elect, such as ill health.
‘indifference’,” as it were. From the position of disponability to whatever God wills in one’s life and hence indifference to the various options which present themselves to the human conscience, Balthasar believes the moral actor is ready to realize himself as a person, that is, to be fully committed to the mission God calls him to. It is critical to see that the Christian or Ignatian indifference that Balthasar prizes has little to do with the “freedom of indifference” which predominates Western culture today. For Balthasar, Christian indifference does not signify a view of reality as intrinsically neutral, as if it only matters subjectively what one chooses in life because things have no inherent meaning. Rather, indifference indicates for Balthasar the capacity to be free and ready, to be patiently listening for what God alone wants. When the Holy Spirit leads one to choose between

---

82 *TD2*, 228. *TDK II.1*, 248. This is really “God’s choice, accomplished in eternal freedom, which is offered to man to choose for himself,” writes Balthasar. *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 302; see also 303-22.

83 On “indifference” (*Indifferenz*) as necessary to dispel “interest” (*Interessiertheit*) in the striving after particular goods so as to reach goodness itself, see *TD2*, 211; *TDK II.1*, 190.

84 “It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence—that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorized mission—that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a ‘person’.” *TD3*, 207. “[W]o er ihm im gleichen Zuge sagt, wozu es existiert – ihm also seine von Gott her beglaubigte Sendung verleiht – dort kann von einem Geistsubjekt gesagt werden, daß es Person sei.” *TDK II.2*, 190. “[I]f man freely affirms and accepts the election, vocation and mission which God, in sovereign freedom, offers him, he has the greatest possible chance of being a person, of laying hold of his own substance, of grasping that most intimate idea of his own self. . . .” *TD3*, 263. “[D]ie vom freien Gott ergehnede Erwählung, Berufung, Sendung, falls sie in Freiheit bejaht und übernommen wird, ist die höchste Chance des Menschen, sich zu personalisieren. . . .” *TDK II.2*, 241. See also Balthasar, “On the Concept of Person,” 25.

85 This is the disparaging term of Servais Pinckaers, O.P. See especially, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 354-77. For Balthasar, indifference means “resolute action” to make room for God. *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 302.

86 This has been shown in Balthasar’s understanding of the infinite glory and mystery of being as manifest in all of the concrete beings of the world.

87 Obedience, often exalted by Balthasar, stems from the Latin words “ob” + “audire”: *to listen closely*. 
options of inherent value, the one marked by Christian indifference is able to give of himself more fully by *choosing* in the full sense of the word, according to Balthasar, because he (the moral actor) is responding in a freedom unencumbered by inordinate desires for this or that particular thing.\(^88\) So it is that man should be indifferent to the plan God has in store for him as he eagerly awaits his “summons,” Balthasar writes.\(^89\) As indicated above, this summons or call is principally a *form* of life, for Balthasar: the spirit of the counsels.\(^90\) Only in and through the Christ-form do divine commands issue forth at various points in history. Within this form is also the space for a response in freedom, including the dramatic choice for a state of life which promotes one’s personal mission and colors one’s actions.

Balthasar’s understanding of choice thus proceeds from a readiness to commit oneself fully. Drawing from the work of Maurice Blondel, Balthasar writes: “Authentic choice always intends the whole: being or non-being.”\(^91\) This would seem to imply two things: (1) 

---

88 What is more, choosing for Balthasar should not be taken as synonymous with how things work out in the end, whether or not one has taken the time to discern and affirm one path over another. Writing of St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s vocation, Balthasar comments, “It is a choice [for the cloister] in the strictest Ignatian sense, not a natural drifting or attraction.” *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 146.

89 Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 134. For this reason, Crawford interprets Balthasar’s ethical reflection here as promoting “‘response,’ more than individual choice between a superior means and a ‘lesser’, albeit still ‘good,’ means.” Crawford, “Love, Action, and Vows,” 300. The point is not that responses are not also choices, for Crawford, but the terminology of response reflects a greater respect for the givenness of reality rather than the construct of reality which a person chooses by preference.

90 “What is a person without a life form, that is to say, without a form which he has chosen for his life, a form into which and through which to pour out his life, so that his life becomes the soul of the form and the form becomes the expression of his soul? For this is no extraneous form, but rather so intimate a one that it is greatly rewarding to identify oneself with it. Nor is it a forcibly imposed form, rather one which has been bestowed from within and has been freely chosen.” *GL1*, 24, as cited by D.C. Schindler, *Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 337. “Was ist er ohne Lebensform, das heisst ohne Form, die er für sein Leben gewählt hat und in die er sein Leben ein- und dahingiesst, damit es zur Seele dieser Form und die Form zum Ausdruck seiner Seele werde, keine fremde Form, sondern eine so intime, dass es lohnt, sich damit zu identizieren, keine aufgezwungene, sondern eine von innen geschenkte und freigewählte, keine beliebige, sondern die einmalige persönliche, das individuelle Gesetz?” *HK I*, 20.

A person who chooses freely, without compulsion or indecisiveness, summons his entire being in the process of willing and in this way determines his life for or against God. Every choice, so defined, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is a foray into the moral object’s transcendent character because the whole is contained in the part.

If true choice has this kind of holistic, life-determining character, as Balthasar suggests, then with it comes a certain abnegation of further options. In this way choice leads to commitment (cf. vow), for Balthasar, the necessity of remaining with the choice one has made to adopt more fully its inherent form and, if it be a good and loving choice, its fruit. When Balthasar highlights the importance of choosing a Christian state of life, he is therefore doing more than enunciating the difference between the state of election and the state of the commandments. He is indicating how persons realize their freedom and humanity relative to God’s binding call on their lives. Fortunately, for Balthasar, God’s infinite freedom does not abrogate man’s finite freedom, but rather roots and assures it in the “bondage of

“Every truly ethical choice or decision presupposes some kind of knowledge of the totality of the good, to which I am necessarily oriented and which I have to choose in freedom.” TL2, 32. “Jede wahrhaft sittliche Wahl oder Entscheidung setzt eine wie immer beschaffene Kenntnis der Totalität des Guten voraus, auf die hin ich mit Notwendigkeit ausgerichtet bin und die ich in Freiheit zu wählen habe.” TLK, II, 31.

92 Ibid., 30-3.
93 See Balthasar, Das Ganze im Fragment.
94 In the early 1970s, with the rise in divorce and more and more people leaving the ranks of the priesthood and religious life, Balthasar would write: “There may be many sorts of sociological reasons why men today are so reluctant to commit their whole existence, and Christians will naturally be affected by these reasons. But if they see that in this the axe is laid at the roots of their existence as Christians, they they have cause for reflection. . . . They imagine that they are being serious about it [a provisional commitment] but in truth, a truth which is hidden to them, they are only flirting like half-virgins who have all kinds of experience but not the decisive one: namely, that of finally giving oneself. . . . For ultimately what stands behind these three programmes, ‘temporary marriage’, ‘temporary priests’, ‘temporary vows’, is the unsaid ‘temporary Christians’.” Elucidations, trans. John Riches (London: S.P.C.K., 1975), 204.
Love can never be content with an act of love performed for the present moment only. It wants to abandon itself, to surrender itself, to entrust itself, to commit itself to love. As a pledge of love it wants to lay its freedom once and for all at the feet of love. As soon as love is truly awakened, the moment of time is transformed for it into a form of eternity. Even erotic egoism cannot forbear swearing “eternal fidelity” and, for a fleeting moment, finding pleasure in actually believing in this eternity. How much more, then, does true love want to outlast time, and for this purpose, rid itself of its most dangerous enemy, its own freedom of choice. Hence, every true love has the inner form of a vow: It binds itself to the beloved—and it does so out of motives and in the spirit of love. Every participation in the love of God partakes of the nature of a vow: The entrance into Christian life through baptism, for instance, explicitly requires the taking of the baptismal vow by the one being baptized as an answer to the gift of divine love. Indeed, the more intimately one is involved in love, the more his love comes to bear the inner form of a vow in which he exchanges his freedom from bonds for the bond of love. Thus the bond that seemed to him, in the beginning, to be exactly the opposite of the freedom of love, to be a burden and duty, appears now to be ever more clearly identical with the freedom of love (original emphases).  

95 Balthasar, Theology of Karl Barth, 134.

96 Notice that love is described here in terms of its transcendent character or what would in effect be a “third thing” which unites the lovers in something beyond them. Of course such absolute love is also integral to the other, allowing the beloved to bind himself “to the beloved.”

With Ignatius, Balthasar sees choice as not just an effect of freedom but, when entrusted to the love grounding the transcendentals, also its enabler. When one decides to do or have the fullness of any particular thing and thereby entrusts himself to the gift of reality as such in and through that one thing, he engages himself at the most personal and dramatic level where the “shepherding” of his being can take place, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.98 This appears to be where the traits of wonder and play develop in the moral actor,99 for Balthasar, because in concentrating on or simply abiding in any one thing,100 which itself is meant to be integral to the person’s mission of love, the person is opened to the transcendent “whole” in this his “part” where he is free to maneuver, to “work out his salvation” (Phl 2:12) through worship and deed, and bear fruit. While the positive element of choice moves the person in a definitive direction, Balthasar is indicating that, negatively speaking, choice in the form of a vow simultaneously renounces (in content if not form) the options in relative opposition to that which has been chosen.101 The proportionate elimination of the freedom to choose, in the secondary sense once a definitive choice has been made,102 can also be a great boon for personal freedom, Balthasar demonstrates.103

98 See GL5, 627.
99 Ibid., 617.
100 See David C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing.”
101 Religious vows, for example, eliminate the possibility of marriage and the single life.
102 This decisive choice could simply be to bear the gift of the other, or the suffering entailed in the present moment, without actively pursuing anything by preference.
103 See the quotation above from CSL 38-9. Love is so steadfast, Aidan Nichols, O.P. contends, it rejects the “freedom of choice” for the freedom of love. Divine Fruitfulness, 207.
knows that the multiplication of options presents a “dangerous enemy” working to mitigate the definitive choice for any one thing and the whole at its depths. This is because a number of options tantalizing the moral actor dissuades him from bonding himself to just one thing with authority and freedom and love, and thereby penetrating to the mystery of being and love at the thing’s core. Balthasar conveys that one who attempts to know many things through exercising various choices rather than a few sustaining ones, struggles to know anything at all with any depth of insight.

The characteristic of the true knower is that he resolves once and for all not to want to know many things and, thus, not to know them at all. He disposes of a constructive unmindfulness, which by rejecting some things, helps brings the essential cognitive elements to the fore, and, in this way, fashions the world of truth into vivid relief. It is not until we see this negative capacity to overlook and to withhold attention from things that the corresponding positive capacity to welcome them freely becomes fully visible.

These reflections regarding choice and commitment, which will be developed further in the third integral correspondence of finite freedom in Balthasar’s work as indicated here,

---


105 “So many small things on every side mean fragmented commitment. Radio, television. Much haste, so much churning out, and the one thing covering up the other. One would rather be in a Charterhouse,” These words are taken from an entry in Balthasar’s diary in late 1960, as cited by Henrici, S.J., “A Sketch of Balthasar’s Life,” 330.

106 See Balthasar, Bernanos, 167, 363 for Bernanos’ description of an “imbecile,” applied in a similar sense.

107 TLI, 109-10. Such a remark may be a bit of an aside for another thinker but, for Balthasar, this quotation corresponds, from yet another perspective, i.e. the freedom of the subject, to one of the central themes in his thought: holding fast to the essential matter. Doing this helps one to simultaneously know things more truly, be imbibed in a spirit of contemplation, see the “whole” or the forest through the trees and thus come to a deeper understanding of its “parts,” be stabilized in peace of mind, pay attention, and so on. It is a perspective which comes to permeate human action in a morally positive way, just as its inverse does so negatively.
“Gift and Gratitude,” should remind the reader of Balthasar’s contention that love has the “inner form of a vow.” It is not simply the case for him that love for another leads eventually to commitment; it is also true that commitments cause freedom and love, according to him, as described above in terms of the fruit of holding fast to any one definitive choice. David Crawford explains,

In a deep sense . . . vows are indeed a cause of love. They are a “cause,” not so much because they are the means or training ground of love (although Balthasar is clear that in a fallen world of very imperfect love they are at least in part a “means”), but they are “cause” because they are implicit in the earliest moment of love as its very structure and its deepest meaning as directed toward communion, which is finally only realized in explicit vows.

(c.) Gift and Gratitude: In Chapter Two when treating the first of the fourfold difference in Balthasar’s metaphysics, it was noted that a child’s wonder in the presence of his mother’s loving smile is itself an occasion of gratitude for the gift of being.

For philosophy begins with the astonished realization that I am this particular individual in being and goes on to see all other existent entities together with me in being; that is, it begins with the sense of wonder that, astonishingly, I am ‘gifted’, the recipient of gifts.

In this way Balthasar elucidates what a gift it is for the human subject to be created to share

---

108 In this way Balthasar indicates how all choices are meant to be “pledges of love,” at least in the spiritual sense. See CSL, 38.


110 See Section II.2 above. See also TD2, 285-91, 312-16.

111 Ibid., 286. “Wenn die Philosophie mit dem Staunen darüber beginnt, daß ich als dieser Einzelne im Sein bin, und nachfolgend, daß alles übrige Seiende mit mir zusammen im Sein ist, mit der Verwunderung also über ein unfaßliches Begabtwordensein. . . .” TD, II.1, 260.
in infinite freedom.112 Because God is not bound to let others participate in his freedom, the free determinacy of one’s will and being indicates that an immense, multifaceted gift has been given. What is more, the gift of being human is particular for each person, which means for Balthasar that each person’s gratitude is not to “be addressed to an anonymous ‘Absolute Good,’” but to “infinite freedom as ‘Thou’, however excessive such language may seem.”113 Balthasar comments,

What is given to me is not just any subjectivity, interchangeable with any other, but a subjectivity which, in order that it can communicate itself, is itself incommunicable.114

112 Balthasar describes this gift of freedom in terms of two pillars which correspond respectively to that which is first given to oneself, and to that which one comes to claim through human action. “The first pillar of freedom [“the universal opening to all being . . . that enables us to affirm the value of things and reject their defects” TD2, 211; “der universalen Öffnung zu allem Seienden . . . die Dinge um ihrer Werte willen zu bejahen oder um ihrer Mängel willen zu verneinen” TDK, II.1, 190] is unequivocally ‘given’; the second [the self-possession acquired in willing; TD2, 211] is both ‘given’ [gegeben] and ‘laid upon us’ [aufgegeben]. We are given the necessity . . . of going out from ourselves in order to make decisions and prove ourselves in the environment of our fellow men and fellow things.” TD2, 212. Der erste Pfeiler der Freiheit ist eindeutig ‘gegeben’; der zweite ist sowohl ‘gegeben’ wie ‘aufgegeben’: gegeben ist die Notwendigkeit (‘Geworfenheit’), aus sich auszugehen, um sich im Mitsein mit Mitmenschen und Mitdingen zu entscheiden und zu bewähren . . . .” TDK, II.1, 192. Balthasar explains, “All this is simply to show that it is impossible to take the second pole of finite freedom (which necessarily arises out of the way our original self-possession is constituted and the conditions that make it possible) and reduce it to the first.” TD2, 212. “Dies alles nur, um zu zeigen, wie wenig der andere Pol der endlichen Freiheit, der notwendig aus der Art, wie der ursprüngliche Selbstbesitz beschaffen oder unter welchen Bedingungen er gewährt ist, hervorgeht, auf den ersten reduziert werden kann.” TDK, II.1, 191. Balthasar indicates how this reduction can only lead to egoism. TD2, 211. “When giving us ethical instructions for the attainment of finite freedom, even those who attempt to restrict finite freedom entirely to the pole of self-possession (autarkia) must always urge us toward acquiring indifference to everything else—both to what attracts and to what repels.” TD2, 212. William E. May describes a similar relation of freedom in terms of “claim rights” and “liberty rights.” See his Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 174-5. Claim rights, such as the right to life, are first given to us. Liberty rights, although also given to us in a secondary sense, are realized in part by deciding for or against a particular thing, such as the right to vote or the right to smoke.

113 TD2, 290. “. . . daß mein Seinsdank nicht an ein anonymes “Absolut-Gutes” zu erfolgen hat. . . . Von meiner Auszeichnung als einmaliger Person aus wird die Anrede Du an die absolute Freiheit unvermeidlich, so überschwenglich ein solcher Gebrauch auch scheinen mag.” TDK, II.2, 264. This gift to address God as “Thou” authenticates worship, for Balthasar. TD2, 287.

114 TD2, 290. “Geschenkt wird mir nicht ein beliebiges, austauschbare Subjektsein, sondern eines, das, um sich mitteilen zu können, selbst unmitteilbar ist.” TDK, II.2, 264. “[T]he ‘gift of freedom’ remains a gift; as we have seen; the more seriously finite freedom appreciates that it is a gift to itself, that it has
Relative to his fourth distinction in being, Balthasar contends:

Finally there is the awareness that, having been addressed by a free, loving Thou, I am both given an answer and called to give one in return. The gift implies a task. Having been awakened to free subjectivity, I have also been entrusted with a ‘mission’; what I have been given is to be transformed and freely given back, and in this way I shall not lose it: on the contrary, now I shall really possess it for the first time.\textsuperscript{115}

This task, this mission, while peculiar to each person, means always sharing in the universal responsibility to give continual thanks for one’s life, indeed, one’s personal role in the divine plan.

We render thanks for our selves, therefore, by responding, giving an answering word [Ant-Wort], to the fact that we have been called “thou”. We do this by progressively incarnating the word of thanks in our lives.\textsuperscript{116}

Thanksgiving or gratitude is so necessary for becoming who we are called to be relative to been handed over to itself, the more it will be full of thanksgiving as it takes control of itself. Nor will it be so occupied with giving thanks as to forget or neglect fully to realize itself, continuing to act as if the umbilical is not severed: it will exercise its own ‘autonomous’ freedom in the Holy Spirit of absolute freedom.” \textit{TD2}, 312.

“... liegt im Wort Frei-Gabe immer das Wort Gabe; je ernsthafter die endliche Freiheit sich selbst als ein Sich-Gegebenes und Sich-Überantwortetes versteht, desto mehr wird sie sich, wie wir sahen, auch im Akt der Selbstübernahme verdanken müssen, gerade nicht, indem sie vor lauter Dankesagen den Vollzug ihrer selbst vergißt oder vernachlässigt und immer noch so tut, als sei die Nabelschnur nicht durchschnitten, sondern indem sie ihre eigene “autonome” Freiheit im Heiligen Geist der absoluten Freiheit ausübt.” \textit{TDK}, II.2, 284.


\textsuperscript{116} \textit{TD2}, 291. “Selbstverdankung heißt also Ant-Wort auf das zugesprochene Du durch progressive Verleiblichung des Dankwortes in der Existenz des Dankenden. . . .” \textit{TDK}, II.1, 265. “[O]ur gratitude for the gift of ourselves must tend toward fashioning our whole existence into a word of thanksgiving. It will remain a lifelong task; but that does not mean that it should be abandoned as impossible.” \textit{TD2}, 290. “[U]nsere Selbstverdankung muß die Tendenz gewinnen, unsere Existenz selbst zu einem Wort des Dankes zu gestalten. Aber nicht, weil dies ein lebenslängliches Anliegen bleibt, darf man es als unvollendbar fallenlassen.” \textit{TDK}, II.1, 264.
Christ, the “infinite prototype” of freedom, for Balthasar, that he claims it accounts for the progressive self-realization of finite freedom within the context of infinite freedom. More precisely, it is the realization, by the finite “copy” [Abbild] of the definitive model [Vorbild] exhibited by the infinite prototype [Urbild]; in this way finite freedom can truly participate in infinite freedom.\footnote{TD2, 291. “. . . als Verwirklichung des im unendlichen Urbild bestimmten Vorbilds des endlichen Abbilds, durch welche Vermittlung die endliche Freiheit wahrhaft an der unendlichen teilerhalten kann.” TDK, II.1, 265. The finite copy is man, the definitive model is God, and the infinite prototype is Jesus Christ, for Balthasar. “The exemplary prototype of finite freedom ‘in Christ’ is that ‘place’ where we participate in his eternal Sonship (Eph 1:5; Rom 8:17) as ‘sons’: there each of us is a unique ‘thou’ in the eternal ‘Thou’.\textsuperscript{117}” TD2, 291. “Das exemplarische Urbild der endlichen Freiheit ist “in Christus” jener “Ort”, und dem wir, teilhabend an seiner ewigen Sohnschaft (Eph 1,5; Röm 8,17), “Söhne” sind: jeder im ewigen Du ein einmaliges Du.” TDK, II.1, 265. No true freedom, or thanksgiving, or worship, can be separated even for a moment from the Gestalt of Christ, according to Balthasar, whether known or not.\textsuperscript{118}"

For moral purposes, Balthasar’s proclivity to see one’s existence and freedom as wondrous gifts which call forth the need for continuous gratitude in one’s life provides an essential framework by which to appropriate one’s being and activities. Every moment is a moment for thanksgiving, according to Balthasar. This could only mean for him that Christ, the “infinite prototype” of freedom,\footnote{“NP,” 79. “. . . sondern personal-konkrete Norm, die kraft seines Leidens für uns und seiner eucharistischen Lebensingabe an uns und in uns hinein . . . uns innerlich ermächtigt, mit ihm . . . dim Willen des Vaters zu tun.” “NS,” 71.}

is also the personal and concrete norm, who, in virtue of his suffering for us and his eucharistic [thanksgiving] surrender of his life for us . . . empowers us inwardly to do the Father’s will together with him (emphasis added).\footnote{Drawing from Ferdinand Ulrich and Adrienne von Speyr, Balthasar contends that the gift (\textit{donum}) of the Father to the Son, a gift not only of constitution as Son but as infinite freedom itself, is such that the Father eternally provides for the Son the opportunity to give freely in return, without coercion or necessity. TL3, 225-6; see also 227-35. This opportunity given to the Son to freely bestow himself in love is itself endemic to the gift, such that the giving of the Son in response is what allows the Son to fully be himself, and the Father knows this and provides for it. The Father is thereby present in the gift as a \textit{donum doni}, of eternal self-emptying love. Ibid., 230 et circa. This intra-Trinitarian basis for the separation or rightful autonomy of the giver and gift, and also their mutual inclusiveness, for Balthasar, provides a foundation for understanding proper gift-giving as ordered to freedom, to mutual love, and so relationship.}\textsuperscript{119}“
Man’s self-realization through thanksgiving is wholly dependent on Christ’s own thanksgiving, his “eucharistic surrender” which “empowers us inwardly,” according to Balthasar.120 In his discussion of infinite and finite freedom, and, more particularly, the relation of gift and gratitude, Balthasar leads the reader to understand that self-realization in freedom occurs in a thanksgiving identifiable with the worship paradigmatically offered by the Incarnate Son.121 This is, for Balthasar, the very condition for “ethical conduct”:

Only in infinite reverence (Phil 2:12) can we participate in the saving work of God, whose absolute love towers infinitely above us—in the maior dissimilitudo. Leiturgia is inseparable from ethical conduct.122

---

120 See also Balthasar’s “Characteristics of Christianity,” in The Word Made Flesh, vol. 1 of Explorations in Theology (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 167: “The Christian life, the life of grace, of faith and charity, is necessarily one that proceeds from fullness of being, and is, therefore, a life of thanksgiving; eucharistia.”

121 Balthasar writes, “When God stands before God we can say ‘that God shows honor to God’ ‘in a reciprocal glorifying’, ‘in an eternal, reciprocal worship’. ‘Worship as we know it is a grace that comes from the trune worship. Nothing is more rooted in God than worship.’ ‘All worship has its primary basis in the other’s otherness. Where there is mere oneness, worship is not possible. The Son does not worship the Father because the Father is like him; that would mean that the Son found himself worthy of worship and that he worshipped himself. Worship is a relation to a Thou, a relation so strong and pure that only the Thou is of any account. Thus worship does not rest on a need, but in the being (and the ‘being-thus’) of God for God and for creatures.’” TD5, 96. “Da Gott vor Gott steht, kann man sagen ‘daß Gott Gott Ehre erweist’ ‘in einer gegenseitigen Verherrlichung’, ‘in ewiger gegenseitiger Anbetung’. ‘Die Anbetung, die wir kennen, [ist] eine Gnade aus der dreieinigen Anbetung. Nichts ist mehr in Gott begründet als die Anbetung.’ ‘Jede Anbetung hat ihren primären Grund im Anderssein des Andern. Im bloßen Einsein wäre Anbetung nicht möglich. Der Sohn kann den Vater nicht darum anbeten, weil der Vater ihm gleich; das hieße nichts anderes, als daß der Sohn sich selbst anbetungswürdig fände, sich darum selbst anbetete. Anbetung ist Beziehung zum Du so sehr und so rein, daß nur das Du in Betracht kommt. Anbetung ruht also nicht auf einem Bedürfnis, sondern im Sein und im Sosein Gottes für Gott und für die Geschöpfe.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, Das Endspiel, Band IV der Theodramatik (= TDK, IV), Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1983), 84. The citation marks within the body of this quotation refer to different statements by Adrienne von Speyr.

What this implies relative to the vowed life or the spirit of the counsels to which all are called, for Balthasar, is the necessity to see each scenario one finds oneself in, every pain and joy, and every material possession or lack thereof, as a gift to be appropriated in thanksgiving to God. Such an ethic is of course no different in principle than St. Paul’s exhortation to “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:16-8). A crucial additional consideration, for Balthasar, is how this thanksgiving encourages self-realization in and through binding love. In other words, thanksgiving is not only meant to be offered as an individual assent in “all circumstances,” for Balthasar, but also as consent in advance to all the encumbrances that the vowed life or spirit of the counsels brings, because the spirit of the counsels, as a form of life offered in union with Jesus’ (and Mary’s) complete and forever consent to the Heavenly Father is the very path for participation in infinite freedom, for Balthasar. Finite freedom is realized in giving thanks for the loves that commit oneself, according to Balthasar, which

---

123 "'[A]utonomous' freedom” is morally justifiable, for Balthasar, but only within “the Holy Spirit of absolute freedom” in continual thanksgiving for the gift of itself. TD2, 312. “'[A]utonome' Freiheit im Heiligen Geist der absoluten Freiheit. . . .” TDK, II.1, 284. Cf. Ibid., 233 on freedom as a gift

124 See Balthasar, Engagement with God, 38: “For only when in all seriousness a man declares in advance his willingness to agree to every divine decree, even should the decree be hidden and incalculable, can it be said that, in making this kind of response, his will is in perfect harmony with the will of God” (original emphasis).

125 In reference to the grace which heals and saves, Balthasar writes: “[T]he one thing necessary is also the freest gift of all.” Theology of Karl Barth, 357. In reference to Mary’s prototypical imaging of creaturely freedom, Balthasar concludes: “The figure of Mary exhibits an utterly exuberant form of creaturely freedom (and, for that very reason, it is utterly simple); as such she is the prototype who fulfills everything said in the previous volume concerning the relationship between finite and infinite freedom. This is the finite freedom that hands itself over and entrusts itself to the sphere of infinite freedom, which, through grace, stands wide open. . . .” TD3, 299. “Marias . . . eine überschwengliche und gerade deshalb ganz einfache Form kreatürlicher Freiheit, die somit all das prototypisch vollendet, was im vorigen Halbband über das Verhältnis von endlicher zu unendlicher Freiheit gesagt worden ist. Es ist die endliche Freiheit, die sich von vornherein in den gnadenhaft großoffenen Raum der unendlichen hinein übereignet. . . .” TDK, II.2, 275. The freer the consent to “God’s all-embracing-plan,” writes Balthasar, the more universal its implications. Ibid., 300.
is to say that being bound in love—to spouse, to neighbor, to parish, to community, to workplace, and even to a specific work, so long as these commitments are formed out of deference to one’s God-given mission and one is grateful for them—is the road to realizing all the morally good behavior and virtues that true love offers. Indeed, if “every true love has the inner form of a vow,”¹²⁶ as Balthasar contends, then such inwardly binding commitments are the only path to morally upright action.¹²⁷ It follows that the deeper the resolve to be and do whatever God asks of oneself in the self-abandoning love of Jesus, and the more exalted the thanksgiving for one’s all-entailing personal mission, the more one will simultaneously realize himself in freedom. In this way Balthasar understands freedom “not in the first place as a right but,” with George Bernanos, “a duty, a burden, an honor.”¹²⁸

Together with the previous examinations of form and command, and choice and commitment in Balthasar’s thought, this analysis on gift and gratitude helps us to see how Balthasar understands the relation between human freedom and love, which is to say, the proper form of moral action. It provides for us still more perspective on Balthasar’s perspective, thus better enabling the reader in his own discernment of applied ethics.


¹²⁷ This is not to say that one would have to be bound in commitments to truly love at all, for then no child would really love in Balthasar’s sight. Rather, even for the child, committed love is the path, the form, the structure of that which leads to Christian abandonment and fruitfulness, for Balthasar. The child could be said to be at play here in the heartfelt surrender to love completely and forever.

¹²⁸ Balthasar, Bernanos, 103. Balthasar makes clear, however, that once a vow is considered for what it is, “the bond that seemed to [man], in the beginning, to be exactly the opposite of the freedom of love, to be a burden and duty, appears now to be ever more clearly identical with the freedom of love.” CSL, 39. “Bindung, die zu Beginn nur als Gegensatz zur Freiheit der Liebe erschien, nämlich als Last und Pflicht, wird jetzt immer sichtbarer als eins mit der Freiheit der Liebe.” CS, 29.
§ III.4 The Saints and their Missions: Examples of Surrendering Love

One’s understanding of the form love takes in the world, as Balthasar conceives it, will however continue to suffer in spite of all theoretical articulations of form and command, choice and commitment, and gift and gratitude, if one does not also have frequent recourse to those who have truly carried out their God-given missions. “The saints are the authentic interpreters of the theo-drama,” Balthasar explains.\textsuperscript{129} This statement confirms the central place the saints occupy in his theology; it also indicates how critically he views their example for the moral life. While no saint can take the place of Christ as the principal actor of the God-man drama, according to Balthasar, and while the saints are not to be imitated in the strict sense because every person has a unique call and mission, because the saints are “new illustrations of how the gospel is to be lived,”\textsuperscript{130} they present for Balthasar lodestars on the path of living the spirit of the counsels, the form love takes in the world for him. Through their surrender or abandonment or indifference or disponability (taken as one), the saints embody God’s plan for their lives, which not only presupposes freedom but is “the very source of freedom,” writes Balthasar.\textsuperscript{131} In turn, “no one is so much himself as the saint.”\textsuperscript{132}

Now, it is not the saint’s persona that should draw the attention of the moral actor, reasons Balthasar, but his mission or “office.”\textsuperscript{133} The saint is a witness to the truth of love


\textsuperscript{130}Balthasar, Two Sisters in the Spirit, 25.

\textsuperscript{131}Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., 27.
which is first given to him in his unique Christian call, and so the beauty of his life participates intimately in his singular mission. Indeed, for Balthasar, person and mission become indistinguishable at the highest level. Mary illustrates this, he suggests, because there is no aspect of her life and personality which is not integrated into her mission as the Mother of God. Reflection on her unique mission, like that of every other saint, presumably encourages one to affirm his own personal mission and live it out more fully. The saints are thus the touchstones for living the form of Christ’s love in the world, for Balthasar. They stand with Christ, infused by his Spirit, at the center of the theo-drama where the infinite freedom of God the Father is lavished on those who surrender their wills to him in the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience. When it therefore comes to discerning a proper manner of life and, indeed, right moral action in any sense, for Balthasar, one should be inclined to reflect on the missions of the saints. From Balthasar’s perspective, one should study their lives and seek to appropriate the same self-abandoning love indicative of Christ’ existence. Because of this, “What would Jesus do?,” could just as well be rendered, for Balthasar, “What would a saint do?”

Even though the canonized saints of the Church have lived disproportionately in

134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., 28.
136 As divinely free, in this sense, the saints are not bound to inordinate desires or a scrupulous hesitancy or a mitigated generosity, they are rather free to give themselves over fully in love, in peace and rectitude, like a child who tenderly embraces his mother without being told to do so.

137 We would only need to reemphasize the point that each person has his own mission, for Balthasar, so no saint could of himself answer this question for the moral actor. However, contemplating the life-forms of the saints as a totality could very well help the moral actor in his own ethical discernment and relationship with God.
religious life, for Balthasar this should not dissuade the moral actor from considering how sanctity can also be embodied in lay persons. To this end, it bears articulating how Balthasar follows Bernanos in making a helpful distinction between vowed religious obedience and lay obedience. It may seem that the co-founder of the Community of St. John would be retracting his stance on love having the “inner form of a vow” by doing this, but the distinction between the two forms of obedience only highlights the importance of the word “inner” (inneren) in Balthasar’s formulation. Both he and Bernanos are wary of exulting religious obedience to the point of identifying it with the spirit of ecclesial obedience as such and, by way of this, supplanting the proper responsibilities of the laity in their own obedient relations and corresponding “secular freedom.” The Church grants the laity its own freedom, they assure us, for both the laity’s good and the Church’s good. Moreover, obedience is also of the understanding, not just of the will, for Balthasar and Bernanos. This means that true obedience cannot be purely passive, executing orders


139 Balthasar, Bernanos, 593.

140 Ibid. See Section IV.3 to follow for a consideration of Balthasar’s interpretation of the role of “Catholic Action” in this regard.

141 “The freedom the Church allows us [lay persons] is a positive good, a positive right, and we have the duty to use it for her glory instead of burying it like a talent in the Gospel. There is a risk, of course there is. . . . There’s a risk in everything. We must accept that risk humbly. The virtue of fortitude was given us just for this.” George Bernanos, To Amoroso Lima, 204, as cited by Balthasar, Bernanos, 596. Of course this “freedom” does not come at the expense of the doctrines and disciplines of the Church, nor the general honor due those in ecclesiastical authority, for Bernanos and Balthasar, but it does guard against “extravagant honors, occasionally bordering on hysteria, shown at times to the highest dignitaries of the Church” (Bernanos, 595) as well as “blind parroting” (Ibid.) or “purely passive obedience that executes an order mechanically, without the full engagement of the whole person in the process.” Ibid., 591.

142 Ibid.
mechanically, but should be “active and conscious,” writes Bernanos.

Balthasar continues to justify the French author’s claims by recourse to the reciprocity of love. Not only is the obeyer responsible for obeying; the one in command must also love the one obeying and seek a personally engaged response, he tells us. Obedience is no one-sided affair.

The openness and self-surrender of the obeying person is something so extraordinary that the resulting “nakedness”—most graphically illustrated by Saint Francis in the central square of Assisi—must at once be embraced and covered over by the superior’s mantle of personal love. In other words, even the most hierarchical and official of relationships between obeyer and obeyed does not dispense from love.

Quoting Romano Guardini, Balthasar continues,

This is the community of self-surrender, in reciprocal love and in the giving of orders and receiving them in obedience. No one can be truly and inwardly obedient if he does not recognize an ultimate commonality between himself and the one who gives orders. But once he knows that, trust enters obedience—just as certainty enters the act of giving orders. Neither does there exist a mutuality of love without a common bond on the basis of which reciprocal surrender occurs. Thus the shared truth is transformed into the love of obedience and of giving orders.

143 Ibid.
144 These are Bernanos’ words as quoted by Balthasar. Ibid., 592.
146 Balthasar, Bernanos, 594.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 G 15, 84 as cited by Balthasar, Guardini, 29-30. Obedience is meant to happen from both sides of a relationship, for Balthasar, although differently. For instance, even bosses have to listen to their employees if their relationship is to develop in love and their work is to bear fruit at all, yet the submissiveness
The saints, religious or lay, whether in a position of authority and so giving orders or in a position of discipleship and so receiving them—as all are in deference to God—do not for Balthasar act from a position of isolation vis-à-vis their neighbor, but rather see the other as sharing an “ultimate commonality,” a “common bond,” which is to say a constitutive relation to love itself. The “mutuality of love” of which Balthasar speaks, which recognizes the legitimate difference in roles between parties, is yet another instance of Balthasar’s understanding of a nuptial relation oriented to a “third,” that is, their “common bond” of love. This sense of the “mutuality of love” orients the giving and receiving of commands to the fulfillment of the love between persons, the locus of freedom and communion for Balthasar. Again, Balthasar lets Guardini speak:

The fact that authority is experienced as “lack of freedom” results from the “experience of autonomy in the modern age” and its “ressentiment” (G, 1, 28).¹⁵⁰

Presumably the dangerous “experience of autonomy” can be dissolved through the loving commitment to others as experienced in consecrated, communal life, which is no doubt integral to the reason why Balthasar so highly esteems not only religious life, but also secular institutes of lay communion.¹⁵¹

Of course to speak of religious life vis-à-vis lay life is to speak of the relation

---

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 30, fn. 33.

¹⁵¹ Chapter Four to follow indicates the importance Balthasar assigns to communal life under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, perhaps his most illustrative example of how his theology promotes a certain ethic.
between contemplation and action, another important theme in Balthasar’s articulation of the path of sanctity. 152 “[I]n the midst of one’s activity one should still remained detached, in contemplation,” Balthasar writes. 153 The Swiss theologian considers “contemplation as the ultimate source of fruitfulness.” 154 Following the Catholic tradition, he affirms that contemplation is “higher” than action, but he claims “solely” because it bears the most abundant fruit. 155 This is because in Christ there “was always a constant, uninterrupted unity of both,” he writes. 156 What this means for Christian ethics, both in terms of following Christ and being encouraged and guided on this path by the saints, Balthasar clarifies:

While the Christian life ostensibly consists in alternate periods of action and contemplation, its aim should be to make the two interpenetrate more and more. With the saints they were no longer distinguishable. The saint in his activities can be in a perfect state of contemplation. . . . [A]nd so, in the formula of Ignatius, he can be actione contemplativus. . . . 157 He is always conscious [however] that the formula in actione contemplativus itself presupposes the ancient patristic and Thomistic ex abundantia contemplationis activus. 158

152 See especially his essays, “Action and Contemplation,” and “Beyond Action and Contemplation,” as cited above.


154 Ibid., 194. We recall here Balthasar’s prioritization of beauty in ethics, without which, he writes, one “can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.” GL1, 18. “. . . nicht mehr beten und bald nicht mehr lieben kann.” HK I, 16.

155 Balthasar, Two Sisters in the Spirit, 196. Balthasar points to the origin of the notion of contemplation’s superiority over action, which can inflate to an opposition, in Greek thought and surmises that it needs to be purified through recourse to Revelation which better highlights their interdependence. See Balthasar, “Action and Contemplation,” 227-31 and Balthasar, “Beyond Action and Contemplation,” 299-300.


157 “Contemplative in action.”

158 “Active from the abundance of contemplation.” Balthasar, “Action and Contemplation,” 237-8. “Christ’s attitude is the model for the Christian, for whom Christ, and no other, is the standard. The Christian [however] is, in the first place, Mary, who in contrast with Christ as God and man represents the unity of action and contemplation in a pure creature. At the same time, she incarncates the feminine form of this unity,
So even though Balthasar can attest that fructifying contemplation is the greatest task of the Christian,\textsuperscript{159} he cannot forget for a moment the essential place the spirit of the counsels or law of self-surrender occupies in realizing the Christian call.\textsuperscript{160} In the final analysis, one must, according to Balthasar, be willing to surrender his pre-determined acts of contemplation or action to serve the living God. Such is why he considers St. Thérèse of Lisieux to have been beyond contemplation and action in her love.\textsuperscript{161} Balthasar is concerned that as soon as one begins to draw up a method for accruing so much contemplation relative to one’s activities, such a person risks Pharisaism—the calculating of one’s own perfection—when all that is needed is “gratitude and self-surrender.”\textsuperscript{162}

This is another indicator then of how Balthasar can attest that two poles of a relation, in this case contemplation and action, are never wholly complete unto themselves, but rather depend on the other for the realization of their own identity, as well as the “fruit” or “third”

\textsuperscript{159} Balthasar, \textit{Two Sisters in the Spirit}, 197. No action could be more effective than that contemplation which inspires all forms of action in the Church, according to Balthasar. Ibid., 241. Balthasar’s book, \textit{Prayer}, as cited above, is a beautiful meditation entirely dedicated to the task of contemplation.

\textsuperscript{160} “[T]he true principle of Christian fruitfulness [is]: a burning readiness to be used and consumed for the salvation and redemption of the world. This is a readiness that will necessarily be expressed as a personal oblation [cf. vow], as the prayer of surrender.” Balthasar, “Beyond Action and Contemplation,” 306. “Mary remains here the paradigm: active-passive readiness to receive the whole Word, never suspecting how it will be articulated in her, together with her.” Ibid., 304.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 198.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 242.
which bridges them. In the case of the relation of contemplation and action in a saint, this third thing is self-surrendering, disposable love.

In summary, frequent recourse to the saints allows Balthasar to attest to the form love takes in the world, to see how Christ in his body, the Church, manifests his ascent to his heavenly Father in the Holy Spirit in a myriad of ways. Each saint interprets Jesus’ love differently according to the mission that God has entrusted him with, but this just proves how all-encompassing the norm of Christ’s love is for Balthasar in spite of the various personages which shape the human drama. What this implies for the moral life today, for Balthasar, is firstly an indication that the particular mission God has gifted one with in Christ is meant to be accepted and lived in gratitude and not set aside in the hope for a more appealing or “spiritually enlightening” project. Secondly, it means for him that the saints are there not only for intercession and general inspiration, but also as guides in the moral life, that is, beacons of light on the Way of all light and grace, Jesus Christ. Finally, Balthasar suggests that all appeals to theoría—virtue, moral action, divine command, contemplation and action, and so on—must be continually referred to the litmus test of Jesus Christ and his love, as interpreted by the saints, in order to see the true value of these theories.

Conclusion

This chapter has concerned Balthasar’s account of the comprehensive framework for realizing Christ’s love in the world, that is, the irrevocable spirit of the evangelical counsels as accepted in gratitude and interpreted by the saints in self-surrender. Balthasar’s understanding of the form love takes in the world should help the reader discern, together
with the previous chapters on the holistic norm of Christ’s love and his theological
metaphysics, further conditional criteria by which to inform one’s view of particular moral
cases. Of particular interest here has been how Balthasar understands freedom to exist in and
through the deepest measure of fidelity to the given reality (= gift) one finds oneself in,
meaning humble and grateful obedience to all that is objective: nature itself,\textsuperscript{163} one’s
relations,\textsuperscript{164} the ecclesial instruments of salvation including the Church’s hierarchy and, of
course, for Balthasar, one’s personal call and mission. On this basis, on this foundation of
wonder and servitude to a reality beyond oneself which is paradoxically, in its immaterial
elements, also interior as natural logos or grace, does one then find the license characteristic
of this same freedom to play and create and blossom as a human person, for Balthasar.

If the last chapter focused especially on man and the world he encounters as subjects
of the gift of being, this chapter, having built on the former, has concerned especially
Balthasar’s understanding of man as a subject of action relative to the infinite freedom which
engages him in the theo-drama of life. Whereas the last chapter focused on the gift of being,
this chapter has focused on human action in accord with this gift.

Due to Steck’s initial foray in the field of Balthasarian ethics, Chapter Three has
addressed Balthasar’s position on divine form and command in mutual relation. In so doing,
the chapter has provided, indirectly, a basis by which to consider a surplus of questions
related to the application of personal freedom, since adjudicating choice and commitment,
and perceiving existence as a gift to be received in gratitude, both concern human freedom

\textsuperscript{163} By nature we mean everything that bears the marks of truth, beauty, and goodness, including
the human body in its natural telos as well as the definition of marriage as originally intended.

\textsuperscript{164} Such relations include husband-wife, parent-child, boss-employee, etc.
relative to vowed love. Suffice it to say that Balthasar’s perspective accentuates maintaining a contemplative-active repose forever ready to live out one’s mission of self-abandoning love which God offers and which man is meant to choose in freedom (totally) for the whole of his life (forever). This mission is meant to color all of one’s actions, actions based on choices which are pledges of love,165 for Balthasar, and sustained in a thanksgiving united to Christ’s “eucharistic surrender.”166

Together with our previous discussion in Chapter One of Balthasar’s understanding of Jesus Christ as the universal and personal norm of ethical action, that is, how it is that Jesus unites origin, worship, and deed, and our discussion in Chapter Two of the service required in the presence of the mystery of being, in its constitutively-related polarity, and in its ordination to fruitfulness in a third, much has now been offered for reflection on the moral life. Each of the defining characteristics of Balthasar’s nexus of love, as mentioned in the General Introduction to this work and in different ways at various junctures throughout the first three chapters, has now been accounted for.167 Although perhaps none of them are wholly original to Balthasar, the fact that he perceives them together within one holistic perspective and brings them into play immediately in the discernment of being and action due to his theological approach, i.e. “the third way of love,” they can come rushing forward and made applicable to numerous ethical questions. Such is why it is rather easy to identify

---

165 This is especially true of the choice for a particular state in life, for Balthasar, but it is in no way limited by that singular choice.


167 Although Balthasar’s promotion of Catholic culture through deed and art has been mentioned in Part One, it is best suited for the following chapter on his personal application of this nexus of love to specific cases, and therefore will receive a more thorough demonstration there.
adherents to Balthasar’s perspective, which is to say, for him at least, a fully Catholic perspective. As this work proceeds in Part Two to examine particular moral cases, we will have recourse to consider how Balthasar himself, David L. Schindler, and me, bring this nexus of Christ’s love to bear on various ethical matters. This is done for the sake of the work itself, but also to help the reader to discern how he also might apply such a form of love to the life we live and the moral questions we ponder. This is Balthasar’s contribution to ethics.
PART TWO
CHAPTER FOUR

Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Moral Treatises

Introduction

As mentioned at the opening of this work, Balthasar did not consider himself a moral theologian or ethicist.\(^1\) His writings demonstrate only the slightest appeal to specific moral cases. The great burden of this dissertation has been to indicate how his Christological theology of love nevertheless provides a foundational perspective for discerning appropriate moral action in given situations, a perspective informed by a theological starting point which tends to differentiate, in its applications, Balthasar’s adherents from other ethicists faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. This chapter begins in earnest the practical dimension of this burden which shall occupy the entirety of Part Two of the dissertation. The focus of this chapter, Chapter Four, is limited to those available writings in which Balthasar himself offers moral guidelines.\(^2\) These can be summarized in three categories: (1) his articulation of the roles of man and woman with respect to God and each other, which indicates, among other things, that artificial contraception is evil and that only men ought to be ministerial priests, (2) the liberality in which he sees property rights which grants some insight into his view of social justice, and (3) his living promotion of secular institutes and communio, which together present the best contemporary model for the Christian to live by, according to Balthasar. The necessarily constricted focus of Chapter Four makes it quite

---

\(^1\) "Ich habe keine Ethik."

\(^2\) This is to say that these ethical applications of Balthasar are quite simply the only ones the present author is aware of or has had access to in any demonstrable form. In fact, the second one listed has had to be teased out of an exposition which is more properly anthropological than moral, and the third concerns directly his life, not a moral argument as such.
brief; it also allows us to plumb the riches of these three applications in a way that could not
be done if there were substantially more material to draw upon. The hope is that the “whole”
of Balthasar’s contribution to ethics as surveyed in Part One of the dissertation will begin to
come into view in this chapter’s three “parts,”³ as indicators of the way Balthasar himself
would and, in fact, did apply the form of Christ’s love to specific moral questions. Although
the reader may not gain from these ethical applications of Balthasar a thorough testament to
his holistic perspective on the form love takes in the world, at least we will have begun to
introduce the matter from the vantage point of the Swiss theologian himself. To describe
these applications in detail, disclosing along the way certain marks of the nexus of love
mentioned in Part One,⁴ is therefore to fulfill the task of this chapter to see how Balthasar’s
theology contributes to his own application of ethics, without either reducing his theology to
these applications or reducing these applications to what has been explicitly made known in
the previous part.⁵

§ IV.1.(a) Nuptiality and Fruitfulness: The Transmission of Human Life

The most striking feature of Balthasar’s modest essay, “A Word on Humanae Vitae,”

³ These three parts come in four sections, as the first part on nuptiality and fruitfulness concerns
two distinct moral cases: contraception and the ministry of the priesthood.

⁴ A point-by-point analysis is not the objective here, since such a method would likely detract
from and obfuscate the larger holistic perspective (the Gestalt) that Balthasar provides, not to mention the
rhythm of the exposition of Balthasar’s analysis. That said, many such points of reference, if not made in the
body of the text, will be provided in the footnotes for additional clarity.

⁵ Of course not all of the distinctive characteristics of Balthasar’s philosophically inclusive
theology of love are recognizable in these extant applications. Then again, nothing here will stand in
contradiction to what has been previously shown.
is his approach. One can see immediately in this note, as it were, how Balthasar’s theological methodology, his “third way of love,” sets him apart from others faithful to the Church’s teaching on the immorality of contraception because in the opening sentence it is apparent that he will be treating the subject matter of Pope Paul VI’s much anticipated and polarizing encyclical, not on the basis of natural law theory (see “the cosmological reduction”) as Paul VI had done, nor from the perspective of philosophical personalism (see “the anthropological reduction”) as Karol Cardinal Wojtyła would do in response, but from “the mystery of the relationship of Christ to his Church” (see Eph 5:21-33). Balthasar’s explicitly theological, indeed, Christological approach, distinguishes him from the Magisterium in its traditional exposition of the transmission of human life.

6 Of course his approach is itself a distinguishing characteristic of his theology of love.

7 This 14-page article contains no footnotes or endnotes.

8 LAC, 51-60.

9 Ibid., 15-30.


11 LAC, 31-50.


What difference does this perspective make? Positively speaking, by understanding the relationship of husband and wife to “take its structure from” Christ’s relationship with his mystical bride, Balthasar is able to indicate the called-for self-surrendering love of husband (cf. Christ) and wife (cf. Church) for one another with particular profundity.\textsuperscript{15} Balthasar makes clear, for example, that while the wife is obligated to be submissive to her husband (see Eph 5:22-4; Tts 2:5; 1 Pe 3:1, 5), this is no one-sided injunction, for the husband too is included in the command to “Submit to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21).\textsuperscript{16} More to the point, Balthasar sees, both with respect to the Marian-ecclesial ideal for discipleship\textsuperscript{17} and also with respect to “modern genetic research,”\textsuperscript{18} that “all created Being” is “essentially feminine when compared to the creator God.”\textsuperscript{19} This “femininity” is not passive, as Balthasar understands it, but actively receptive in its fruitfulness, as is particularly discernible in the sexually fecund relationship of man and woman where “by reason of the long pregnancy, birth, the stage of feeding, and subsequent child care on the mother’s part, we could say that the woman exhibits an activity which is significantly superior to the

\textsuperscript{15} Balthasar describes the Church as “feminine,” “receptive and nurturing.” “A Word on \textit{Humanae Vitae},” 440.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 440. This understanding fits in nicely with Balthasar’s metaphysical exposition of the polarity and fruitfulness of being. The husband is meant to serve in such a way as to anticipate, make way for, submit to and receive, a loving response from his wife for the sake of a third thing, that is, God and his love, which acts both in them and transcends them. This submission to one another out of reverence for God in Christ allows for fruitfulness, which is to say the instantiation of a third thing (conjugal love; child) beyond the couple themselves.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 441, 443.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 442.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
man’s.” 20 This means, for Balthasar, that submission or “feminine” receptivity, so to speak, is indicative of the self-surrendering love to which all are called and which alone allows for a fruitful relationship in God’s eyes. 21

This does not mean, according to Balthasar, that man and woman have the same roles in life and in marriage, or that masculinity has no positive genius of its own. The man remains the “progenitor” of marital fruitfulness, writes Balthasar, analogous to God the Father as “the very source and origin of all things” and Jesus Christ “who creates the Church from the totality of his divine and human substance.” 22 It is precisely in this way, the theologian from Basel indicates, that the man is the “head of his wife” (Eph 5:23). 23 Balthasar summarizes:

From all this we have gained one general insight: for the Christian husband and for the Christian wife, the norm of their sexual relationship is a theological one, namely the relationship between Christ and the Church. 24

Notice that Balthasar’s theological methodology serves him in adjudicating the spousal relationship from the perspective of the Christological norm, itself based on his obedient love for his Heavenly Father and expressed analogously in the relationship of Christ

20 Ibid., cf. 444.

21 This calls to mind the frequent recourse he makes to Marian disponability or child-likeness in his work, which of course finds expression at the root of being for him.

22 “A Word on Humanae Vitae,” 444. “[T]he man represents only a distant analogy to this trinitarian and christological event. But it is an analogy nonetheless. . . .” Ibid.

23 Ibid., 445.

24 Ibid. Balthasar continues, “We could say that this holds true for all non-Christians as well, only they know nothing of this norm and therefore cannot consciously pattern themselves after it.” Ibid.
and his Church. Not only are husband and wife called to procreate as natural law theory discloses, nor are they simply called to express personal love between one another, as personalism aptly indicates, but they are called to a graced, sacramental relationship which identifies self-surrendering fruitful love as the (supra) basis by which to properly understand the call to procreate and the call to interpersonal love. Of course both natural law and personalism, properly understood, point to the same reality, but Balthasar’s methodology arguably discloses this reality more clearly and profoundly than either natural law or personalism could do by themselves. When Balthasar finally turns in the last third of his essay to the topic at hand “by reflecting explicitly on *Humanae Vitae,*”25 he has in place a Christological-ecclesial-anthropological framework for judging the morality of contraception from a theological perspective.26

Any arrogating of power to regulate the full procreative function within the husband-wife relationship would seriously jeopardize their conjugal bond, in Balthasar’s view, based as it is on the norm of Christ who holds nothing “back for himself or places any reservations on his own self-surrender.”27 Unlike periodic abstinence, Balthasar writes, artificial contraception adds “calculation and limitation *into an act* that is meant to be the symbolic

25 Ibid.

26 A “Christological-ecclesial-anthropological” framework would be one that deliberately holds these orders together in their distinctiveness—such as a nuptial or trinitarian relation—because each of the orders is best interpreted in light of the others. Such a faith-first methodology is distinguishable from the cosmological and anthropological “reductions” that Balthasar describes in *LAC,* 15-60.

27 “A Word on *Humanae Vitae,*” 444; cf. 439-40. We recall here that, for Balthasar, “the norm of Christ” and his love includes within it obediential reverence, submission, or receptivity to Jesus’ Heavenly Father, indeed to his earthly parents. In this way it encompasses the reciprocity involved in Christ’s marriage with the Church. This is why in the same article Balthasar can expound the norm of the Christ-Church relationship as though identical to the norm of Christ. Ibid., 443; cf. 445.
expression of an unconditional love between man and woman” (emphasis added).28

[T]here is all the difference in the world between using one’s awareness of the periods of infertility and arrogating to oneself the right to impose radical restrictions on fertility by the use of artificial contraception.29

Many see little difference here. And perhaps there is little difference, so long as man views himself as an entity that invents itself and regulates itself: homo technicus. Were this view of man the truth, no limits at all could be set on his manipulation of his own nature.30

If man however sees himself as one who, rather than inventing and regulating himself in the manner of homo technicus, receives himself from God in love as Mary-Church does,31 indeed, as is fitting to homo sapiens, intimates Balthasar, then and only then can man respect the spirit of fruitfulness proper to marital sexuality as exemplified in the love relationship between Christ and his Church.

The man, even and specifically in the sexual act, must show perfect, loving self-giving, which at the same time takes up the self-giving of the woman and gives it form, the wife is the one who allows herself to be formed, without

28 Ibid., 448.
29 Ibid., 449. Balthasar does not identify what contraception is in itself; he simply disparages “artificial” contraception. Perhaps there is some confusion here between what Paul VI describes as “artificial birth control” (Humanae vitae, 16) and contraception. Morally speaking, all acts of contraception are unlawful (see Ibid., 14; John Paul II, Familiaris consortio, 32; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2370), while certain reasons for (natural) birth control, such as periodic abstinence during trying times, are legitimate owing to their respect for the “procreative significance” of the marital embrace. Humanae vitae, 12.
30 Ibid., 449. One can see in this remark Balthasar’s depreciation of the inherent inclination of technolog, ordered as it is to efficiency and comfort, to obfuscate the inherent beauty of reality and subvert man’s virtuous actions, if not necessarily in every practical (and prudent) appropriation of it. Such a logic which “invents” and “regulates” itself stands in stark contrast to his understanding that surrender or receptivity is a condition for authentic creativity (fruitfulness).
31 By this is meant incorporating a contemplative repose and grateful attitude in one's life which corresponds to how one’s body-person has been given to oneself by God.
setting inner limits on the love which she has received.  

Moreover, if man is to receive in gratitude his body (and that of his spouse) and minister it as a gift from God, as Balthasar suggests, man assures his identity and acts in accord with his nature, in other words, he avoids the “manipulation of his own nature.”

Suggesting an appeal to natural law theory, Balthasar writes that any diverting of the “inherent purpose” of “species-orientation” subverts and dissects man as person from man as animal, because man’s personal or spiritual fruitfulness is dependent in some way on the “inner finality” of his humanity. One can see here how natural law has a place in Balthasar’s thought as a pointer to the fruitfulness that men and women are meant to obtain in marriage. Nevertheless, as is typical of Balthasar’s methodology, he makes primary the faith-based a posteriori argument that the revelation of Jesus’ and Mary’s (or Christ’s and the Church’s) communio love for one another grants inestimable insight and meaning to the sexual act’s natural ordination to self-giving love:

32 Balthasar, Elucidations, 149. Balthasar continues, “In the opposition of the sexes, which in none of its aspects is simply physical but which always leaves its imprint on personal attitudes and responses, lies the possibility of a perfect mutual interpenetration which opens up the way to a unity of love and to a fruitfulness which transcends the two individual partners.” Ibid.

33 Man should “nourish it and take care of it as Christ cares for the Church.” Balthasar, “A Word on Humanae Vitae,” 446.

34 Ibid., 450. This is particularly evident today in those who attempt to change their sexual identity or seek-out vasectomies or hysterectomies for the regulation of births, or, in less serious cases but cases still consistent with Balthasar’s understanding of the artificial manipulation of one’s humanity—liposuction, hair replacements, cosmetic “plastic” surgery, and so on.

35 Ibid., 448. It is necessary to recall here that “person” in Balthasar’s usage refers to one’s divine mission. His indication that person and nature belong together is another way of suggesting the ultimate co-terminus of nature and grace.

36 Ibid., 447.
[W]hen a man and a woman live this sort of life, keeping before their eyes Christ’s eucharistic love and Mary’s assent, they will inevitably find themselves restrained from debasing their acts of married love, acts that are intended by their very nature to express an unlimited and self-giving love.37

Negatively speaking, the dual-limitation with Balthasar’s chief approach is (1) its putative unreasonableness for those without Christian faith who are not likely to be persuaded by the examples of Jesus and Mary or the Pauline reference to the relationship between Christ and his Church and (2) its apparent non-applicability to persons engaging in sexual acts outside of the bond of marriage.38 Although Balthasar is clearly not addressing these audiences in this near literal “word” on Human vitae, further explanation of the inherent immorality of contraception will remain for many readers of this work. For the faithful observer, however, Balthasar’s albeit constricted accounts of the danger of making oneself into a homo technicus and of the “inherent purpose” of “species-orientation,” that is, his natural law references, together with his in-depth meditation on the character of self-abandoning, fruitful love, leave little doubt that men and women, whether they be Christian or married or neither of these, are not meant to obstruct the sexual act through unnatural means. In any case, for Balthasar, human intercourse is properly understood only in the context of Christian marriage, as a graced reflection of the nuptials between Christ and his

37  Ibid., 449. “So long as the Christian’s heart and mind are spellbound by this humble and totally selfless love he has in his possession the best possible compass for finding his way in the fog of sexual matters.” Balthasar, Elucidations, 153.

38  Church teaching stipulates that contraception is always wrong, no matter the circumstances of the act or the persons involved (see Paul VI, Humanae vitae, 14; John Paul II, Familiaris consortio, 32; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2370).
§ IV.1.(b) Nuptiality and Fruitfulness: Roles in the Church

As one might expect from the foregoing discussion of Balthasar’s approach to contraception, as well as the more foundational remarks in Section II.3 above on The Polarity of Being: Nuptiality and Fruitfulness in Balthasar’s thought, the gender difference comes to bear on man’s and woman’s roles in the Church, for Balthasar. This is the subject matter of his still briefer essay, “Woman Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture.” One might first ask, “How is this anthropological-ecclesial theme a moral question?” The presupposition here is that the practical concern of whether women should be priests and in particular how Balthasar answers this question by appealing to the theological anthropology of the sexes, works as a touchstone, not unlike the argument advanced in the previous section, for considering a number of different issues related to gender and sexuality that operate as serious moral questions. The presupposition here is that human anthropology provides an intelligible basis for discerning right action.

39 “Human sexuality is precisely created by and for such love.” Balthasar, Elucidations, 149.

40 It is apparent enough that practical concerns were not Balthasar’s foremost interest. “Woman Priests?” is only seven pages long, with no footnotes. Communio 22 (1995): 164-70, orig. pub. New Elucidations, 187-98. This essay appears shortly before the re-publication of “A Word on Humanae Vitae,” 204-28 in the same book.

41 See the conclusion to this section for a listing of such cases.

42 Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter Mulieris dignitatem, Apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women, Vatican Website, August 15, 1988, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html, recalls that “The foundation of the whole human ‘ethos’ is rooted in the image and likeness of God which the human being bears within himself from the beginning” (Mulieris dignitatem, 7). This letter further suggests that the psycho-sexual difference between man and woman plays out in distinct vocations or roles (Ibid., 10), and thus in different moral activities. This is not to suggest a simplistic “is-ought”
Our previous references to Balthasar’s understanding of the relation of man and woman in terms of Christ’s relation to the Church would seem to go a long way toward answering whether women should be ministerial priests, for Balthasar, and indeed the character of the Marian-Church plays a substantial role in “Woman Priests?,” but here Balthasar also appeals to the reestablishment of the “balance” between the sexes as such.\(^43\) In sum, the Church of recent memory is ensconced in a “predominantly male-oriented, technological civilization,”\(^44\) according to Balthasar, which “is traceable to the prevalence of a rationalism to which natural things and conditions mean above all material for manufacturables.”\(^45\) Both sexes have increasingly treated nature in an overtly “masculine” way as something to be manipulated in their quest for power, Balthasar contends,\(^46\) without realizing that what is needed for true spiritual fruit to be born is the “precedence of the feminine aspect of the Church over the masculine,”\(^47\) that is, the contemplative-receptive repose before God and creation which is the call of every human being.\(^48\) Therefore, in order


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 164.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 165. Here again Balthasar’s reluctance to embrace a technological order is evident, not because he is a romantic for the days of horse and carriage, but because he believes that technology’s positivist underpinnings tend to render opaque the mystery and wonder of being, and that it also orients persons to a predominantly active and manipulative, i.e. not firstly receptive and grateful, ethos.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 169.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 168.

\(^{48}\) In today’s civilization, writes Balthasar, “a feminine element—to state it briefly—that makes a person secure in nature and in being is abandoned in favor a of a preponderance of the masculine element, which pushes forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own” (original emphasis). Ibid., 165.
to retain the difference between the sexes and thus effect the balance between them so necessary for fruitfulness, Balthasar suggests that women ought not to seek distinctive male tasks.49

“A woman who would aspire to this [ministerial] office would be aspiring to specifically masculine functions,”50 writes Balthasar, rather than “making a home for man who is always on the run, exposed to the world.”51 While the Swiss priest does not indicate systematically how it is that the functions of a priest are “masculine” and how, in contrast, the woman’s role involves the nurturing aspect of “making a home,” his articulation of the Marian and Petrine dimensions of the Church,52 the latter a mere “function” of its essential Marian femininity relative to God in Christ,53 suggests a proclivity to see that which is active, creative, productive, authoritative, but also controlling and manipulative of material resources, as typically “masculine,” while that which is receptive, nurturing and affectionate, contemplative, grateful, and otherwise disponable to the gift of being, to be typically

49 Ibid., 165. The balance is not effected “by the woman’s movement into the already overpopulated other side. Such a change would totally destroy the disturbed balance, level the all-fructifying difference between the sexes in favor of an asexuality (with male indications, however) and consume humanity’s last ideological reserves.” Ibid., 166. John Paul later echoes Balthasar’s thought when he writes, “In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’. There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfillment’, but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness. It is indeed an enormous richness” (original emphasis). Mulieris dignitatem, 10.


51 Ibid., 166.

52 Ibid., 167. See also Balthasar, Mary: The Church at the Source, 165-74.

53 “This femininity of the Church is all-encompassing. By contrast, the ministerial office filled by the apostles and their male successors is a pure function within this overarching reality.” Balthasar, Mary: The Church at the Source, 111.
“feminine.” Inclusive of Balthasar’s point here is that Peter and his priestly successors are first children of God and disciples of Jesus before they image Christ in priestly ministry, indicating for Balthasar that even the priest needs to exemplify the fundamental traits of “femininity” noted above to reveal the true meaning of masculine authority as service. On the other hand, because specifically masculine traits are not fundamental or essential for every human person, according to Balthasar, and in fact are misappropriated as rationalism, material manipulation, and/or a quest for power without their proper feminine or, shall we say, natural basis, this is all the more reason for Balthasar why women ought to remain grounded in the essential Marian role given to them as their particular genius.

Indeed, the meaningfulness of the specifically feminine is crucial to overcoming the

54 This is not to suggest that Balthasar does not find active elements in femininity and receptive elements in masculinity (see “Woman Priests?,” 165), but that these components come by way of the fundamental receptivity of all creatures and are not, as it were, “typical” of a philosophically applicable adjudication of femininity and masculinity. He moreover states that “the sexual image suggested here should not be pressed” (Ibid., 65), yet it is unquestionably the operative archetype at work in his thesis.


56 For further commentary in this regard, see Balthasar’s article “The Uninterrupted Tradition of the Church,” L’Osservatore Romano, February 24, 1977, 6-7: “Restored nature would bring to light—within the parity of nature and parity of value of the sexes—above all the fundamental difference, according to which woman does not represent, but is, while man has to represent and, therefore, is more and less than what he is. Insofar as he is more, he is woman’s “head” and on the Christian plane intermediary of divine goods; but insofar as he is less, he depends upon woman as a haven of refuge and exemplary fulfillment.” See also Balthasar, “How Weighty is the Argument from ‘Uninterrupted Tradition’ to Justify the Male Priesthood?,” Communio 18 (1991): 185-92 RT.

57 See Balthasar, “Woman Priests?,” 168. John Paul II also develops the notion of the vocation of woman as fundamentally Marian in its virginal, motherly, and spousal dimensions. See Mulieris dignitatem, 17, 22. Regarding those women called to religious life, Balthasar comments: “[A] woman called to the religious life suffers no loss because she is not admitted to the priesthood. She shares just as much as, if not more than, men in the existential priesthood of Christ, in which no one has so deep a share as the Lord’s mother at the foot of the Cross.” CSL, 374. “Genau an dieser Stelle zeigt sich auch, daß der zum Leben der Räte berufenen Frau dadurch nichts vorenthalten ist, daß sie das Priestertum nicht erhält. Hat sie doch zumindest ebensosehr, wenn nicht mehr als der Mann Anteil an dem existentiellen Priestertum Christi, an dem niemand so tief beteiligt war als die Mutter des Herrn unter dem Kreuz.” CS, 303.
imbalance of the predominately masculine world we now live in, for Balthasar, where natural things are seen without “history” and “superabundance” and are therefore more and more frequently appropriated as material to be “technologized:”

Neither competition with man in the typically masculine field nor a rationally drawn up (with masculine means!) counteraction against the masculine world is meaningful; meaning can be found only in creating a vital force against history-less, technologized existence, in abstaining from the artificial superabundance being offered with a view to noticing anew the real “superabundance of life.”

Lest Balthasar be accused of having nothing positive to say about the masculine character of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the following excursions from an earlier work of his should help clarify what he has in mind when he reserves the priestly “function” for men alone. Balthasar claims that “the priest I want . . . needs both the commission and authority from God and the experience in the Spirit: that would entitle him to demand of me, not for himself but for God and for me, things which I do not dare to demand for myself.”

Balthasar continues,

This is the first quality that the priest I am looking for would have to have; for he would have to be a priest, or at any rate he would have to have been commissioned and authorized from above, by Christ, to confront me with God’s incarnate word in such a manner that I can be sure that it is not I who


59 That Balthasar describes the priesthood as a “pure function” (Mary: The Church at the Source, 111) and states that “One must . . . guard against exalting the service of the bishop and the priest to a quality fundamentally inaccessible to women” (“Woman Priests?,” 169), suggests that he stopped short of recognizing an ontological basis for the male-only priesthood, even as he recognizes the traits of the priest to be typically masculine in character. That there is an ontological basis for the male-only priesthood is an argument best reserved for another forum.

60 Balthasar, Elucidations, 107.
am making use of it; I have to know that I have not from the very outset emasculated it by psychologizing, interpreting, demythologizing it away to such an extent that it can no longer create in me what it wills. No, what I am looking for is the man who can confront me with it in such a way that I cannot escape its demands, because I meet them in the concrete form of the authority of the Church which, as a serving authority, actualizes the concrete form of the divine authority.\(^{61}\)

Balthasar first discloses the commission and authorization needed by the priest he wants, implying that this priest would have to be a man acting in persona Christi, while also being experienced in the Spirit.\(^{62}\) Also noteworthy is that Balthasar wants the priest to be “demanding,” one who would “confront” him in such a way that Balthasar could not “emasculate” the word of truth offered to the point that it would “no longer create in me what it wills.”\(^{63}\) Clearly Balthasar sees the role of the priest to convey an authority and creativity properly considered masculine, to which he, as any other Christian receiver of this ministry, is meant to encounter in a “feminine” way. Finally, Balthasar indicates how priestly authority ought to be “a serving authority,” as derivative of both the Church and God himself;\(^{64}\) for our purposes this simply shows the consistency of his remarks on the priesthood and the masculine role in general as dependent on an authority to which it is fundamentally childlike or feminine in receptivity. Upon being childlike, the man, the priest, no longer lords it over another (cf. Gen 3:16); instead, he serves.

What Balthasar’s perspective on the sexual difference ultimately illustrates is that

---

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
without the active and authoritative force of male creativity, always-already informed by the[

feminine receptive mode of creaturely existence relative to God, and this concomitant with the female genius of “making a home” to nurture the proverbial male seed—*no fruit can be born.* As indicated in Chapter Two above, fruitfulness is a critical category for Balthasar for discerning the value of a thing (see Mt 7:16; 12:33). The sexual difference, because it naturally provides the required “space” between partners, allows for the being and development of such fruit, whether this be the unity and faith of a congregation, the love between persons, the marriage bond, a child, or some other third thing analogously indicative of the triune order of love. It is no reach, for instance, to see here and in the previous section how Balthasar’s perspective runs counter to the advocacy of same-sex marriage or homosexual activity of any kind. Furthermore, if Part One of this work was not enough of an indication, Balthasar’s more practical essays illustrate that he would undoubtedly see an artificial and uncalled-for technological imprint in *in-vitro* fertilization, self-absorption in

---

65 This would certainly not be a fruit reflective of Christ’s relationship with the Church, itself an image of the triune communion.

66 See Section II.3.

67 This is not just a physical space, but also a psychological, emotional, and intellectual space, for Balthasar, owing to the entire psycho-somatic created difference between man and woman. “[T]he division of the sexes touches man’s spirit so totally, from its deepest roots to its highest pinnacle, that the physical difference appears insignificant in comparison with this distinction that affects the whole person.” *CSL*, 227. “[D]ie geschlechtliche Unterscheidung durchherrscht den Geist des Menschen bis in die tiefsten Wurzeln und höchsten Gipfel, so sehr, daß die körperliche Differenz neben dieser gesamtpersonalen als ein bloßes Teilmoment erscheint.” *CS*, 183. Moreover, the roles that man and woman assume by nature and in Christian mission illustrate this difference accordingly.

masturbation, the antithesis of either sacrificial or nurturing love in abortion, and so on. 69 Each of these inherently disordered activities, as the Church considers them, could not stand the test of natural “fruitfulness” for Balthasar. This is to say nothing of the fact that they represent positions contrary to magisterial teaching and therefore contrary to Balthasar’s understanding of the due obedience and self-abandoning love required of the Christian as a follower of Jesus Christ and his Church. 70

§ IV.2 Poverty and the Natural Rights of Ownership

Now we turn to an ethical discussion that Balthasar engages within a larger work on Christian anthropology. The task here, as with the other applications in this chapter, is to clarify how Balthasar would and, in fact, did apply his own theology to a specific case study. It is simply to demonstrate one of the only known (social) ethical studies of Balthasar in light of what has been disclosed in Part One, without reducing one to the other. Here in particular we gain added insight into how Balthasar understands the spirit of counsels—poverty in this case—as integral to love and thus at the root of being, of creation, of ownership, and ultimately the economic order. Since Balthasar’s contribution to ethics rests on the holistic perspective or theological foundation he provides the ethicist, this case is still another pointer

69 Balthasar treats an array of individual sins in Bernanos, 388-402.

70 Balthasar observes, “The declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood has prudently touched on all the decisive dimensions of the problem. It was not afraid to penetrate into the depths of the mystery, from which such liberating and convincing light shines forth for the true believer. Certainly, the actual proof which justifies the Church’s way of acting is given in sections 2-4 on the normative way of action of Christ, then of the apostles and then of the tradition of the Church. The constancy of this tradition is presented finally not as a ‘kind of archaism, but as faithfulness’ to her own founder. It is precisely here that it derives its ‘normative character’.” “The Uninterrupted Tradition of the Church,” 6-7.
for the reader to understand how best to apply Balthasar’s perspective in his own life and practical concerns.  

Just as Christian anthropology helps Balthasar to discern appropriate sexual behavior and distinctive roles in the Church, then, so too does the anthropology of the original state of man, interpreted in light of the Gospel, provide certain criteria for social ethics, for Balthasar. The following review of point three of the section entitled “Man in Paradise” in Balthasar’s *The Christian State of Life* is an attempt to show how he advances a line of social justice by elucidating the positions of other respected theologians in the Christian tradition on poverty and ownership in the Garden of Eden. Balthasar does not leave the reader a list of “do’s” and “dont’s,” but his articulation of the original state of man in light of his overall Christological theology of love makes evident his general perspective on economic issues today, a perspective, we shall see, that is strikingly similar to Benedict XVI’s in *Caritas in veritate*.

Indeed, when one considers again how Balthasar understands love to take the form of a vow, that is, the form of the evangelical counsels as elucidated in Chapter Three, then one is apt to see how a moral case as putatively isolated as the relation of poverty and ownership in the earthly “Paradise,” makes claims even on contemporary Catholic social doctrine. Balthasar’s investigation allows him to offer what he undoubtedly thinks is the “natural” basis for fruitful economic life in this world order. What may seem ironic is that he does this

---

71 Because Balthasar engages the Fathers and St. Thomas (and none other) on this subject, these and the Church’s own social doctrine will serve as our secondary sources. Stratford Caldecott mentions this work, but no more. See Caldecott, “The Social Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” 185.

72 *CSL*, 103-29. See also Balthasar, “Natural Law and Private Ownership,” 105-19 RT.
by arguing for the presence of poverty in man’s original state, in addition to chastity and obedience. Balthasar does not mean to claim that the evangelical counsels existed “from the beginning” (Mt 19:8) as they do at present, that is, as counsels, but he does argue how they were nevertheless present with and integral to their relative counterweights: riches, fecundity, and freedom, in the original state of man. Balthasar’s understanding leads him to consider private ownership, the feeling of shame, and man’s critical intellect and freedom of will as derivative of sin and thus realities, in the full sense of the word, only of the fallen state of man. This is not to say that he does not find them natural in some way as well, for he thinks that “These realities had been, as it were, suspended for man by the grace of his original state and destined to fulfill their role as inner, unheeded functions of a higher being, to work unseen in grace.” That being said, we will concentrate our discussion here on Balthasar’s position on ownership in the original state, for his depiction of shame and man’s spiritual faculties in “Paradise” do not bear on morality in a fashion substantially different

---

73 CSL, 103-29. Balthasar’s theological methodology, his faith-first perspective, affords him the opportunity to see how even “natural” man is governed by the norm of Christ’s love. In other words, even prior to Revelation, Adam and Eve’s personal fulfillment rested on giving themselves away in vowed love, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.

74 Ibid., 104, 119-22.


than what has already been covered in this dissertation. Balthasar’s claims in support of the common use of goods, as has been mentioned, have noteworthy implications for social ethics.

Balthasar proceeds to recount in general outline—”since precisely in this area the various interpretations diverge only slightly and are for the most part complimentary to one another”78—the positions on private ownership of a number of Christian theologians up to and beyond Thomas Aquinas.79 While some take a more “absolute” stance, such as Chrysostom and Ambrose, that there was no private ownership in Paradise,80 writes Balthasar, others such as Clement of Alexandria and Lactantius see the role of private property present or logically fitting in the original state but under a constant form of generosity which “placed all they possessed at the disposal of others.”81 In this way Clement, for example, sees no distinction between private and common ownership in the

---

77 Balthasar’s exposition of shame and its link, for him, to sexual fecundity, traces the history of the question in the Fathers and Schoolmen just as his exposition of private ownership. See Ibid., 85-7, 92-103. Like many of the Fathers he comments upon, Balthasar thinks that the Garden of Eden, ala “Paradise,” was not meant for sexual relations. Rather, he believes, human propagation would have come about another way, such as Eve came from Adam’s rib, for instance, had there been no sin. However, because Balthasar does not understand sexual fecundity to be perverse or sinful in the fallen state of man, but rather expressive of the love between spouses, there is nothing in his depiction of man’s virginal character in “Paradise” that suggests a different morality than his notion of disponability articulated at various points in Part One of this work. Likewise, Balthasar’s insistence that man’s intellect and will were under the “form of obedient love” prior to sin and thus yet to manifest “critical” and “free” traits, offers little that would imply a difference in perspective on the moral life than what has been discussed in reference to obedience, choice, and commitment in Part One.

78 CSL, 105-6. “. . . da die einzelnen Auffassungen gerade in dieser Beziehung nur wenig schwanken und sich in ihren Abweichungen meist nur ergänzen. . . .” CS, 83.

79 CSL, 105.

80 See Ibid., 106-9.

81 Ibid., 109. “. . . daß sie alles, was sie besaßen, wiederum für alle bereithielten.” CS, 85.
The “absolute” and “relative” positions should not be seen as contrary, Balthasar notes, for even Chrysostom and Ambrose had no quarrel with Clement’s position. Natural law allows for possessions, according to both conceptions, but as the common property of all, explains Balthasar.

The conception of natural law (on property rights) just articulated undergoes a shift when Aristotle’s thought begins to become appropriated by theologians during the time of Aquinas, writes Balthasar.

As a result, the concrete and analogous concept of nature (as actually realized only in, not apart from, the three fundamental states of life: original state, state of sin, state of redemption) began to be replaced, slowly and not always with immediately perceptible logic, by the abstract concept of “nature as such”—of a nature that did exist apart from these fundamental states of life.

Formerly, the *ius naturale* had been regarded as the law proper to man in his original state, the *ius gentium* as the law common to all men after the Fall, and the *ius civile* as the specification of the *ius gentium* in laws proper to each nation. In the new way of thinking, the *ius naturale* came to be defined as the law of human nature as such without regard to human history or the fundamental state of life previously defined.

---

82 CSL, 109.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 115, cf. 105.
From this “new way of thinking” comes the “canonization of private ownership,” as Edgar Salin terms it, relates Balthasar. Indeed, Pope Leo XIII would confirm that private ownership is a “natural right” in what is commonly considered the first and surely the most paradigmatic social encyclical, *Rerum novarum*. This position would be corroborated in later encyclicals and still enjoys an integral place in the Church’s social teachings, and yet it is important to see that in more recent years a shift of emphasis has occurred in magisterial discourse which appears very much in agreement with the general position of the Fathers and Balthasar. As the recently released *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* confirms,

writes Balthasar. *CSL*, 118. “... das Wesentliche der patristischen Ansicht insofern gerettet, als er nur von einer Angemessenheit, nicht von einer Notwendigkeit des Privateigentums spricht.” *CS*, 90. For his part, Balthasar sees two senses of the natural law in the Fathers, corresponding to how God originally intended things to be (vis. the primary sense) and the subsequent application of natural law in the fallen state (vis. the secondary sense). *CSL*, 114-5.

87 Edgar Salin, *Geschichte der Volkswirtschaftslehre*, 1st ed. (Berlin: Spring, 1923), 46, as cited in Ibid., 117.


The right to the common use of goods is the ‘first principle of the whole ethical and social order’ and ‘the characteristic principle of Catholic social doctrine’ (emphasis added). [This is] first of all a natural right, inscribed in human nature and not merely a positive right connected with changing historical circumstances. . . .” (original emphasis).

All other rights, whatever they are, including property rights and the right of free trade must be subordinated to this norm [the universal destination of goods]; they must not hinder it but rather expedite its application. It must be considered a serious and urgent social obligation to refer these rights to their original purpose (emphasis added).

Note that the term “natural right” is now applied in reference to the common use of goods rather than what would seem to be its opposite: private ownership. Property rights are recognized but explicitly “subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone,” concurs John Paul II. Clearly Balthasar’s concentration on the majority opinion of the Fathers of the Church on the question of the ownership of goods in the original state, that is, that goods were the “common possession of all,” is a confirmation

---


92 *CSDC*, 76.


94 *CSDC*, 76.


of the evolved position of the Magisterium on the matter.97

As Balthasar observes from Thomas Aquinas, however, this does not mean that anybody and everybody has the right, in the *ius gentium* in which we now live, to make indiscriminate use of another’s possessions. Rather, the owner himself has the privilege of dispensing his goods in the way he sees fit.

[B]ecause there are many who suffer and it is not possible to help all of them from the same store of goods, the dispensation of his property is left to the discretion of each individual.98

Still, as Balthasar interprets Aquinas,

In case of necessity, a needy person or a third person acting in his behalf may take from another’s possessions whatever is needed to support the life of the needy person, for to this the needy person has a right.99

Essential to Balthasar’s stance on the right of the needy to the common property of all is that, for the Christian in particular, it is in some manner *obligatory* to share one’s

---

97 Balthasar released *Christlicher Stand (The Christian State of Life)*, which contains his treatise on this subject, in 1977. Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, the first encyclical to place an emphasis on common use rather than private, was released in 1967.

98 *ST*, II-II, q. 66, a. 7, as cited in *CSL*, 117. “Es sei denn, daß in casu necessitatis der Arme oder ein Dritter, der ihm zu helfen hat, dem Besitzer das zum Leben Notwendige entwendet, worauf der Arme ein Recht hat.” *CS*, 90. See *CSDC*, 76: “Universal destination and utilization of goods does not mean that everything is at the disposal of each person or of all people, or that the same object may be useful or belong to each person or all people.”

99 *CSL*, 117 in reference to *ST*, II-II, q. 66, a. 7. “Insoweit ist der Besitz Sünde, als der Reiche alios ab usu rei indiscrete prohibeat.” *CS*, 90. While Balthasar claims a subjective “right” of the needy, Aquinas rather writes of compliance with the law and the absence of sin for those who would take from another out of need. From the same article in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas states: “In cases of need all things are common property, so that there would seem to be no sin in taking another’s property, for need has made it common.”
wealth.\textsuperscript{100} Ambrose considered it a matter of \textit{justice}, Balthasar notes,\textsuperscript{101} while Chrysostom consistently encouraged his flock to hold “all things in common” (Acts 4:32).\textsuperscript{102} The point being that “it is not just an act of love and of supererogation to strive for the equalization of goods through gifts and the giving of alms; it is also a duty,” Balthasar argues.\textsuperscript{103} Without committing to an understanding that, in the fallen state, there could be no such thing as private property, it is clear enough for Balthasar that the just distribution of goods derives from a concept of nature at work in and analogous to the original state where the law of common ownership was in effect; this is also of course the Gospel ideal.

\textit{Man’s original state, then, was the perfect synthesis of the Christian state of life whether in the world or in the way of the evangelical counsels, in which the state of the counsels expressed the inner attitude and disposition, the worldly state the outer counterpart and fulfillment (original emphasis).}\textsuperscript{104}

Although Balthasar makes no specific injunctions, his way of characterizing the sharing of wealth as a matter of justice, while allowing for the provision elucidated by Aquinas that the prerogative for the giving pertains to the individual owner (as opposed to the state or the Church), clearly aligns with the general positions of Justinian, Isidore of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{100} CSL, 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 107, 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 113-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 112. “Ferner ist der bestmögliche Ausgleich der Güter durch Schenken und Almosengeben kein bloßes Werk der Liebe und der Übergäubr, sondern der Pflicht. . . .” CS, 86.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} CSL, 121. “Der Urstand ist also die vollkommene Synthese des christlichen Welt- und Rätestandes, wobei der Rätestand die innere Haltung und Gesinnung, der Weltstand die äußere Erfillung und Entsprechung ausdrückt” (original emphasis). CS, 93.
\end{itemize}
Seville, and the Fathers. More to the point, because the giving pertains to the order of justice, for Balthasar, even as charity remains the form of all of the virtues, he is de facto suggesting that this giving is implicit to the order of ownership. Whoever shall conceive of his own goods or that of his business, according to Balthasar’s reasoning, shall see here the just insistence that this ownership be at the disposal of others as a structural form pertaining to the inner logic or law of ownership, not (simply) as a moral additive by individuals who wish to be charitable in the moment. This position is also articulated by Benedict XVI when he writes,

[T]he logic of gift does not exclude justice, nor does it merely sit alongside it as a second element added from without; on the other hand, economic, social, and political development, if it is to be authentically human, needs to make room for the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity (original emphasis).

In commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity” (original emphases).

105 See Ibid., 106-119.

106 ST, II-II, q. 23, a. 8. For Balthasar this notion is encapsulated in the understanding that the Gestalt of Christ is meant to govern all actions.

107 Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate, Encyclical letter on charity in truth, June 29, 2009 (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2009), sec. 34.

As has been mentioned, the concept of ownership promoted by Balthasar (and today’s Magisterium) has obvious allusions to the evangelical counsel of poverty. Due to Balthasar’s “third way of love” which, as a hermeneutic, discloses the form of love proper to being and action, he is able see how holding nothing back for oneself in the original state “paralleled the fullness of grace and calling to love.”

Man owes both the origin and the indispensability of the concept “mine and thine” to his turning aside from the “riches” of paradise where he could have been completely “poor” without knowing want, where his poverty paralleled the fullness of grace and calling to love. But love knows only how to give; it keeps nothing for itself.

Finally, this same logic of giving without counting the cost, this spiritual poverty, is also present in Heaven, according to Balthasar, the ultimate measure of the economic order of this world.

Men will have to divest themselves in the anteroom of heaven of every tendency toward buying and selling, for in heaven they will give and receive all things without recompense (Rev 21:6; 22:17)—just as, in the Old Testament, wisdom dispensed its gifts to those who had no money to buy (Is 31:1).
55:1) and, in the New Testament, the Lord gave himself freely to all who sought him, admonishing his disciples: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:8). The poverty of heaven will exist, not for its own sake, but to serve and bear witness to a love that finds its expression in the eternal sharing of all good things. It will not remove what is proper to each one’s nature or the graces and mission assigned to each by God, but it will ensure that what each one possesses, he possesses only for the sake of others: that he not only holds all external goods on loan, as it were, to be used in the service of God and the community, but likewise transforms all that he has and is into a gift. Such poverty is as much a part of the blessedness of heaven as are perfect obedience and perfect purity, for “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).  

From the above commentary on Balthasar’s notion of poverty in the original state of man and finally in Heaven, one has come to consider how the Swiss theologian understands the proper basis by which to judge the possession of goods in this world order. What one possesses, he should possess “only for the sake of others: that he not only holds all external goods on loan, as it were, to be used in the service of God and the community, but likewise transforms all that he has and is into a gift.” This may seem unrealistic in today’s ius gentium, but only if one considers, falsely, that the receiver of the gift cannot be the same person (or group) as the giver. This ethic of transforming “all that [one] has and is into a

111 CSL, 126. “Alles, was mit Kauf und Verkauf zusammenhängt, muß im Vorraum des Himmels nach Tat und Gesinnung abgelegt werden. Im Himmel schenkt und empfängt man alles ‘umsonst’ (Offb 21, 6; 22, 17), wie schon die Weisheit im Alten Bund nur umsonst gab (Jes 55,1) und der Herr sich allen preislos anbietet (Joh 7, 37) und seine Jünger anweist, umsonst zu geben, was sie umsonst empfangen haben (Mt 10, 8). Es ist Armut nicht um ihrer selbst willen, sondern im Dienst und als Ausdruck der Liebe, die sich in einem ewigen Kreislauf aller Güter äußert. Sie hebt die Besonderheit der Naturen und der von Gott dem Einzeln zugedachten Gnaden und Aufträge nicht auf; aber was jeder hat, besitzt er nur, um es für andere zu haben, so daß er nicht nur leihweise äußere Gaben für Gott und die Gemeinschaft bereithält, sondern alles, was er hat und ist, in eine Gabe verwandelt. Darin wird, ebensosehr wie im vollendeten Gehorsam und in der Reinheit, ein Teil der Seligkeit bestehen, denn ‘Geben ist seliger als Nehmen’ (Apg 20, 35).” CS, 97.

112 CSL, 126. “[W]as jeder hat, besitzt er nur, um es für andere zu haben, so daß er nicht nur leihweise äußere Gaben für Gott und die Gemeinschaft bereithält, sondern alles, was er hat und ist, in eine Gabe verwandelt.” CS, 97.

113 It is in keeping with Balthasar’s thought on this matter that the “other,” in this world order,
gift,” is again a matter of justice from Balthasar’s perspective.\footnote{114} It is in keeping with human nature as such, according to his reasoning, and therefore cannot be set aside for inspired moments of supernatural charity; it rather must become the basis by which one acts economically. This is even more fundamentally the case for Balthasar because, as he argues elsewhere, the love which finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus is, on analogous levels, co-extensive with being, meaning it is of the intelligible order of the world and therefore a matter of justice to give all that one has for the sake of another. Although Balthasar’s position here receives only the most limited commentary,\footnote{115} in the following chapter we will have the occasion to look at David Schindler’s “Balthasarian” views on the economy in juxtaposition to “neo-conservative” economists with whom he is in debate in order to bring out more clearly the implications of the Swiss theologian’s thought. For now it suffices it to mention that, according to Balthasar’s line of reasoning, charitable action should be integrated into one’s personal budgeting and business management in such a way that the very logos of both examples take on the resonance of gratuitousness rather than self-interest (even if such self-interest were to lead in most cases, hopefully, to giving).

\footnote{114}{Ibid., 107, 112.}
§ IV.3 Secular Institutes, Catholic Action, and Communio

Much has been written thus far regarding Balthasar’s promotion of the evangelical counsels and, indeed, how he sees Jesus’ love embodied in them. The spirit of the counsels is truly meant for everyone, for Balthasar, just as everyone is meant to share in Christ’s life. What has been largely left unsaid here, however, is how the consecrated life is a perfect image of God’s triune love only when it is lived, for Balthasar, not as an isolated project of an individual penitent, but rather in a communion of persons at the “heart of the world.” It remains for us to show (1) Balthasar’s personal adherence to disponable love (go wherever you are told no matter the cost), (2) his understanding that this disponable love needs to go to the heart of the world in full undying commitment if the world is to be sanctified at all, and (3) how this love must be ordered within communio from beginning (in community) to end (in world) if it is to reflect the Trinitarian Gestalt of Christ and bear an abundance of fruit.

116 In this final section we turn to those life foundations and examples Balthasar emphasizes in order to set in relief what lifestyles he promotes and, by implication, those which he does not encourage, particularly for the layman. As was noted in the previous chapter, choosing a state in life brings with it a general code of conduct with implications seemingly on all aspects of one’s moral life. When Balthasar promotes secular institutes and a life of communio while simultaneously cautioning against virulent forms of “Catholic Action,” as will be shown, he is therefore providing foundational criteria by which to judge particular lifestyles and those actions commonly associated with them. In this way Balthasar presents a moral treatise of his very own life decisions and emphases.

117 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Heart of the World, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979) is one of Balthasar’s books on the spiritual life. In it he repeats a constant theme in his writings, that the Christian life is not about acquiring self-perfection through specific acts which one decides to do in advance and for his own spiritual benefit, rather it involves “patience,” “renunciation,” “surrender” and, of course, “obedience” to fulfill the mission that God has set aside for oneself to be for others at the heart of the world. Although the life of the counsels as a life for others is typically expressed in community, Balthasar is not in the least dismissive of even the hermit, so long as he lives his eremitical existence, again, for others. The hermit, Father Charles de Foucauld, for example, who also established lay and clerical congregations, receives much praise from Balthasar at different points in his works. See e.g. Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 115-16, 173-75, 219, and 229. See also Charles de Foucauld, Der letzte Platz. Sigillum Collection I (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1957; 7th ed., 1979).

118 “[V]on Balthasar’s thinking and writings are in fact a theological biography, where it would be impossible to separate the spiritual from the theological, the existential from the intellectual.” Johann Roten,
When Balthasar returned to his home country of Switzerland in 1940 to become the student chaplain at the University of Basel,\textsuperscript{119} he would meet a very unusual and, by his own testimony, the primary earthly influence on his life and work as a theologian: the married physician and (then) Protestant mystic, Adrienne von Speyr.\textsuperscript{120} As Balthasar’s relationship with von Speyr grew, for he affected her conversion to Catholicism\textsuperscript{121} and served as her spiritual director and the stenographer of her theological writings,\textsuperscript{122} Balthasar came to agree with her that he had a call within a call to form a lay community with her obliged to the evangelical counsels.\textsuperscript{123} The initial meeting of the Community of St. John occurred with Fr.

---

\textsuperscript{119} Given the choice by the Jesuit Order to teach theology at the Gregorian in Rome, Balthasar, forever one who sought to embody his learning, chose the latter pastoral assignment, the only one available in a country hostile to the Jesuits. Henrici, 315.

\textsuperscript{120} Balthasar would claim that “Her work and mine are neither psychologically nor philologically to be separated: two halves of a single whole, which has its center a unique foundation.” My Work in Retrospect, trans. Fr. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 89; cf. 105, 107.


\textsuperscript{122} Von Speyr would dictate close to 60 books to Balthasar between the years of 1940 and 1953. “‘Her spiritual productivity knew no limits,’” wrote Balthasar. “‘[W]e could just as well have two or three times as many texts of hers today.’” Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 43. It is widely held that this decision of Balthasar’s, which entailed leaving the Jesuits, was part in parcel of the reason why he was not invited to participate at the Second Vatican Council, unlike many of his peers. As Henri de Lubac related at the opening of his eulogy for his longtime friend, the effect may have been inadvertently providential, also for Balthasar: “[I]t is disconcerting that from the first summons of the Council by John XXIII, it did not seem to have occurred to anyone to invite Hans Urs von Balthasar to contribute to its preparatory work. Disconcerting and—not to put a tooth in it—humiliating, but a fact that must be humbly accepted. Perhaps, all in all, it was better that he should be allowed to devote himself completely to his task, to the continuation of a work so immense in size and depth that the contemporary Church has seen nothing comparable.” Henri de Lubac, “Funeral Liturgy for Hans Urs von Balthasar,” WordPress, accessed March 1, 2012, http://seeingtheform.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/funeral-eulogy-for-hans-urs-von-balthasar-delubac.pdf.
von Balthasar, S.J., von Speyr, M.D. and four college students on December 8, 1944, \(^{124}\) roughly two years prior to the release of Pope Pius XII’s Apostolic Constitution *Provida mater ecclesia* and its establishment of secular institutes. \(^{125}\) When the Society of Jesus to which Balthasar belonged communicated their disapproval of his endeavors with von Speyr, and after his petitions to incorporate their secular institute within the Society’s structural organism also failed, \(^{126}\) Balthasar felt compelled in 1950 to leave his beloved Jesuits and face the suspicions which were to come. \(^{127}\) The remaining years until von Speyr’s passing in 1967 saw the priest in continuous dialogue with the mystic, if even from a distance at first, \(^{128}\) and, finally, for the last decade of her life, as a resident of her household. \(^{129}\) It is no secret

\(^{124}\) Maximilian Greiner, “The Community of St. John: A Conversation with Cornelia Capol and Martha Gisi,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler, 87-102 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 88. The founding exercises were in August 1945, but the true founding had already occurred. Ibid.

\(^{125}\) The constitution was released on February 2, 1947. Secular institutes are defined by Pius XII therein as “Societies, clerical or lay, whose members make profession of the evangelical counsels, living in a secular condition for the purpose of Christian perfection and full apostolate. . . .” *Provida mater ecclesia*, Apostolic constitution on secular institutes, Vatican Website, February 2, 1947, accessed March 17, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19470202_provida-mater-ecclesia_en.html, sec. A.1.

\(^{126}\) On April 22, 1947 Balthasar spoke unsuccessfully about the Community of St. John with the Father General of the Jesuits in Rome; on November 26, 1947, he tried again, this time being sent to Lyons to discuss his situation with a different superior, but to no avail. See Henrici, 322-3. Despite the close proximity of dates between Balthasar’s petitions to the Jesuits and the release of *Provida mater*, he evidently was not aware of the constitution for quite some time. See Balthasar, *First Glance*, 41.

\(^{127}\) “For me the Society was of course a beloved homeland; the thought that one might have to ‘leave all’ more than once in a lifetime in order to follow the Lord, even an order, had never occurred to me, and struck me like a blow.” Balthasar, *First Glance*, 43. Contrary to some rumors, Balthasar never left the priesthood. His and von Speyr’s relationship lacked all sensual dependence. See von Speyr, *Erde und Himmel*, Teil I: *Einüübungen* (1940-1944), as cited by Roten, 425. It is presumed that von Speyr committed herself to the evangelical counsels *within marriage* at the founding of the secular institute, if not earlier. See Roten, 429.

\(^{128}\) The Bishop of Basel at the time was also suspicious of the Community of St. John. Without a formal link to the Jesuits, Balthasar would have to leave Basel until 1956 when, being incardinated in the Diocese of Chur, he was able to return to the town and home of von Speyr. Henrici, 326.

\(^{129}\) Roten, 423. Balthasar founded the publishing house *Johannesverlag*, at great personal
that chief among Balthasar’s concerns in life was not his theology or even his priestly ministry as such, but his “double mission” with von Speyr, the Community of St. John.\textsuperscript{130}

Balthasar would die in 1988 after living the evangelical counsels in some form of community for the greater part of his life.\textsuperscript{131}

This brief biographical sketch of Balthasar’s personal journey with von Speyr and the community they formed together should elucidate the great emphasis he places in his writings on secular institutes and the corresponding vocation of laypersons. It is again in his book, \textit{The Christian State of Life}, together with the posthumous compilation of certain of his writings in \textit{The Laity and the Life of the Counsels: The Church’s Mission in the World}, that Balthasar expresses what is finally a moral treatise on the call of each and every person to radically available, communal love. For many this occurs in marriage, for others in religious life but, for still others, according to Balthasar, this calling is best expressed by living the counsels, in community, in the midst of the world.\textsuperscript{132}

Owing to Balthasar’s constant stress on remaining disposable to God’s call in one’s expense, primarily to publish the works of von Speyr whose mystical writings were looked upon with suspicion and disregarded by other publishing houses. Henrici, 321.

\textsuperscript{130} See Roten, 429-32.

\textsuperscript{131} Balthasar was born in 1905 and joined the Jesuits in 1929. As to the communal nature of secular institutes, Balthasar cites this line from \textit{Provida mater}: “Although the secular institutes do not require their members to live in common or under a single roof”, they must “nevertheless, for the sake of emergencies, and out of consideration of usefulness, have one or more houses in common, in which (1) the regional or, in particular, the general directors can live [this would be von Speyr’s home in the case of the Community of St. John]; (2) aspirants can live or meet in order to receive or further their formation, to make retreats, and for similar purposes; (3) it is possible to house those members who because of sickness or other circumstances cannot look after themselves, or for whom it is not good to live alone or in others’ households.” Balthasar, \textit{Laity and the Life of the Counsels}, 109.

\textsuperscript{132} Although a priest, Balthasar no doubt thought this was the case for himself, in service to his lay community and the world.
life as the “presupposition for fruitfulness in the world,” the co-founder of the Community of St. John draws attention to the great increase in secular institutes after the release of *Provida mater* as a way highlighting how living the life of the counsels in the world best meets this presupposition. Indeed, Balthasar not only thinks that the canonical establishment of secular institutes within the Church was a confirmation of the Spirit’s providential concern for certain laypersons to fulfill their vocations to love in imitation of Christ’s manner of life, he also thinks it is the “archetypal” avenue for leavening the modern world with the Gospel.

> [T]he grace for all depends on the form of life of him who through the shame of his poverty, his obedience and his bodily ‘castratedness’ (Mt 19:12) embodied God’s grace and desired at every stage . . . that others also partake of this form. Far from being one among many equally important ‘eschatological signs’ for the general public, as is said today in a pacifying tone of voice, this form of life is rather the archetype of all Christian existence. . . . This form of life is the ‘salt’ of the earth that must not become

---


134 Ibid., 41, 129-30. Balthasar notes how the increase in secular institutes presupposed a burgeoning interest among the lay faithful in the Church to which Pius XII was responding. Balthasar’s own Community of St. John is one such example of a lay community meaning to live the counsels prior to the release of *Provida mater*.

135 The mission of members of a secular institute is to live in the midst of the world, in ordinary jobs and tasks of life, but with one radical difference: they do so in conformance to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Unlike religious, such consecrated persons live as civilians in the world, unlike those married, they adopt the evangelical counsels, and unlike others who might wish to live the counsels on an individual basis, those in secular institutes live under the constitutions of a community. In *Provida mater ecclesia*, Pius XII distinguishes between “public religious vows” (A. 2, §1) and the “profession,” “vow or promise” of the same evangelical counsels made by members of secular institutes “before God” and in accordance with their respective constitutions (A. 3, §2, 1-3).

insipid, and only this form can penetrate the ‘secular world’ as ‘leaven’. . . .
(emphasis added).137

Balthasar makes his case in different ways: by appeal to the Gospel and the lives of the saints,138 by calling to mind the particular vocation of certain persons to be fully devoted to God in consecration while also not being called away from the world or to the diocesan priesthood (where then shall they go?),139 and by noting how the modern shift toward the specialization of the sciences has led to the putative isolation of clergy and religious from the trials and concerns of laypeople.140 While this last point was surely more of a concern for Balthasar at the time of the release of Provida mater before secular institutes had gained a foothold in the Church and more than a decade before Vatican II’s great aggiornamento,141 it still holds for him that there is a need to bridge the distance between those in consecrated life and the laity.142 It stands to reason that even should the perception of the isolation of religious

137 Balthasar, My Work in Retrospect, 57.

138 Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 237-46. “Great founders like Francis and Ignatius did not originally intend the foundation of “Orders” as such, but of groups of consecrated laymen in the midst of the world, who were not to be externally distinguished from their fellowmen and were to be for them a model and a provocation.” Ibid., 246.

139 Ibid., 247.

140 Ibid., 45. This turn toward the specialization of the sciences in the modern era (see Chapter One above), has left clerics and religious to study philosophy and theology rather in depth, but without the integration of the various sciences present, for example, in the early Middle Ages, writes Balthasar. Ibid., 84-7. Meanwhile, the layperson loses interest in theology, nor does he always have the means to study it, insofar as it is bracketed from the particular field which will earn him a living. Ibid.

141 Balthasar makes this case as early as 1948 in the essay Der Laie und der Ordensstand, republished as “The Layman and the Life of the Counsels,” in Balthasar, Laity and the Life of the Counsels, 41-9.

142 Writing in 1965, the last year of the Council, Balthasar states: “Today this form of existence takes a new ecclesial shape in the ‘secular institutes’. For these as a structure are beyond doubt the unifying midpoint of the Church; they constitute the link between the lay state and the life of the vows and show not only the existential unity of the Church but also her perennial and most ‘up-to-date’ mission in the world.” My Work
and clerics be mistaken, they will bear an almost insurmountable breach in the confidence of the laity to provide adequate instruction pertaining to lay life and morality so long as they are perceived, in Balthasar’s words, as “religious specialists” at a remove from them. Due to this concern, which is by no means exclusive to Balthasar, two principal movements have arisen in the Church which draw the attention of the Swiss theologian: the secular institutes just described and “Catholic Action.”

Balthasar for one sees the path of the secular institutes to be the very “opposite” to that of Catholic Action, a lay apostolate established 20 years prior to *Probata mater* which attempted to address the separation of clergy from laity, but from a different perspective. While secular institutes come “from below,” “from the bosom of the people of the Church,” states Balthasar, Catholic Action comes “from above,” namely as a papal directive with the intention of placing laypersons under the direct mission of the hierarchy of the Church.

---

144 Ibid., 41.
145 Ibid., 41-2. Balthasar notes that Catholic Action is defined by Pope Pius XI as “the participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church.” Ibid., 49, as taken from Pius XI, Handwritten letter to Cardinal Gasparri, Vatican Website, February 18, 1926, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/letters/documents/hf_p-xi_lett_19260218_annunciato_it.html. Pius X issued *Il fermo proposito*, Encyclical letter on catholic action in Italy, Vatican Website, June 11, 1905, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11061905_il-fermo-proposito_en.html, but in 1905 the term referred to those various lay movements within the Church, faithful to the Magisterium, which incarnated the Catholic faith in the world; it was as yet not a distinct apostolate. In 1931, Pius XI states emphatically, “We have repeatedly and solemnly affirmed and protested that Catholic Action, both from its very nature and essence (“the participation and the collaboration of the laity with the Apostolic Hierarchy”) and by our precise and categorical directions and orders is outside and above all party politics.” *Non abbiamo bisogno*, Encyclical letter on Catholic Action in Italy, Vatican Website, June 29, 1931, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29061931_non-abbiamo-bisogno_en.html, sec. 22. Here later clarifies, “Catholic Action has been, is, and will always be, dependent upon the episcopate, under your direction, under you who have always assigned ecclesiastical assistants and have nominated the presidents of the diocesan committees.” Ibid., sec. 25.
This is to say that Catholic Action also attempts to place clergy in cooperation with laity, but in a way which moves the layman into the clerical sphere of “action”, such as ‘effective job training’, in busy-ness and mere organization,” writes Balthasar. Catholic Action presents unnecessary limitations, contends Balthasar, insofar as he understands laypersons to be called to a different form of life than clerics and Catholic Action would seem to endeavor to set the laity on missions appropriate to clergy. Balthasar agrees that there should be a certain embodiment of the priestly and religious model of life in lay circles, but for him this should be complimented by the life of the counsels and open to lay direction. He writes,

[I]t is the interrelationship of the priestly and religious states that forms a model for the lay state. This does not mean that the laity should imitate the other two states exteriorly, but rather that the spirit of this union of office and person should become the determining factor of the Christian life in the world.

The concrete demand of the present hour is that we look directly to the synthesis between lay existence and the state of the counsels. *Provida Mater* has done this and has thus provided the most important compliment to

---

146 While *Provida mater* had the precise aim of uniting consecrated persons and laity, Catholic Action endeavors to unite the laity with the clergy, but of course there is cross-over here. Balthasar, *Laity and the Life of the Counsels*, 42.

147 Ibid., 55.


150 CSL, 375. “[I]st es das Zueinander von Priesterstand und Ordensstand, das für den Laienstand vorbildlich bleibt; nicht so, als sollten die Laien äußerlich die beiden andern Standesformen nachahmen, wohl aber so, daß der Geist dieser Einheit von Amt und Person ihr Christenleben in der Welt zu bestimmen hat.” CS, 304.
“Catholic Action.”\textsuperscript{151}

What is involved is thus not at all an either/or between “Catholic Action” and the life of the counsels. . . . Rather it is a question of making “Catholic Action” ultimately possible and fruitful through a total imitation of Christ. . . .\textsuperscript{152}

Positively, Balthasar is echoing his constant refrain that everyone, laypersons included, ought to hold fast to the spirit of the evangelical counsels as a form of life which manifests the Christological love all persons are called to, and of course endeavor to incarnate the teachings of the Church in their apostolic life. Negatively speaking, Balthasar is cautioning against the clericalism of the lay state, making it clear that all Christians, but especially laypersons, are to adopt a Marian form of receptivity which is natural to them as creatures rather than appropriate the characteristics of priests and religious under official instruction. The concern is to guard against a kind of formalistic and uniform but also activist Christianity which is neither consonant with the Gospel and the life of contemplation, or, not surprisingly, appealing to laypersons who are already beset by the demands of family and work.\textsuperscript{153} Again, Balthasar is wary of an overwrought masculinity holding sway in Christianity, particularly in the modern world which already moves in this activist line, so he instead encourages a deeper intimation of the feminine, contemplative and natural spirit in this work-a-day world. So long as this is the case, even for clerics and those consecrated, then the Spirit’s authoritative power can shine through those it is meant to, when it is meant

\textsuperscript{151} Balthasar, \textit{Laity and the Life of the Counsels}, 58.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 95-7, et al.
to, and make for a fruitful harvest of discipleship, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.

Moreover, as mentioned in Section III.3 above, laypersons are to exercise a certain freedom and creativity owing to their state in life, for Balthasar. It can often, no doubt, be difficult to exercise this freedom and creativity while still retaining a contemplative spirit informed by Christ and the Church, but should the layperson adopt the life of the counsels or at least their spirit, writes Balthasar, “the bond that seemed to [man], in the beginning, to be exactly the opposite of the freedom of love, to be a burden and duty, [would appear] to be ever more clearly identical with the freedom of love.” Citing Bernanos, Balthasar instructs,

The freedom the Church allows us [lay persons] is a positive good, a positive right, and we have the duty to use it for her glory instead of burying it like a talent in the Gospel. There is a risk, of course there is. . . . There’s a risk in everything. We must accept that risk humbly. The virtue of fortitude was given us just for this.155

Of course this “freedom” does not come at the expense of the doctrines and disciplines of the Church, nor the general honor due those in ecclesiastical authority, for Bernanos and Balthasar, but it does guard against “extravagant honors, occasionally bordering on hysteria, shown at times to the highest dignitaries of the Church”156 as well as “blind parroting”157 or “purely passive obedience that executes an order mechanically, without the full engagement

---

154 CSL, 39. Bindung, die zu Beginn nur als Gegensatz zur Freiheit der Liebe erschien, nämlich als Last und Pflicht, wird jetzt immer sichtbarer als eins mit der Freiheit der Liebe.” CS, 29.

155 George Bernanos, To Amoroso Lima, 204, as cited in Balthasar, Bernanos, 596.

156 Balthasar, Bernanos, 595.

157 Ibid.
of the whole person in the process.”158 One can see then how Balthasar’s idea and support of the secular institutes stands in rather stark contrast to those abuses Catholic Action appears open to.

For the sake of promoting certain personal examples in addition to the saints which he frequently makes note of, it is worth mentioning here that three of Balthasar’s books are dedicated to contemporary Catholic laity and their manner of life: First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr, Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence, and Tragedy Under Grace: Reinhold Schneider on the Experience of the West.159 In every case Balthasar is concerned above all with the objective mission of the person he depicts or, as the case may be, the missions of saints and luminaries which the person calls to mind in his or her work, for all three were writers of a sort.

With regard to Reinhold Schneider, the one yet to be referenced in here, Balthasar is able to draw upon a most important theme: the confluence of nobility and holiness. In the Preface to Tragedy Under Grace, Balthasar comments,

What most fascinated me in this work was the omnipresent drama of the encounter between two missions that are equally original and yet stand in a deadly mutual conflict: the mission of the one who is entrusted with the task of administering the earthly realm and the mission of the saint as the real symbol of the kingdom of God that descends into the world. The inescapable quality of this encounter appeared to me as a guiding image, an image to be retained at all costs, for the secular institutes that had recently been permitted to exist in the Church: their fundamental aim is to combine the radicalism of

158 Ibid., 591.

159 Balthasar, Tragedy Under Grace. Balthasar also wrote the preface to the German edition of Madeline Delbrêt’s autobiographical work, We, the Ordinary People of the Streets, as cited above. Delbrêt was yet another Catholic, consecrated layperson “at the heart of the world.”
the gospel with the total, active involvement in secular work. . . .160

Balthasar goes on to remark in his Introduction how Schneider is best able to capture

the holy man of supernatural form, but turned toward the formlessness of world and history, the religious knight . . . clearing the earth in the humility of his Christian mission so that it can bear culture. And this is no longer utopia and contradiction . . . but the summons of the hour to some individuals who dare to confront it without a safety net. . . . This book was written for the sake of this summons.161

Schneider’s work allows Balthasar to see the highpoint of the Christian response to the contemporary world in the religious knight who, like Saint Francis of Assisi, exhibits the “highest pride and deepest humility.”162 Rightful “pride” comes in the realization and the bearing of the responsibility laid upon one in his mission for the sake of the world; it can only exist in the Christian sense, for Schneider and Balthasar, inexorably tied to the humility of prayer and service.163 This is then another way of highlighting the type of person Balthasar has in mind when he promotes secular institutes, those communities of consecrated persons “at the heart of the world.”

Historically speaking, Balthasar’s advocacy of a theological (Trinitarian-

---

160 Balthasar, Tragedy Under Grace, 11.

161 Ibid., 29.

162 Ibid., 57.

163 “[King] Philip [II]’s mystery was to set the profane in order on the basis of the sacred, letting the reflected splendor of prayer fall on all secular business and understanding the service of the state and of justice as responsibility in the presence of the God who is close at hand and accompanies all that the king does.” Ibid., 61. “No matter how well constituted and autonomous the temporal well-being of the people may be, the one who administers it cannot dispense himself from looking to that which is eternal; and this look is objective only when it makes him available to God in indifferencia and prayer, and with the expectation that the form of the highest responsibility, the crown of thorns, will impress itself upon his own responsibility. . . .” Ibid., 62.
Christological) imprint in lay society continued with the founding of Communio: International Catholic Review in 1972,¹⁶⁴ a journal which was prophesied and encouraged by von Speyr as early as 1945.¹⁶⁵ Communio’s editors endeavor to reach back to the Fathers and Scholastics, really the entire tradition, in order to retrieve a holistic theology which interpenetrates various disciplines, for examples, morality, culture, and spirituality, that confront the ordinary Christian. The central idea, as another co-founder of the journal conceives it, is that of a circle of persons representing all of the traditions of the Church engaged in dialogue.¹⁶⁶ Reflection on the articles of the quarterly journal is not meant to occur in isolation, therefore, but is rather to occur in community, in groups who gather to discuss the articles so as to realize the communio which already exists between them as persons and as believers.¹⁶⁷ In this way communio is sought both personally and

¹⁶⁴ As David L. Schindler relates in the Introduction to the Fall 1989 North American issue of Communio on the “The Life and Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” “During a meeting of the International Theological Commission in Rome in 1970, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Louis Bouyer, and Joseph Ratzinger met together and discussed the need for a new journal which would take up spiritual and theological renewal in the spirit envisioned by Vatican II. Out of this meeting came the decision to launch Communio. Balthasar, reluctantly, assumed leadership of the undertaking. Today, seventeen years after the first issue appeared in German, there are twelve language-area editions of Communio.”

¹⁶⁵ Roten, 430 as taken from von Speyr, Erde und Himmel, II, 1439 and 1643. If true, this should strike the observer as a confirmation of Balthasar’s decision to leave the Jesuits and join von Speyr with the Community of St. John, for her mystical revelations would surely not have received the audience they had with Balthasar serving as her secretary, theological interpreter and guide, and publisher, nor would Balthasar have devoted some much space and attention to both the plight of secular institutes as an authentic movement of the Spirit and, arguably, the dedication he needed to persevere in the founding of Communio, a journal that continues to provide a wealth of Catholic reasoning years beyond both of their deaths.

¹⁶⁶ “The communion and communication between the greatest possible number of reflective believers, as if everyone were in a circle simultaneously joined to the present in order to form a consensus and assembly today, is at the basis of this new conception of theology and its method.” Henri de Lubac, Meditazione sulla Chiesa (Milan, 1978), xiv-xv, as cited by Antonio Sicari, “Communio,” Communio 19 (1992): 452.

¹⁶⁷ See Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program,” 440-1. Cf. Nicholas J. Healy, “Communio: A Theological Journey,” 118-9 and Balthasar, “Communio—A Program,” 156: “The decisive, distinctive feature is that the fact of being together, of forming a community, only provides the first impetus to freedom to build up,
intellectually at the intersection of faith and the most pertinent issues of the world. One could say the journal and its program of action represents the intellectual arm of the same impetus behind Balthasar’s support of secular institutes: to usher in Trinitarian-Christological communio at the heart of the world. The review thus appears to be another way of bridging the divide between the “official Church” (clergy, religious) and the “people of the Church” (single and married laity), by providing a reflective theological method, akin to Balthasar’s own, on issues which the laity commonly encounter. Both the Community of St. John and Communio serve as personal examples for Balthasar of key instruments which encourage lay persons in their call to be the salt of the earth. In their own way they each promote and, in fact, propagate the intrinsic link between origin (Trinitarian communio), worship, and deed at the heart of the world.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a retrieval of Balthasar’s own applied ethics, however slight, in order to indicate how he implements his Christological theology of love in particular moral cases. In this way it has indicated how Balthasar applies his own holistic perspective, inclusive of a number of tenets but not reducible to these, in his own limited carry through, and, if possible, to perfect such a pattern, so as to undertake the conscious, considered steps to engage in common activity: to come together (con-gredi, to gather in a congress, a synod), to move towards one another (con-cieo, to summon to a council), to put out feelers (con-tingere, to make contact), to fall into conversation (con-loqui, to confer, to enter into mutual discussion).” See Ibid., 155, 159-60.

168 “[T]he journal refuses to separate theology and culture, theology and holiness, and thus addresses itself, not only to the academic theologian, but also to the intelligent lay specialist, offering him help to deal with the specific problems of his discipline from a radical Christian perspective. The point is to help the laity discover how and where the mystery of trinitarian love is present within the specific horizon of concern for which they are most immediately responsible; or, to borrow an image from Balthasar, to help the layman discover the watermark of Christ in every aspect of creation.” Healy, “Communio,” 122-3.
ethical reflections. In the first two cases presented above one sees the application of his nuptial theology between Christ and the Church serving as a hermeneutic for discerning the proper ordering of sexual love and gender roles in the Church.169 These are no doubt two volatile issues in the Church and the world today to which Balthasar provides a rather unique and illuminating perspective owing to a logic which finds polarity indicative of being and, in fact, essential to its fruitfulness. In the case of poverty in the original state of man and finally in Heaven, as next presented, Balthasar likewise sheds light on the ultimate foundations of economic life in this world order. As we will see in the following chapter on David Schindler’s application of certain Balthasarian themes in his moral writings, this perspective of Balthasar’s is no antiquated treasure but rather has relevance even in the most subtle of debates today among Catholics faithful to the Magisterium. Finally, in the last section above, Balthasar’s adherence to his own theology and thus concrete application of his Christology of love is shown in three ways, in (1) his abandonment to the perceived violation of Catholic mores in leaving the Jesuits and forming a life-long collaboration with a lay woman who was, to make matters more precarious, under suspicion for her mystical experiences, (2) in terms of instituting with her what he took to be the “archetypal” answer to the division between consecrated life and the laity, and (3) in leading the collaborative effort to implement another dimension of this same communio in the midst of the world through a theological dialogue at the intersection of faith and culture.

In each of the cases presented in this chapter the faithful observer will perceive the

169 See Margaret H. McCarthy’s essay, “‘Husbands, love your wives as your own bodies’: Is Nuptial Love a Case of Love or Its Paradigm?,” Communio 32 (2005): 260–94, for a reflection on the archetypal correspondence of this nuptial theme to love in general.
great consistency in Balthasar’s work where it might otherwise seem like disparate themes have led him to promote certain ideals based on personal preference. Although no one, perhaps especially Balthasar, would consider him a systematic thinker, there is nevertheless a substantial harmony in his writings and life owing to one central theme taken broadly: theology is meant to be holistically centered on Christ in Trinitarian dialogue and, from there, reality in all of its parts. This sheds light on being as disponible, communal love, a love which for Balthasar takes on the completeness (total) and permanency (forever) of a vow in the midst of the world in order to glorify God and provide an abundance of fruit.
CHAPTER FIVE
Balthasar’s Theology of Love in the Work of David L. Schindler

Introduction

What can be discerned as morally applicable in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s writings is quite brief, as has been noted throughout this work. However, at least one theologian who has been profoundly impacted by Balthasar’s thought and could be said to share a common perspective has been engaged in a number of moral arguments over his publishing career. These arguments would seem to shed light on the reach and applicability of Balthasar’s thought because of their profound similarities, just as a “Thomist” could be said to illuminate the applicability of St. Thomas’s thought when considering a subject even when the Angelic Doctor is not cited.1 Like Balthasar, David Louis Schindler (1943-) does not consider himself a moral theologian, but it is clear that the longtime editor of the North American edition of the journal Balthasar co-founded, Communio: International Catholic Review, has been a key player in at least three major ethical disputes among Catholics faithful to the Magisterium.2 These debates can be identified as: (1) the Neo-Conservatism dispute involving the notions of liberty and economics in Catholic social ethics, (2), the ANT-OAR controversy which concerns Altered Nuclear Transfer and Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming

1 Balthasar did not himself think an approach which endeavors to see theological problems through one particular school of thought, e.g. Thomist or Franciscan, was helpful in seeing the whole in Christ. For Balthasar, theology is meant to draw from the best thought in the tradition on any particular subject rather than from only certain persons, irrespective of the topic, as though in rank. See Balthasar’s “Spirituality,” in The Word Made Flesh, vol. 1 of Explorations in Theology, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 211-26.

2 Schindler has also applied his ‘Balthasarian’-Communio perspective to questions on Catholic higher education, feminism, the Thomistic nature-grace dispute, and the metaphysics of receptivity. See Heart of the World, Center of the Church.
(ANT-OAR) as putative, morally legitimate options of stem-cell research, and (3) the Theology of the Body debate concerning its proper interpretation. The burden of this chapter is to identify consistent marks of Balthasar’s Christological theology of love which distinguish Schindler’s approach in these arguments in order to see how the Swiss theologian’s thought encourages a distinctive foundation for moral theology. This will help the reader to see certain fundamental implications of applying such a Balthasarian perspective in moral theology. Here the principal concern is what makes Balthasar’s perspective different than others who espouse fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, as seen in the work of one who, perhaps more than anyone else, applies a similar understanding of being and love in his own moral analyses.

Note well, in each of the moral cases presented in this chapter it will first be necessary to assess Schindler’s arguments on their own terms. Although the reader will surely notice points of agreement between Schindler’s positions and Balthasar’s theology of love as these discussions progress, perhaps only at the conclusion of each section will one be able to adequately judge whether Schindler’s arguments merit the depiction of a so-called Balthasarian moral application at work. The reader will also see that no attempt will be made in these cases to give Schindler’s interlocutors “equal time,” as it were, in the depiction of their own arguments. Indeed, it is not my intention to present every detail of these disputes, 

3 While this foundation is “distinctive” or rather unique among moral theologians today, this is not to suggest that its essential elements are not rooted in the tradition or broad enough to include all Catholics and others of good will.

4 While Schindler’s work is often more recognizable as philosophy rather than theology, it is operative as a Christian philosophy which gleans the insights of faith for the understanding and depiction of reality. For a discussion of the relation between theology and Christian philosophy in Schindler’s work, see Nicholas J. Healy, Jr., “Preaeambula fidei.” The reader will note that the ANT-OAR debate, for instance, follows a properly philosophical line.
nor is it to “solve them” or otherwise convince the reader of a particular position however obvious it may be that I am in agreement with Schindler (and Balthasar by way of him).\(^5\)

The purpose, rather, is more modest—it is simply to convey how in what ways Balthasar’s Christology theology of love, the only theology he has at bottom, provides a distinctive foundation for assessing moral questions as discerned in a prominent protégé’s ethical writings.

Before examining the three debates, which neatly form the final three sections of this chapter, let us recall the influence Balthasar has had on Schindler more generally in order to see how the elements of allegiance in these cases are less circumstantial than they are matters of common theology and perspective.

§ V.1 Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Influence on David L. Schindler

The first point of contact between the two men is of course the review, *Communio*. Schindler describes his first encounter with Balthasar in his essay, “Modernity and the Nature of a Distinction: Balthasar’s Ontology of Generosity” in the book, *How Balthasar Changed My Mind*,\(^6\) by recalling a meeting he attended in Rome in 1972 for a council of *Communio* editors; Schindler was the new managing editor of the North American edition.\(^7\) Although

---

5 The neo-conservative debate, for instance, ranges over 20 years, multiple authors, and even more articles. An adequate appraisal of the entire debate would take the attention of at least a chapter if not (more probably) an entire dissertation.

6 As cited above. This essay has been reprised to form a chapter of Schindler’s latest book, *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 350-82.

7 Schindler assumed this post at the request of his friend and former classmate, Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., who had written his doctoral dissertation under Joseph Ratzinger on Balthasar’s ecclesiology. Ibid., 224. It was not until 1974 that the American edition made its debut.
this first meeting was for Schindler not much more than a handshake and a seat at the table, so to speak, when Schindler was later appointed editor-in-chief in 1982, a position he holds to this day, he began to have regular contact with Balthasar, the co-founder and then editor of the flagship German edition. Still, while Schindler was impressed with the integrity between Balthasar’s life and theology, with his graciousness and attentiveness, he admits he did not engage substantially Balthasar’s scholarship until after his passing in 1988. Schindler’s initial hesitancy had ironically to do with whether Balthasar would tackle cultural questions with sufficient insight into their ontology, something that had occupied Schindler in his own scholarship. The American was already indebted to existential Thomism and its hallmark, the distinction between esse and essentia, when he encountered Balthasar. Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) was no small influence on him. What Schindler needed and

---

8 Schindler now shares editorial responsibility with three others: his son David C. Schindler, Nicholas J. Healy III, and Adrian J. Walker. The reader will note how all four thinkers have been referenced at different junctures in this work regarding various aspects of Balthasar’s thought and again regarding Schindler’s thought in this chapter.


10 Ibid., 224-5; 233. “What most impressed me about Balthasar in the years of our contact,” Schindler writes, “can be summarized, in a word, in terms of how his person embodied so profoundly the content of his theology: what was emphasized in his thought was transparent in his life.” Ibid., 225.

11 Ibid., 291, en 1. In light of Balthasar’s being-love axiom and its ramifications on all things, Schindler’s hesitancy was by his own admission, unfounded.

12 Ibid., 230-1.

13 Ibid., 228-30.
subsequently learned from Balthasar was a better theological integration of his Christian philosophy. As Schindler reveals, Balthasar’s work provided this in an “unequaled” way:

Here, then, is the heart of what Balthasar communicated to me with an unequaled comprehensiveness and depth: *God in his creative and redemptive love—in his love as imaged in creation, as embodied hypostatically in the person of Jesus Christ, and as present sacramentally in the (Marian-Petrine) church, reveals the proper and most basic terms of all distinctions and all unities in the cosmos* (original emphasis).

This is of course another way of indicating Schindler’s indebtedness to Balthasar’s understanding of being as love, first articulated by Ferdinand Ulrich (1931-), but brought to new and decisive depth in Balthasar’s depiction of Christ’s obediential surrender for the sake of (ever-deepening) communion at “the heart of the world.” This being-as-love axiom or, *being-as-gift*, a synonymous term often employed by Schindler, is no less than the cornerstone of Schindler’s approach to moral questions. Through it Schindler gains a deeper intimation of the rightful place of wonder and gratitude in response to being and, of

---

14 Ibid., 233.
15 Ibid., 233-4.
16 Schindler writes: “What Balthasar showed me, in his life and work, was the indissoluble unity—or convertibility—of being and love in relation to God, and thereby what is meant by living the catholicity entailed in Catholicism down into the heart of every being, thus in a way that spans the cosmos in its entirety.” “Modernity and the Nature of a Distinction,” 241. Schindler’s first book is titled *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism and Liberation*.

17 Schindler makes the transition from being-as-love to being-as-gift through an understood, if not always referenced, appeal to Balthasar’s fourfold distinction in being, the foundation of the Swiss theologian’s ontology of love. That Schindler makes this appeal can be discerned in the arguments to follow in this chapter. See also Schindler, “Is Truth Ugly? Moralism and the Convertibility of Being and Love,” *Communio* 27 (2000): 712: “The pertinent point . . . is that the world in its entirety is an expression of the love of this God, and all of worldly being and existence thereby takes place ‘inside’ the event of this God’s love. There is no being in the cosmos that is not, at its core, a being-loved—a being-loved that is itself simultaneously a being-loving. Created being is a being-loved that is at once apt for love and loves: a beloved that is at once a lover. To put it another way: created being is a being-given, hence a gift, which, in being-received, at once itself gives.
crucial importance to him, the constitutive relation between things as the source of their identity.\textsuperscript{18} This point of understanding rightly a thing’s identity requires some initial reflection.\textsuperscript{19}

Opposed to Balthasar’s “ontology of generosity,”\textsuperscript{20} as Schindler coins it, is what he considers modernity’s prevalent “Cartesian ontology.”\textsuperscript{21} Schindler sees René Descartes’ (1596-1650) understanding of the relation between things, his understanding of what identifies something in itself and relative to another,\textsuperscript{22} as undergirding much of contemporary Western thought, even for most Catholics. “[V]iewed in the light of Balthasar,” he writes, the dominant stream of modern Catholic theology and philosophy, even when harshly critical of modern patterns of life and thought, has nevertheless left intact the root assumptions of those patterns as reflected in a Cartesian ontology of identity. Modern Catholic thought has itself typically taken the identity of x to be originally-conceptually closed to non-x or to any implication of the presence of non-x in x. That is to say, much of modern Catholic thought has itself presupposed just the structural indifference between x and non-x that, on Balthasar’s understanding as outlined above, lies at root of the modernity that mechanizes the order and intelligibility of things even as it (then) moralizes—voluntarizes: conceives as arbitrary and just so far not integral to the order and intelligibility of things—relation and love and religious piety.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. GL5, 613-27.

\textsuperscript{19} Adrian J. Walker discusses the philosophical merits of this understanding in “Constitutive Relations”: Toward a Spiritual Reading of \textit{Physis},” in \textit{BHW}, 123-61. Cf. Michael Maria Waldstein, “‘Constitutive Relations’,” and Schindler, “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: \textit{Status Quaestionis}.” This article is revised under the same title, save for “\textit{Status Quaestionis},” to form a chapter in \textit{Ordering Love}, 242-74.

\textsuperscript{20} This phrase is within the title of Schindler’s essay “Modernity and the Nature of a Distinction: Balthasar’s Ontology of Generosity” and explained on pages 245 and following of \textit{Ordering Love}.

\textsuperscript{21} Schindler, \textit{Ordering Love}, 250.

\textsuperscript{22} Identifying something in itself and relative to others, principally God, is what Schindler has in mind when articulating ontologies such as Balthasar’s and Descartes’.

\textsuperscript{23} Schindler, \textit{Ordering Love}, 250.
This quotation and its claims will become more understandable when we enter below the three discussions between Schindler and his interlocutors and are able to see examples of things (x) which appear to his interlocutors to have no intrinsic relation to other things (non-x), and then see how this apparent “Cartesian” (dualistic) or “mechanistic” (extrinsicist) worldview leads these thinkers to positions in opposition to Schindler’s own. In general terms, sufficient for this theoretical introduction, Schindler means that modernity’s predominant “Cartesian ontology” depicts relations between one thing and another, intentionally or not, as “arbitrary and dispersive and thus a matter of relativism—or indeed better . . . relativistic nihilism.”24 This is to say, for Schindler, that things or orders—e.g. marriage, the sexual difference—have no apparent meaning for many today precisely because they do not see reality as constitutively given in creation, “interiorly-anteriorly open to God,”25 and thus intrinsically related.26

Contrariwise, Balthasar helps Schindler perceive being, including the economy, stem cells, and the language of the human body, all of which are shaped by human action, as integrated into the norm of Jesus Christ (the Logos through whom all things are made; Jn 1:1-3) and his defining love.27 All of these orders are therefore bound by their very logic—just

24 Ibid., 252.
25 Ibid.
26 Such is why Schindler prefers to depict two things in correspondence by a dash “-“, e.g. Mary-Church, instead of a slash mark “/”, e.g. Mary/Church, which would seem to admit no relation. It is a way of demonstrating the paradox of being or its difference-within-unity. It is an indicator of a “both-and” relation between things, rather than “either/or”. As related above, the title of Balthasar’s article “Mary-Church-Office,” shows the same preference.
27 Peter J. Casarella notes how “Schindler hinges his theological metaphysics on just a few
as the discipline of moral theology itself—to the filial and surrendering, *communio* love which Jesus exemplified in his life and death. Schindler explains:

In sum, it is Balthasar’s originally generous identity that alone enables us reasonably to reject relativism, while on the contrary, [Neo-]Scholasticism’s mechanistic identity of its inner logic generates, dialectically, the very relativism that is [Neo-]Scholasticism’s intention to oppose.28

Balthasar’s C(c)atholic ontology is . . . fulfilled and recapitulated in a sanctity that takes every reality and every thought “captive” in Jesus Christ, *generously*: in a way that “assumes,” while thus not “absorbing” but rather gathering up and “perfecting” every being and meaning of the cosmos in its singular creaturely integrity as such.29

These comments provide yet more evidence for the ways in which Balthasar’s Christological theology of love is of fundamental importance for Schindler and his own theology, a theology become moral theology (or Christian philosophy as the case may be) when he is tasked with answering ethical questions.

---

28 Schindler, *Ordering Love*, 252. I have included “[Neo-]” prior to Scholasticism in this quotation from Schindler to indicate how his grievance is precisely with what he calls “modern, or Cajetanian, Scholasticism.” Ibid., 250. “Cajetanian Scholasticism customarily insists that inscribing generosity within the original logic of being and meaning leads to relativism. Such a fear, however, from the point of view argued above in the name of Balthasar, overlooks the crucial fact that it is the *very relation to God* by which the creature is constituted in existence that gives the creature its substantial *identity* in the first place.” Ibid., 251. Schindler no doubt follows E. Gilson and H. de Lubac in their understanding that Thomas Cardinal Cajetan, O.P. misinterprets St. Thomas’s thought on the relation of nature and grace, i.e. whether nature can adequately be viewed as a self-enclosed system. The point, as it relates to Balthasar, is that faith is not meant to be bracketed from the determination of a thing or, indeed, from moral activity.

29 Ibid., 249-50. “Here, then, we see in all its radicality Balthasar’s C(c)atholicity: all of created being and meaning is ordered in its depths toward participation in sanctity, in and through the human persons, who alone among the beings of the cosmos realize sanctity in the proper sense.” Ibid., 242. “[Neo-] Scholasticism lacks just the ontology of generosity ordered to sanctity whose absence is the bane of modernity, an ontology that Balthasar takes to be implied in the symphony of all great Catholic theologian-saints.” Ibid., 251.
To set in relief how Balthasar’s theology has influenced Schindler, it is enough now to mention both the frequency and formal applicability of the references to Balthasar in Schindler’s work.30 Four of Schindler’s articles bear his mentor’s name.31 Two books he has edited, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Works* and *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*,32 show an immediate link. Of course Balthasar is mentioned and/or his thought is applied in many of the 70+ articles that Schindler has authored.33 Perhaps more indicative of Balthasar’s influence on Schindler than any of these references and, more importantly, the realities which they refer to,34 is the first book that Schindler penned, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation*,35 wherein Schindler lists no less than a dozen quotations from Balthasar (and no one else!) *before the title page* and then goes on to

---

30 As mentioned, this is done “in order to see how the elements of allegiance in [the following] cases are less circumstantial than they are matters of common theology and perspective.”


32 The fact that this is “Volume 1” indicates Schindler’s continued interest in the subject.


34 These references would have no bearing on the matter if they did not indicate a consistency between Schindler’s work and Balthasar’s. The remainder of this chapter is indebted to showing precisely this.

35 Schindler’s second book, *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God*, which has just been released at this writing, continues on the foundation which Balthasar helps provide for Schindler in his earlier work.
advance prominent Balthasarian themes—the link between theology and sanctity, the being-love axiom, gift and gratitude, etc.—amply throughout the work, a work that concludes with this telling statement: “In conclusion, let us recall, with the help of Balthasar, the main outlines of communio ecclesiology which has guided us throughout our study.”\(^{36}\) In short, Balthasar more than any thinker in the Christian tradition helps provide Schindler with the theological-philosophical foundation for communicating a “communio ecclesiology” and its antitheses in modern-day liberalism.\(^ {37}\) Let us now turn to the most prominently featured discussion of this book, the tenets and pitfalls of neo-conservatism.

\(\S\) V.2 The Neo-Conservatism Debate

[T]he difference between myself and the neoconservatives regarding the present situation in America turns principally on the question of whether the problems—which we both in some sense acknowledge—represent primarily moral aberrations with respect to America’s founding principles, or whether, on the contrary, they represent an unfolding which clarifies the inner logic of those principles. And our differences in answer to this question depend in turn on our respective understandings of the human person and the Christian mission.\(^ {38}\)


\(^{37}\) This is not in the least to discount Schindler’s other influences, including such prominent thinkers as Étienne Gilson, Henri Cardinal de Lubac, Pope John Paul II, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, but it is to say that Balthasar provides more than any other a comprehensive perspective for his work.

\(^{38}\) Schindler, “Response to Lowery,” 255. The first interpretation (“moral aberrations”) would be the neoconservative reading, while the second (“unfolding of the inner logic”) would be Schindler’s.
The purpose of this section is to outline the origins of the (continuing) debate between Schindler and his “neoconservative” interlocutors, George Weigel, the late Fr. Richard Neuhaus, Michael Novak,39 and, more recently concerning economics, Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute, in order to locate Balthasar’s influence on Schindler’s argument and thus underscore how Schindler’s antidote to American (U.S.) liberalism, that is, *communio* ecclesiology, shares a radical (Latin: *of or pertaining to the root*) continuity with the Swiss theologian’s Christological theology of love. In this way this section indicates decisively how Balthasar’s theology of self-abandoning love for the sake of (ever deepening) communion lends itself to a particular view of the human person and the Christian mission which orients certain, albeit broadly defined, moral conclusions regarding the American experiment. Not to overstate it, the reader comes to know on what side of the debate Balthasar would have found himself and some of the principal reasons why.40 This is not to suggest that Schindler comes to his present understanding by way of Balthasar *tout court*, in fact the debate begins in 1987 before Schindler really began to engage Balthasar’s scholarship the following year, but the framework which Schindler operates in and derives insights from in this socio-ethical analysis is unquestionably Balthasarian due to its

39 The label “neoconservative” as applied to Weigel, Neuhaus, and Novak is first given by Weigel himself in “The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society,” *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 190-211. In this instance it refers to those who consider the democratic founding and free market economy of the United States to be, in principle, advantageous for the spread of the common good and the Catholic faith in particular. The nub of the issue is precisely this “in principle” question.

40 This is somewhat of a disputed claim. Michael Novak also purports to be an aficionado of Balthasar (Novak, “Schindler’s Conversion: The Catholic Right Accepts Pluralism,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 147-8), for instance, but the crucial import of Balthasar’s theological ontology in the American experiment—he admits as much—is not his.
application of a proposed Catholic theological ontology to even the most specific of worldly concerns. The results will become evident shortly.

The debate begins with Schindler’s article, “Is America Bourgeois?” in *Communio*, itself a response to George Weigel’s article by the same title in *Crisis* magazine. Weigel had disputed the claim made by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger that “Catholic Christianity in America is marked in significant ways by bourgeois disorder.” This means, in Weigel’s words, that Ratzinger “thinks of American culture as gravely deficient morally—as characterized by a selfishness and radical individualism which has little or no concern for fundamental moral norms, or for the common good.” Schindler’s task in his article is to show the reasonableness of Ratzinger’s depiction of American culture by privileging a “theological-ontological” model for assessing the merits of the future pope’s claims rather than individualism and self-interest.

---

41 The debate with the initial three interlocutors mentioned above is on full display in the first five chapters of Schindler’s Heart of the World, Center of the Church under the heading, “Part One: Catholic Liberalism.” Even the remaining five chapters, i.e. “Part Two: Communio Ecclesiology and Liberal Culture,” are very much related to it. Again, Schindler uses quotations from Balthasar to lead the book’s discussion, cites him amply throughout, and concludes by returning to Balthasar’s frame of reference, which is to say his Christological theology of love. As the proceeding discussion makes clear, such a theology grants logical primacy to receptive, constitutive relations and self-giving rather than individualism and self-interest.


43 Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?,” 263.

44 Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?,” 5. At different junctures in this dissertation the link between Balthasar’s theology of love and Ratzinger’s has been indicated. See e.g. Rudolf Voderholzer, Treir, “Glaubhaft is nur Liebe” – “Deus caritas est.” In modernity certain antitheses to this general theological perspective are presented. See, e.g. Balthasar, “On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time,” and a work he penned in 1939, “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,” *Communio* 24 (1997): 347-96 RT.
than a “moral-psychological” one. While conceding, at least for the sake of argument, that the Founding Fathers of America were well-intentioned God-fearing people who did much (morally-psychologically) to encourage civic virtue through word and speech, Schindler’s point is that they nevertheless left intact through the founding documents an underlying (theological-ontological) order or logic which disposes American culture toward individualism and selfishness. This bourgeois logic is not in the first place psychological or intentional, Schindler repeats, but rather onto-logical (concerning the being of things) which predisposes people to think and act more selfishly than they otherwise would.

As an example of what Schindler takes to be the rather hidden and subtle intrusion of this ontological selfishness, he cites the legal right in the United States to abort one’s unborn child, a legal sanction which claims close to 3,000 babies a day under the spurious but unflagging banner of “freedom” and “human rights.” It follows, for Schindler, that sincere

45 Schindler, “Once Again,” 94. See also Schindler’s “Is America Bourgeois?,” 264-5 passim.

46 That Schindler’s argument requires precisely an ontological critique without begging the question still further appears to go unnoticed. See, for instance, Weigel, “Is America Bourgeois?,” and Novak, “Schindler’s Conversion.”

47 Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?,” 282-4. Schindler also cites the materialism present in American society and the secularization of intelligence that occurs in America’s institutes of learning which pits the bearer of wisdom and truth to be the so-called “expert” instead of the saint as in classic Catholic culture. Ibid., 278-282, at 278. In response to Novak’s insight that the average woman in the U.S.S.R. had between five and six abortions in her lifetime (“Schindler’s Conversion,” 156), Schindler firstly states that this is hardly an argument against the 1.6 million babies aborted every year in the United States but, more to the point, it bespeaks the reality that both liberal and Marxist societies, despite their significant differences in other respects, grant primacy in their public institutions to the economic dimension of human being.” This shared underlying tendency to devalue the other as an economic instrument would seem to facilitate more frequent abortions, for Schindler. “Christology and the Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission: Response to Michael Novak,” Communio 19 (1992): 175. In a later article, Schindler expands the list of “dominant features” in American culture: “its consumerism; its tendency to confuse genuine thinking with the taking of empirical public-opinion polls, and to replace substantive judgment with the following of formal-legal procedures (proceduralism); its tendency, in the academy, to replace philosophical reflection with ‘analysis,’ history, and archeology—the gathering of bits of data; its reduction of the meaning of freedom to mere freedom of choice. . . . What all of these tendencies have in common . . . is precisely their surface character.” Schindler, “The Significance of Hans Urs von Balthasar in the Contemporary Cultural Situation,” 29.
people who think they are promoting such estimable traits as freedom and human rights are very often doing just the opposite when they act in formal (if not always intentional) allegiance with American liberalism.\textsuperscript{48} This is because however much the Founding Fathers would have personally abhorred abortion and in fact spoke in their time of the unalienable right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” the end result, Schindler implies, is that they simultaneously undermined these tenets by presenting a conception of the human person which has the formal (logical) traits of an individual bearer of rights who stands over against the imposition of others,\textsuperscript{49} in this way the person’s relation to God and others in God, so conceived on individualist terms, Schindler argues, is “extrinsic” to his own identity as person.\textsuperscript{50} Such a person is morally encouraged to exercise civic participation and virtue, no doubt, but, according to Schindler, only from the cultural parameters of self-interest.\textsuperscript{51} For Schindler, such parameters set in advance a disposition, an attitude, indeed an entire way of

\textsuperscript{48} Schindler often cites Alasdair MacIntyre in this connection: “The contemporary debates within modern political systems are almost exclusively between conservative liberals, liberal liberals, and radical liberals. There is little place in such political systems . . . for putting liberalism in question.” (\textit{Whose Justice? Which Rationality?} [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]: 392), as referenced for example in Schindler, “Response to Mark Lowery,” 461, fn. 11.

\textsuperscript{49} This is illustrated by, among other things, Schindler’s allusion to John Locke’s philosophy as decisive in the shaping of the Founding. See Schindler, “Is America Bourgeois?,” 264. Cf. Once Again,” 102, 104 for a discussion of rights as conceived in the American experience.

\textsuperscript{50} This theme is developed in Schindler’s subsequent articles. Here it is cast in terms of “extroversion” as Christopher Dawson describes it. “Is America Bourgeois?,” 266. Schindler further states: “In short, Weigel’s conception of the problem \textit{ipso facto} instantiates—already as a matter of principle implies—the claim that the relation of others to the \textit{being of one’s self is external}” (original emphases). Ibid., 272. In this connection we are reminded of Schindler’s account of Cartesian ontology presenting things “x” as having no fundamental relation to other things “non-x,” even as both are constituted by God. The intrinsic relation between things is, for Schindler, “analogical,” not “integral” nor “dualistic.” \textit{Heart of the World, Center of the Church}, 14. It is finally an analogy of being and love.

\textsuperscript{51} Concerning economics, this can be understood from Adam Smith’s foundational account of “self-interest rightly understood” in his classic work, \textit{The Wealth of Nations}, vol. 1-2, orig. pub. 1776 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, LTD, 1910).
thinking, which simultaneously militates against the very virtues which the Founders applauded precisely in their integrity as virtues of *communio*, self-giving love. This is of course a very broad depiction of the Founders of America and what they conveyed through their writings—surely not all were in agreement on the benefits of self-interest, for instance—but Schindler reasons that individualism and its rights claims nonetheless *effectively form* the operative basis for ethics in American society writ large. It would seem, according to Schindler’s line of argument, that an American seeking to see as the saints and judge and act accordingly must then recognize America’s self-interested logic or ontology in contradistinction to the Gospel and contemplate (daily if necessary) the inverse theological ontology of what he describes as Ratzinger’s “Catholic-creedal understanding.” The import of this so-called Catholic theological perspective includes an understanding of *being* as *fundamentally relational*.


---

52 The understanding, from St. Thomas among others, that charity is the form of the virtues—all of them—receives attention and approval in no less than four paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 826, 1827, 1841, and 1844.


54 Schindler draws from Ratzinger’s book, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Crossroads, 1969), to indicate Jesus’ relation to his Heavenly Father as “being-relative or –related” (“Is America Bourgeois?,” 267), which then situates a proper ontology for human appropriation on relational terms (Ibid., 268f). The operative basis for Schindler’s critique of American Catholic and conservative liberalism or, simply neoconservatism, then, is the same “ontology of generosity” to which Schindler feels so indebted to Balthasar.

Schindler would describe the relation between the Church (grace) and world (nature) as “organic-paradoxical,” he considers Neuhaus’ self-admittedly “dialectical” and “dualistic” account of this relation to again be “extrinsicist” and just so far not Catholic. In Schindler’s judgment,

Neuhaus’s paradoxical understanding (of grace-nature and faith-reason) entails a privatizing of faith which is simultaneous with a “naturalizing” of nature and a “rationalizing” of reason. That is, Christianity can go public, can speak in and for the public order, but only in the name of a nature just so far unpenetrated by grace and a reason just so far unaffected (internally) by faith.

In contradistinction to Neuhaus’s conception of the nature-grace relation, Schindler cites Henri de Lubac and Balthasar, the latter for the first time in the neo-conservatism debate, in support of what he considers the Catholic position on the matter and the subsequent understanding of the Church’s worldly mission.


57 See Schindler, “Catholicism, Public Theology,” 110-17, at 110 and 117.

58 This quotation begins, “To put the matter in the most radical terms…” Ibid., 130.

59 Ibid., 114f. Schindler draws from the Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacraementum Mundi, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) to summarize this position: “Man does not exist except as intrinsically ordained by grace to the vision of God as his end, which is the only absolutely final end of that very nature.” Ibid., 115. This is not to dismiss the important differences between Rahner on the one hand and de Lubac and Balthasar on the other concerning such matters.
On this [de Lubacian, Balthasarian] understanding of Christianity, the order of grace is never collapsed into the order of nature, even as the relation between these orders is always \textit{(de facto)} direct (grace establishes from the beginning an \textit{ontological} orientation in nature), that is, rather than extrinsic or dialectical or inverse in the way indicated in “crisis theology” and in Neuhaus’s understanding of paradox.\footnote{Schindler, “Catholicism, Public Theology,” 116.}

The point as it relates to morality, for Schindler, is that “Catholic Christianity has an intrinsic mission truly to enter into, to penetrate, all of human being and activity and hence all of culture: to help carry through this ordering of all of being to God in Christ.”\footnote{Ibid., 118.} As Schindler had conveyed in “Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism and American Culture” a year earlier, Weigel should be hesitant to embrace Neuhaus’s theological claims regarding the American experiment insofar as his self-identified “post liberal” vision of things appears to circumvent “intelligence and truth” for “decision,” “reasonableness” for “faith,” “nature (cosmos)” for a simple “eschatological” perspective of grace, and “universality” for “particularity.”\footnote{Schindler, “Once Again,” 115-16. Weigel will later distinguish their approaches: “Novak and I are more inclined to the model of Church-and-society that H. Richard Niebuhr described as “Christ the Transformer of Culture”: Neuhaus clearly prefers the paradox model.” Weigel, “Response to Lowery,” 439. The question remains whether this model which Niebuhr (1894-1962), a Protestant, presents but does not necessarily adopt as his own, is consistent with the Catholic “analogue” understanding of the Church-world relation which Schindler is proposing here in the names of de Lubac and Balthasar, and elsewhere (as depicted herein) in the names of Ratzinger and John Paul II. Cf. Niebuhr, \textit{Christ and Culture} (New York: HarperCollins, 1951), esp. 191-96.} While Neuhaus had presented these latter traits—decision, faith, eschatological grace, and particularity—as critical to the Church’s transformation of the world, according to Schindler they were not sufficiently conceived and articulated as integral to “the features of intelligence and truth, of reasonableness, of nature (cosmos), and of
universality,“ and therefore adequate to dispel his contention that Neuhaus proposes an extrinsicist, dualist Christian-world relation which translates finally, however unintentionally, as voluntarist and fideist, purely spiritual and congregationalist. Although Schindler briefly returns to Balthasar’s thought toward the end of his critique of Neuhaus to show how Christ’s incarnation applies even to worldly being, it is not until 1991 that Schindler lets Balthasar’s Christological perspective fully inform his position.

In response to Mark Lowery’s attempt to reconcile Weigel’s and Schindler’s accounts of American liberalism by suggesting that Weigel’s theological ontology “participates” on a certain rudimentary level in Schindler’s, the chief editor of *Communio* drafts two articles for the same issue of the review: one to directly answer Lowery (as Weigel does), and another, “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission: Neoconverativism and American Culture,” to

---


64 See Schindler, “Catholicism, Public Theology,” esp. 123-30. “[T]o be sure, there is an evident truth to the suggestion that the Christian vision (way of being and knowing) involves decision, belief, and an eschatological perspective and indeed is irretrievably “particularistic” (i.e., finally because that vision is essentially linked with the person of Jesus Christ). But once this has been said, the hard questions come rushing forward: to wit, in what sense is the Christian vision also a matter of intelligence and truth (even as it is a matter of volition: decision), a matter of reason (even as it is a matter of belief), a matter which is in and for the cosmos in which we are living (even as it is a matter for the eschaton); and a matter which is universalist in its reach (even as it is mediated in and through a particular linguistic community and tradition?” Ibid., 115.

65 Schindler, “Catholicism, Public Theology,” 140.

66 Schindler admits that his “emphasis on transformation” in “Catholicism, Public Theology,” was “insufficiently christological.” Schindler, “Response to Lowery,” 456, fn. 6. This is not to cede a point to Neuhaus but rather to indicate how an Christological vantage point, such that Balthasar provides, grants greater depth of understanding to the world’s meaning and finality, and thus its path, by grace, to sanctification.

67 See Lowery, “The Schindler/Weigel Debate.”

provide his most paradigmatic case to date on the subject. In both of these articles, Schindler defends “in the name of Balthasar and John Paul II” a theology counter to the (however inadvertently expressed and differentiated) theology of Weigel, Neuhaus, and Michael Novak. Schindler describes the difference between these perspectives as one of “informing spirit,” “by virtue of the different form (Gestalt) carried in their respective first principles.”

Schindler’s deliberate use of Balthasar’s principal term “form” or “Gestalt” suggests an essential difference between these theologies which appears unbridgeable (non-participatory) by mere “moral-psychological” means since their respective onto-logics—one that implies the primacy of communio, self-giving love and all that entails versus one that arguably implies the primacy of individualist, self-interest and all that entails—govern the manner of their appropriation at every turn.

In “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission,” Schindler makes five points relative to this so-called Balthasarian theological perspective: (1) “the Christian’s mission takes form from


70 Schindler, “Response to Lowery,” 451. This theology “in the name of Balthasar and John Paul II” can be described as one of Christological anthropology, reminiscent of Gaudium et spes 22 (“Christ . . . fully reveals man to himself”), the most commonly cited article of John Paul II’s pontificate. With respect to this article, Cardinal Ratzinger states: “We are probably justified in saying that here for the first time in an official document of the magisterium, a new type of completely Christocentric theology appears. On the basis of Christ this dares to present theology as anthropology and only becomes radically theological by including man in discourse about God by way of Christ, thus manifesting the deepest unity of theology. The generally theologically reserved text of the Pastoral Constitution here attains very lofty heights and points the way to theological reflection in our present situation” (“The Church and Man’s Calling,” 159 in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. 5, 1969), as cited in Schindler, Heart of the World, Center of the Church, 13, fn. 17.


72 Ibid., 453-4. As John Paul II states, “[L]ove, which has been and remains the driving force of mission . . . is also ‘the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed. ‘It is the principle which must direct every action, and end to which that action must be directed.”’ Redemptoris missio (1990), 60.
within Christ’s [Eucharistic] mission,”73 (2) the features of the Christian form “are indicated above all in the fiat,”74 (3) “Balthasar’s deep sense of sin does not lead him to deny . . . that gift [Eucharist] and receptivity [fiat] remain the norm for authentic Christian spirituality,”75 (4) “The proper intention of the Eucharist and fiat . . . is to pass into worldly activity,”76 and (5) when Balthasar “refers to the soul of contemporary Western culture as an ‘anima technica vacua’ [Epilogue, 8],” he is indicating “a culture lacking the dispositions given in the fiat.”77

The contrary marks of the West, Schindler argues, are “activism and instrumentalism, which signal a primary disposition of doing, making, and having in relation to the other, or again indicate a lack of a genuinely receptive-contemplative disposition toward the other.”78 He summarizes thus:

The position of a ‘Balthasarian’ theology seems clear. The Christian is called, by the very nature of Christianity, to enter the world in all of its historical diversity: that is, from within the gospel of Jesus Christ as carried in the church—and thus from within the Eucharist (incarnation, cross, redemption) and the fiat. It is this gospel which always and everywhere, even in the post-seventeenth century West, gives the a priori form for new inculturations.


74 Ibid., 368. The quotation continues, “: in the threefold—perfectly open and boundless—consent of the Son to the Father, of Mary, and of the Church [Balthasar, Love Alone, 101-2]. Within the fiat, says Balthasar, “the Son’s mission is formed, and within this the Church’s mission, and within this again, the Christian’s mission” (Love Alone, 102). Ibid. Schindler promotes in this regard: “a disposition of receptivity toward God, as the condition for giving birth to God; of contemplation and interiority, as the condition for creativity; a disposition of wonder at the gift of being—and thus of humility . . . ; a suffering disposition that already anticipates a passion; a willingness to bear the other (Christ) for the other (Christ), unto death” (emphases added). Ibid., 368-9.


76 Ibid., 370.

77 Ibid., 371-2.

These new incultarations, in other words, must be differentiations of the normative gospel spirituality and not either exceptions or mere additions to it.  

Clearly the Swiss theologian helps Schindler see and apply a giving (Eucharistic) and receptive (fiat) theology “always and everywhere,” that is, also to the varied inculturations of America. Note how the Balthasarian terms that Schindler applies are indicative of a perspective which sees the Catholic faith and its liturgical and Marian sensibilities proper to a culture as culture, without, by that measure, suggesting that this faith should be imposed. Schindler’s point, rather, is that the only culture that should be advocated, certainly by such Catholics as Weigel, the late Fr. Neuhaus, and Novak, is an authentically C(c)atholic—E(e)ucharistic and M(m)arian—one, because this culture has non-obtrusive informing characteristics, such as the relational ontology and implicit espousal of self-giving and receiving which Schindler has previously identified, that are serviceable for politics, law, the

79 Schindler, “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission,” 380. Schindler conveys his influence: “I draw on Balthasar because I believe his theology of “worldly” mission is perhaps the most significant such theology in our time, and because his is the theology that most informs the questions I have wanted to put before Novak, Weigel, and Neuhaus.” Ibid., 366. This statement alone signifies the fact that Balthasar’s theology provides a certain foundation for social ethics, even without itself being a social ethic in the conventional sense.

80 Schindler, “Response to Lowery,” 462. Lowery had suggested that the real bone of contention between Schindler and Weigel concerns a proper interpretation of religious freedom. Lowery, “The Schindler/Weigel Debate: An Appraisal,” 430. In response to Lowery’s charge that Schindler “must show how his views are compatible with Dignitatis Humanae” (Ibid., 433), Schindler agrees with Walter Kasper that the Declaration on Human Freedom, while a true achievement, is nevertheless incomplete and in need of a comprehensive theology. Schindler, “Response to Lowery,” 463. For Schindler “What remains still to be developed, then, is how human dignity and freedom are anchored in Jesus Christ: how Christ’s hypostatic union is both the foundation for and gives the primary meaning of man in relation to God and indeed to all else in God.” Ibid.

81 Simply capitalizing “Catholic,” “Eucharistic” and “Marian,” in this context may give the false impression that Schindler would advocate imposing the content of the Catholic faith as such. By both capitalizing and non-capitalizing, we are underscoring the universal and formal applicability of relational ontology, self-giving, and receiving, while still accounting for the fact that the Catholic faith is also applicable to (if not enforceable upon) all peoples. Cf. Schindler, “Modernity and the Nature of a Distinction,” 242, where Schindler uses a similar reference for “C(c)atholic.”
economy, community life, and so on. According to Schindler, these characteristics are not (formally, logically) identifiable with America’s founding principles, nor do they suggest an invalid, but rather valid natural law, nor are they reducible to public expressions of faith. One will also note, if not in Schindler’s article, “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission,” certainly in his book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* published five years later, that Schindler’s argument is augmented by Balthasar’s reading of the nuptial relation between Christ and the Church as it comes to orient by analogy the terms of the Christian’s mission in the world. Considering the comprehensiveness of Balthasar’s reading of this nuptial and fruitful relation as paradigmatic of love, which is co-extensive with being for Balthasar and Schindler, Schindler can remark that

---

82 It is the common position of Weigel, Neuhaus and Novak that natural law theory is the optimum resource for authentic transformation in a pluralistic society. See Lowery, 435. This however leaves open the question whether such a version of natural law will draw from the light of revelation. Granting that it is not always prudent to express the content of one’s faith in the public square, Schindler’s question appears to be, “Should not Catholics allow their faith to in-form their interpretation and articulation of the natural law precisely as natural?” See Schindler, “Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism and American Culture,” 111. A larger question here is “Does not faith help reason be itself?” To wit, Schindler makes the following address: “[T]he cultural task of our time in America must involve an effort to tie the political-constitutional order intrinsically to a natural law the public reasonableness of which is always already metaphysical (and open to the theological) and not—as a matter of principle is not ever—first simply formal or merely ‘political’-juridical.... We need, in a word, to recuperate . . . the awareness that we are not our own, that belonging to ourselves at its root is always anteriorly a belonging to God and to others, to the entire community of being, a belonging whose basic (indeed, in light of Christian revelation, whose primordially sacramental) form is given in filial-nuptial relationality.” Schindler, “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: Status Quaestionis,” 431.


84 “[T]he world’s response to God in Jesus Christ must therefore take the primary feminine form of Mary-Church,” in order to avoid “a false ‘masculinization’ of the world and thus a ‘gay’ culture because primarily masculine vis-à-vis God.” Ibid., 39. This statement clearly has allusions to Balthasar’s essay, “Woman Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture.”

85 As the title of Schindler’s latest book, *Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God*, suggests, Schindler returns again and again to the notion that being is love in his analyses of culture, of education, of the human being, and so on.
“the form of sainthood” is given in the “form of Christ” and in turn “in the form of trinitarian love”—and thus in Christ’s spousal relation with the Church, in his Eucharist, in the *communio* which he shares with the Father in the Spirit. Sainthood in this comprehensive sense thus makes up the content of the Christian’s proposal for the world: sainthood is meant to inform a Christian’s “worldly” morality and social justice, indeed all of his or her “worldly” being and acting.86

As Schindler sees it, “What liberation therefore requires is transformation through spousal union: ever-deeper penetration of the form of Christ into our being, to the end of communion with the Father.”87

From this theological and indubitably Balthasarian vantage point, Schindler argues that what the neo-conservatives are advancing in their approval of the philosophical underpinnings of American liberality is not of “the normative gospel spirituality,”88 but instead a “new spirituality” with its own intelligible form:

The new spirituality which these men are calling for, in other words, appears already to have its own *a priori* form built into it: a form which is given in and by these assumptions of the modern Western world. The risk, then, is that these latter assumptions will already be functioning normatively when one

86 Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, 40. Schindler willingly concedes the influence of John Courtney Murray, S.J.—who is thought to have contributed significantly to the drafting of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*—on Novak, Weigel, and Neuhaus. The *Communio* editor critiques Murray accordingly. “[I]t is no accident that Balthasar’s model for the Christian as he or she enters the world is the saint, whereas (for example) John Courtney Murray’s is the man or woman of civility. For Balthasar, the call to sanctity both precedes and includes—even as it transforms—the need to speak reasonably and with civility. Mother Teresa knows this well, as did Dorothy Day and Madeleine Delbrêl.” Schindler, “Response to Michael Novak,” 171. Cf. Schindler’s critique of Murray in “Response to Lowery,” 464-7 and especially in Chapter One of *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, “Religious Freedom, Truth, and Anglo-American Liberalism: Another Look at John Courtney Murray,” 43-88. See Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960).

87 Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, 312.

turns to the gospel—and this is something quite different from having one’s assumptions first judged by the gospel."89

Schindler follows this comment with what he perceives to be the implications of this shift in starting principles:

At stake here in clarifying the primary source for the form of one’s spirituality is nothing less than whether the transformation envisioned by that spirituality will be first on the church’s terms—and thereby a transformation first of the world; or first on the world’s terms—and thereby a transformation first of the Church.90

He clarifies that “the two theologies begin with different understandings of person and mission.”91 The theology that Schindler advocates, in the name of Balthasar,92 regards the human person as fundamentally receptive qua creature (qua child and Mary)—so being takes precedence over doing and having, receptivity provides the occasion for creativity,93 and

89 Ibid., 381.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Schindler cites Balthasar in making note of a proper “theological reflection or intuition that is able to take in at a single glance three things in the concept of universality (= Catholicism): the will of the Creator that all should be saved, the effective instrument Christ-Church for the carrying out of this will, and the imprinting of the love of Christ, through the Church, on all worldly order.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Council of the Holy Spirit,” in Creator Spirit, vol. 3 of Explorations in Theology (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 245-67, as cited in Schindler, Heart of the World, Center of the Church, 141-2.
93 Weigel considers in the chapter, “Camels and Needles, Talents and Treasures: American Catholicism and the Capitalist Ethic,” in The Capitalist Spirit: Toward a Religious Ethic of Wealth Creation, ed. Peter L. Berger (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1990), 103, as cited in “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission,” 382, that “man’s distinguishing characteristic” is participation in “God’s creative activity.” Schindler’s aim is to pinpoint receptivity as the anterior condition for such creativity.
“contemplation-immanent activity is an anterior condition for all action-transitive/transcendent activity. . . .”\(^{94}\)

Of course the accuracy of Schindler’s determination that his neo-conservative interlocutors propose a “new spirituality” depends on whether Schindler has properly conceived their arguments in the first place—a larger question than can be dealt with comprehensively in this examination of Balthasar’s influence on Schindler in the debate. Notwithstanding this question of adversarial interpretation, it is clear from the above that Balthasar’s theology assists Schindler in his critique of the self-interested and individualist claims perceived in the literature of the American founding. In this way Balthasar helps Schindler dispute the claim that such founding principles, as principles, as informative starting points, are advantageous for advancing the common good and Catholicism in particular.

Like Balthasar, Schindler offers no specific means for realizing his different way of thinking and acting on the political-juridical level; he concedes that such a project would require a number of people over a significant amount of time.\(^{95}\) He also offers the most limited of cultural solutions, if by solutions one means the reconfiguration of exterior structures and forms.\(^{96}\) It is however clear that culture is, for Schindler, the primary arena in

\(^{94}\) Schindler, “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission,” 382.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 176.

\(^{96}\) This statement deserves some qualification. In pointing to such figures as Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day and Madeline Delbrêl, Schindler points indirectly to the cultural solutions offered by them. See “Response to Michael Novak,” 171. Schindler also repeats John Paul II’s claim in Centesimus annus that what he is envisioning will necessitate for some a change in lifestyles “in order to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, thus enabling every individual and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources.” Centesimus annus, 52, as cited in Heart of the World, 126. Against the claim of Neuhaus in particular, Schindler reports that a change of lifestyles does not necessitate “political-juridical coercion as an
which the difference in theological-ontological perspectives are evidenced, meaning that people intelligently informed with an adequate understanding of (Catholic Christian) theology as suggested most decisively by Balthasar, according to Schindler, will be led to agree that American liberalism is inherently flawed, not simply limited, and see a need to communicate, in person and action, the ecclesial *communio* he proposes. Again, Schindler makes no pretext to offer another constitutional structure different from the present one. While these structures carry within them an anthropology and an attendant understanding of freedom which appears in tension with Catholicism, Schindler resists the impulse to create his own more “Catholic” structure. He does however provide, in the context especially of the economy, a different way of informing this culture than what is suggested by the conventional self-interested wisdom of the American experiment.

This different way of informing the culture, for Schindler according to the primacy of love, comes to light in a book he co-edits with Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute which brings the two sides of the debate into conversation precisely on the economy. Bandow selects seven essays from seven authors in the vein of neo-conservative economics, while appropriate means for effecting this change.” *Heart of the World*, 12. Further examples of the concrete differences his perspective makes will be shown below in reference to the economic portion of the debate. For our part, cultural differences between neoconservatism and Balthasarian-*communio* ethics will be offered in Chapter Six to follow, modeled in part on the different life-form or culture deliberately embodied at the John Paul II Institute which Schindler presided over as Dean for more than 20 years, and now serves as Provost.

Schindler also expresses the influence of Joseph Ratzinger and Henri de Lubac, not to mention John Paul II. See *Heart of the World*, 30, fn. 48.


Of the essays he chooses from, one is authored by Michael Novak and another by Richard John Neuhaus. See Novak, “Catholic Social Teaching, Markets, and the Poor,” 51-76 and Neuhaus, “The Liberalism of John Paul II and the Technological Imperative,” 289-306 in *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*. Needless to say, Schindler takes issue with Neuhaus’s interpretation of John Paul II’s thought here (Schindler,
Schindler does the same from the perspective of *communio* theology. The editors also contribute their own summary essays in the book. In Schindler’s essay, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism: Toward an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude,” he expands on an example provided in his book, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, which can serve here to illustrate the difference between an “economy of love” in the “Balthasarian-Catholic” sense, and an economy of self-interest in the “Adam Smithian-neo-conservative” sense.

The baker who works for the sake of love—however much he may or may not conceive what he is doing explicitly in theoretical terms—approaches the making of bread, the bread made, the other for whom the bread is made, and indeed himself as invested in the process and the thing, as gift. He makes the bread—which is to say he gratefully gives himself over to the making of the bread—simultaneously for its own sake and for the sake of the other. In contrast, the baker who works primarily for profit, and insofar as he works primarily for profit, approaches the making of bread, the bread made, and the other for whom the bread is made, as instrument. He does not make the bread intrinsically for itself or for the other (consumer). Rather, he utilizes, for the

---


100 *Communio* theology refers here to the theology Schindler proposes, in the names of Balthasar, de Lubac, John Paul II, and Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, to represent his own perspective. Not incidentally, all of these authors have contributed to the formation and/or production of the international Catholic review by the same title. John Paul II was instrumental in the formation of the Polish edition, for instance. Of course Weigel, Neuhaus, and Novak would claim John Paul II for their own, but this is a debate best left for another forum.


102 Schindler’s application of the theology of “gift and gratitude” in the proceeding discussion and, indeed, as the terms occupy the back-end of the subtitle of his essay, shares rather obviously in Balthasar’s own perspective. Cf. Section III.3 above.
sake of himself—primarily out of self-interest—the process of bread-making, the bread made, and the person who eventually buys and consumes the bread. The simple but crucial point I wish to make here, then, is that an economy of love deepens the reality, which is to say, enhances the worth of everything and everyone involved in the production and exchange of goods: self, thing, and other.\(^{103}\)

Schindler adds to this example, two others: (1) the difference of a home-cooked meal whereby the mother’s love “takes form in the food, such that the food itself now takes on the form of the love,”\(^{104}\) which could be contrasted especially with that of a fast-food meal courtesy of America’s increasingly commercial distribution of food, and (2) the difference between Blessed Teresa of Calcutta’s care of an invalid as distinct from a hired nurse’s care.\(^{105}\) All things being equal, the difference between one acting principally out of love and one acting principally out of self-interest, Schindler contends, is exhibited in the thing itself or, in the case of service, in the manner of treatment.\(^{106}\) It follows that one seeking to live

\(^{103}\) Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 360-4, at 362-3. Cf. Schindler, Heart of the World, 123: “A baker trying to live out his life as a businessperson . . . would seek first to make a loaf of bread that was intrinsically good—in terms of its taste and health-producing qualities and the like—and he would seek to do this from the beginning for the sake of being of service to others in society, of enhancing their health and well-being. To be sure, he would recognize profit as a necessary condition of his continuing ability to provide this service to others. He would recognize that he was realizing his own good in this service to others. But that is just the point: his legitimate concern for profit, and his own ‘self-interest,’ would be integrated from the beginning and all along the way into the intention of service.” Cf. also Schindler, Ordering Love, 179-80 of a chapter revised from “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” titled, “Market Liberalism and an Economic Culture of Gift and Gratitude.”

\(^{104}\) Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 359-60, at 360.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 360.

\(^{106}\) Ibid. That Schindler rejects a command economy in favor of a market economy (Heart of the World, 136), illustrates again his unwillingness to simply do away with America’s constitutional structures “all things being equal.” His point, rather, is to promote significant reflection on the difference between the misguided anthropology and attendant understanding of freedom and human action conceived in these structures relative to a C(c)atholic relational ontology and its “economic culture of gift and gratitude.” This reflection will presumably lead to a different, i.e. more Christian and humane, culture and just so different course and manner of action.
and love as a saint should not adopt the order and subsequent culture of self-interest implicit in neo-conservative economics, according to Schindler’s reasoning.

In still another example of seeing and informing the culture differently, from a Catholic perspective, Schindler responds to an essay chosen by Bandow which claims that “the arrival of a ‘new heaven and new earth,’ indicates that nature as it is will collapse and is less to be contemplated and followed than to be intentionally altered and used,”\textsuperscript{107} and moreover that “[t]echnology might well help restore humankind by recovering the knowledge lost in the Fall, and such knowledge would be most useful for moving humanity, as an ally and servant of God, closer to a new kind perfection.”\textsuperscript{108} Schindler argues instead that technology’s growing imprint on American civilization, however beneficial it may be in certain respects, is not without significant problems.\textsuperscript{109} Just as technology represents a distinct kind of knowing for Balthasar, such as the obfuscation of the mystery of being in positivism, Schindler echoes this thought, citing the computer as an example.

Whatever else it is, the computer is an arrangement or ordering of space and time and matter and motion for the purpose of realizing a certain kind of knowledge. The ordering is binary and digital. The knowledge sought consists in the gathering of discreet bits of information. Knowledge takes the form of acquiring, manipulating, and controlling data. The knowledge proper to a computer is more a matter of power and of “summing” than of “seeing.” To put this in negative terms, the knowledge, or kind of consciousness and


\textsuperscript{108} Stackhouse with Stratton, 453 as cited in Schindler, “Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 406. Stackhouse and Stratton are this time citing David Noble.

\textsuperscript{109} See Ibid., 401-411. Cf. an essay chosen by Schindler: Arthur Davis, “‘We Are Not Our Own’: George Grant’s Critique of Science, Technology, and Capitalism,” 271-288, in Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny. Although technology predominates in American culture, its influence is increasingly worldwide.
experience, implicit in the technological order of the computer is weighted against habits of patient interiority, of contemplativeness, of wonder, of sustained mutual presence, of an embodied being-with, of the wisdom that sees the order of the whole. . . .

Cleary the habits which technology is weighted against, such as contemplation and wonder, according to Schindler, are habits that Balthasar promotes as proper to the miracle of being.

Schindler has indeed shown a deep allegiance with Balthasar’s thought, particularly his metaphysics or ontology of love, in the working out of his arguments relative to neo-conservatism. The American neatly summarizes this perspective in a more recent article on the subject of the cultural task in America:

My summary argument, then, is that the problems of America in our time can be identified and addressed properly only through recuperation of a generous “letting be” as constitutive of our being and acting—this is not a matter of mere “theory” but of the concrete logic of our being, of our entire way of life. . . . Insofar as we fail to embrace being in its constitutive (filial-nuptial) relation to God and others as the basic logic of our lives, we will, eo ipso, lack the capacity to transform our culture in the required Christian and human sense.111

From the above analysis, we may conclude that Schindler has shown a proclivity to apply Balthasar’s Christological theology of love to the neo-conservatism debate insofar as he (a) appropriates a theological form or Gestalt for assessing intermundane realities (including the constitutive structure of American liberalism) and so defines the Christian mission relative to them, (b) articulates this form in its Christological (Eucharistic-giving)
and Marian (fiat-receiving) dimensions,\(^{112}\) (c) further articulates the form as always-already filial and nuptial, (d) notes its counterfactual logic in an ethic which grants primacy to self-interest, (e) notes its counter-factual logic in modern technology, (f) indicates its calling forth of contemplation and wonder (“letting be”), patience and interiority, and of course gratitude for the gift of the natural and supernatural accents of reality, (g) cites saints and other holy personages as instantiations of this Christological, ethical norm and, finally, (h) describes all of this in its universal, i.e. “catholic” scope. So it is that Schindler’s work provides an avenue for Balthasar’s theology of love to truly touch down in the concrete moral situations of the American experiment.

To be sure, Schindler’s work in this regard is not reducible to Balthasar’s foundational theology. As indicated at the outset, Schindler’s discomfort with neo-conservatism hinges on the Catholic relational ontology already indicative of his thought prior to his extensive reading of Balthasar and the informative inclusion of his work in the debate. Schindler at times has different emphases as well. His application of the term “poverty” in his essay, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism: Toward an Anthropology of Gift and Gratitude,” for example, looks nothing like Balthasar’s common promotion of the evangelical counsel. Schindler describes poverty as a synonym for “homelessness” in the cosmos, which is to say, in its most comprehensively negative sense.\(^ {113}\) Clearly one would not want to call the Christ

\(^{112}\) As was indicated in Part One above, even Christ’s giving is first receptive relative to his Heavenly Father and, in a different way, as anticipatory of a response from Mary-Church. Cf. Jn 21:3-10: “Nevertheless, not my will be done, but yours.” Also, Mary’s receptivity is itself actively generous, so identifying the Eucharist as giving and the fiat as receptive here, although true and, in a deep sense, primary to their meaning, is not meant to contradict the paradoxical unity of Jesus and Mary as both giving and receiving, each in their own way.

\(^{113}\) Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 357: “Wealth and poverty in their
child “poor” in this respect. Schindler’s description of true wealth in the same article, however, sounds much like Balthasar: “Wealth, in its truest sense . . . consists in participation in reality-as-gift, a participation enabled and indeed always first constituted by gratitude.”\textsuperscript{114} Schindler’s account of wealth relativizes the meaning of riches commonly understood so that capital is not as descriptive of wealth as is the relational dimension of the person and the gratitude proper to seeing reality-as-gift. Schindler’s overarching point in both cases—poverty and wealth—is much like Balthasar’s. He wants to show how their true meaning goes well beyond the commercial exchange of things to the meaning of person and being in their deepest dimensions.

A final remark must be made here about the differences between Balthasar and Schindler; this concerns the possible transformation of the structures of the given world. We have seen how Schindler addresses and seeks to influence the present political and economic culture of the United States and, by extension, the western world. What does Balthasar have to say about such an enterprise?

In an ideal world, the structures of the subhuman creation and those which determine the way society is organized would be so deeply imbued with the spirit of Christianity, that they would completely become instruments for the expression of the love of one person to another and serve toward the establishment of a Christian communion.\textsuperscript{115}

That said, we live not in an ideal world, and so

\textsuperscript{114} Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 358.

\textsuperscript{115} Balthasar, \textit{Engagement with God}, 85.
[t]heology as such has no obvious direct competence to make pronouncements on the structure of the secular world and simply sends the Christian into the world with an image of man, whereby and according to which he is to organize its structures as responsibly and intelligently as he can.  

Clearly Balthasar and Schindler have different projects, so to speak, regarding the Christian influence in the world. Schindler takes a more structural-societal approach, and Balthasar a more personal one, highlighting always the transformative power of persons who live poverty, chastity, and obedience at the heart of the world according to their particular states in life. Yet we have also seen that Schindler’s thought is infused with Balthasar’s work and, just as important, that Schindler’s response to the proposal often put before him, “What do you have to offer instead?,” is a cultural one and an interior one. This is finally to say that Schindler appears to furrow a path that Balthasar himself would not, but does so nevertheless in a “Balthasarian” way. D. Stephen Long, himself a Protestant, acknowledges the debt owed to Schindler for bringing Balthasar’s theology to bear in this manner:

David Schindler’s theology makes it difficult for Protestants because he develops what Balthasar pointed toward in his critique of Barth, and what is often missing in Balthasar’s work itself: the political and economic significance of his theology. Schindler develops the properly secular role for politics, economics, and ethics. His development of this properly secular role first challenges a mechanistic ontology that came to define the secular in the modern era. But in rejecting this account of the secular, Schindler does not

116 Balthasar, Engagement with God, 87. See 86-8 for Balthasar’s criticism of the idea that Christians should attempt to turn their life structures into some kind of ghetto Catholicism. “The challenging signal [of the Gospel] will attract the more attention in proportion as it refuses to close its doors against the world and as it refuses to make the claim to have discovered all and therefore to be infallible. Rather, it should stand open to all who are compelled to live among those same structures that characterize the life of all men. If it does this then it will not appear as some icon from another world, but, rather, as a shining witness to God’s actions for the sake of the world.” Ibid., 88.

117 As Balthasar states, “[T]he ideal of the Christian [is] to follow the counsels of Jesus in the midst of the world without abandoning one’s post.” My Work in Retrospect, 43.
reject the secular altogether. Instead, he shows how a Christian ordering of grace and nature leads to a better account of the secular than occurred within that mechanistic ontology. This ordering of grace and nature reflects a Trinitarian ontology of love. Only such an ontology helps us understand why a happy baker, who first bakes intrinsically good bread because she loves such goodness, matters theologically.118

§ V.3 The ANT-OAR Debate

Regarding the Altered Nuclear Transfer-Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming (ANT-OAR) debate, the topic of this section,119 what the reader is presented with is above all a philosophical disagreement, not a theological one, at least not in the conventional sense.120 The burden of this section therefore rests on indicating how Balthasar’s thought, certainly theological in its contours, also implies a philosophy and fundamental bioethics. Although Balthasar is cited by Schindler only at the beginning of his participation in the debate, it will become clear how the latter countenances the same theological ontology of love characteristic of the Swiss theologian’s thought throughout his metaphysical analysis.

Let us begin with a description of Altered Nuclear Transfer and its variant, Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming. From the central proponent of such experimentation, Stanford Professor William Hurlbut, we learn that

---


119 Considering the reach and depth of the neoconservatism debate for illustrating the perspective which Balthasar helps form in Schindler’s ethical work, one may well wonder what more could possibly be added by investigating Schindler’s contribution to the ANT-OAR and the Theology of the Body (TOB) debates. In fact, “the addition” in these latter two disputes will not so much be what Balthasar provides for Schindler, as much as how the Christological foundation shown in the previous (25 year and counting) debate on America’s political and economic structures is morally applicable in such varied forums as stem-cell research and human sexuality.

120 Schindler acknowledges that the “ontological question must ultimately take a theological form,” which is to say, must regard the ultimacy of its designations. See “Biotechnology and the Givenness of the Good: Posing Properly the Moral Question Regarding Human Dignity,” Communio 31 (2004): 622; cf. 641.
Standard nuclear transfer (NT) is the technology popularly known as cloning, but in scientific terms is called ‘Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer’ (SCNT). The nucleus (which contains the DNA) is removed from an adult body (somatic) cell and implanted (transferred) into an egg cell that first has its own nucleus removed. The egg then has a full set of DNA and, after it is electrically stimulated, starts to divide like a naturally fertilized egg and forms an embryo. This is how Dolly the sheep was produced.

Altered Nuclear Transfer uses the technology of NT but with a preemptive alteration that assures that no embryo is created. The somatic cell nucleus or the enucleated egg contents (cytoplasm) or both are first altered before the somatic cell nucleus is transferred into the egg. The alterations cause the somatic cell DNA to function in such a way that no embryo is generated, but pluripotent stem cells (PSCs) are produced.

ANT is a broad concept with many possible means of implementation, including: alteration to promote forced expression (jump-starting) of genes characteristic of a later and more specialized cell type that is unable to generate an organism but capable of producing PSCs. A recently proposed version of this type of alteration is called ‘oocyte assisted reprogramming’ (OAR) because the egg cell (oocyte) cytoplasm assists the transferred somatic cell nuclear DNA to become reprogrammed so the cell behaves directly like a pluripotent cell and not like an embryo.\(^\text{121}\)

In other terms, a somatic cell nucleus and an enucleated egg are “fused” in ANT-OAR,\(^\text{122}\) but one or the other has been altered before the fusion takes places. The result of the fusion, Hurlbut attests, is an entity that is not capable of proceeding to an embryonic stage of growth.

---


\(^{122}\) Not all proponents of ANT-OAR agree that the term “fusion” here is accurate, evidently because it implies that a third thing, i.e. a new whole, comes to be through contact between a somatic cell nucleus and an enucleated egg. See E. Christian Brugger, “ANT-OAR: A Morally Acceptable Means for Deriving Pluripotent Stem Cells. A Reply to Criticisms,” Communio 32 (2005): 762, where a fusion between a somatic cell nucleus and an oocyte in OAR is outright denied, because the oocyte, now that it has been enucleated, is properly considered “a bag of cytoplasm.” Of course this begs the question whether there is nevertheless a fusion between the somatic cell nucleus and enucleated egg or cytoplasm. See Walker, “Reasonable Doubts. A Reply to E. Christian Brugger,” Communio 32 (2005): 772.
development.\textsuperscript{123} This entity is destroyed in the process of obtaining stem cells from it. The philosophical or ontological question here then is whether such an entity, in spite of the malformation that results from the previous alteration of the egg or nucleus, is in fact a human being in the sense used by John Paul II when he writes: \textit{“The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the first moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life”} (original emphasis).\textsuperscript{124} The central moral issue, therefore, is whether the manufactured entity in ANT and/or OAR, whatever else it may be called, has the same or equivalent moral status as a human person. If it does have such a moral status, then deliberately destroying this entity would be morally equivalent to abortion.

Schindler’s participation in the debate begins in the Winter 2004 edition of \textit{Communio} alongside articles authored from a similar vantage point by Roberto Columbo and Adrian Walker.\textsuperscript{125} They are each critical of the proposal, put forth by Hurlbut in his address to the...
President’s Council on Bioethics in December of 2004, that altered nuclear transfer represents a morally legitimate means for procuring pluripotent stem cells. Schindler’s initial foray in the discussion has a broader aim than Columbo’s and Walker’s, for he addresses the ANT issue (a discussion of OAR comes later) only within a sustained reflection on “biotechnology and the givenness of the good.” Schindler’s central and positive point in the article is that since everything that exists is good, everything must also be a gift and a mystery

that prompts and “requires” wonder as the most fundamentally reasonable, and at once most fundamentally ethical, way of relating to given reality. . . . *Wonder is but the subjective cognitional form of participation in the objective nature of being-as-gift.* Thus it is wonder that sees the world as it really is (—given), in its truest nature as such, and, in that act, sees at once (also) that the world as it really is (—given) invites—immediately “demands” from the whole of each of us—a “yes”: a “*fiat*” that takes in, thus “permitting” and itself bringing to completion, the world’s original and abiding being *and* worth as such (original emphases).

One will recall from Chapter Two above that Balthasar’s understanding of the miracle of being leads him to acknowledge it as a gift and mystery without end. This indicates in

---


128 Ibid., 622. On the gift and mystery of being, see especially pages 620-1.

129 See in particular Section II.2 on “The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference” and Section II.4 on “The Infinite Mystery of Being: Wonder and Worship.” Mystery denotes here being’s capacity to hide the higher truth of itself in God even as it appears to the knower. Every ascertainment of a concrete
turn, for Balthasar, that wonder (and gratitude)\(^{130}\) is the proper response to the gift of reality, eliciting in the moral actor a “\textit{fiat}” like unto Mary’s at the Annunciation of the Lord.\(^{131}\) In short, Schindler’s basis for assessing being, including in this case biotechnology, is distinctly Balthasarian.

Such a perspective arguably helps Schindler to see a deeper intimation of the claim proposed by John Paul II that “human nature and the body” “constitute reference points for moral decisions” and are therefore not “merely ‘physical’ goods, called by some \textit{premoral}.”\(^{132}\) Indeed, Schindler ascertains that modern man’s proclivity to see the human body as “\textit{premoral}” or “neutral,” absent its appropriation by a good or bad will, is better termed “\textit{not-good},” since this understanding illustrates the perception that goodness can only be ascribed to the human body, as it were, \textit{from outside of itself}, instrumentally and mechanically.\(^{133}\) Schindler summarizes:

\[\text{reality (\textit{ens}) will simultaneously symbolize something (\textit{esse}) beyond it; its \textit{esse} cannot be quantified but rather remains mysterious.}\]

\(^{130}\) No doubt gratitude is critical also for Schindler, as the previous discussion on the economy has indicated.

\(^{131}\) Indeed, Schindler contends that researchers should “obey” the reality which they are investigating in accord with the reality’s “needs.” Schindler, “Biotechnology and the Givenness of the Good,” 616, fn. 7. His allusion to obedience as implicit to the fundamental response to being is yet another reminder of Balthasar’s thought.


\(^{133}\) Schindler, “Biotechnology and the Givenness of the Good,” 615. “We have seen that this deflection of the moral question away from biotechnology’s intrinsic order and toward its application just so far presupposes that this order is neutral with respect to the nature of morality properly conceived: that the dominant practices of biotechnology are as such empty of any (pre)judgments affecting the nature of morality. Such a deflection, in a word, presupposes that biotechnological practices are in the first instance ‘\textit{premoral},’ matters of a purely technical or empirical ‘know-how’ that becomes morally significant only after the ‘fact’—for example, when exercised vis-à-vis a human moral object.” Ibid., 624.
The point, then, is that the cosmos in modernity is not neutral but on the contrary “premoral”: nature or cosmological order no longer provides an inner reference point for morality. In the characteristic assumptions of modern science and technology, the world is approached as meaningless “stuff.” The order of such “stuff” is not-good and is thus unworthy of “theory” (wonder or contemplation or “obedience”), and acquires goodness only insofar as it becomes an instrument of what is—and can only be, by virtue of modernity’s separation of body/physicality and spirit/interiority—an originally indifferent and purely formal human freedom and intelligence. In terms of the view of Balthasar mentioned above, the “worldly” or cosmic order in the modern era need—and indeed can—no longer be integrated into the call to holiness, becoming rather a matter of indifference except, again, as an instrument of the will (voluntarism).134

Balthasar’s influence on Schindler’s assessment of the cosmos in modernity here needs no further mention.135 What is interesting is how the fundamental morality undergirding this perspective serves Schindler in rejecting the thrust of Hurlbut’s proposal, that which seeks a “technological solution to a moral impasse.”136

There can be no unqualifiedly technological solution to the moral problem that ANT seeks to address because in fact there is no unqualifiedly technological solution to any human problem. Technology in and of itself is already-also an ontological form, and hence there can be an adequate technological solution only insofar as that solution embodies an adequate ontological form.137

134 Ibid., 616.

135 The reference to Balthasar in the above quotation hinges on the understanding, demonstrated in his essay, “Theology and Sanctity,” 614-5, that “holiness as realized in the great saints up through Aquinas and Bonaventure was understood to include a dynamic for integration of the entire ‘worldly’ or cosmic order of things.” See also Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy.


That Schindler relies on the notion of “ontological form” to address the technological imprint in ANT (and OAR by way of it) is a move consistent with Balthasar’s manner of assessing reality through recourse to “intellectually perceivable Gestalten” as they relate “to that complete and perfect Being. . . .”138 This perspective leads Schindler to propose the meaning of this intervention, i.e. the process, relative to the human body and its natural capacities as gifts apt for, and, in some sense, “demanding” wonder, contemplation, and obedience.139 In the same way, ontological form as a hermeneutic gives rise to an adjudication of the thing manufactured in ANT, i.e. the product, precisely in its constitution as a whole and therefore existing “all-at-once”; it does not simply exist through so many pre-natal stages of becoming, according to Schindler.140 What Schindler’s Balthasarian framework leads him to suggest, finally, are two key points in tension with Hurlbut’s proposal:

(1) Such a technological process (intervention) with its implications, including the manipulation of certain reproductive cells of a woman in vitro, moves in a direction counter-intuitive, for Schindler (and presumably Balthasar), to a disposition of wonder and obedience to the reality of a woman’s body-soul unity and the generation of sacred human life. It appears to Schindler that ANT (and OAR) does so also by mimicking, artificially and mechanically as it were, the natural process by which persons come together to share their

138 Balthasar, “Transcendentality and Gestalt,” 6. See Chapter One above, particularly Section I.5, for a recollection of Balthasar’s use of form or Gestalt to illustrate beings.


140 Ibid., 630. “Furthermore,” writes Schindler, “this ‘all-at-once’ character implies an immediate ‘downward’ causality, such that the parts of the organism are now properly understood as parts of the whole, or indeed temporal unfoldings, or stages, of something that is ‘already’ (‘essentially’) there.” Ibid.
chromosomes in the parenting of a new human life, this time without nuptial and fruitful communion. Modern technology presents an already problematic way of knowing and treating things for Schindler (and Balthasar), simply as an ontological form. The idea of applying technology to the generative faculties of human life makes the case of ANT (and OAR), for him, that much less advisable.

Although the marks of this first point do not de facto render the act of ANT (and OAR) evil according to object, they appear to put into question the “need” for obtaining pluripotent cells (what are we here for?) and suggest to Schindler that other avenues of (adult) stem-cell research are more prudently pursued toward this aim.

(2) The product that results from this technological process is greater than the sum of its parts, according to Schindler, greater than the chromosomes fused together “all-at-once,” precisely as an ontological form. A “third” has come to be through a fusion of two. On a metaphysical (if not empirical) accounting, this form or “whole” appears to be an integrally, if malformed quasi nuptially, human being with inviolable life. Triggering the integrating elements of a soon-to-be human life to “fail” and die at its origins so that one may harvest its bodily structure, then, is on Schindler’s Balthasarian reading, “homicide.”

---

141 See Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Donum vitae*, I.6, for the gravity of techniques of fertilization *in vitro*.


Of course no claim is being made here that Schindler would not have been morally affronted at the prospect of ANT (and OAR) even without Balthasar’s influence upon him, and that he would not have been able to mount an intelligent argument against the procedure(s) which draws on the same ontological distinctions. It is to say, however, that Schindler’s formative argument is essentially Balthasarian in its contemplative emphases and metaphysics, not to mention its language.

As the debate progresses from the Winter 2004 edition of Communio to the Winter 2005 issue, a signature development occurs: the release of “Production of Pluripotent Stem Cells by Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming: Joint Statement with Signatories” in the summer of 2005. The document in favor of experimenting with animals to test OAR is signed by 35 scholars, many of whom are notable “pro-life” Catholic moral theologians and ethicists. Schindler’s response to the Joint Statement, together with three more articles he writes on ANT-OAR within the context of the debate, continues to promote the two key points mentioned above as indicative of his initial entry, only now without mention of Balthasar and almost entirely lacking formative theological claims.

---


philosophical categories reminiscent of Balthasar’s metaphysics, is that OAR presents the same ontological questions and moral problems as ANT does as a variant thereof.148

What is especially interesting for our purposes here is how Schindler’s philosophical arguments against OAR and indeed all forms of ANT draw heavily from Balthasar’s “fourfold difference in being.”149 For instance, the central point of “Biotechnology and the Givenness of the Good” that being is a mystery and gift apt for wonder, which has all the central marks of Balthasar’s first distinction,150 serves Schindler as an epistemological starting point in each of the remaining articles he writes on the subject for Communio.151

Some of the questions that arise from such a starting point and appear to inform Schindler’s

148 Although no one on either side of the debate denies that OAR is a form of ANT (see Hurlbut’s initiating explanation above), and therefore poses the same, if less perceptible, risk of producing a malformed embryo, there is reason to believe that not all of the 35 signatories of the Joint Statement think that other forms of ANT are morally permissible, but only OAR if animal experimentation indicates such. See Stuart W. Swetland and William L. Saunders, “Joint Statement on the Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming (OAR) Proposal: A Response to Criticisms,” Communio 32 (2005): 744-52.

149 See my introductory marks to the fourfold distinction in Section II:2 above: “1. I realize by my mother’s presence and smile that I am loved into being, that I am a gift, that I need not be. This original experience evokes a wonder that never dies. 2. In recognizing the world around me, I induce that others too must be gifts, that reality itself need not be but is. Being is glorious. 3. For all the wonderment of this reality beyond me, I realize that existence requires me and other things to substantiate it. In other words, no matter how wondrous being is in itself, it is open to and anticipates the response of the smallest entity. 4. I come to realize that this entire dynamic is grounded in God who as first cause freely determines being at every level.”

150 See Schindler’s, “Veritatis Splendor and the Foundations of Bioethics,” 196-7: “(3) The nature of an organism and the inherent limits of empirical knowledge and experimentation: ontological mystery. In light of (1) and (2), we can see that mystery is woven into the fabric of organic reality, into the very nature of an organism. Mystery expresses the non-deterministic (not exhaustively mechanical) being and causal agency proper to an organism as described above. Mystery does not signify an unknown lying somehow simply behind or beyond the organism in its proper structure (cf. vitalism). Mystery and knowledge with respect to the being and behavior of an organism are not inversely but directly related: mystery does not first begin where knowledge leaves off, nor does knowledge come to an end where mystery first begins,” at 197. Cf. Schindler, “Biotechnology and the Givenness of the Good,” 639. These passages could have been copied from Balthasar’s Theo-Logic, Volume I, so closely do they mirror its thought. See Section II.4 above on the “Infinite Mystery of Being,” with relevant citations and D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth.

arguments include: Where does the manufactured entity in ANT-OAR come from? How is it a gift and mystery? In what sense is the empirical knowledge of the entity produced not the only and, in fact, not the most important knowledge concerning it? How might a technological intrusion obfuscate the gift quality of the thing made and so impair contemplation of, and obedience to its natural integrity, indeed, contemplation-obedience to its natural integrity as a source of wonder for its origin in being?

Of course the moral legitimacy of ANT-OAR rests on the notion that what is created when the somatic cell nucleus and an enucleated oocyte come together is not a whole organism at all, but simply a “part,” i.e. a pluripotent stem cell line. In the following passage Schindler addresses this issue through recourse to the fourfold difference, including the fourth distinction on how the entire dynamic of being in its givenness can be fully addressed only by invoking “God and his goodness”:

The organism is not an absolute first cause of itself as a whole or in its parts. Because the being of the organism as such is first given, this givenness remains the inner and abiding condition of its acting. . . . The ontological dependence indicated here can be fully and properly understood only in terms of the distinction between Being and beings, of what Thomists call the “real distinction” between esse and ens, or again of what Thomas understands as

152 Adrian Walker offers perhaps the most succinct summation of the issue here: “I repeat: we cannot assemble pluripotent stem cells or pull them out of thin air, we can only get them from organisms. And since we are not talking about already existing adult organisms—as we would be if it were a question of, say, regressing adult stem cells to a pluripotent stage without using anything at all like nuclear transfer—then we must be talking about the creation of new embryonic ones. OAR, like every other conceivable form of ANT, cannot get around this adamantine fact. It can only appear to do so—with the help of bad metaphysics and faulty logic.” Walker, “A Way Around the Cloning Objection Against ANT? A Brief Response to the Joint Statement on the Production of Pluripotent Stem Cells by Oocyte Assisted Reprogramming,” Communio 32 (2005): 194. Walker describes the logical sequence of OAR in three steps: “fusion-new cell-initiation of reprogramming process,” in “Reasonable Doubts: A Reply to E. Christian Brugger,” 775. Cf. José Granados, “Love and the Organism: A Theological Contribution to the Study of Life,” Communio 32 (2005): 435-71.

153 Balthasar is not cited, nor are Schindler’s remarks here simply a paraphrase of Balthasar, and yet the “fourfold difference” is apparent in Schindler’s argument.
the primacy of esse precisely as non-subsistent. The distinction between Being and beings in turn evokes the question of God and his goodness, and of goodness as diffusive (bonum est diffusivum sui), and, finally, the question of the theological meaning of creation (and indeed of redemption). The existence and nature of organic life as gift can be fully grasped only in the pondering of such questions.\footnote{Schindler, “Veritatis Splendor and the Foundations of Bioethics,” 200. Cf. “Agere Sequitur Esse: What Does It Mean?,” 821-2 where, in the final pages of his last essay in the debate, Schindler returns to the fourfold difference in being as the fundamental criterion by which he assesses reality in its origins.}

Notably, Schindler often presents Balthasar’s second and third distinctions—what Schindler’s son calls “The difference of Being from beings” and “The difference of beings from Being”\footnote{D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 39, 41.}—together:

\textit{The causal agency constitutive of an organism, then, is simultaneously “downward” from whole to parts and “upward” from parts to whole (and the causal relation among the parts always shares in this simultaneously “downward” and “upward” causality). The organism in its wholeness has primacy in accounting for the (coordinated) behavior of the parts, even as the (coordinated) behavior of the parts is simultaneously-subordinately the functioning of the organism as a whole. (All of this implies that an organism is not an absolute first cause of itself, as a whole or in its parts. . . .)\footnote{Schindler, “Veritatis Splendor and the Foundations of Bioethics,” 196-7. Cf. “[T]he causal agency constitutive of an organism involves a mutual if asymmetrical dependence of whole and parts. That is, the organism in its actual wholeness is prior to the organism in the coordinated action of its parts, even as the coordinated action of its parts is simultaneously-subordinately necessary for that actual wholeness. This mutual if asymmetrical dependence of whole and parts, as constitutive, implies that the being and indeed the existing nature of an organism is in the first instance dependent, hence received, given to itself and not self-generated.” Ibid., 200. Cf. Schindler, “A Response to the Joint Statement,” 375.}}

The mutual dependence of whole and parts described above becomes critical to the discussion, for Schindler, just as it is for Balthasar’s metaphysics. On the one hand, the \textit{primacy of the whole}, form, or act to the parts, matter or potencies of a thing is crucial to
Schindler’s argument. A whole logically precedes its parts, meaning that no part exists, as Adrian Walker indicates, “out of thin air,” but only from its relation to an entire (if severely malformed in this case) organism.\textsuperscript{157} On the other hand, Schindler also wants to ensure that this primacy of form, this “downward” causality, is not conceived unilaterally since that would imply that the parts are there only to be shaped and manipulated. He argues instead, as can be seen from the above quotation and in the one following, that the parts too have a role to play (if not the primary one) “in accounting for the original constitution of an organism”\textsuperscript{158} because the non-subistence of being suggests to him that without the “reception” of matter, there could be no material substance.\textsuperscript{159} Schindler brings these points together in the final essay of the debate as recorded in Communio:

[Fr. Nicanor Austriaco, O.P.’s] argument\textsuperscript{160} misses what is the radical asymmetry coincident with the genuine mutuality between substantial form and \textit{materia apta} (organized material parts) in accounting for the original constitution of an organism. On the one hand: he evinces no sense of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item[158] See the following quotation.
\item[159] The reader will recall that the non-subistence of being, as Thomas Aquinas clarifies in his “real distinction” between \textit{esse} and essence, affirms for Balthasar and Schindler that a sensible thing without matter cannot exist in the proper sense, but remains an abstraction. In this way form stands in need of matter’s “reception,” just as, and more primarily, matter needs form to actualize it and specify it as a sensible thing. Substance properly understood, then, is a \textit{gift} which derives not from either being or beings, but from their ultimate cause: subsistent being, God himself.
\item[160] Austriaco appeals to Aristotle’s notion that acting follows being (\textit{agere sequitur esse}) to suggest that a being is revealed only by the consistent manner in which it acts, which would imply in this case that unless the product of ANT-OAR evinces the traits of an integral human organism there is no cause to believe that it is one. See Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., “Are Teratomas Embryos or Nonembryos?,” \textit{National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly (= NCBQ)} 5 (2005): 697–706. Schindler is arguing that Austriaco has not interpreted Aristotle’s dictum correctly because the invisible form (soul) of a being onto-logically precedes its visible parts. In the case of a malformed human being, Schindler proposes that its physical structure (parts) will not necessarily connote that it is a human being even when it is (since it has already been specified so by its causal form).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
absolute priority of substantial form, of the “downward,” hence hierarchical, causality exercised by form in accounting for the all-at-once, instantaneous beginning and primitive being and acting of an organism. At the same time, and consequently: he evinces no sense of a genuine mutuality (coincident with asymmetry) between substantial form and materia apta in accounting for this beginning and primitive being and acting. Although Austriaco nominally affirms the priority and distinctness of form in relation to materia apta—of form as the actuality of the latter—his argument in fact hinges on his having (however unwittingly) conceived form reductively as the effect of materia apta.161

In conclusion, Schindler’s use of Balthasar’s fourfold difference in being, together with his aforementioned appropriation of Balthasar’s reliance on form or Gestalt, as this section’s references suggest, guides his perception of the ANT-OAR quandary and his subsequent argumentation. The reader comes to learn on which bases, broadly speaking, Schindler’s bioethical analysis derives and simultaneously discovers how Balthasar’s metaphysics, at root his Christological theology of love, is applicable even to the most subtle of stem-cell debates. While no claim has been made here to have provided a full exposition of the ANT-OAR disputation, perhaps the reader will have gained insight into Schindler’s perspective by coming to better understand original aspects of it.162


§ V.4 The Theology of the Body Debate

The Theology of the Body (TOB) debate between Christopher West, Janet Smith, Michael Waldstein, Michael Healy, et al. on the one hand, and David L. Schindler, Alice von Hildebrand, Mary Shivanandan, Fr. José Granados, D.C.J.M., et al. on the other, erupted following West’s appearance on *ABC’s Nightline* on May 7, 2009. In the program West noted the “very profound historical connections” between Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) and Hugh Hefner, the founder of Playboy Magazine, insofar as both sought to address in the early 1950s the problems inherent in Puritanism which had arguably been ensconced in Christian and American thinking about sexual activity. The television program gave Schindler occasion to issue a public, online correction of West, a former student of his at the John M...
Paul II Institute, to which Smith and Waldstein responded in West’s defense. In short time additional Catholic thinkers on the topic of marriage and human sexuality, including von Hildebrand, Shivanandan, Granados, and Healy, weighed in on the online debate and/or provided their own analysis of TOB. Finally, Justin Cardinal Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia and Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Harrisburg, PA, issued a statement in support of West’s work; West followed with his own response.

Of course the focus in this section will be on Schindler’s writings, including especially his initial correction of West, his response to Smith’s and Waldstein’s defenses,

---


169 See “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West,” Headline Bistro, no date given, accessed December 10, 2011,
and finally a more developed article published prior to the debate with West in which Schindler critiques Waldstein’s “Introduction” to the celebrated translation of John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*; 

Waldstein’s response is published in 2010, a year after the debate with West begins. The reason for endeavoring to learn Schindler’s thought on TOB, like the two previous disputes covered in this chapter, is simply to see how Balthasar influences Schindler’s positions on a topic of great moral relevance. In this way one comes to learn how Balthasar himself may have interpreted John Paul II’s theology of the body and, just as important, how Balthasar’s theology informs another prominent and influential thinker’s work on the subject.

In the initial entry in the debate, Schindler offers four central points in contradistinction to West’s theology of the body and his manner of presenting that theology. They can be summarized as: (1) West emphasizes purity of intention in the absence of a like emphasis on the objective concupiscence of the body; (2) West uses analogy improperly: the Christian mysteries are interpreted in terms of human experience and that of a sort which treats love reductively in a “bodily-sexual sense;” (3) West does not have a proper feminine or, better, Marian view of unveiling. His overtly masculine perspective


171 Waldstein, ““Constitutive Relations’.”

172 Schindler, “Christopher West’s Theology of the Body.”

173 Drawing from Joseph Ratzinger, Schindler states on the contrary that sexuality is a consequence of the image of God, not the content of that image. Ibid. Cf. See Schindler, “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: *Status Quaestionis*,” 410, fn. 22.
inadequately informs his sense of shame and reverence, giving his presentation of TOB a one-sided emphasis; (4) The style of evangelizing West practices is no mere style; it is also a matter of theology.\footnote{Schindler also argues that Hugh Hefner has more in common with Puritanism than West thinks. In both pornography and Puritanism, the body is seen as a tool—one for gratification and the other for reproducing children. Ibid. Cf. Granados, “Statement on Christopher West’s Nightline Interview.”}

The reader will easily notice the hallmarks of Balthasar’s thought with respect to the third criticism above.\footnote{The fourth point is also distinctly Balthasarian, as will be shown shortly.} The “overtly masculine-insufficiently feminine” charge raised against West is just what Balthasar claims of the modern purview informing the opinion that women ought also to be ministerial priests.\footnote{See Balthasar, “Women Priests?”} This purview does not regard, for Balthasar (and Schindler), the genuinely Marian, i.e. the receptive, patient, contemplative and “hidden” dimension of the interior life, to play an essential and, indeed, \textit{foundational role} in Christian discipleship.\footnote{Even before discipleship, simple creaturehood is meant to embody this for Balthasar and Schindler.} Rather, one informed by an overtly masculine perspective abstracts from this Marian foundation, this “patient reverence,”\footnote{See the quotation below from Schindler.} most notably when identifying with and expressing one’s God-given role in the Church, whether this be motherhood, priestly ministry, apologist for theology of the body, or some other apostolate. Schindler distills his criticism thus:

West’s treatment of shame and reverence is marred by a too-male vision of things—not only too much maleness but distorted maleness. If we could just get over our prudishness and sin-induced guilt, he seems to think, we would
be ready simply to dispense with clothes and look at others in their nakedness. He has no discernible sense of the difference between what might be a feminine as distinct from masculine sense of unveiling. He (thus) lacks a reverence for the body entailing a modesty not reducible simply to shame, or again a patient reverence presupposing the “veiledness” proper to what essentially contains mystery. His work is preoccupied with what is external to the detriment of the interiority proper to persons. In this context, we can say that West’s theology ultimately lacks a Marian dimension: not in the sense that he fails to make references to Mary, but because his work is not adequately formed, in method or content, in Mary’s archetypal feminine-human sensibility.  

Interestingly, Janet Smith responds to this charge of Schindler in a manner which appears both insightful and confused.

One reason Schindler fails to provide citations from West’s works to illustrate his charges may be that in some instances Schindler is trying to prove a negative: West isn’t doing what or enough of what Schindler thinks he should do. Schindler says that West’s presentation of the Theology of the Body is not Marian enough. (Is John Paul II’s Theology of the Body Marian enough?) If so, can Schindler show that West has missed the Marian elements of John Paul II’s Theology of the Body? Can Schindler justifiably say, “You should have said X about passage A but you failed to do so?” If he can’t do that, what is West supposed to do?

While Smith is able to (insightfully) notice that Schindler is not simply relying on John Paul II’s Wednesday audiences on TOB for this criticism of West—indeed, Balthasar helps Schindler see the necessary Marian point of emphasis perhaps better than John Paul himself—and otherwise hopes that Schindler will provide more detailed references of his misgivings with West’s work, Smith appears to (confusedly) think the issue can be resolved

179 Schindler, “Christopher West’s Theology of the Body.”

by a point-by-point content analysis of West’s presentation of TOB when Schindler contends the issue is as much about West’s manner (form) as it is about his content. To be sure, content reveals form, and Schindler certainly raises issues of content with West’s presentation, but what he is asking of West (and the reader in general) is reflection on the whole of West’s theological style, the forest through the trees, if you will, in order to see how such matters of content already cited, such as the putative historical connection between John Paul II and Hugh Hefner and the references to the paschal candle as a phallic symbol, themselves express an insufficiently Marian theological and evangelical style. Such is why Schindler emphasizes the time and patient reflection necessary to understand what he has attempted to communicate in his critique of West; the manner of reflection will indubitably affect the content of the response.

---

181 See both “Christopher West’s Theology of the Body” and “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West.”

182 See (1) and (4) of Schindler’s “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West.”

183 Schindler, “Christopher West’s Theology of the Body.”

184 Schindler comments: “The third of my criticisms meant to indicate the sense in which the Church’s Marian mystery, and also the feminine dimension, are central for the theology of the body. After Christ, Mary reveals to us most profoundly the ‘original’ meaning of body that needs to remain present within sexual-marital love. In her fiat, we discover the contemplative meaning of the body (Mary ‘pondered these things in her heart’). In this light, contrary to what is assumed in the dominant culture, women have a naturally more profound sense (than do men) of the implicit, and of interiority or of what develops slowly-organically and from within. Women have a naturally more profound sense of mystery and thus of what is entailed in the unveiling of the body— for example, an organic in contrast to mechanical sense of time, and consequently a different idea of the meaning and significance of nakedness itself. . . . A theology of the body which does not sufficiently integrate a Marian and feminine dimension in these ways, cannot but default into what becomes a one-sided and distorted male approach that treats the body too explicitly and too reductively as the object of a look (even if a ‘pure’ one). The result is a tendency, for example, to conflate modesty with prudishness or guilt-induced shame, with a consequent displacement of modesty in its true meaning as an enhancement of genuine bodily beauty.” Schindler, “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West.”

185 Ibid: ‘The theology of the body—or anthropology of love—is of crucial significance for the Church and indeed for humanity, in light of the great gift of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as interpreters of the
Regarding West’s evangelical style as also being a matter of theology, Schindler’s fourth criticism cited above, the reader should see here too a fundamentally Balthasarian perspective. Just as Christ’s love pertains to the whole of being and acting as a form of self-abandonment ordered to divine communion, for Balthasar—and this form cannot not be beautiful in God’s sight—so too does one’s style of preaching stand under the measure of the splendor of the Christ-form, for Balthasar. In a word, West’s style must be beautiful, modest, and meek if it is to be authentically Catholic, according to Balthasar’s and

Second Vatican Council. Service to the Church and humanity in connection with this anthropology is a matter above all of communicating in its integrity the truth about the nature and destiny of the human being before God. The condition sine qua non for realizing such service is sustained thought linked with prayerful patience, and these of their essence take time. . . . I would like to offer West the pages of Communio for his reflections on the matters that have been engaged. To be sure, he may want to reformulate the issues in his own way, but I believe both of us agree regarding the spirit which alone would make such an exchange into the kind of fruitful service we both want. I would only emphasize in this connection, to all those who have followed the present discussion, that this exchange, needless to say, would have to take time.”

186 To West’s credit, he took a sabbatical from his work after the Nightline spot and waited patiently for the responses of Bishops Regali and Rhoades in August of 2009 (three months later) before responding to the criticisms of Schindler, et al. See West, “The Theology of the Body Debate: The Pivotal Question.” While West does not address a number of the issues raised against him in this piece—he only responds directly to the first of the four objections presented by Schindler—this he does in a modest style with humble reference to the work of others on TOB and, furthermore, by citing amply John Paul II’s writings in his defense.

187 See Section I.1 above.

188 See especially Barrett, Love’s Beauty at the Heart of the Christian Moral Life.

189 See GL I, 39, where Balthasar argues, “[A] theology of beauty may be elaborated only in a beautiful manner. The particular nature of one’s subject matter must be reflected first of all in the particular nature of one’s method.” “[E]ine Theologie des Schönen darf nicht anders entwickelt werden als auf schöne Weise. An der Eigentümlichkeit der Methode schon muss die Eigentümlichkeit des Gegenstandes aufleuchten.” HK I, 36. See also Schindler’s comments in his interview with Scott Alessi, “Experts Debate ‘Theology of Body’ Presenter’s Tactics,” Our Sunday Visitor, June 28, 2009, accessed December 10, 2011, http://www.osv.com/tabid/7621/itemid/4997/Experts-debate-Christopher-Wests-theology-of-the.aspx: “The problems are not merely matters of taste; on the contrary, they affect the content of theology,” he said. “The problem is that the theology of the body gets reduced to a theology of sex, and that is a serious problem. . . . John Paul II’s theology of the body must be seen within his theological anthropology as a whole, which is an entire vision of reality centered in love and expressed in the communion of persons and inclusive of the body. It is this anthropological whole that underpins his defense of Humanae Vitae [the Church’s 1968 prohibition of contraception].”
Schindler’s reasoning. Would not anything less, they appear to ask, be an instrumentalization of the faith and dependent for its authenticity on consequentialist arguments of its effectiveness?

In his response to Smith’s and Waldstein’s defenses of West, Schindler expands on his explanation of the second criticism in his initial critique, that is, that West appears to understand analogy (*maior dissimilitudo*) improperly. In so doing, Schindler recalls the central point of his disputation with Waldstein in his 2008 *Communio* essay, “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: *Status Quaestionis*,” where Schindler argues that the human imaging of God is *first filial* before it is spousal. This is so because man is first a creature of God and an adopted son or daughter by grace before he images God in spousal love. It is worth quoting Schindler at length here to see in what sense this can be seen in John Paul II’s theology of the body relative to West’s own emphasis of spousal-sexual love in his interpretation thereof.

John Paul II says that the body in its “original solitude” is “substantially prior” to the body in its “original unity” and hence in its sexual difference (see *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 157; General Audience, 7 November 1979). This means that the body in its most original sense is *made for God*. The

---

190 Beauty could be attributed to *obedience* to form, modesty to *chastity*, and meekness to *poverty*, if one wishes to see how Balthasar’s understanding of the universality of the counsels might apply here.

191 See Pinto, “By His Fruits You Shall Know Him: A Defense of Christopher West.” This is not to discount Christ’s words in Matthew 7:15-20, nor is it to deny that West has been significantly effective in helping to bring persons to faith and morality. It is to suggest, however, that, for Balthasar and Schindler, a person who comes to faith and morality independent of a beautiful exposition of the truth and remains under the impression of that inadequate form or spirit, will just so far be independent of the true faith and morality which Catholicism communicates.

192 See “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West.”

193 See pages 417-23 for Schindler’s critique of Waldstein.
body, we may say, bears what is first a filial relation to God. As a creature (hence child) of God, I bear a basic relation to or capacity for God, and only consequently, though simultaneously, inside this relation, do I bear a capacity for another human being. Indeed, this filial relation is rightly understood as a “virginal” relation – bearing a different shape in the celibate and married states – because it involves the whole of my being in relation to the whole God.\footnote{Schindler, “Response to Profs. Smith and Waldstein Regarding Christopher West.”}

It is crucial to understand that this original filial relation to God retains its priority within the relation between spouses, though the filial and spousal relations are “circumincessive” within each other: that is, they each illuminate the inner meaning of the other, in their own distinct ways. In the terms of Joseph Ratzinger, filial love is the “content” (Inhalt), and spousal love the “consequence” (Folge) of the imago Dei. The two loves, united in the human being’s single imaging of God, nevertheless bear an order that accords filial love absolute priority within this unity. Or, to put it differently, filial love and spousal love bear a mutual but asymmetrical relation within what is always the unified content of the human being’s imaging of God.\footnote{Ibid.}

The overarching point here, then, is that sexual love as understood in the work of John Pope II must be inserted within a love between spouses that itself takes its most radical meaning from filial relation to God. Sexual-spousal love participates in this more original filial relation to God as its sign and expression, but does so only as consequent to and distinct from this more original filial relation.\footnote{Ibid.}

In connection with Schindler’s dispute with Waldstein, man can only make “a sincere gift of himself,”\footnote{\textit{Gaudium et spes}, 24.} according to Schindler, insofar as he is himself already, anteriorly, a gift of God.\footnote{For this reason, and to emphasize how it is precisely Christ’s imaging of God the Father and his love which fully reveals man to himself as a gift, Schindler draws on the only text cited by John Paul II (and Benedict XVI) more than \textit{Gaudium et spes}, 24, namely, \textit{Gaudium et spes}, 22. Schindler comments: “The text of \textit{GS}, 22, in other words, together with scriptural texts . . . helps us see the fuller implication of the principle}
must be receptive, contemplative, even “virginal” in purity and intention, before and all the way through committing oneself in action, especially in the intimate sphere of sexual relations.

Now, as indicated in the quotations above, the absolute priority of the filial relation within the spousal can be found in John Paul II’s thought, but being like a child is foundational for Balthasar, forming in fact the only adequate response to being for him. Indeed, Balthasar has written an entire book on just this subject and, still more importantly, it is integral to the first and most fundamental of his famous “fourfold difference in being.” Schindler is clearly drawing upon Balthasar for his interpretation of an adequately conceived theology of the body.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to indicate how Balthasar’s Christological theology of love, interpreted both theologically and in its deepest philosophical and metaphysical roots, applies to (at minimum) three widely divergent themes in moral theology and ethics: neo-conservativism, stem-cell research, and the theology of the body. Moreover, Schindler’s

emphasized in GS, 24, that God wills human beings for their own sake. God gives us our being for our own sake, and this means generously: he gives us our being such that, in this being-given, we are at once exercisers of our own being as responsive givers.” Schindler, “Embodied Person as Gift,” 420.

199 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, Unless You Become Like This Child, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, 1991). Also recall the first distinction of Balthasar’s fourfold difference (see II.2 above), that the wonder of a child in the presence of his mother’s smile is the fundamental step in the appropriation of being as gift; it should permeate one’s behavior in the face of reality throughout life, according to Balthasar.

200 Ibid. “Hans Urs von Balthasar sums all of this up well when he suggests that a creaturely ontology is best approached through reflection on the mother’s smile. A child’s first experience of being comes through the smile and embrace of the mother, hence through the radiant presence of the goodness of another. The child’s first experience of existence, then, is of being loved. It is an experience of existence itself as generous: as gift from another.” Schindler, “‘Homelessness’ and Market Liberalism,” 355.
metaphysical work demonstrates through these three topics and others that Balthasar’s Catholicity is indeed “catholic” or universal in dimension. In its application to being, it applies to everything, including all moral action. This means that what has been discussed at length in the four previous chapters regarding Balthasar’s thought, for example, his attention to form and wholeness for interpreting a part of something in its integrity, the self-abandonment indicative of this primal form, his emphasis on receiving being in wonder and gratitude, and the obstructionist character of technology and other mechanical manipulations of being as an affront to beauty in its givenness, tell us a great deal about how to appropriate reality in moral action. While the specifics remain open for interpretation, the Christological framework has been set, so to speak, for those who wish to adopt it.

Schindler has shown in a particular way how Balthasar’s thought is serviceable in forums as varied as politics, economics, stem-cell interpretation, modesty of speech, and relating between the sexes, to name just a few applications. It is critical to see that Schindler’s remarks in these respects stem not on account of his being a certifiable “expert” in anyone of these fields, especially relative to his interlocutors in the debates, but on account of the (Christo-logical) foundation from which his thinking about everything—including not mentioned above: the Trinity, community life in general, the relation between faith and reason, the academy, and so on—proceeds (cf. Col 1:15-20). Balthasar, more than any other thinker, leads Schindler, by his own accounting, to theologically integrate the metaphysical foundation which the American was already indebted to, and thus apply it more

---

201 These further examples are brought to bear especially in the two books he has authored: Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation (1996) and Ordering Love: Liberal Societies and the Memory of God (2011).
deeply and comprehensively. This is precisely the kind of contribution Balthasar can make to moral theology and ethics in general.
CHAPTER SIX

An Artistry of Love: Foundations and Proposals

Introduction

Part One of this work indicated how human action is to be assessed in a number of elemental ways, according to Balthasar. In no particular order for him, action should be (a.) integrative of the divine source of being and Christocentric, Catholic worship right there in the midst of mundane activities, (b.) steadfastly appealed to Jesus’ obediential self-abandonment and the saints as signposts of this life, (c.) attuned to the paradox and nuptiality of being, (d.) in accord with both the spirit of the evangelical counsels and one’s personal mission, (e.) under the metric of gift and gratitude and the primacy of filial receptivity, (f.) informed by contemplation and yet “beyond” the necessary application of contemplation (or action) in any given situation, and so on.¹ Now that we have seen some ways in which this foundation plays out morally for Balthasar (Ch. 4) as well as in the work of his influential protégée, David L. Schindler (Ch. 5),² this chapter presents my own attempt at signaling how the nexus of love that Balthasar advances might contribute to questions in moral theology today. For this reason, what has been largely expository in character over the first five chapters becomes here more disputative. The change in focus is signified also by a change in language. I will use personal pronouns throughout the chapter.

¹ These themes and other presented in Part One, although not systematized by Balthasar, are traceable throughout his corpus. Indeed, the arguments in this chapter presuppose a thorough reading of Part One and, to a lesser extent, also Chapters 4 and 5. In order not to tire the reader, references which are contained in the previous chapters will be reintroduced here sparingly.

² See additionally, Nicholas J. Healy and D.C. Schindler, eds., Being Holy in the World: Theology and Culture in the Thought of David L. Schindler. The reader is also invited to consider moral cases from a Balthasarian framework. How would the theology elaborated in Part One of this work apply to the moral cases you commonly consider? Is there any difference?
To my mind, the greatest contribution that Balthasar has to offer fundamental moral theology is methodological; it is the holistic frame of reference by which he considers all questions first in terms of Jesus Christ's triune love as the governing light for the cosmos, if not always in theological terms. Balthasar rarely if ever “brackets” some aspect of the faith to investigate something else. On the contrary, he lets the dramatic character of the Gospel with all of its apparent tensions (paradoxes) come to bear on each of the questions of the mundane world, thus helping one to see the link between creatures, particularly persons, and their divine source and call. This is another way of repeating that Balthasar’s methodology of ascribing formal primacy to (the Catholic) faith, including especially what true love is as manifested in Christ’s life, grants new meaning and comprehensiveness to various facets of the reality we live in. For Balthasar, faith is decisively important in overcoming the obstacles of the human condition which dim the right perception of things in their inherent form and finality, because the form and finality of things, indeed, the relations between things, depend already on the triune order of love inscribed in being itself. From this universal and, as it were, Catholic theological-metaphysical perspective, Balthasar helps one see the paths by which the human person and his actions are best ordered to God’s self-abandoning, communio love.

---

3 Schindler and Ratzinger’s works are in my judgment profound and effective at marshaling arguments in their favor in large part because they ask the big questions in the first place. If one cannot grant one’s argument the space necessary to illustrate the divine point of view on a subject, how true and helpful can the argument really be? The question whether reason is capable by itself to see many of the same answers that faith helps illumine is rather beside the point for a Christian. “The Christian will make the weighty decisions of his life from the perspective of Christ, that is, of faith,” writes Balthasar. “NP” 77; “[W]ird der Christ die Tiefenentscheidungen seines Lebens aus dem Gesichtspunkt Christi, d.h. aus dem Glauben, fallen.” “NS,” 69. I would like to suggest that a Christian should also let faith illumine his answers in what may seem to be trivial matters, because no human act is finally of trivial concern for God.
So it is that this chapter attempts my own reformulation of the philosophical and theological import of Balthasar’s work as illustrated especially in Chapter One under the rubric of aestheticism and personalism in Christian love, in order to address certain fundamental issues in moral theology today. The first of these topics (§ 1) is a Catholic form of life which Balthasar leads one to appropriate as his own. While this way of life certainly includes those teachings and sacramental graces particular to Roman Catholics (“C”), the more radical point is its universal (“c”) character as personal and communal, vowed love.

Such a form of life is arguably good and wholesome for everyone in all circumstances and therefore needed by everyone irrespective of one’s faith tradition or lack thereof. This first section is articulated first in terms of what a Catholic form of life is, then with respect to how this form interpenetrates the work-a-day world, and finally relative to its nuptial and fruitful logic. The second topic of relevance here (§ 2) is the difference Christ’s holistic norm makes for the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. With an adequate understanding of the unity-in-distinction (nuptiality) of theoretical and practical reason, one which Balthasar would appear to advocate, moral action theory can become governed from the center of Christ’s informative love rather than a notion of natural law cornered off from the import of faith. Natural law, reinterpreted as governing “all things” under the measure of the Word made flesh, even as this need not be mentioned in the public square, is then better

4 By vowed love is meant an inculcation of the spirit of the evangelical counsels.

5 This is because it is based on the norm of God made man, the judge of all. See “Nine Propositions,” 96-7.

6 See TD2, 85. “[I]n the light of the gospel it is clear that all things were created in the Word that was eventually to become flesh; that is, from the very outset, everyone is already within the norm that is to appear definitively in Christ.” TDK, II.1, 77: “[I]m Licht des Evangeliums wird klar, daß alle Dinge im Wort
seen as harmonious with the cosmic liturgy and every man’s call to holiness. A series of proposals will be considered in this respect—Livio Melina’s, Martin Rhonheimer’s, and David Crawford’s—in order to better locate Balthasar’s contribution. I then offer concluding remarks in this section in order to clarify the import of a so-called Balthasarian understanding of the relation between speculative and practical reasoning relative to Balthasar’s central contribution of uniting by inference, *origin* of faith and being, *worship*, and *deed*. Through these two sections, each depicted in three distinct categories, I endeavor to illustrate an *artistry of love* apt for moral application as conveyed in Balthasar’s fundamental theology.

§ VI.1 *A Catholic Form of Life*

If “the norm provided by Christ’s concrete existence is personal and, as such, universal,”7 and the only form of life which configures to this norm is at once Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesial,8 then it must be Catholic too. Clearly to be universal is to be “catholic” (καθολικός);9 to be hierarchical and sacramental and enfleshed by the saints is to be “Catholic.” While being Catholic in this latter sense need not mean anything more, technically speaking, than being baptized in the Catholic Church without committing an act

---

7 “NP,” 82. “Die Norm der konkreten Existenz Christi ist als personale zugleich universal. . . .”

8 See Section I.5 above.

9 “When I act, I know that I cannot do so except by presupposing the categorical validity of a universal (‘catholic’) norm, which absolutely transcends me as an empirical subject and which includes the idea of freedom, immortality, and divinity.” *LAC*, 33. “Handelnd weiß ich, daß ich nicht anders tätig sein kann als unter der Voraussetzung der kategorischen Geltung einer universalen (‘katholischen’) Norm, die mich als empirisches Subjekt schlechterdings übersteigt und in sich die Idee der Freiheit, der Unsterblichkeit und der Gottheit einschließt.” *GNL*, 20.
of apostasy, few would dispute that living in fidelity with the Church’s teachings and otherwise abiding in sacramental grace is integral to one’s identity as a Catholic. Likewise, while being “catholic” with a small “c” implies no more (or less) than the Christian expression of universality,\(^\text{10}\) the deeper import of this characteristic, certainly for Balthasar, is that every Christian is called to personal and communal, vowed love, which is to say, the spirit of the evangelical counsels according to their particular mission in life.\(^\text{11}\) Together, the basic supposition of this section is that what Balthasar indicates as binding for ethics is in effect a “C(c)atholic” form of life.\(^\text{12}\) As we shall see, this means nothing other than living the form of Christ’s love in the world.\(^\text{13}\)

Let us first recall, according to Balthasar, (a.) the assimilating elements of the Christ-form, in order to then (b.) penetrate its meaning relative to the distinctive manner by which the form is lived out in the world, and finally (c.) relative to its nuptial and fruitful characteristics as an artistry of love.\(^\text{14}\) This we do to recuperate the most integrative aspects

---

\(^\text{10}\) The Christian Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 811-2; 830-56.

\(^\text{11}\) “The doctrine of Christ is Christ himself, and so for the Christian the content of Christian existence is nothing other than its form, namely, following.” Balthasar, “Office in the Church,” 97.

\(^\text{12}\) The use of “C(c)atholic” in this way is taken from David L. Schindler’s “Modernity and the Nature of a Distinction,” 249-50. Schindler identifies it as descriptive of Balthasar’s ontology. The reader should understand my use of “Catholic” in the description of a form of life to mean, unless stated otherwise, the same thing as what Schindler means by “C(c)atholic.”

\(^\text{13}\) Balthasar will himself write an essay on “The Christian Form,” in *Spirit and Institution*, 41-64 and place it immediately prior to his essay “The Claim to Catholicity,” 65-121 in the same volume. The characteristic marks of these essays center on the personal and universal dimensions of the form of Christ living, dying, and rising, and as given by God through his Church as a means for Christocentric service.

of Balthasar’s work as indicated in Part One in order to help us better see the rightful connection between moral theology and the other theological disciplines, what I take to be the *status quaedestionis* of moral theology today.\(^{15}\) It shall also help set the terms for the following discussion on theoretical and practical reason.

(a.) Integrates Origin, Worship, and Deed in Jesus Christ

Now, to speak of “form” immediately recalls the Platonic ideas (*eide*), a so-called “top-down” metaphysics by which forms are understood as divine ideas or spiritual essences such as “horseness” which are perfect unto themselves and specify material substances insofar as these things participate (imperfectly) in the higher realities.\(^{16}\) A horse is a horse because it participates in the form or idea of horseness, for example. An Aristotelian or so-called “bottom-up” perspective,\(^{17}\) on the other hand, construes form (*morphē*) to be the “living principle” of matter,\(^{18}\) identifiable as something which could not exist purely or separately of individual things.\(^{19}\) Forms may be considered of themselves *mentally,*

\(^{15}\) See Section I.I above.

\(^{16}\) The references in this paragraph to “top-down” and “bottom-up” perspectives are of course much too simplistic to indicate rightly the positions of Plato and Aristotle, but that in a way is precisely the point. Balthasar should not be labeled in this manner either, especially because his pattern of theology integrates important aspects of both perspectives.

\(^{17}\) Perhaps a nominalist would better serve as an example of the “bottom-up” perspective, since a nominalist by definition does not believe in universal forms but only in particulars which are identified according to certain common names. Aristotle is mentioned here because Balthasar draws from him, and also because he differs from his mentor Plato on just this subject.


\(^{19}\) See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* I, 990b-992b and *Physics* II, 193b 33-7. As to whether Plato himself considered the divine ideas as forms separate from concrete reality and existing, so to speak, on their own, or more properly as perfections indicative of reality at its most exalted, is a question worthy of another
according to Aristotle, as for instance the form of horseness or the form of humanity, but no such forms exist without certain instantiations of them, that is, without there being horses and humans. While Balthasar acknowledges that his notion of *Gestalt* (figure, form) “is inherited from Plato and Aristotle (as *eidos* and *morphē*),” he also insists that his theology is neither “top-down” nor “bottom-up,” but rather comes from “the center,” since Jesus Christ is the center of history as both God and man. In his person as the Word made flesh, Jesus bridges Creator and creatures, divine and human, and eternity and time (see Col 1:15-20); he also lives within Christians through his Spirit and by grace. To reflect on these points is to recognize that, above all, a Catholic form of life should not be seen as an imposition from without, as though God or the Church applies such a form mechanically and obtrusively to persons who have no interior longing for such a healing guide in the first place. Nor should a Catholic form in the sense being used here be understood as limited to an expression of intermundane culture. This latter sense is criticized by Balthasar himself when he attests that a Catholic historical and cultural form is not superior to biblical revelation. What he means is that any preconceived form of life must be surrendered to the way of love revealed by God,

---


22 See McIntosh, *Christology from Within.*

23 See below for a reflection on the place of human *eros* in a Catholic form of life.

24 *GL4,* 36.
a way which is always personal, often unpredictable, and certainly not bound to historical, social mores.25

On at least one occasion, however, Balthasar uses the expression “Catholic form” in a manner consistent with the way of love just described.26 Commenting on Rheinhold Schneider’s writings which depict the lives of certain remarkable Catholics of history, Balthasar confesses:

Here, as nowhere else, Christianity [is] once again light and judgment of every event within and outside the Church; the solitary, adoring act of listening to the Word of God was the primal cell of all fruitful action; the renunciation carried out by those chosen and sent was the inner form of all world governance and conquest. Nowhere else did I find in such a pure form what I sought everywhere, namely, the anti-psychological instinct, the native knowledge of roles, service and mission, a Catholic form that does not live in monastic fortresses and “political Catholicisms”, perhaps not even in organized Orders at all, but in the souls of those who have received commissions, whether these be kings or founders or simple laymen (emphasis added).27

Balthasar highlights here the fruitful action proper to a Catholic form as that which is credited to a Christian who acts out his “part,” his service or mission, on the theo-dramatic stage of life, insofar as he participates in Christ’s own (inclusive) mission by grace.28

25 This of course is just another way of repeating Balthasar’s maxim of self-abandonment or Christian indifference.

26 See Balthasar, My Work in Retrospect, 39-40; cf. 57-8, as quoted below. Cf. LAC, 33, where Balthasar writes of a “‘catholic’ norm.” (“katholischen”) Norm.” GNL, 20.

27 Balthasar, My Work in Retrospect, 39-40; cf. 57-8. Balthasar’s apparent criticism of religious orders here needs to be balanced by his evident regard for many who have lived in religious life, for example, Sts. Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity. That said, his personal view that secular institutes present the ideal form of Christian life should not go unnoticed.

28 See TD3, 263. Aidan Nichols contends that Balthasar tried “to transmit to posterity a Catholic culture wide and rich enough to serve as a basis for Christian life and mission as it ought to be.” Divine
“[T]he Christian will realize his mission only if he truly becomes this form which has been willed and instituted by Christ,” writes Balthasar. This the believer does, not in a programmatic, uniform manner, as if by following so many pre-determined rules governing the spiritual life, according to the Swiss theologian, nor is it by some kind of psychological groping for his own peculiar spirituality, but by “listening to the Word of God” and abiding in the spirit of the evangelical counsels in whatever office the Christian has been presently assigned. In this way a Catholic form of life takes its modus operandi from the mission given to one interiorly by the Holy Spirit in radical conformity with the Gestalt of the Lord, Balthasar conveys, through listening to his Word and abiding in his grace. It is therefore not a stagnant, imposed form “from above,” he implies, nor does it evolve ever so often from one’s thoughts or desires “here below.” Rather, it is Christ’s own dramatic form which has been revealed in his historical existence as a certain way of love, and continues to reveal itself within all Christians by grace, especially the saints who live a Catholic form so well. How then is such a form of life expressed in a common moral perspective?

---

Fruitfulness, 195. This is no doubt because, in addition to his theological works, Balthasar wrote books on such topics of culture as poetry, music, and the great literary figures of past and present, which he often translated.

29 GL1, 28. “... nur dann erreicht, wenn er wirklich zu dieser von Christus gewollten und gestifteten Gestalt wird. . . .” HK I, 26.

30 In almost all of his writings Balthasar expounds on the notion that Christianity is best expressed in the abandonment of one’s own prerogatives and designs to let God alone speak.

31 See, for examples, Balthasar, “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” 141 and the “anti-psychological instinct” noted in the quotation above. “[T]he mission, not the psychology of the saints, must always have the last word. . . .” Balthasar, My Work in Retrospect, 71.

32 As Balthasar states, “[T]he ideal of the Christian [is] to follow the counsels of Jesus in the midst of the world without abandoning one’s post.” Ibid., 43.
As noted in the discussion of “the third way of love” in the opening chapter of this work, Balthasar thinks two paths—personalism and aestheticism—suggest themselves for realizing the form love takes in the world.\(^{33}\) Personalism conveys how the moral actor is drawn out of himself by love (eros) to the irreducible beauty of another,\(^{34}\) whom he is meant to appropriate as a “Thou” not under his possession but, rather, as a gift and a “miracle.”\(^{35}\) Similarly, the aesthetic object is truly perceived only through eros, according to Balthasar, which means it cannot be reduced to some truth; it rather must be seen in its genuine distinctiveness as beautiful\(^{36}\) and hence also as a “miracle.”\(^{37}\) The two perspectives thus converge, for Balthasar, when the moral subject is drawn by the world around him as so many objects of beauty (subjects of being) to desire and wonder about,\(^{38}\) not to possess or manipulate, but to behold as “miraculous” and serve as a “shepherd of being.”\(^{39}\) In the convergence of personalism and aestheticism, Balthasar indicates that a moral perspective arises which takes its leitmotif from objective reality requiring disponable love in response.


\(^{34}\) The beauty referred to here corresponds to the mysterious incommunicability of another person, that is, his or her spiritual soul. It is not meant to imply certain physical traits and not others. Similarly, eros is not reducible to erotica, for Balthasar, but rather any love that takes one beyond oneself in desire or longing. Cf. Plato, \textit{Symposium}, trans. Michael Joyce, in \textit{Plato: The Collected Dialogues}, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 526-74.


\(^{36}\) “To dispel the charm of beauty by reducing its ‘appearance’ into some ‘truth’ lying behind or above it is to eliminate beauty altogether and to show that it was never really perceived in its distinctiveness.” \textit{LAC}, 54. “Entzaubernde Auflösung des schönen ‘Scheins’ in irgendeine darunter- oder darüberliegende ‘Wahrheit’ hebt das Schöne auf und bezeugt damit, daß es in seinem Eigentümlichen gar nicht wahrgenommen worden ist.” \textit{GNL}, 35.

\(^{37}\) \textit{LAC}, 52-3.

\(^{38}\) See Ibid., 54.

Yet we also know that Balthasar holds that these paths—*eros* and beauty—are surpassed in Revelation, and hence stand in need of further reflection (reinterpretation) because the divine Word has interpreted himself as both Love and Glory (*Agapē* and absolute beauty).\(^{40}\)

Revelation illustrates for Balthasar that he who is absolute freedom both comes to encounter moral subjects in the perception of forms (cf. aesthetic dimension) and imparts personal missions (cf. personalist dimension). Aesthetically speaking, God encounters the personal subject in perception when he conveys the depths of being, that is, the splendor in the forms perceived.\(^{41}\) He stands behind these forms as their origin, and so in seeing a form well, by faith, a subject is drawn, “enraptured,” writes Balthasar, to worship.

The appearance of form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, *and* it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths. . . .\(^{42}\) Both aspects are inseparable from one another, and together they constitute the fundamental configuration of Being. We ‘behold’ the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being. We are ‘enraptured’ by our contemplation of these depths and are ‘transported’ to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) *LAC*, 54.

\(^{41}\) *GLI*, 119. This is the fourth of Balthasar’s fourfold distinction in being.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 118. “Die Erscheinung als Offenbarung der Tiefe ist unauflosbar beides zugleich: wirkliche Anwesenheit der Tiefe, des Ganzen, und wirklicher Verweis über sich hinaus auf diese Tiefe.” *HK*, I, 111. The passage continues: “In different periods of intellectual history, to be sure, one or the other of these aspects may be emphasized: on the one hand, classical perfection (*Vollendung*: the form which contains the depths), on the other, Romantic boundlessness, infinity (*Unendlichkeit*: the form that transcends itself by pointing beyond to the depths). Be this as it may, however, both aspects. . . .” *GLI*, 118-9. “Man kann zwar in verschiedenen geistgeschichtlichen Epochen einmal das Erste, einmal das Zweite betonen, klassische Vollendung (der die Tiefe fassenden Gestalt), romantische Unendlichkeit (der auf die Tiefe transzendierenden Gestalt). . . .” *HK*, I, 111.

\(^{43}\) *GLI*, 119. “[B]eides bleibt doch voneinander untrennbar und macht mitsammen die Grundfigur des Seins aus. Wir ‘erblicken’ die Gestalt, aber wenn wir sie wirklich erblicken, dann nicht nur die
Moreover, the same God who meets the subject’s desires (*eros*) with his glory,\(^{44}\) we know by faith to also impart personal missions which are meant to conform to his Son’s earthly existence.\(^{45}\) By discerning that the mysterious other one encounters in love has a unique personal mission, just like oneself, to surrender himself for the sake of ultimate communion in God, Balthasar is able to add increased depth of meaning to the personalist dimension of love previously articulated.\(^{46}\) Together with what faith grants to the aesthetic dimension, Balthasar has implied that a Catholic form of life is (1) consistent with the love by which the moral actor subjects himself to and adores Christ on analogical levels of being, and (2) informed by Christ’s own mission of love (*agape*)—as the principal actor to his understudy—which enables the moral subject to discern between things in accord with his

---

\(^{44}\) To say that God meets man in perception is not to say that he always realizes this, that he always ponders the depths of being in perceiving any specific form.

\(^{45}\) “God does not want just to be ‘contemplated’ and ‘perceived’ by us, like a solitary actor by his public; no, from the beginning he has provided for a play in which we all must share.” *My Work in Retrospect*, 97.

\(^{46}\) “Finally there is the awareness that, having been addressed by a free, loving Thou, I am both given an answer and called to give one in return. The gift implies a task. Having been awakened to free subjectivity, I have also been entrusted with a ‘mission’; what I have been given is to be transformed and freely given back, and in this way I shall not lose it: on the contrary, now I shall really possess it for the first time.” *TD3*, 458. “Endlich das Bewußtsein, daß mir im freien, liebenden Angesprochenwerden durch ein Du eine Antwort zugleich geschenkt und abgefordert wird, daß in der Gabe zugleich das Geschenk einer Aufgabe liegt, daß meine Erweckung zu einem freien Subjekt mich zugleich mit einer ‘Sendung’ investiert, das Erhaltene verwandelt, weil aus der eigenen Freiheit zurückzugeben, nicht um es zu verlieren, sondern um es erst eigentlich zu besitzen.” *TDK, II.2*, 421.
own personal mission and that of others within the body of the Church. Number (1) would seem to correspond to the reinterpretation faith grants to the aesthetic dimension of love, and number (2) appears to represent the reinterpretation faith elucidates to the personalist. Balthasar finally leaves the moral interpreter with one faith-influenced perspective which sees both poles of perception—the aesthetic object and the personal subject—in conformity with Christ’s self-offering for the sake of the world.47

As noted throughout this work, Balthasar helps us to see that it is indeed Jesus who unites origin of faith and being, worship (cf. aesthetic dimension), and deed (cf. personalist dimension).48 Jesus is the source of faith and being insofar as he is consubstantial with the Father as the Word through whom all things are created; he is in the aesthetic moment to be contemplated and adored in the splendor of the forms created through him; and he is in the personalist moment to be acted with and under because God grants to each man a share (a mission) in Christ’s own mission by grace. The fundamental moral injunction that Balthasar leaves the personal actor, therefore, is that he ought to live his mission in its given integration with the cosmic liturgy, the return of all things back to Father, through his Son, in the Spirit.49

---

47 The reader may note that the personalist dimension is articulated here as also inclusive of oneself, and not just other persons.

48 To compare worship to aestheticism and deed to personalism is not to equate them, but rather to indicate the terms by which aestheticism and personalism best refer in the harmony between origin, worship, and deed, prevalent in Balthasar’s work. Of course aestheticism also has to do with action, and personalism with worship. Their mutuality in difference is part in parcel of their nuptial relation, as will be indicated shortly.

49 See Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to St. Maximus the Confessor. To see the link between mission and cosmic liturgy is in part to recognize that man must serve creation even as it serves him. “Only in infinite reverence (Phil 2:12) can we participate in the saving work of God, whose absolute love towers infinitely above us—in the maior dissimilitudo. Leiturgia is inseparable from ethical conduct.” “NP,” 80. “Nur in unendlicher Ehrfurcht (Phil 2, 12) können wir am Heilswerk Gottes mitwirken, dessen absolute Liebe uns—in der maior dissimilitudo—unendlich überragt. Leiturgia ist von ethischem Tun untrennbar.” “NS,” 71-2.
In this way Balthasar indicates how a Catholic form of life integrates origin, worship, and deed in Jesus. As Balthasar states, the “return of love [to God] determines the whole man in his religious, ethical, devotional, and secular existence.”

(b.) Interpenetrates the Work-a-Day World

It follows from the above that man’s task in the world must be undergirded by the higher values of the Gospel to morally integrate these Christocentric dimensions of a Catholic form of life. Here is where these otherwise abstract notions touch down in the reality of our lives. Balthasar explains:

[W]hoever desires greater action needs better contemplation; whoever wants to play a more formative role must pray and obey more profoundly; whoever wants to achieve additional goals must grasp the uselessness and futility, the uncalculating and the incalculable (hence “unprofitable”) nature of the eternal love in Christ, as well as of every love along the path of Christian discipleship. Whoever wants to command must have learned to follow in a Christ-like manner; whoever wants to administer the goods of the world must first have freed himself from all desire for possession; whoever wants to show the world Christian love must have practiced the love of Christ (even in marriage) to the point of pure selflessness.

Notice that Balthasar does not bracket the above traits of Christian discipleship when describing how one best acts in the world, even when this acting has an honorable purpose which might seem to compromise the need to behave like a Christian while carrying it out.

---

52 We are immediately reminded here of David L. Schindler’s disputation with Christopher West over his method of evangelizing. As for Balthasar, “[A] theology of beauty may be elaborated only in a beautiful manner. The particular nature of one’s subject matter must be reflected first of all in the particular
After all, if one is not only called to be as “innocent as a dove,” that is, to have good intentions, but also to be as “wise as a serpent” (Mt 10:16), does this not mean that contemplation is not all-together important for worldly action, that prayer and obedience are not crucial for one’s formative role in the public realm, that a proper understanding of uselessness and futility are not significant for achieving one’s goals, and so forth? Balthasar certainly does not think so. To him these higher Gospel values point to love itself, that which must be embodied at all times and in all circumstances as a witness to Christ’s own existence. Even the cleverness and the cunning proper to a Christian’s activity in the world must be based and formed from within, for Balthasar, on the *a priori* call to love one’s neighbor as Christ would (cf. Jn 13:34). Of course this is for Balthasar no mere ideal either. “[S]urrender creates new beings,” he reminds us. It is precisely in and through an integrated (personalist-Christocentric-aesthetic) Catholic form of life that one lives as a saint and thus transforms the world in Christ’s image, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.

Indeed, he states:

---


35. Cf. Jn 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”


56. David L. Schindler comments in this regard, “[G]iven the ever-present reality and weight of
It will be objected that such a program of action demands the character of a saint. This may well be; but from the very beginning, Christian living has always been most credible, where at the very least it has shown a few faints signs of true holiness.57

(c.) Expresses a Logic Both Nuptial and Fruitful

We can further surmise that the relation between the objective (aesthetic) and subjective (personalist) poles of Balthasar’s (inclusive) Christocentric moral perspective is nuptial because each man’s mission and corresponding deeds will meet the objectivity of the world with the love of Christ integral to both dimensions. Thus, the aesthetic and personalist poles of love are not in competition, from Balthasar’s perspective, but rather find their meaning and integration relative to one another under the measure of Christ’s formative love. If the moral actor fails with regard to one dimension, for example, by not appreciating reality as a gift apt for wonder, he simultaneously fails also in the other aspect of love, for instance, by not surrendering himself to the wondrous mission of another or, indeed, his own mission as something objectively given to him from above. This is to say that the nuptial relation between appreciating reality as a gift which occasions wonder and finally worship of God in being (cf. aesthetic dimension), and treating persons as irreducibly unique and

57 Balthasar, Engagement with God, 61. “The saint—I am always returning to this point—has no hole, although he pours out his substance from every pore. We can consider again Foucauld or Madeleine Delbrêl or other figures that we know. What matters is the prayerful translation of dogma into life through meditation on the poor love of God (which is not encountered in Zen meditation), also the mystery of the poor Church, which Lumen Gentium mentions right at the beginning. And then there is the active following, and indeed a following once and for all and without forethought, which Ignatius described, ‘con grande animo y liberalidad.’ And then, when one is entirely inside, wherever the bastions are, then one can be at the same time entirely outside in the world.” Balthasar, “Spirit and Fire,” 586.
mysterious gifts with missions entrusted to them by Christ (cf. personalist dimension), is based in something (or someone!) both beyond and interior to both aspects, namely the eternal Word’s disponable love. The nuptial relation that I have identified between Balthasar’s accounts of aestheticism and personalism has shown itself to be “triune and circumincessive,” in the words of David Crawford. It is God in Christ who establishes the mutuality in difference between aesthetic object and personal subject, such that, a helpful if still limited visual of the relation between these terms may be rendered: aestheticism - Christ - personalism. The reader need only understand that Christ is not just between these poles, but is within them and beyond them. In other words, the personalist must see Christ in his personalism even as he strives to be a Christian aesthete, and the aesthete must see Christ in his aestheticism even as he strives to be a Christian personalist, in a Balthasarian schema. While Crawford locates a triune relation between practical and theoretical reason and, as indicated in Chapter Two, Balthasar sees a nuptial relation between the subject and object of knowledge, it appears consistent with their arguments to posit that both of these polarities (practical-theoretical, subject-object), as well as the relation between personalism and aestheticism, are at once nuptial and triune. This is certainly consonant with Balthasar’s understanding of the polarity of (all) being as both nuptial and fruitful.

So if Balthasar has led us to understand, consistent with his metaphysics of love, that a nuptial (triune) relation exists between personal subject-(Christ)-object of beauty, then moral “attunement”

58  This is the way Crawford understands the relation between practical and speculative reason. See Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 348.

59  See LAC, 53.
dimensions integrally within the hierarchy of their Christological framework, will also be fruitful (also triune). First, in terms of integration, Balthasar indicates that every action needs to simultaneously respect objective reality as a gift and honor personal mission (one’s own and others). By doing this, the moral subject acts in a manner characteristic of an artist who frames the components of reality in such wise as to reveal the depth of its beauty while simultaneously fulfilling his personal aspirations (and God’s) to do so from his heart.60 This kind of action proceeds from the personal subject and displays truth, beauty, and goodness in every direction, if not always in quantifiable terms. The object of reality in this sense depends on the personal subject to express its (objective) meaning and value through (subjective) perception and contemplation. Secondly, with respect to the hierarchy of aesthetic object and personal subject more generally, Balthasar implies that, precisely as a matter of love, the person must surrender his own designs and ambitions for the sake of the “miraculous” reality before him. Choosing well presupposes a definite intuition or grasp on reality, according to Balthasar.61 “[T]he ‘ethical’ is revealed precisely in the figure of the ‘aesthetic’,”62 he writes, ultimately in the encounter with the Son of Man.63 Thus “seeing the form” of Christ brings the true, the good, and the beautiful of every other perceivable form into the light along with it, for Balthasar. In this way, the moral meaning of revelation

60 “Let us not forget that ‘form’ is primarily ordered to art: it is a term growing out of our experience with art.” Balthasar, “The Christian Form,” 50-1.

61 GL3, 423. Although Balthasar is here citing Péguy, Oeuvres en prose 1898-1908, 739, it is clear that he agrees with the poet in this regard.


63 Ibid. Cf. GL3, 401-2; 423.
penetrates the beholder’s heart, and the form of love becomes for the beholder, genuine form and beautiful.  

This being said, the dignity of the person rests in part on his freedom to carry out the program of action he so chooses. While the hierarchy of goods provides a basis for action so that no act may rightly occur in a vacuum of self-interest, according to Balthasar’s line of reasoning, the personal subject is nevertheless free to exercise himself as an artist of love. So it is that the objectivity of the intelligible form (be it a person or some other object of inherent beauty) to which the moral actor responds in love, Balthasar indicates, must be contextualized by the actor within the framework of his own mission in life, i.e. his own intelligible form. To live as a Catholic is thus, for Balthasar, to respond to the miracle of reality within and beyond oneself with an eros (desire) transformed by agape (service), and in this way to live beautifully.

What finally is the fruit of respect for the mutuality in difference of truly Catholic aestheticism and truly Catholic personalism? The glory of personal sanctity. This spiritual fruit is a “third” (contemplation-adoration of form, mission-deed, glory-sanctity), we can

---

64 See GL2, 13-14, 22-3.

65 “What is a person without a life form, that is to say, without a form which he has chosen for his life, a form into which and through which to pour out his life, so that his life becomes the soul of the form and the form becomes the expression of his soul? For this is no extraneous form, but rather so intimate a one that it is greatly rewarding to identify oneself with it. Nor is it a forcibly imposed form, rather one which has been bestowed from within and has been freely chosen.” GL1, 24, as cited by D.C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 337. “Was ist er ohne Lebensform, das heisst ohne Form, die er für sein Leben gewählt hat und in die er sein Leben ein- und dahingiesst, damit es zur Seele dieser Form und die Form zum Ausdruck seiner Seele werde, keine fremde Form, sondern eine so intime, dass es lohnt, sich damit zu identifizieren, keine aufgezwungene, sondern eine von innen geschenkte und freigewählte, keine beliebige, sondern die einmalige persönliche, das individuelle Gesetz?” HK I, 20. We recall that person and mission, understood theologically, are identical for Balthasar. “On the Concept of Person,” 25. Cf. TD3, 202-14; 263-82.

66 The chief attribute of this sanctity, this earthly glory, is vowed love received in thanksgiving, according to my reading of Balthasar.
deduce, which has proceeded from another “third” (God-glory of being, contemplation-adoration of form, mission-deed) beyond it. It is a triune order of love which freely proceeds from another triune order of love, itself proceeding in freedom from the Triune God himself. Balthasar has provided a path for the integration of spiritual theology, morality, aesthetics, and dogmatic theology—without the system. He gives us instead a view to the nuptial and triune order of being which, because it proceeds from God and is oriented toward its fulfillment in the cosmic liturgy (exitus-reditus), is adequately appropriated only with a service indicative of nuptial and fruitful love.

Of course much more could be said about what constitutes a Catholic form of life for Balthasar if what we mean by this is essentially Christ’s form of love in the world. To better “see the form,” the reader would do well to consider especially the end of Chapter One on the “Catholic” elements of due obedience to hierarchy and sacramentality enfleshed in the saints, as well as Chapter Three above for further reflection on the “catholic” characteristics of self-abandoning, vowed love as complete and forever, and received in gratitude in each moment. The present reflections suffice to indicate those aspects of a Catholic form of life which would be most helpful for ascertaining, in Balthasar’s thought, the Christocentric basis for (a.) uniting origin of faith and being, worship, and deed, as well as (b.) the integrity of the Christian response in the midst of the world, and (c.) the relation between subject and object.

---

67 Of course every act of contemplation and/or adoration is also a moral deed, but the point here is to highlight that contemplation-adoration is in the first respect a matter of knowing, not freely determined action, such as the beatific vision suggests. That knowing and action are integral to one another while also being distinct is precisely the nuptial and trinitarian point here.

68 This is not to attenuate the importance of more systematic accounts, such as Sts. Bonaventure and Thomas, but it is to show how one may account for a thorough integration of the theological disciplines even in Balthasar’s unsystematic style.
Drawing especially on the understanding of subject and object as nuptial and fruitful, we now turn to a critical issue in fundamental moral theology today, the relation between theoretical and practical reason.

§ VI.2 Theoretical and Practical Reason: Unity-in-Distinction

Granting that practical reason (what ought I to do?) is meant to be guided if not absolutely and mechanically from theoretical reason (what is the case?), just as theory takes its bearings from the intelligibility of the world, the primary endeavor of this section is to indicate how crucial it is for moral theologians to see the intelligibility of the world well and convey it properly in moral discourse. Insofar as one misconstrues who moral actors really are and/or what the subject of their discourse really is at their most fundamental (theological-ontological) level, moral advice suffers, sometimes dangerously so. Positively speaking, a proper understanding of the unity-in-distinction or nuptiality of theoretical and practical reason can provide insights into matters previously obscured by what Schindler describes as modernity’s prevalent “Cartesian ontology.” It can help reintegrate the balance between aestheticism and personalism and thus direct a path toward the reintegration of moral theology in the other theological disciplines. In a word, an integrated view into practical and

69 The aesthetic moment of “seeing the form” well is so fundamental for Balthasar that he makes it the title and subject matter of the first volume in his 15-volume (in English) trilogy.

70 If Schindler, et al. are correct in their interpretation of ANT-OAR and the implications of animal experimentation for determining the being of the “third” thing under question, as I take them to be, the possibility of creating and destroying human beings looms large. Note how this possibility revolves almost exclusively around the question of seeing properly the intelligibility of the product of ANT-OAR and not the intentions of those involved in the debate.

71 See Section V.I above.
speculative reason can assist the moral observer to value Catholic culture more, become by way of this an artist of love, and so bridge theology and sanctity.\textsuperscript{72}

Now, because the relation between theoretical and practical reason is largely an ethical concern and Balthasar famously denies he has an ethics, one would be hard pressed to find a treatise on the subject in the Swiss theologian’s writings. However, what has already been conveyed regarding his thought can serve here to illustrate what this relation would likely entail for Balthasar or, better, what this relation entails for me as one working from the theological-philosophical foundation that Balthasar offers.

To this end, I will first investigate Msgr. Livio Melina’s articulation of “a dynamic model” of human action in his recently released book, \textit{The Epiphany of Love: Toward a Theological Understanding of Christian Action},\textsuperscript{73} because Melina has shown a predilection for integrating what is helpful in Balthasar’s thought in fundamental moral theology,\textsuperscript{74} is adeptly able to signify its limitations,\textsuperscript{75} and yet, in my judgment, still misses certain key

\begin{itemize}
\item This is of course to repeat a central concern of Balthasar’s throughout his corpus, revealed most adroitly and famously in his essay, “Theology and Sanctity.”
\item This book is part of a series edited by Melina’s colleague and friend, David L. Schindler. Melina is the worldwide President of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family and Professor of Fundamental Moral Theology at the Institute’s session in Rome.
\item Melina is particularly keen on advancing a Christocentric moral theology, on identifying the moral actor in the theo-drama with Christ in the lead role, on Balthasar’s notion of person as a theological mission received in response to one’s baptismal call, and on Balthasar’s account of filiality, that is, the importance of being a child, particularly a “son in the Son.” Besides \textit{Epiphany of Love,} 4, 61, 67, 88, 97, 132, 134, 159, see also Melina’s \textit{Sharing in Christ’s Virtues,} 89, 92, 110, 120, 126-8, 134, 149-50, 151, 182, 191 and “Christ and the Dynamism of Action,” 124-8.
\item Melina will also and more explicitly account for Balthasar’s “Christological norm” of ethical action in “Christ and the Dynamism of Action,” 124-8 and \textit{Sharing in Christ’s Virtues,} 126-8. While edified by Balthasar’s Christocentrism and his overall aim of bridging faith and morality, Melina is also wary of the language of “norm” that he uses in “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,” given its Kantian and extrinsicist underpinnings. Melina much prefers the category of “virtue,” as the title of his first book suggests.
\end{itemize}
points. This view to Melina’s work will help us identify a Balthasarian methodology for appropriating the relation between theoretical and practical reason by ensuring that the insights noted above with respect to faith-illumined aestheticism and personalism are not relegated to the periphery in a foundational moral theology going forward. Next we consider the work of Father Martin Rhonheimer and David Crawford, both of whom are Catholics who claim allegiance to the Magisterium of the Church, but only the latter who can be identified as working from a perspective agreeable with Balthasar’s theological, ontological aestheticism, which helps to account for his nuptial reading of subject and object. Rhonheimer’s “parallelism” and Crawford’s “triune and circumincessive” models of the relation between speculative and practical reasoning will be treated in juxtaposition since Crawford has written a series of critiques of Rhonheimer’s positions.76 In short, Melina seeks to include Balthasar’s thought in his moral analysis but does not, in my view, do it full justice, Rhonheimer appears to neglect such theological aestheticism all-together, while Crawford, who upholds it in his own way, shows precisely why it is needed. I will finally offer some concluding remarks on Balthasar’s perspective relative to these proposals for the sake of clarifying Balthasar’s contribution to the discussion of speculative and practical reasoning.

---
(a.) Melina’s “Dynamic Model”

Clearly Melina knows Balthasar’s work and appreciates it. In at least three of his writings in English he brings Balthasar’s theological insights to bear on moral discourse.\(^77\) In articulating the “ontological model of the orthodox tradition” in the book, *The Epiphany of Love*, however, Melina identifies certain problems with what appears to be Balthasar’s more dogmatic method without mentioning him by name.\(^78\) Melina writes:

According to this [Balthasarian-esque] theological understanding, morality has nothing to do with the individual reaching perfection through his or her ethical efforts, but is rather about adhering to a new ontology, which is already given as sacramental grace in the Church. The Church, who realizes herself above all in the holy liturgy, is seen as the dwelling place of the *ethos*. In this way, the primacy of ontology at times amounts to the rejection of axiology and of the specific nature of moral considerations. Reflections on the moral dynamism do not have anything specific to add to theological anthropology, which deals with the being of the Christian subject, and are therefore absorbed by it. In some of these theological and pastoral approaches, the aesthetic moment (wonder at the gift received) replaces the ethical dimension. Any reference to moral effort is then suspected of Pelagianism.\(^79\)

Because Balthasar has little to offer in the way of ethics, views it as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve,\(^80\) and in all cases devalues the importance of an individual striving for

\(^77\) See fn. 74 of this chapter.

\(^78\) See Melina, *Epiphany of Love*, 112-3. Melina cites in this connection three Orthodox theologians, Christo Yannaras, John Zizioulas, and Vigen Guroian, as well as one Catholic, Luigi Ceccarini. Ibid., 112. Because Balthasar does not pen an ethical treatise of any substantial length (Melina often resorts to citing Balthasar’s “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics” and different aspects of his five-volume *Theo-Drama*) perhaps Melina does not think he has enough of a basis by which to categorize Balthasar’s thought in this manner. He does however mention that Balthasar’s approach is “perhaps too ‘theological’ and too little ‘moral. . . .’” to present as sufficient for moral theology. Melina, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues*, 128. Cf. Melina, “Christ and the Dynamism of Action,” 127.

\(^79\) Melina, *Epiphany of Love*, 113.

\(^80\) “We come now to the third characteristic of man before the Fall: man without knowledge of good and evil. In other words, man without ‘ethics’. . . .” *CSL*, 87. “Und endlich gar das dritte: der Mensch
perfection to rather put the locus of morality on self-abandonment to one’s mission in the Church, the first set of claims above are particularly suited to him. Moreover, since “the aesthetic moment (wonder at the gift received)” is another way of stating the primary movement in Balthasar’s assessment of being, that is, the first and most programmatic of the “fourfold difference in being,” and since David L. Schindler’s “Balthasarian” ethical work is noted for charging his interlocutors with activism and Pelagianism, the references in the last two sentences of the above quotation accurately depict Balthasar’s thought as well.

These are indeed serious concerns for judging Balthasar’s contribution to ethics. The reason why the present study has not concerned those matters of ethical reflection which Balthasar does not provide in his work but are nevertheless necessary for foundational ethics,

---

81 Although this theme is noticeable throughout Balthasar’s corpus, it is especially evident when he speaks on matters directly concerning the spiritual life. See, e.g., Two Sisters in the Spirit, 276-8.

82 See Balthasar, “Spirit and Fire,” 585: “What you call activism comes from a certain fear of the poverty of love, of the Cross. It is a flight from the inescapability of being offered.”
such as virtue development, the precepts of natural law and the principles of practical reason, the inclinations, personalist intuitions, and moral action theory, is because our concern here has been limited to what Balthasar actually contributes to the subject of morality. Insofar as one model can encapsulate a sound moral theory, these elements would need to be included.83 Because of this, Melina is correct to critique “the ontological model” and offer instead “a dynamic model” which is meant to be integrative of the most important concerns of fundamental moral theology from an ecclesial perspective. Indeed, Melina “urges us to develop a new model that safeguards the universality of moral truth proposed by the Church as well as its historical and concrete communitarian character, its ontological and sacramental foundation as well as the dynamic proper to freedom.”84 My question is, “Does Melina adequately convey, in his proposed model, the insights that Balthasar does offer which pertain to the relation between theoretical and practical reason?”

The section “Toward a Dynamic Model” is written in only three paragraphs, so each of the propositions in Melina’s proposal is of considerable value.85 Identifying Veritatis

---

83 As if commenting on Balthasar’s essay, “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,” Melina writes: “[T]he aesthetic absolutization of the moment of faith . . . does not take seriously the dynamic of action and practical reason and thus remains inconclusive, an abstract anthropological affirmation that is not mediated at the level of the principles proper to action.” Epiphany of Love, 79.

84 Ibid., 113.

85 See Ibid., 113-5. The subtlety of the following argument on just a few propositions in Melina’s work should not dissuade the reader from seeing its relevance. Melina has often cited Martin Rhonheimer favorably on matters related to theory and practice (see Melina, Sharing in Christ’s Virtues, 5n, 6n, 45n, 49n, 64n, 65n, 68n, 79n, 97n, 135n, 168, and 174n), and has commended Rhonheimer’s recent book, The Perspective of the Acting Person, where, on the back flap, he calls Rhonheimer “a master and a necessary point of reference for rereading . . . St. Thomas Aquinas,” even though Rhonheimer argues from a vantage point incongruous with Balthasar’s theological aestheticism, as the following discussion evidences.
splendor, 78 on “placing oneself in the perspective of the acting person” as the leitmotif for moral experience, he writes:

It is through acting that the moral subject establishes him- or herself. A moral choice is not a decision made about something exterior but a choice that regards our very selves and which is situated within an interpersonal context.86

These two statements may seem innocuous enough, but they go to the heart of just how Balthasar’s more “ontological model” would situate these matters differently and, I believe, better fulfill Melina’s ecclesial (Catholic) aspirations for a “dynamic model.”

Concerning the first statement quoted above, Melina is certainly referring to the notion that a personal subject is not conventionally considered “moral” until he is actually able to perform moral actions. To have something happen to oneself is not yet to act through oneself, as Karol Wojtyła aptly described the matter.87 My concern is that Melina’s statement nevertheless frames moral choice in an overtly activist way. Melina would surely agree that a moral subject is never not a person whose constitution as a moral subject occurs simultaneous with the establishment of his personhood. While the Magisterium of the Church has not declared definitively when a human being becomes a human person,88 and indeed Balthasar himself speaks of this putative change happening only in the acceptance of

86 Melina, Epiphany of Love, 114.


88 For a particularly compelling argument on the creation of personhood at conception, see Patrick Lee, Abortion and Unborn Human Life (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 7-68.
one’s theological mission following the grace of baptism, Balthasar’s (theo-)ontological-aestheticism—seeing the form—sets a definitive course for viewing the constitution of the human person at creation when the form or soul of the child comes to be. In fact, the magisterial teaching that a human being is to be treated at every stage of his development as a person (with rights claims) is the reason why there has been an ANT-OAR debate. Prior to the moral subject establishing himself through action, he is established (or must be treated as being established) in creation by God. Hence receptivity, the moral subject’s perception and acceptance of the reality before him, rightly serves, in a Balthasarian framework, as the constitutive basis for his morality. The moral life, in other words, is fundamentally a response to something or someone beyond oneself first affecting oneself as a person. If it is instead defined first in terms of action, as Melina does here, it risks the charge of activism and Pelagianism—not because moral effort has been appealed to, but because it has been appealed to without first situating it in its a priori creaturely-receptive mode.

---


90 See Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, Donum vitae, I.1.

91 This does not mean that Melina is not aware of the issue being raised here, that is, the priority of receptivity in action. He describes love as a gift which “precedes our desire and guides it. In recognizing this gracious anticipation, we find the sure norm of action, a norm that is older and greater than our will.” The Epiphany of Love, 13. The question here is to what extent is this issue, for Melina, important for establishing a recommendable ecclesial model of moral theology.

92 My understanding then is that the moral subject is constituted first in being—a particular being which conveys a sign of self-gift simply by being a body-person, as John Paul II has conveyed. See Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 203, inter alia, as cited in David S. Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body, 332; cf. 346, fn 63. Of course a moral subject is reconstituted in action, but human action, itself preceded by the passions as Melina notes (114), depends for its establishment or constitution on the human body and its inherent symbolism. Action is a bodily response to something or someone.
The second statement cited above deepens this problem for Melina because he describes moral choice exclusively in terms of the self “situated within an interpersonal context,” that is, by denying (at least here) that a moral choice is also about “something exterior” (emphasis added). Of course, Melina would agree, no moral choice is made in an intra-conscience vacuum without at least implicit reference to what is “exterior.”93 Every rational choice presupposes sense knowledge of that which is beyond the self, according to Saint Thomas,94 and even if one wishes to debate Thomas and claim that not all cognition is based on the senses, such as the knowledge that comes in religious experience, even in such cases knowledge concerns first what is exterior to oneself affecting oneself.95

To be sure, Melina recognizes these points. He later clarifies: “Prior to action there is a passion; prior to responsibility there is a gift; prior to freedom there is grace.”96 In point of fact, his stress on the “constitutively interpersonal dimension of freedom” as setting a

93 See ST, I-II, q. 9, a. 4: “I answer that, As far as the will is moved by the object, it is evident that it can be moved by something exterior. But in so far as it is moved in the exercise of its act, we must again hold it to be moved by some exterior principle.” “Respondeo dicendum quod, secundum quod voluntas movetur ab obiecto, manifestum est quod moveri potest ab aliquo exteriori. Sed eo modo quo movetur quantum ad exercitium actus, adhuc nesse est ponere voluntatem ab aliquo principio exteriori moveri.”

94 ST, I, q. 1, a. 9.

95 A similar problem is at issue in William E. May’s, An Introduction to Moral Theology, Revised Edition (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 104: “[H]uman acts, precisely as ‘human’ or ‘moral’, receive their ‘forms’, not from nature, but from human intelligence, which places them in their moral species by discerning their ‘ends’, ‘objects’, and ‘circumstances’.” (May is the translator of Melina’s, Sharing Christ’s Virtues and Michael J. McGivney Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology at the John Paul II Institute.) At issue here is the phrase “not from nature.” Human intelligence is itself informed by nature, by sensate objects impressing their intelligible forms upon the intellect, as St. Thomas argues (see ST, I, q. 86), so the idea that the moral formation of a human act, which of course presupposes intelligence, somehow occurs isolated from or “not from nature,” appears to me misleading. Clearly there is a distinction between the two realms, between the subject and object of knowledge, practical and theoretical reason, and the moral and natural species of a human act, but terminology such as “not from nature” suggests an “either/or” depiction of their respective relations rather than a nuptial and fruitful one.

96 Melina, Epiphany of Love, 114.
framework for action oriented toward communion\textsuperscript{97} is necessarily an acknowledgment that someone (if not something) exterior to the self has something to do with what moral choices are about.\textsuperscript{98} My concern with Melina’s proposed model for morality then is not that he does not otherwise acknowledge and even occasionally highlight Balthasarian-type insights regarding the formative perception of being for morality, it is rather that by appealing to the ontological-aesthetic dimension only intermittently, and in fact expressly denying its influence in a leading statement on moral choice, he risks relegating its significance to the periphery of foundational moral theology.\textsuperscript{99}

What can be gained by Balthasar’s formative insights? Perhaps the most significant contribution that Balthasar can make to the discussion of theoretical and practical reason concerns his understanding of the polarity of being, that is, being’s inherent nuptiality and fruitfulness. Considered in this light, a Balthasarian perspective would see theoretical and practical reason in mutually dependent relation because Balthasar sees an analogous relation between worldly object (“exterior something”) and human subject (interior ego).\textsuperscript{100} As

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} “The original form of the gift that moves to action is an interpersonal encounter that invites us to communion. The constitutively interpersonal dimension of freedom locates action within a framework that is characterized by the progressive steps of presence—encounter—communion.” Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{98} I would suggest that human action is constitutively interpersonal because God is tri-personal and speaks always to our moral consciences, indeed, through being (\textit{esse}) itself; it is not so because we necessarily perceive or respond to other human persons in every action.
\item \textsuperscript{99} In my judgment, Melina represents on the whole a more integrated account of subject and object, and, in turn, theoretical and practical reason, than many other Catholic moral theologians today. He is to be commended for his frequent references to the gift of being and action, and the primacy of filiality in the receptivity of being and action, as just two examples of this determination.
\item \textsuperscript{100} See Section II.3 above on nuptiality and fruitfulness, particularly on the subject and object relation in the attainment of knowledge. The further the separation of subject and object, the more open such a stance is to claims of “Cartesian ontology.” Does the knowing subject establish himself in thought (\textit{Cogito ergo sum})? Or rather is knowledge dependent on the gift of being for its constitution, the logic of which pervades its own order? My understanding is that morality is first dependent on the subject knowing the world beyond him
\end{itemize}
argued above, the nuptiality of subject and object would seem to orient moral actors to the fruit of sanctity through (Christocentric) deeds harmonious with the (Christocentric) contemplation of form.\textsuperscript{101} For Balthasar, perceiving an object of the world as it truly is requires that one (morally) enter into the dynamic of his own receptive constitution through (nuptial) service.

The subject’s task [in ascertaining knowledge of the object] 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 in knowledge.\textsuperscript{102}

[T]he 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.\textsuperscript{103}

One can see that the ontological-aesthetic dimension is already, for Balthasar, a moral movement requiring the actor’s choice become “attitude” of service.\textsuperscript{104} This in turn allows

\begin{flushleft}
and, in that knowing, truly perceived in an attitude of service, will this same moral actor respond in matters of choice. See \textit{ST}, I-II, q. 9, a. 1 on the intellect as a mover of the will.
\end{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{101} This is again not to suggest a simple is-ought relation between form and deed, but rather that an integrative perception of natural forms, i.e. seeing things as they really are, has something to do with right action.


\textsuperscript{103} \textit{TLJ}, 76. “Die Grundhaltung des erkennenden Subjekts kann demnach keine andere sein als die phänomenologisch geforderte einer vollen, indifferenten Aufnahmebereitschaft, die zunächst nichts anderes wünscht, als das Phänomen so rein wie möglich aufzunehmen und zu reproduzieren.” \textit{TLK}, I, 74.

\textsuperscript{104} For St. Thomas, this would be expressed in the fact that the will moves the intellect as to the exercise of its act. See \textit{ST}, I-II, q. 9, a. 4, ad. 3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod voluntas quantum ad aliquid sufficienter se movet, et in suo ordine, scilicet sicut agens proximum, sed non potest seipsam movere quantum ad omnia, ut ostensum est. Unde indiget moveri ab alio sicut a primo movente.”
the object to “have its needs met” in revealing itself to the subject; but here I am only repeating what was presented in Chapter Two when describing Balthasar’s understanding of the nuptial relation between subject and object in the disclosure of knowledge and truth—*their fruit (third)*. The crucial point for our consideration now is how Balthasar’s epistemology, itself analogously (not univocally) derivative of his theological ontology, leads to a morality analogously derivative of it. In his ontology, epistemology, and now morality Balthasar presents a consistent *law of surrender* which recalls Christ’s relationship with his Heavenly Father. Furthermore, this law of surrender is no one-sided injunction, simply for the eternal Son, or the subject of being, or the subject of knowledge, or the subject of action, but rather also, differently (analogously), for the unbegotten Father,\(^{105}\) the Creator, and the objects of knowledge and action to which the human subject is responding.\(^{106}\) It involves “surrender” on both sides of an object-subject polarity because *love is mutual*, and because this is what bears creative fruit, as Balthasar has indicated. This is why Schindler describes Balthasar as conveying an “ontology of generosity” as distinct from a “Cartesian ontology” which would see subject and object at odds or at least without a constitutive logic which informs them both, within them and beyond them.\(^{107}\)

---

\(^{105}\) As an example of how this might be conceived, God the Father “surrenders” his Son to the world as a gift and in this makes himself “vulnerable” to the Son’s plaintive cry: “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34).

\(^{106}\) This is an allusion to Balthasar’s third distinction in being, put forth mnemonically in Chapter Two as “For all the wonderment of this reality beyond me, I realize that existence requires me and other things to substantiate it. In other words, no matter how wondrous being is in itself, it is open to and anticipates the response of the smallest entity.”

\(^{107}\) Not surprisingly, Schindler thinks that “genuine morality (as distinct from the spurious sort termed moralism) demands something like John Paul II’s nuptial body.” “Is Truth Ugly?,” 702; cf. 704. See also Schindler, “The Significance of World and Culture for Moral Theology: *Veritatis Splendor* and the
Once the character of subject and object are seen in their mutuality in difference, in their nuptiality, the moral interpreter has better access to the link between morality and true (objective) spiritual growth in the cosmic liturgy. He rightly sees his morality and spirituality as inextricably linked, for every moral choice is necessarily a spiritual act, moved by one rational faculty (the intellect) and expressed through another (free-will). According to this understanding, the moral actor values objective form more than he otherwise would and consequently grows in appreciation for the aesthetic dimension of love, which is to say Catholic culture (form-art). To stipulate, in contrast, that “a moral choice is not a decision made about something exterior” is to split theoretical and practical reason and leave no formative basis by which to assess the difference between going to a B-movie and going to

“Nuptial-Sacramental” Nature of the Body.”

Sometimes anecdotes can help clarify a point better than a systematic presentation of a topic, so I offer one here concerning the difference between an “ontology of generosity” and a “Cartesian ontology.” Recently I attended a conference on Christian marriage in which the opening speaker presented the relation between the procreative and unitive dimensions of marriage as displaced from one another, even as he attempted to assure the audience that he was not doing so. Procreation was considered by him the natural purpose of marriage while unity between the spouses was portrayed as that which comes before and after the procreative act. What the scholar failed to communicate (and probably see in the first place) is that both dimensions, procreative and unitive—or objective and subjective poles of marriage, if you will—can only be defined properly if marriage itself and the marital act in particular are seen as ordered from within to self-giving, communio love. In other words, both procreation and unity, while distinct, are still two aspects of a single whole, i.e. a single unitive, self-surrendering bond of love which gives formal and interior meaning to procreation as procreation, and unity as unity. They are not at odds, competing to be the natural end of marriage, but rather are integrative dimensions of this end, otherwise defined as self-abandoning, communio love. As I read Balthasar, this is what marriage, like every other state and every other action, is for. So the marital act is not meant exclusively for life-giving procreation (and the education of children), and the other aspects of marital life meant exclusively for mutually gratifying union, rather both spheres of marriage are meant for life-giving union at all times and in all respects. See Paul VI, Humanae vitae, 8-12 and Second Vatican Council, Guadium et spes, 50.

108 See ST, I, q. 83, a. 4 and I-II, q. 9, a. 1-3. Because the will also moves the intellect as to the exercise of its act (I-II, q. 9, a. 4, ad 3), it is apparent that the intellect and will are mutually dependent, for St. Thomas.

109 We are reminded of Balthasar’s deep appreciation for culture and the arts, and that he was himself, according to de Lubac, “perhaps the most cultivated of his time. If there is a Christian culture, then it is!”
the theater, or receiving daily a piece of Wonderbread rather than the Eucharist. Certainly Melina is correct to argue that moral choice must be assessed “from the perspective of the acting person” and does not rely entirely on the hierarchy of goods present already in the world. For Balthasar, this would leave little avenue for Catholics to be anything less than consecrated virgins, since consecration is “to be preferred” to marriage according to Church teaching. There would be less of a reason to “listen to the Word of God” because the believer would know that a prompting of the Spirit could do no more than fix one on the highest goods of choice—contemplation and prayer, for example. No, for Balthasar, both personalism and aestheticism, reinterpreted in agape, are crucial for moral behavior.

(b.) Rhonheimer’s “Parallelism” and Crawford’s “Triune and Circumincessive” Model

David Crawford, who has drawn on Balthasar copiously for a series of works concerning the Christian states of life, including his dissertation become book, utilizes a similar “nuptial” logic when addressing the relation between theoretical and practical reason, between fact and value, subject and object, moral and natural species of a human act, and nature and intention. This he does in a series of articles published in Communio in which he

---

110 Of course this is not suggest that Melina would not see the difference in value between such goods, but only that his description of moral choice in his preferred ecclesial model for morality does not register this fact.

111 Although Balthasar is not one to draw attention to the role of the natural inclinations in self-abandoning love, certainly they also play a formative role in action.

112 See Chapter 3 above, fn. 13.

113 See fn. 76 of this chapter.

114 Crawford, Marriage and the Sequela Christi. Notably, David L. Schindler was the director of Crawford’s dissertation, and Melina served as a reader on his board.
critiques Martin Rhonheimer’s depiction of moral theory, most notably because Rhonheimer
deems as licit the use of condoms for those married couples physically affected by
HIV/AIDS, and embryonic craniotomy for the purposes of saving the life of a mother.\textsuperscript{115}

Crawford draws attention to the text that Melina cites as fundamental to moral
experience, an excerpt from \textit{Veritatis splendor}, 78, because it is Crawford’s position that the
“dominant interpretation” of this quotation, including Rhonheimer’s, is faulty.\textsuperscript{116} The text in
question states:

\begin{quote}
In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act
morally, it is . . . necessary to place oneself \textit{in the perspective of the acting person}.\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

While John Paul II is herein clearly arguing against a “physicalist” reading of human action
which would understand the morality of a human act as inexorably tied to its conformity to
its natural (or physical) species,\textsuperscript{118} irrespective of intention, Crawford argues that this

Rhonheimer, a priest of the personal prelature Opus Dei, presumably has every intention, like Crawford, of
being faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. See, \textit{inter alia}, Rhonheimer, “The Truth About
Approach to Craniotomy and Tubal Pregnancies}, ed. William F. Murphy, Jr. (Washington, DC: The Catholic
University of America Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{116} Crawford, “Experience of Nature, Moral Experience,” 267. See also Crawford, “Conjugal

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Veritatis splendor}, 78, original emphasis.

\textsuperscript{118} Such an understanding would no doubt construe as morally wrong Jesus’ action of clearing the
temple precincts of money changers by overturning tables with whip in hand (See Mt 21:12; Mk 11:15; Jn 2:14-5).
After all, Jesus is doing something in itself destructive to the order of things. But this just recalls the point
that morality is not directly derivative or deductive of nature.
judgment does not *de facto* lead to the notion that human action pertains *only* to intention or what is interior to the personal subject.¹¹⁹ Crawford is quick to point out that the next sentence in paragraph 78, “The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behavior,”¹²⁰ expresses the fact that human acts cannot be exhaustively defined by intention because they also pertain to the “vocation of human nature.”¹²¹ They also must be “capable or not of being ordered to God.”¹²² By understanding human action to involve at once a deliberate decision of the interior order and a “specific kind of behavior”¹²³ in the realm of the body and nature,¹²⁴ Crawford alludes to the fact that every choice is necessarily a choice about something.¹²⁵ This is to say that a human act is specified logically subsequent to nature itself informing, in the order of knowledge,¹²⁶ the acting person’s appraisal of what it

---

¹¹⁹ See Crawford, “Conjugal Love, Condoms,” 506. See also *Veritatis splendor*, 47, where John Paul II argues against those who would deem the Church’s teachings on intrinsically evil acts to be physicalist.

¹²⁰ Emphasis added. See also the reference in the same paragraph to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “. . . there are certain specific kinds of behavior that are always wrong to choose. . . .” Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, 79-81.

¹²¹ See Crawford, “Conjugal Love, Condoms,” 506. Cf. Crawford, “Experience of Nature, Moral Experience,” 277. This phrasing of Crawford’s, “vocation of human nature,” calls to mind Balthasar’s meta-anthropology by which creation finds its pinnacle expression in the human being, particularly the human being of Jesus Christ, and can be understood on analogous levels according to the various orders of being.

¹²² *Veritatis splendor*, 78; original emphasis. See Crawford, “Conjugal Love, Condoms,” 506.

¹²³ See the title of Section III, *Veritatis splendor*, 65-70: “Fundamental Choice and Specific Kinds of Behavior.”

¹²⁴ We are embodied persons after all.

¹²⁵ In Melina’s words, “Prior to action, there is a passion. . . .” *Epiphany of Love*, 114.

is he will be pursuing or avoiding. The character of the act to be chosen therefore depends radically on the intelligibility already given in the natural world, even as this act is not principally of the physical order because it is specified morally through the moral actor’s reasoned and free appropriation of this informing intelligibility, which is finally an exterior made interior intelligibility. After all, what is the acting person deliberating about? In a word, nature and intention are mutually dependent in action.

For such reasons as the above, Crawford rejects all sharp divisions between body and soul, subject and object, fact and value, natural and moral species of a human act, is and ought, nature and freedom, as well as Rhonheimer’s apparent understanding of

---

127 This is not suggest a simple deduction from nature to act nor a conflating of the practical and the speculative reason, but rather a rational formation from the natural order which precedes and informs acting, necessarily.

128 The ANT-OAR debate presents a clear view into the critical importance of understanding rightly the nature of the thing being chosen. With respect to the legitimacy of embryonic craniotomy, another case in point, Crawford concludes: “A skull can therefore only be a whole insofar as it is organically related to the formal cause of a whole and indeed can only be explained in terms of it.” Crawford, “Experience of Nature, Moral Experience,” 277.

129 From nature to reason, and sense perception to understanding.

130 What is more, a Balthasarian perspective would see this mutual dependence as itself subordinate to the origin of nature and intention: God.


135 Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body: Between Deductivism and Parallelism,” 334-5. “Ratzinger would seem to be telling us that we should remind ourselves that the strict division between fact and value, is and ought, arose in the wake of empiricist and positivist reductions of nature to purely material sub-personal reality. Some discernment is therefore in order concerning the validity of this division.” Ibid., 334.

the “parallel” relation between speculative and practical reason. If matter is not dumb and mechanical “stuff” with no interior order or metaphysical constitution, but rather is created by God through eternal reason, then what man appropriates in action is not segregated from his own constitution as a body-person, but rather participates in the same intelligible order of being as a subject thereof. Crawford explains:

If nature is created ex nihilo, as Christians believe, then a number of implications follow. First, this means that it has “value” inscribed in it from its beginning in the form of a vocation that constitutes and radically structures it. Second, it means that nature and even the physical world represent and manifest God’s freedom, in which human freedom is given its possibility and form. Third, physical reality possesses a radically sacramental structure, or what is sometimes called a “symbolic ontology,” indicating its saturation with meaning. The strict division between is and ought, by contrast, would seem to entail just the opposite of these consequences of creation out of nothing.

To situate his understanding vis-à-vis Rhonheimer’s, Crawford showcases, in his article, “Natural Law and the Body: Between Deductivism and Parallelism,” Eberhard Schockenhoff’s description of four varying positions on the interpretation of practical as examples.

137 Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body: Between Deductivism and Parallelism,” 340-1. See Rhonheimer, The Perspective of the Acting Person, 172. David L. Schindler, drawing upon Balthasar’s understanding of the “unity-within-distinctness” of form and event, would add to this list, the true and the good. See Schindler, “Is Truth Ugly?,” 718-9. It seems to me the point in each case is to see an intrinsic relation between such polarities, finally realizable in a third thing interior to and yet beyond both aspects. So form and event are “two aspects of a single whole” (D. C. Schindler, Dramatic Structure of Truth, 25), the true and the good are one in beauty (“Is Truth Ugly?, 718, 720f), body and soul are one in a human person, natural and moral species are one in a human act and, likewise, is and ought, subject and object are one in being, fact and value are one in res, nature and freedom are one in act, and so on, presumably because this is the structure of being itself. In fact, esse is the overarching (supra-) “third” of each of these relations, and being is convertible with love, according to Balthasar.

Each subsequent position finds a closer link with the natural inclinations of man than the one preceding it. In both the second and third variants, Schockenhoff depicts practical reason as operating “strictly parallel to theoretical reason;” while the second variant appears to be Schockenhoff’s, he identifies Rhonheimer with the third. Indeed, according to Crawford, both Schockenhoff and Rhonheimer identify their respective positions on speculative and practical reason as “parallelism.” The question then is whether parallelism in the sense understood especially, for our purposes, by Rhonheimer, sufficiently avoids a dualistic interpretation of theoretical and practical reason. The reader will recall that Balthasar’s “nuptial” and “fruitful” approach to interpreting subject and object, what Schindler calls an “ontology of generosity,” is far removed from a dualistic interpretation of being, that is, a “Cartesian ontology.”

---


140 For example, #4 is more integrated in the inclinations than #3, and #3 more so than #2.

141 Ibid., 141, as cited in Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 339, 341.


143 Ibid., 341.

144 Ibid., 345. For our purposes, see Rhonheimer, *Perspective of the Acting Person*, 96, 172, and 270f.

145 Since Rhonheimer’s position is more integrative of the inclinations than the second model, identifying it as dualistic would necessarily imply that the second, presumably Schockenhoff’s preference, is even more separatist.

Interestingly, Rhonheimer is also concerned about avoiding a “dualistic fallacy” which would counterpoise nature and morality.\textsuperscript{147} He states that such a polarizing description of the two realms “favors a physicalist understanding of natural law,” such that “‘law’ is identified with the merely natural structures and ends upon which a moral normativity is conferred in an immediate way.”\textsuperscript{148} In other words, Rhonheimer believes a dualistic speculative reading of nature and freedom tends one to a monistic practical reading of human action whereby the natural order is perceived to already contain the “oughts” that morality interprets.\textsuperscript{149} For, according to this understanding, as soon as one knows what nature is ordered to, then one has all the moral bearings one needs to deduce how to act. Starting with one extreme—dualism—the moral actor ends in another—deductivism.\textsuperscript{150}

To circumvent the initial dualistic reading, then, Rhonheimer appeals to the Thomistic understanding of natural law as “none other than the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.”\textsuperscript{151} This leads him to claim that human reason refers, “in the establishing

\begin{footnotes}
\item[147] Rhonheimer, \textit{Perspective of the Acting Person}, 158f.
\item[148] Ibid., 161. See Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 341.
\item[149] It seems to me that practical reason, while guided in every instance by the knowledge that natural forms provide via sense perception, as well as the desires incumbent in the inclinations, receives the range of its “oughts” from its participation by nature in the eternal reason of God, i.e. natural law, from the revelation of divine positive law, from civil and ecclesial law, from specific interior movements of the Holy Spirit, and from familial, cultural, and social mores. What is more, all of these “oughts” would need to be reinterpreted, certainly for Balthasar, in terms proper to the theological mission of the acting person to give himself away completely and forever in self-abandoning communion.
\item[150] This much we can agree on. Avoiding both of these extremes is of course Crawford’s thesis in “Natural Law and the Body: Between Parallelism and Deductivism.”
\end{footnotes}
of its normativity, not so much to ‘nature’ or to a ‘natural order’ as to divine reason!”

Again, “Human reason, therefore, because it is the natural law, refers back not to nature but to God.” Now, why Rhonheimer wishes to identify the natural law with human reason simply, providing no account here of the distinctive role of speculative reason in matters of demonstration, for St. Thomas, is a question worth considering. I can only think he means this in the sense that “practical reason, because it is natural law and proceeds on the basis of the natural law, is really the authoritative guide for action, imposes duties, and formulates rights” (emphasis added). In any case, his conclusion above that human reason, which of course includes both speculative and practical dimensions, does not refer to nature, brackets all-together the ontological-aesthetic dimension in action, as though what is good to pursue, e.g. “preserving human life,” “sexual intercourse, education of offspring, and so forth,” can be understood without first knowing what human life, sex, and education actually are. So while Rhonheimer understands reason to be at work in man’s inclinations as “form to matter,” something quite congruence with Balthasar’s nuptial vision of reality, he leaves little account of how eternal reason might also be pervasive through the whole of being,


154 ST, I-II, q. 94, a. 2: “[T]he precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason. . . .” “[P]raecepta legis naturae hoc modo se habent ad rationem practicam, sicut principia prima demonstrationum se habent ad rationem speculativam. . . .”


156 ST, I-II, q. 94, a. 2. These examples are taken from St. Thomas’s account of secondary precepts of the natural law.

created through the divine Logos (see Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:15-20; Rm 8:22; Eph 1:9-10; 1 Cor 15:28; Heb 1:2). In fact, Rhonheimer expressly states, “We do not find the divine logos either in nature or ‘on tablets of stone’” (emphasis added). . . Rhonheimer’s position here could be contrasted sharply with Balthasar’s acceptance of the cosmological worldview proper to the Scholastics, even as Balthasar would want to theologically clothe this understanding of the divine Logos with the humanity of Christ for a more adequate interpretation of cosmic being as co-extensive with love. For his part, Crawford cites Pope Benedict XVI to counter Rhonheimer’s position:

[T]he Church believes that in the beginning was the Logos and that therefore being itself bears the language of the Logos—not just mathematical, but also aesthetical and moral reason. This is what is meant when the Church insists that “nature” has a moral expression. No one is saying that biologism should become the standard of man. That viewpoint has been recommended only by some behavioral scientists.

Moreover, Rhonheimer rightly notes the differing first principles of practical and speculative reason, but then concludes that they thus have differing “starting points” and

---

158 This list of scriptural references is an edited version of what Peter Casarella finds in David L. Schindler’s work. See “Trinity and Creation: David L. Schindler and the Catholic Tradition,” in Being Holy in the World, 48.

159 Rhonheimer, Perspective of the Acting Person, 172. Is nature a “tablet of stone”?

160 See LAC, 15-30.

161 Benedict XVI, “The Only Valid Bulwark Against Arbitrary Power,” address to the participants of the International Congress on Natural Law, organized by the Pontifical Lateran University of Rome, February 22, 2007, accessed March 17, 2012, http://www.zenit.org/article-18989?l=english, as cited in Natural Law and the Body,” 328. Regarding the phrase, “‘nature’ has a moral expression,” Benedict is affirming that the forms of the natural world are intelligibly ordered by God toward their own fulfillment or fruition, thereby expressing a Gestalt and telos which must be assessed morally, that is, not mechanically or simply as instrument for one’s use.

162 See ST, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.
therefore stand in “parallel” relation. On this reading, a question arises as to whether Rhonheimer takes sufficient account of practical reason’s dependence from the start on speculative reason, itself informed through the senses and, just so far, through the “exterior” world. Does not the “exterior” natural order, the aesthetically perceived order, after all, participate in the eternal law in a passive way, according to St. Thomas? Staying with Thomas here, this would seem to be his understanding of the first two marks of the natural law, which pertain, analogously (similitudinem), to (1) all substances, and to (2) all animals, not just rational ones:


164 Rhonheimer, *Perspective of the Acting Person*, esp. 270f.

165 Of course, from a Balthasarian perspective, speculative reason would need also to depend on practical reason to truly be nuptial. Rhonheimer grasps an aspect of this point when he states: “[T]he metaphysics of man (philosophical anthropology) presupposes this practical experience of the natural law: the natural law as natural knowing of good is the presupposition of knowledge of human nature.” *Perspective of the Acting Person*, 178. See Crawford, “Nature and the Body,” 348.

166 After noting “an independence” between theoretical and practical reason because of “their own [respective] unassailable starting point,” Rhonheimer concludes that “Metaphysics . . . is rather a subsequent illumination and deeper explication of independent, self-experienced practical reasoning by the subject of action” (emphasis added). *Perspective of the Acting Person*, 96. This understanding seems to me to be turned on its head. Again, what are we deliberating about? The good cannot be assessed without first knowing being (even as every act of knowing is moved by the will). Rhonheimer himself acknowledges this at a later point in his book (274), but not without situating theoretical reason only within, as a “minor premise,” the order of practical reasoning about action (271). “[T]his is the decisive point,” he states, “to know what is the-good-for-man” and to know that we are moral subjects does not require a study of metaphysics and anthropology” (276). While “study” is not strictly necessary for these practical ends, hopefully we can also see the decisive point Rhonheimer does not emphasize: that the study of metaphysics and anthropology elucidates what it is that we are engaging in action and therefore what it is that we perceive as good to pursue.

167 See ST, I-II, q. 91, a. 2: “Unde cum omnia quae divinae providentiae subduntur, a lege aeterna regulentur et mensurentur, ut ex dictis patet; manifestum est quod omnia participant aliquiliter legem aeternam, inquantum scilicet ex impressione eius habent inclinationes in proprios actus et fines.” In this way, eternal reason “weds” the non-rational order of being inextricably to the human action which engages it “according to the order of natural inclinations.” See ST, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

168 ST, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.
Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law. Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law. Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, "which nature has taught to all animals" [Pandect. Just. I, tit. i], such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth.169

Now, I would not expect Rhonheimer to quibble with Thomas’s reasoning here; I only wish to suggest that the “parallelism” which he proposes, and his deliberate undermining of metaphysical analysis for moral action170—itself depending, no doubt, on his contra-magisterial belief that “we do not find the divine logos . . . in nature”—situates the natural order and moral behavior in dualistic terms.

In contrast to Rhonheimer, Crawford pays due emphasis to the human body as “also . . . ‘similar’ to God,”171 in the words of John Paul II, since “all of being is an expression of

---

169 ST, I-II, a. 94, q. 2. The text in its full context reads: “Quia vero bonum habet rationem finis, malum autem rationem contrarii, inde est quod omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda. Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium, est ordo praecipuum legis naturae. Inest enim primo inclinationi homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis, prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam. Et secundum hanc inclinationem, pertinent ad legem naturalem ea per quae vita hominum conservatur, et contrarium impeditur. Secundo inest homini inclinationi ad aliqum magis specialia, secundum naturam in qua communicat cum ceteris animalibus. Et secundum hoc, dicuntur ea esse de lege naturali quae natura omnia animalia docuit, ut est coniunctio maris et feminae, et educatio liberorum, et similia. Tertio modo inest homini inclinationi ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria, sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in socieitate vivat. Et secundum hoc, ad legem naturalem pertinent ea quae ad huiusmodi inclinationem spectant, utpote quod homo ignorantiam vitet, quod alios non offendat cum quibus debet conversari, et cetera huiusmodi quae ad hoc spectant.”

170 See Rhonheimer, Perspective of the Acting Person 96, inter alia.

171 John Paul II, Man and Woman He Created Them, 164, as cited in Crawford, “Natural Law and
God’s Logos.” Crawford also surmises that “the relationship between speculative and practical reason is not that of “parallel” lines of thought . . . ” He offers his own model of interpretation instead:

A better image would be, perhaps, trinitarian, viz. a relationship of circumincession. That is to say, while practical and speculative reason are distinct, at the same time they are neither different things nor are they sealed off from each other. In short, the idea of circumincession implies that, while remaining distinct, neither lacks a specific share in what is innermost to the other.

Crawford’s depiction of a trinitarian or circumincessive relationship between theoretical and practical reason, which is to say a relation which implies a unity-in-distinction between the two orders of intelligence, shows strong similarities with Balthasar’s nuptial understanding of being. In fact, Crawford cites Balthasar’s depiction of the relation between contemplation and action to indicate an analogy with theoretical and practical reason. What is of especial

---


173 Ibid., 348.

174 Ibid. Crawford continues, “This is partly captured by Rhonheimer when he argues that speculative reasoning about the human person would be woefully inadequate or even impossible without practical reason. How could anyone claim to know about the human person without knowing about his inclinations, goods, and the moral life that these spawn?” Ibid. Likewise, “nothing is known simply for the sake of knowing it. Indeed, the relationship between reason and knowing the truth is closely analogous to that between the two dimensions of love, which is never simply disinterested nor simply self-seeking. While it is of course possible to consider an act of knowing strictly from the point of view of speculation, or an act of seeking the truth only for the sake of knowing the truth and nothing more, it must be remembered that to do so is to consider speculative reason and the act of knowing the truth in a highly abstract fashion. Insofar as anyone does anything, he does it in view of attaining some good. Hence, striving to understand being as being in speculative reason is always and concretely saturated with practical implications. Thus, while conceptually distinct, speculative and practical functions of reason are never concretely separate.” Ibid., 348-9.

175 See Ibid., 349, fn. 68.
importance in order to better understand how such a nuptial logic within these orders is possible, is that one or the other pole or even both together are never wholly operative on their own, but only in light of a third beyond and within them.176 Crawford explains:

> This means that inclinations and appetites presuppose a prior order. This order is not simply known speculatively and then given a practical meaning. Nor, again, is it simply created by practical reason. Rather, it is at once speculative and practical, contemplative and creative, since it is rooted in a depth that encompasses both the “already” and the “not yet.”177

In making reference to the eternal law which undergirds these respective orders,178 Crawford appeals, perhaps inadvertently, to Balthasar’s fourth distinction in being: that the dynamic of being in mutually dependent relation and symbolic glory is itself grounded in God who, as first cause, determines being at every level.179 Pursuant to this line of reasoning, Crawford surmises that

> Ethical knowing . . . is neither a deduction from a metaphysics nor, again, a purely creative positing of the moral agent. It is original, but its originality consists in a mysterious simultaneity of “forward” and “backward” perspectives, of creativity in obedience to the origin.180

---

176 Balthasar calls “the sole source of fruitfulness both of action and contemplation: charity.” “Action and Contemplation,” 239. Over a decade later he phrases the source of their unity this way: “a burning readiness to be used and consumed for the salvation and redemption of the world.” “Beyond Action and Contemplation?,” 306. For human reason in its two applications, the source or third would have to be human reason in the natural order, and eternal reason in the divine. Of course, divine reason is thoroughly a matter of self-abandoning love, for Balthasar.

177 Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 352.

178 See Ibid., 345, 347.

179 This is the summary statement given in Section II.2 above.

180 Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 333. Crawford’s expression, “a mysterious simultaneity of ‘forward’ and ‘backward’ perspectives, of creativity in obedience to the origin,” implies that ethical knowing involves both perceiving the natural world as God intended it in its form and finality (see “backward”), as well as making distinct choices or actions regarding it (see “forward”). Origin refers to God,
After citing Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI amply concerning the human body and, indeed, all of creation as a sign and expression of the divine, Crawford’s hallmark of ethical knowing—“creativity in obedience to the origin”—could just as well be termed Balthasarian. This is an obedience not simply to form or nature as in deductivism, and surely not just to intention either, which parallelism appears open to, but also and more radically to the origin of both nature and intention. In the natural order, this could be termed, as Crawford does, the “vocation” of being.

(c.) Concluding Remarks on Speculative and Practical Reasoning

We have now come full circle to Balthasar’s implied understanding of the mutuality in difference of aestheticism and personalism in a Catholic form of life. If we consider speculative reasoning to correspond most emphatically to aestheticism, and practical reasoning to best correspond to personalism, as Balthasar understands them, then we have

and creativity to the work of moral reasoning in dependence on God and in light of his order, but not as an activity of simply replicating the perceived order.

181 This is of course to be understood analogically according to different orders of being. See especially Crawford, “Natural Law and the Body,” 327-33 for references from Benedict and John Paul which preface Crawford’s argument.

182 See Rhonheimer, Perspective of the Acting Person, 195-249 on the object of the human act, which he considers to be constituted (simply?) by intentionality (241, inter alia).


184 I offer the following remarks to clarify what I believe to be the central implications of the foregoing arguments on speculative and practical reasoning. The point now is not to offer new data, but rather to reflect on what has been conveyed in this relation relative to Balthasar’s contribution to ethics as a whole.

185 Aestheticism and personalism could just as well be linked, with some variation, to Balthasar’s articulation of “Die Kosmologische Reduktion,” and “Die Anthropologische Reduktion,” respectively. See LAC, 15-30.
recourse to better understand how Christ’s love makes a difference for both perception and human response in action, from a Balthasarian perspective.

Reinterpreted in the Word’s constituting love, that is to say, in truth, perception of the natural order is oriented to finding the inherent splendor in the forms perceived and, from there, the mysterious and infinite glory which grounds them as gifts to assess in gratitude. All of being becomes identified by its inherent, if analogous, beauty, in this respect, and persons are moved to worship the God who creates the world. In terms of the theo-drama, everything conceived in love has a part to play in the cosmic symphony for God’s glory. When man assesses an object of being, he is therefore simultaneously judging a subject of being with its own inner telos or “vocation,” to use Crawford’s language. In light of love, matter is thus seen less as something to be manipulated for one’s own end, and more to be cared for and nurtured along its path in the theo-drama. Again, the human subject and the sensible good (including especially the material ground for the subject, i.e. the human body), do not reside in separate realms where their interaction can only be mediated by force: manipulation or competition. Nor should the inherent quality of an “exterior” sensible being

186 This can be seen especially with respect to Balthasar’s understanding of the fourth distinction in being. See GLI, 119.

187 Ibid.


189 This is not an argument for animal and ecological preservation at all costs. A thing’s part or service, might be precisely “to give” of its very form or life for the sake of another, particularly for the most dignified of God’s creatures: man. That being said, even with respect to those things not equal in value to human beings, care and service must be given as appropriate to their level of being in perception augmented by love.
be logically abstracted from or bracketed, as it were, because it would not seem to pertain to me and my actions. All created beings are “constitutively related,” to use David L. Schindler’s term, and are therefore here to serve each other, each in their own way. This is something of how love augments perception and speculative reasoning, from a Balthasarian perspective.\textsuperscript{190}

With respect to practical reasoning, reinterpreted in the same Christocentric love, what the human person ought to do is co-extensive with his mission in life, from a Balthasarian point of view. The question of personal mission, itself conceived as an integral aspect of the cosmic splendor and the return of all things back to God, that is, in terms of the cosmic dimension of reality, is perceived now also from within, according to the subject of morality, i.e. the anthropological dimension. So practical reasoning is not simply an internal charter for human action, under this perspective, but an internal charter for the realization of one’s mission in the cosmic liturgy. The interplay of the natural and theological virtues is therefore to be perceived according to the unique mission of each acting person, for Balthasar. What is more, even the reinterpretation of practical reasoning which Christian

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{190} Another anecdote may help here. On the morning of this writing, I attended a Mass at which the priest-homilist spoke about the “truth” of perceiving the ill and the lame as “disgusting,” “frustrating,” and “annoying.” Pleased with his somewhat shocking description, he went on to indicate how necessary it is to love such persons in Christian charity anyway, despite the “natural instinct” to look the other way. He wanted, of course, to both avoid whitewashing the truth of their condition, while at the same time to encourage, in spite of this truth, the radical Christian response of love for them. But here is where a Balthasarian perspective would approach this matter differently: Since Christ’s love sets the terms for a theological aesthetic from the beginning, love reorients basic human perception from the beginning. I no longer see the lame as “disgusting,” for instance, but rather as other Christ’s. Instead of having to overcome, constantly, as it were, a natural aversion to those deeply afflicted in mind or body, I am attracted to them out of love and moved by pity, perhaps even empathy. The effective difference then, all other matters being equal, is precisely how I treat them, the way or the manner. I treat them with sincere peace and joy in their presence, and as other Christ’s, not as person’s to normally avoid but which, in all Christian heroism, I have condescended to help. In Blessed Teresa of Calcutta’s words, “It is not how much you do, but how much love you put into the doing that matters.” See “Mother Teresa Quotations: Seek Inspiration in These Words,” About.com Quotations, ed. Simran Khurana, accessed March 17, 2012, http://quotations.about.com/od/morepeople/a/teresa_quote3.htm. The truth is, God would never see such persons as disgusting. Love changes perception, and perception changes love.
\end{footnote}
love enjoins is meant to be augmented by the call to realize the *communio* which exists as form or structure between persons already related in nature and being, according to Balthasar’s reasoning.\(^{191}\) So the mission which one has, which again, bespeaks in no small part what one ought to do in particular cases, is itself informed by Christ’s mission in the world for the sake of the world. In other words, one’s mission is both subjectively and objectively constituted in Christ. This is something of how love augments practical reasoning, from a Balthasarian perspective.

Finally, with the reinterpretation love provides we better see with Balthasar how natural law is itself insufficient for moral theory and thus stands as a pointer to Christian revelation, and not as an enclosed system.\(^{192}\) Let me give two examples: (1) My natural desire to live, my *eros* to preserve my life, now transformed in *agape*, becomes informed by and thus subordinate to the Christian desire to offer my life in martyrdom. The full truth of the natural desire to live, perceived in this light, includes the inherent meaning it grants to offer my life to God in martyrdom, for martyrdom would be of little value if I never cared to live. (2) Similarly, *agape* transforms the desire for sexual intercourse to rather share intimate love with others for the sake of the love between them, either in consecrated life where intercourse is renounced or, to an objectively lower but still operative extent, in sacramental marriage where intercourse is situated within vowed love. The natural desire for sexual intercourse, now perceived in Christian love, reveals its full truth only integral to its loving self-offering in a Christian state of life. For Balthasar, such reinterpretations of the natural

\(^{191}\) Love as the inner form of a vow, for Balthasar. See Chapter Three above.

desires for life and sex which love provides finally need to be inserted into a perspective which gives pride of place to one’s divinely given mission of dispenable and ready love. This is to say that God may call persons to express these natural desires according to their respective missions, but only in such a way that the form of Christ embodied in the evangelical counsels is realized spiritually in each of these instances. So here then are two examples in which a Christian reinterpretation of aestheticism in nature can become harmonious with a reinterpretation of personalism in an artistry of love.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to return to Balthasar’s theological aestheticism, his methodology as articulated in the first chapter, to present a kind of bookend to his life work’s bearing on the *status quaestionis* of moral theology today. As an articulation of my own answer to Balthasar’s contribution to ethics, to take nothing away from Balthasar’s personal applications (Ch. 4) or David Schindler’s (Ch. 5), I thought it first important to reestablish what is arguably his greatest gift to moral thinking: an entirely holistic, Christocentric perspective of reality which takes shape as a Catholic form of life. This “artistry of love,” as I have also called it, has the particular advantage of uniting origin of faith and being (= God), worship, and deed. It helps us consider moral theology within the ambit of spiritual and dogmatic theology, at all times and in all respects, and thus reunite theology and sanctity.

After describing a Catholic form of life, its interpenetration in the world, and the particular shape it takes in terms of nuptiality and fruitfulness, the majority of this chapter
has focused on how such an artistry of love might contribute to different models of speculative and practical reason in Catholic ethical theory today. The importance of considering rightly these proposals redounds precisely on the question of uniting origin, worship, and deed. If Christ’s “way of love” both unites and surpasses aestheticism and personalism conventionally understood, as Balthasar purports, then it has much to offer in the way of raising moral inquiry to a task befitting a theologian-saint.

Livio Melina’s “dynamic model” was first considered in this respect. As one whose work represents an attempt to integrate Balthasar’s thought in moral theology, I have argued that Melina nevertheless does not do justice to the ontological-aesthetic dimension of love, which Balthasar offers, in his proposed ecclesial model for action. Martin Rhoheimer, whose ethical thought was next considered, appears to take a similar direction as Melina, but perhaps a step further. In the self-described “parallelism” which he sees between theoretical and practical reason, Rhoheimer advances what I take to be a dualistic account of the subject of action and the subject of being, even as Rhoheimer himself wishes to avoid such dualism by defining (the only morally relevant?) nature in terms of human reason. Finally, David Crawford’s work was considered in this respect, especially since Crawford, himself a moral theologian often in debate with Rhoheimer, offers an account of ethical theory which could well be considered Balthasarian in insight. Crawford’s “triune and circumincessive” understanding of the relation between speculative and practical reasoning, which considers this relation as one of unity-in-distinction, shows an especial nuptial and fruitful logic

193 LAC, 51-60.

indicative of how Balthasar understands the polarity of being. The end result is a fundamental perspective on life and morality which sees one’s deeds integrally woven into one’s worship (or not) of the triune God. Catholic culture becomes greatly esteemed in this light and each Christian can better see himself as an artist of love.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to introduce the reader to Balthasar’s theological perspective on life to indicate how such an integrative, Christological viewpoint contributes to ethical query. This has been done in a speculative manner in Part One by disclosing in depth his philosophically inclusive, Christological theology of love. It is has been done in a practical manner in Part Two by demonstrating how authors who are influenced by such a holistic perspective, including Balthasar himself, adopt his general framework, interpret ethical questions within that framework, and propose answers to ethical questions in accord with that framework.

Since Balthasar was neither a systematician nor a moral theologian, there is no discernible moral method in his thought. In fact, for Balthasar, systematizing theology risks obscuring its beautiful form (Gestalt) to the point that it becomes significantly less attractive and meaningful than it is meant to be. In losing its attractiveness, the reader simultaneously finds his desire for theology’s object—the triune God—bracketed from his inquiry, hopefully (although surely not always) to be rediscovered in a specifically spiritual moment such as prayer. The answer to reintegrating theology and spirituality, and thus theologians and saints, is therefore, for Balthasar, to reintegrate theology’s sub-disciplines in the holistic norm of Jesus Christ’s existence. It is to let the reality of Jesus’ life, his “self-interpreting love,”1 to fully inform, if not always in terminology, one’s understanding and articulation of each of the sub-disciplines, including, of course, moral theology and ethics. He who is both God and man, the bridge between eternity and time, Creator and creature, displays in his earthly

1 LAC, 56. “… selbst auslegende Offenbarungs-Gestalt der Liebe. . . .” GNL, 36.
reality a form of love which showcases the integral meaning of being and action, for Balthasar. Insofar as one sees Jesus for who he truly is, which is to say, in his divine and human relations, one has the resources to perceive again, differently and for the first time, as it were, the meaning of reality and its most fruitful applications in human action. The centrality of Balthasar’s position is the perception of self-abandoning, *communio* love as integral to being and persons. This perspective is not exclusive to the Swiss theologian, however. It arguably obtains in all of the theologian-saints of the Catholic tradition. As the argument goes, Balthasar’s general perspective, so articulated, is simply a fully “Catholic” perspective. It is therefore not meant to be placed alongside the viewpoints of so many other theologians and philosophers in the tradition, particularly those of the modern era where the division between theology and sanctity is most pronounced, but it is rather meant to reintegrate the contributions of those tied to particular sub-disciplines in a reality both beyond and within each of these fields. This reality is Jesus Christ.

The content of this Christological form or framework has been illustrated in different ways throughout this work. Here I recall for the reader those tenets listed in the General Introduction: (a) a holistic vision of theology centered on the person of Christ not only as the end of man’s striving but also as the *source* and *manner* by which he accounts for all of his actions, (b) the intrinsic link between theology, spirituality, and morality, and, therefore, God, worship, and deed, (c) the integral place of the beauty of obediential, surrendering love in one’s conception of being and action, (d) the importance of “seeing the form” of a thing *in the above light* in order to consider it properly in ethical discourse, (e) the nuptiality and

---

fruitfulness of being, (f) the priority of the evangelical counsels for all forms of life, (g) a stress on communal rather than individualistic living practices, (h) the decisive importance of thanksgiving and child-like wonder, (i) freedom’s ordination to a vow of love as a counter to disinterested liberty, (j) a general aversion to technology as a positive disruption of the gift-character of reality, (k) an emphasis on a contemplative-active mode of life, (l) the promotion of Catholic culture through deed and art, (m) the self-abandonment required in remaining completely disposable to the dramatic mission the Lord entrusts oneself with, (n) his fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, and (o) his critical dependence on the thought of the saints as “the authentic interpreters of the theo-drama.”

While each of these points is formative of his claim that “The very structure of our ethics changes as we draw near to or away from love,” they do not of themselves comprise an ethics in the ordinary sense. They are rather aspects of a single theological whole, teased out of his thought and life example, which make a claim on all those who would seek to apply his perspective to particular moral questions. Part Two of this work has shown how Balthasar, Schindler, Crawford, and I apply different aspects of this perspective to different ethical concerns without contradicting any of the others. In return, the reader should have come to perceive how he himself could apply a Balthasarian theological perspective to his own moral analyses.

What is more, we have seen how Balthasar’s (Christological) theology of love, the only theology he has at bottom, encourages Christian behavior and discourages unethical

---

4 CSL, 34.
conduct without recourse to natural law, moral action theory, virtue theory, or some other abstract and/or academic configuration of morality. Certainly his objective does not cancel the legitimacy, indeed the irreducible value of these theories, rather it discloses their validity as relative to and contextualized by a most sound theology of love. Balthasar’s vision, and others of like mind, illuminates the merits and demerits of other moral investigations, revealing how they ought not be whole-scale approaches in their own right. He suggests that they remain pointers to what is essential, the personal and universal norm of Christ. Perhaps this means that the most distinguishing aspect of his thought is one of methodology. By endeavoring to apply his Christocentric perspective from the beginning of an inquiry, without rather beginning from a so-called “cosmological” or “anthropological” approach, Balthasar and those of like mind are able to see and articulate the Christian difference in being and action with added depth and reach.

Indeed, understanding with Balthasar that Christ overcomes the world through obediential, vowed love ordered to communion, means that the fulfillment of being, and human beings in particular, occurs paradoxically through disponable, surrendering love, analogously understood according to different levels of being. Because Balthasar sees this paradoxical truth and is not distracted from its inherent radicalism as vowed love, he can go on to articulate an ontology, with its lynchpin the “fourfold difference in being,” which leads Adrian Walker to claim him as a “Master of Theological Renewal.” Balthasar can go on to show how wonder is properly the continuous response to being, he can indicate being’s mutual reciprocity, its beauty precisely in its poverty, its self-abandoning fruitfulness, its call

---

to worship, and its ordering to everlasting communion in the triune God. This he can make
evident at the root of being and action. In fact, Balthasar’s reasoning has led us to understand
that every appropriation of created things that does not respect this ordering (if not extol it as
the saints would)—as roles in the Church, as sexual fruitfulness, as ownership, as stem-cell
research, as politics and economics, as speech, as dress, as arranging one’s home, as
calculating one’s plans, as serving another, as anything—is to that extent a mechanical
imposition, an instrumentation, an act of utilitarianism. Moreover, because Balthasar’s
theological aestheticism is finally a revelation of the glory of the person of Jesus Christ as the
principal actor in his Father’s drama, directed by the Holy Spirit, Balthasar can show how
one’s personal mission in Christ is a mission which, precisely in its spirit of poverty, chastity,
and obedience, embodies the nexus of love just mentioned as a bit part in the cosmic liturgy.

In conclusion, I surmise that Balthasar’s capacity to integrate the theological
disciplines and apply them as a unity to the understanding of being as such allows him to
advance a theological (ontological-) aestheticism which views every created thing and hence
every value to be inwardly ordered to give itself away completely and forever for the sake of
communion. This integrated perspective, complete with a number of identifiable tenets,
lends adherents to see moral questions more integrally and wisely, leading them to
conclusions which better understand and hence guard the mystery and sacredness of being in
its proper Christological light. Furthermore, because Balthasar wishes to see all human
endeavors in light of the “Call of Christ” upon persons, that is, in light of personal missions,
the evaluation of a human act for him does not simply pertain to whether it is good in itself,
but it also regards whether the act is advantageous for each of the unique persons involved.
For Balthasar, each human act is tied immediately to the spiritual horizon in which the person performing the act and all those affected by it are oriented by grace. In this way, Balthasar unites origin of faith and being, worship, and deed in one’s participation by grace in the mission of Jesus Christ. Such is how Balthasar can contribute to ethics without being an ethicist in the conventional sense.
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources: Hans Urs von Balthasar


Christlicher Stand. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1981.


“The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves.” Communio 24 (1997): 347-96 RT.


“How Weighty is the Argument from ‘Uninterrupted Tradition’ to Justify the Male Priesthood?” Communio 23 (1996): 185-92 RT.


“Natural Law and Private Ownership.” Communio 17 (1990): 105-19 RT.


**Secondary Sources: Hans Urs von Balthasar**


Other Sources


http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11061905_il-fermo-proposito_en.html.


http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25031954_sacra-virginitas_en.html.


______.  “The Church and Man’s Calling.”  In *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II.*  Vol. 5.  1969.


______. “Letter to the Editor.” Crisis, April 2006.


______. “We Love God in All that We Love.” Interview by Emily Reilly. Inside the Vatican, April 2008.


