

**KARL BARTH AND HANS URS VON BALTHASAR:
A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

by

STEPHEN DAVID WIGLEY

A thesis submitted to
the University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Theology and Religion
School of Historical Studies
The University of Birmingham
January 2006

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between two major twentieth century theologians, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. It seeks to show how their meeting, resulting in von Balthasar's seminal study *The Theology of Karl Barth*, goes on to influence von Balthasar's theological development throughout his trilogy beginning with *The Glory of the Lord*, continuing in the *Theo-Drama* and concluding with the *Theo-Logic*. In particular it explores the significance of the debate over the 'analogy of being' and seeks to show that von Balthasar's decision to structure his trilogy around the transcendentals of 'being', the beautiful, the good and the true, results from his re-affirmation of the role of analogy in light of his debate with Barth. It will also suggest that von Balthasar's adoption of a 'theo-dramatic' approach to God's saving action and assertion of the role of Church as a 'theo-dramatic character' in her own right is prompted by concern over what he alleges to be 'christological constriction' and an inadequate doctrine of the Church in Barth. This argument will be conducted in dialogue with other theologians and interpreters of von Balthasar and conclude with a personal reflection on how the issues raised remain relevant today.

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Jenny who, though no great proponent of either Barth or von Balthasar, knew how much this project meant to me and encouraged me to see it through. “Greater love hath no wife than this... “

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my debt to David Ford and Iain Torrance who first pointed me in the way of Barth; to Rowan Williams who first suggested that I should also look at von Balthasar; to my church colleagues and congregations who have borne with and supported me during my studies; and above all to Karen Kilby and Frances Young who have not only supervised but encouraged me to believe that this thesis is worth undertaking.

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

List of Abbreviations

1) Karl Barth

FQI *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931) tr. Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM, 1960)

CD *Church Dogmatics* (1932-67) tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2nd edition 1975)

2) Hans Urs von Balthasar

KB *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (1951) tr. Edward T. Oakes, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)

GL1 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume I: *Seeing the Form* (1961) tr. Erasmo Leivà-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982)

GL2 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume II: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles* (1962) tr. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984)

GL3 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume III: *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (1962) tr. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)

GL4 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume IV: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* (1967) tr. Brian McNeil, Andrew Louth, John Saward, Rowan Williams, and Oliver Davies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989)

- GL5 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume V: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (1965) tr. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991)
- GL6 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume VI: *Theology: the Old Covenant* (1967) tr. Brian McNeil and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- GL7 *The Glory of the Lord*, volume VII: *Theology: the New Covenant* (1969) tr. Brian McNeil, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark & San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989)
- TD1 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume I: *Prolegomena* (1973) tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988)
- TD2 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume II: *Dramatic Personae: Man in God* (1976) tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990)
- TD3 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (1978) tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992)
- TD4 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume IV: *The Action* (1980) tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)
- TD5 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume V: *The Final Act* (1983) tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998)
- TL1 *Theo-Logic*, volume I: *Truth of the World* (1985) tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000)
- TL2 *Theo-Logic*, volume II: *Truth of God* (1985) tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004)
- TL3 *Theo-Logic*, volume I: *The Spirit of Truth* (1987) tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005)

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

Table of Contents

Abstract

Dedication

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

Introduction to the Thesis Page 1

Chapter 1) 'No brief encounter':

the relationship between Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar Page 7

1.1) The background to their relationship Page 7

1.2) The influence of Przywara Page 14

Chapter 2) 'From dialectic to analogy': *The Theology of Karl Barth* Page 22

2.1) Introduction Page 22

2.2.1) Part I – Overture; a House Divided Page 26

2.2.2.1) Part II – The Form and Structure of Barth's Thought: Exposition Page 31

2.2.2.2) Part II – The Form and Structure of Barth's Thought: Interpretation Page 41

2.2.3) Part III – The Form and Structure of Catholic Thought Page 48

2.2.4) Part IV – Prospects for a Rapprochement Page 65

2.3) McCormack's challenge to von Balthasar's reading Page 68

2.4) Implications for von Balthasar's theology Page 76

Chapter 3) ‘Beauty and Being’: <i>The Glory of the Lord</i>	Page 84
3.1) Introduction – Why begin with beauty?	Page 84
3.2) Allowing beauty to speak	Page 90
3.3) Beauty and revelation; engaging with Chia	Page 112
3.4) Beauty and Being; the ongoing debate with Barth	Page 121
3.5) Summary and conclusions	Page 141
 Chapter 4 ‘Participating in the action’: the <i>Theo-Drama</i>	Page 147
4.1) Introduction – Setting the stage	Page 147
4.2) Getting down to the action – a theo-dramatic theory	Page 151
4.2.1) Introduction – the Prolegomena	Page 151
4.2.2) Anthropology – Man in God	Page 156
4.2.3) Christology – Persons in Christ	Page 158
4.2.4) Soteriology – The Action	Page 165
4.2.5) Eschatology – The Last Act	Page 172
4.3) Dramatic tension with Barth	Page 177
4.4) In company with Quash	Page 190
4.5) Summary and conclusions	Page 206
 Chapter 5) ‘Speaking the truth in love’: the <i>Theo-Logic</i>	Page 209
5.1) Introduction	Page 209
5.2) <i>Truth of the World</i>	Page 211
5.3) <i>Truth of God</i> and <i>The Spirit of Truth</i>	Page 217
5.4) With reference to Barth	Page 223

5.5) Summary and Conclusions	Page 225
------------------------------	----------

Chapter 6) Anselm: a case study

in the approaches of Barth and von Balthasar	Page 228
---	----------

6.1) Why Anselm?	Page 229
------------------	----------

6.2) Barth on Anselm	Page 230
----------------------	----------

6.3) Anselm in von Balthasar	Page 233
------------------------------	----------

6.4) Summary and Conclusions	Page 241
------------------------------	----------

Chapter 7) *Epilogue* and Concluding Reflections

7.1) <i>Epilogue</i>	Page 244
----------------------	----------

7.2) <i>The Theology of Karl Barth</i>	Page 247
--	----------

7.3) <i>The Glory of the Lord</i>	Page 251
-----------------------------------	----------

7.4) <i>The Theo-Drama</i>	Page 254
----------------------------	----------

7.5) <i>The Theo-Logic</i>	Page 256
----------------------------	----------

7.6) Other recent interpretations	Page 258
-----------------------------------	----------

7.7) 'Concluding unscientific postscript'	Page 264
---	----------

Bibliography	Page 277
---------------------	----------

Barth and von Balthasar: a critical engagement; an Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis explores the influence of Karl Barth on the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar as it developed. It seeks to show not just what von Balthasar took positively from his study of Barth, an influence which has been widely recognised by subsequent scholars, but also how the development of his theological trilogy is shaped by his critical re-appropriation of a theme which Barth rejects in his *Church Dogmatics*,¹ namely the *analogia entis* or analogy of being. It will show how von Balthasar's response to Barth's rejection of the analogy of being in favour of the analogy of faith, shapes the development of his own theology in *The Glory of the Lord*,² the *Theo-Drama*,³ and the *Theo-Logic*.⁴ For in basing his work firmly on the transcendentals of being, the beautiful, the good and the true, von Balthasar is both building on Barth's christocentric foundations and also explicitly countering his misconstrual of Catholic teaching on natural theology and the role of creation.

It will do this recognising that while the significance of von Balthasar's study *The Theology of Karl Barth*⁵ is widely accepted, the accuracy of his interpretation of Barth's theology, of a 'conversion' from 'dialectic' to 'analogy' occasioned by his 1931 study of Anselm, has recently been challenged. Bruce McCormack's *Karl Barth's*

¹ *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1932, and Zürich: EVZ, 1938-65) ET *Church Dogmatics* tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2nd Edition 1975) hereafter *CD*

² *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961- 69) ET *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982-89) hereafter *GL*

³ *Theodramatik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973-83) ET *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-98) hereafter *TD*

⁴ *Theologik* (Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1985-87) ET *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000-05) hereafter *TL*

⁵ *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1951) ; ET *The Theology of Karl Barth*, tr. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) hereafter *KB*

*Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*⁶ maintains instead that Barth remained throughout a 'critically realistic dialectical theologian', that his study on Anselm was not a turning point, and that other developments in terms of his understanding of christology and election were to have a much more decisive impact. This thesis will suggest that von Balthasar's interpretation of Barth is actually much more subtle and complex than McCormack's critique would allow. For in his study, von Balthasar is not just interpreting Barth but also responding to Barth's challenge to Catholic theology explicitly as a Catholic theologian; and part of his response will be to insist on a proper understanding and use of the analogy of being as crucial to all theology.

Accordingly we shall focus on those themes which he has drawn from Barth, as well as the ongoing debate about the centrality of analogy, and see how these shape the development of his own trilogy. In reviewing *The Glory of the Lord*, this study will explore how von Balthasar builds on the themes he has identified in Barth as important for Catholic theology, namely, 'the foundations for a Christocentrism', for the 'historicity of nature' and for the 'created character of worldly truth'. It will examine how von Balthasar develops Barth's rediscovery of the beauty and glory of God into a 'theological aesthetics.' At the same time it will also register von Balthasar's concerns about Barth, in particular his reduction of God's 'being' to 'act' and unwillingness to allow a proper role to creation. It will explain how, in seeking to establish a broader basis to the 'form' of beauty than simply the 'event' of God's revelation, von Balthasar will show how God's creation can come to share in that beauty which has its source and fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the one who personifies the analogy of being.

⁶ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, (Oxford: OUP, 1995)

In addressing the *Theo-Drama*, this thesis will examine von Balthasar's allegation of 'christological constriction'; the charge that Barth has so summed all things up in God's act in Christ, that there is no room left for any meaningful human response on a creaturely level. Given his concern to allow for a properly creaturely response to God, it is significant that here von Balthasar develops the concept of 'theo-drama', a drama in which human beings are given their own distinct roles to play alongside the principal protagonists within the divine Trinity. This thesis will also show how it is on such issues as the understanding of role and character and the relationship between divine and human freedom that the dialogue with Barth continues in detail.

Finally, this thesis will briefly review the *Theo-Logic*, noting how although the first volume predates his study of Barth, it will later be included in a trilogy which insists on the centrality of being and thus continues his ongoing debate with Barth. And in order to highlight both what these two theologians share in common as well as how their approaches differ, it will also look at their respective treatments of Anselm; how in Barth's approach it leads to the epistemological framework of Anselm's 'theological scheme' whereas for von Balthasar, it is only Anselm's 'aesthetic reason' which can offer a worthy human response to God's self-emptying love.

This focus upon his relationship with Barth is not intended to deny that there are other significant influences upon the development of von Balthasar's theology. In the background to the debate over analogy we shall examine the influence of his Jesuit colleague, Erich Przywara. We might equally have mentioned his close friend and

colleague from Fourvière days, Henri de Lubac, who was responsible perhaps more than any other for awakening his love for the Fathers and his early monographs on Origen, Maximus the Confessor and others. Nor should we ignore the fact that in choosing to follow the analogical method opened up by Przywara, he was to find himself increasingly at odds with the transcendental theology being developed by his fellow Jesuit, Karl Rahner, with its emphasis instead upon the human subject.

Moreover, von Balthasar himself always indicated that his writings were a secondary part of his work, regarding the opening up of the Church to the world and his work with Adrienne von Speyr in setting up the Community of St. John as his major mission. Indeed, conscious of the suspicion which surrounded the mystical experiences of Adrienne, which as her confessor he was to transcribe and publish through the publishing house Johannes Verlag which they had established, von Balthasar was always to stress that even his written work was to be viewed as a joint venture, in which their respective roles could not be separated. That much is clear from his summary of their work published in 1984, as *Unser Auftrag (Our Task)*.⁷

All these clearly have their influence upon von Balthasar's theology as well. In the *Theo-Drama* especially we can see the impact of the mystical experiences of Adrienne von Speyr on von Balthasar's account of the Easter Triduum, particularly surrounding the events of Holy Saturday and Christ's descent into hell. In *The Glory of the Lord*, we find his concern to rediscover something of that aesthetic vision which infused the work of the Fathers and which von Balthasar learnt from his friend

⁷ *Unser Auftrag* (1984) ET *Our Task*, tr. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)

and colleague Henri de Lubac. And in his 1947 work *Truth of the World*, later to re-appear as the first volume of the *Theo-Logic*, we can see how one of his principal concerns at this point was to counter the move to the subject of Karl Rahner and his transcendental theology with a contrasting emphasis upon the divine initiative in the human encounter with truth.

Nevertheless, the argument of this thesis is that the impact of his meeting with Barth and the theological friendship which emerged from it remains crucial. This has been noted by various scholars, not least by Medard Kehl, who, in an introduction to a collection of his writings, *The von Balthasar Reader*, observes how, 'In a very close, friendly and neighborly encounter of the two Basel theologians over a long period of time, a mutual give-and-take shaped a theology which, in each of them, took on a quite unmistakably unique form, but which nevertheless clearly manifests their far-reaching common ground and influence on each other.'⁸ And so, what we will be attempting is to show just how the theological influence from this critical relationship pans out systematically across the whole of von Balthasar's great trilogy.

At each stage, we will engage with the works of other scholars who have noted the significance of this relationship. We have already referred to Bruce McCormack's critique of *The Theology of Karl Barth*.⁹ We will also engage with Roland Chia when we come to look at *The Glory of the Lord*,¹⁰ and the works of Ben Quash when we

⁸ (Eds.) Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, *The von Balthasar Reader*, tr. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) p.23

⁹ See chapter 2, 'From Dialectic to Analogy – McCormack's challenge to von Balthasar's reading'

¹⁰ See chapter 3, 'Beauty and revelation – engaging with Chia'

examine the *Theo-Drama*,¹¹ before addressing the recent works of scholars such as Mongrain and McIntosh, who have played up the role of the Fathers in von Balthasar's thought and sought to make these the key influence upon his theology.¹²

What this thesis will seek to show is how von Balthasar, in picking up the debate over the analogy of being, will demonstrate that this issue is of fundamental importance, not just in the interpretation of Barth, but for the study of theology as a whole. How, through his study of Barth, von Balthasar will identify not just those points which Barth has to contribute to Catholic, and indeed to all theology, in terms of his christocentric focus and re-interpretation of the doctrine of election, but also those aspects where Barth's theology falls short, namely his lack of an adequate ontological basis to explain the relationship between God and creation which thereby denies the possibility of a proper creaturely response to God's grace in Christ. How these will be the themes which von Balthasar will pick up in his own great theological trilogy, founded as it is on the three fundamentals of being. And finally how his ongoing relationship with Barth will shape the way in which these themes are developed throughout that trilogy.

In approaching these themes, we are conscious that both Barth and von Balthasar use gender specific and what would now be regarded as exclusive language in their discussion of God. Our approach will aim to reflect their use of language in so far as we seek to interpret their views for the sake of historical accuracy, but to use inclusive language where we seek to offer any interpretations of our own.

¹¹ See chapter 4, 'Participating in the Action – in company with Quash'

¹² See chapter 7, 'Concluding Reflections – other recent interpretations'

Chapter 1) No brief encounter: an introduction to the relationship between Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar

1.1) The background to their relationship

The relationship between Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) is one between two of, perhaps even *the* two, theological giants of the twentieth century. However, theirs was more than an intellectual engagement. It was a relationship which grew out of a personal meeting and life-long friendship, and in order to assess the impact and implications of their long relationship, we need first to understand something of the background to their encounter.¹

Even the most cursory examination of their life and work, will reveal that there is much which these Swiss theologians had in common. Both were to react against the dominant theological perspective in which they had been brought up, Barth against the liberal Protestantism which he'd studied in Germany and von Balthasar against the 'dry as sawdust' Thomism which had been part of his Jesuit training. Both were to take decisions, in the midst of the theological and political tumult of their times, which would involve their swimming against the theological tide, and have profound implications for their future life and ministry; Barth first with his decisive break with liberalism, then his separation from former colleagues in the dialectical theology movement, and then his stance against the German Christians and the Nazi regime which led to his ejection from the University in Bonn and return to Switzerland; von

Balthasar with his decision, in light of the suspicions surrounding his relationship with the Catholic convert and mystic Adrienne von Speyr and their joint establishment of the Community of St. John, to leave the Society of Jesus and to continue his work as an unpaid, almost free-lance, secular priest.

Both have left behind, in addition to various smaller books and articles, a major piece of sustained theological writing of a size and scale so as to dwarf most of their contemporaries. In Barth's case, it is the massive 14 volume series of the *Church Dogmatics*, which began to be published in 1932 and was still incomplete at his death in 1968. With von Balthasar it is the great trilogy, beginning with the 7 volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, continuing with the 5 volumes of the *Theo-Drama* and concluding with the 3 volumes of the *Theo-Logic*. Both are highly creative and individual works, conceived and undertaken on a vast scale, seeking to offer a comprehensive approach to Christian faith and practice. And both are also notoriously difficult to summarise or synthesise from any perspective other than their own, so powerful and unique is their vision of the Christian faith. Reflecting on this, George Lindbeck refers to a discernible 'family resemblance' between their respective theologies,² which Aidan Nichols interprets in terms of their both being 'wary of transposing biblical revelation into categories alien to itself, seeking rather to describe the world in terms which are biblically rooted.'³

¹ A sympathetic introduction to this relationship can be found in John Thompson's article 'Barth and von Balthasar: An Ecumenical Dialogue' in McGregor and Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) pp.171-192

² George Lindbeck, 'Scripture, Consensus and Community' in R.J. Niehaus (ed.) *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: the Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1989) pp.74-101

This is not to deny that there are also major differences between the two. No study of their work can fail to pick up the role which confessional perspectives will play in their theology. For all his break with liberal Protestantism, Barth remains a theologian in the Reformed tradition, conscious of his debt to Calvin as well as Luther, and wary of the magisterial claims of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, von Balthasar, notwithstanding the crisis surrounding his leaving the Jesuits, remains a devoutly Catholic theologian, seeking to put his writings at the service of the Church, and increasingly suspicious of those modernising trends which would seek to dismiss the claims of antiquity and tradition. Awareness of their differences, as well as mutual respect for each other's achievement, is at the heart of their relationship. Yet, as von Balthasar was to acknowledge, 'It is almost unnecessary to set out how much I owe to Karl Barth: the vision of a comprehensive biblical theology, combined with the urgent invitation to engage in a dogmatically serious ecumenical dialogue'.⁴

All of this was to bear fruit in the seminal work which came out of their meeting and critical engagement in Basel, namely von Balthasar's *The Theology of Karl Barth* published in 1951. The impact of this work upon the reception of Barth is widely acknowledged. It was recognised by Barth himself, when he referred to 'the well-known book which Hans Urs von Balthasar addressed to me, in which I find an understanding of the concentration on Jesus Christ attempted in *C. D.*, and the implied Christian concept of reality, which is incomparably more powerful than that of

³ Aidan Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad; A Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) xvii

⁴ *Rechenschaft* 1965 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965) ET 'In Retrospect', in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986) p.220

most of the books which have clustered around me.’⁵ Even Bruce McCormack, who is critical of the thrust of von Balthasar’s interpretation of Barth in terms of a shift from dialectic to analogy, concedes that its influence has been enormous. ‘For over forty years now, interpretation of Karl Barth’s theological development has stood beneath the massive shadow cast by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s 1951 book’.⁶ McCormack’s verdict is that von Balthasar’s interpretation overplays the significance of Barth’s study of Anselm and underplays the extent to which his theology remains a ‘critically realistic dialectical theology’ following his break with liberalism. We shall return to these criticisms of the ‘von Balthasar thesis’ in our next chapter.

For the purpose of this introductory chapter, the point to be made is that the significance of von Balthasar’s work lies not simply in what it has to say about Barth, but about what he discovers through his engagement with Barth and seeks to say about theology as a whole. For its intention is not just to offer an introduction to and interpretation of Barth’s theology. In addition to an appreciation and summary of what Barth has achieved as a Protestant theologian, it is also intended as the response of an explicitly Catholic theologian to Barth’s challenge to Catholic theology, especially to his assault on natural theology and the use of analogy. Moreover it is here that the specific context of von Balthasar’s relationship with Barth needs to be noted, for Barth’s critique of natural theology is focused on that concept of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, which had been formulated by von Balthasar’s Jesuit colleague and former mentor, Erich Przywara.

⁵ Karl Barth, *CD 4.1* p.768

⁶ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology; Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, (Oxford: OUP, 1995) p.1

This suggests that in order to understand the nature of this critical engagement, we need first to have some awareness of the matrix of relationships out of which it came.⁷ The personal relationship between the two began with von Balthasar's return to Switzerland in 1940 (although as John Webster notes, he had already published a series of articles engaging with Barth's theology.⁸) Following the outbreak of war, and after the completion of his tertianship at Pullach near Munich in 1939, the Jesuit Order had given von Balthasar the choice of going to Rome as a Professor at the Gregorian University or returning to Basel as a student chaplain. His decision was to go to Basel, which meant going to the University where Barth had been a Professor of Theology since his ejection from his Chair in Bonn in 1936. There von Balthasar became active in the setting up of student societies and organising retreats as well as in the translation and publication of literary and theological works for the increasingly isolated German-speaking Catholic community in Switzerland.

In the summer of 1941 Barth invited him to become a member of his seminar on the Council of Trent (according to one of Barth's letters with the words, 'The enemy is listening in!'⁹) Their friendship developed, nurtured by a mutual love of music (especially the music of Mozart) which inspired Barth to buy a gramophone and a large number of Mozart records. In the winter of 1948-49 von Balthasar gave a well-publicised series of lectures on 'Karl Barth and Catholicism' (which were to form the basis of his 1951 book) and these were followed by gatherings at the Charon, a

⁷ In the absence of any substantial biography, perhaps the best introduction to his life is the article by his cousin Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of his Life' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) pp.7-44

⁸ 'Balthasar and Karl Barth' (in Oakes and Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) pp. 241-2

tavern near the Spalentor in Basel where Barth liked to entertain guests and students. And in 1956, von Balthasar, together with Adrienne von Speyr, went with Barth to Paris to take part in the doctoral examination at the Sorbonne of the Jesuit scholar, Henri Bouillard, whose doctoral thesis was on none other than Karl Barth!¹⁰

Each may have had their own particular hopes riding on this friendship; Balthasar had a reputation as a high-profile 'convert-maker' in the University world and seems to have intimated that after his double-break with Protestant theology Barth might be converted to Catholicism. For his part, Barth seemed to entertain hopes that, through this relationship with Balthasar and other young Catholic scholars, he might be able to introduce a 'Trojan horse' inside the ramparts of Catholic theology.¹¹ Neither of these somewhat contrary hopes would be fulfilled and, as subsequent papal statements were made which appeared to run counter to that 'christological renaissance' for which Barth hoped, there were times when a degree of reserve crept into their relationship. Nevertheless, theirs was a friendship which was to be valued right through to the end of Barth's life. Indeed one of the last public events Barth ever undertook was in February 1968 to share with von Balthasar in a lecture given to Swiss church leaders on 'The Church in Renewal'.

Despite the differences in their age, there were various issues which they shared from their educational background; in particular, a common concern for what had

⁹ Quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth*, (Munich: Kaiser Christian Verlag, 1975) tr. John Bowden, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts* (London: SCM, 1976) p.302

¹⁰ Bouillard's own summary of the debate between Barth and von Balthasar over the analogy of being can be found in his book *Connaissance de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1967) ET *The Knowledge of God* (London: Herder and Herder, 1968)

¹¹ Busch, *Op. cit.* p.362

happened to German philosophy and theology following the Enlightenment. Barth's break with the liberal Protestant theology of his youth, and occasioned by the publication of his commentary on Romans, is well documented. In subsequent writings, in his lectures on the theology of Schleiermacher, in various essays, and then more substantially in his 1947 book *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*,¹² Barth sought to explain how the influence of the Idealist and then Romantic movements had left Protestant theology in a dead-end, pre-occupied with its human subject rather than with divine revelation, and undertaking theology as if speaking about God were really 'speaking of man in a loud voice'¹³.

This was a concern shared by von Balthasar, but for different reasons. His original training was in Germanic studies rather than theology, and his doctoral thesis, published in expanded form between 1937 and 1939 as *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele*, was a philosophical and literary study of German thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of its approach to the 'Last Things'. This included a wide-ranging and highly individual survey of writings from Herder and Kant, to Goethe and Rilke, to Hegel and Nietzsche. Von Balthasar's conclusion, as summarised by Edward T. Oakes, was that 'the dominant eschatological myths of German thought (Prometheus, Dionysius, twilight of the Gods etc.) arise from the refusal to make the (analogical) distinction between God and world. This results in

¹² *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947) ET *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. John Bowden and Brian Cozens (London: SCM Press, 1972)

¹³ Karl Barth *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1924) ET *The Word of God and the Word of Man* tr. Sidney A. Weston (London: Hodder, 1928) p.196

either an attempt to effect a complete transfiguration of the world and a divinisation of earth (Marx) or a pure collapse into nothingness and nihilistic despair (Nietzsche).’¹⁴

This is a theme to which von Balthasar would return in later, in volume 5 of in *The Glory of the Lord, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (and which we shall explore in chapter 3.) For the moment it is sufficient to see how such a study rendered him highly receptive to Barth’s challenge to liberal Protestantism in light of its inheritance from German Idealism and Romanticism. Indeed, Barth himself was one of the subjects to be studied in the third volume. But it also flags up one of the key issues which, as we shall see, will form a crucial point of contention between the two theologians; namely the importance of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. And this brings into focus the theologian responsible for re-introducing the analogy of being into twentieth century theology, namely the Jesuit scholar, Erich Przywara.

1.2) The influence of Przywara

Przywara was to have a significant influence both in their lives and upon their mutual relationship.¹⁵ Barth had originally come across Przywara’s writings in the journal *Stimmen der Zeit* in the early 1920’s, in which he often appeared in Przywara’s summary of contemporary theology.¹⁶ Indeed, so taken was he with the acuity of Przywara’s analysis that, during his time as Professor at the University of Münster, Barth invited him to give an important lecture in 1929 on ‘The Catholic Church

¹⁴ Edward T. Oakes *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p. 75

¹⁵ For the most recent biography of Przywara, see Thomas F. O’Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J.: His Theology and His World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002)

Principle', and then invited him again to lead a seminar on natural theology in Bonn in the winter semester 1931-32.¹⁷ Barth was both enthralled and challenged by Przywara's presentation of the *analogia entis*, which he interpreted as the attempt to fit the doctrine of God within a framework pre-determined by a philosophical understanding of being. But at the same time, as Ben Quash notes in his article 'Von Balthasar and the dialogue with Karl Barth', Przywara also challenged Barth over his lack of an adequate doctrine of the Incarnation, a criticism which was to spur Barth on to the more mature incarnational christocentrism of the *Church Dogmatics*.¹⁸

However, Przywara was also a Jesuit colleague of von Balthasar's.¹⁹ The two had first met while von Balthasar was studying philosophy at the Jesuit house at Pullach in the 1920's. He then stayed with Przywara for a couple of years while working on the journal *Stimmen der Zeit*. For von Balthasar, Przywara was a valued mentor, indeed an 'unforgettable guide and master'²⁰ during the difficult years of his Jesuit training, and his teaching on analogy a key influence on von Balthasar's subsequent development. Shortly after publication of Przywara's *Analogia Entis* in 1932, von Balthasar was to write an article *Die Metaphysik Erich Przywaras* reviewing the significance of his work, and in later years von Balthasar would not only publish a 3 volume edition of his early writings but also bring him back to Basel to recover after his break-down in 1947. Despite some reservations about the way Przywara presented his teachings, von Balthasar is clear that his position has been

¹⁶ See McCormack, *Op. cit.* pp. 319-321

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp.383-391 and 416

¹⁸ 'Von Balthasar and the dialogue with Karl Barth' (in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 70/923, 1998) pp. 48-49

¹⁹ See Henrici, *Op. cit.* p.13; for the importance of Przywara, see also Medard Kehl, ET 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait' in *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1982) esp. pp.17-22

²⁰ 'In Retrospect' in John Riches (ed.) *The Analogy of Beauty*. p.219

substantially misinterpreted by Barth and that Przywara was just as concerned as Barth to protect the divine sovereignty.²¹

So what was it about the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, that made it such a contentious issue for theology?²² 'Analogy' was a term invented by the Greeks, originally used in the science of mathematics and then borrowed by philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle to interpret non-numerical proportions, to explain how the same word can refer to things which are neither identical nor utterly divergent, that is to say which are related *analogously*. In terms of everyday language, such usage is not controversial, and echoes the way in which language is learnt, as children learn how the same word can be used in different but connected ways (for example as their own experience of 'dancing to music' can be related to the sight of flowers and trees 'dancing in the breeze'.) But such analogous use of language is not restricted to simple situations; it can be used to apply to complex situations also, as when scientists use their experience of the natural world, in terms of wind and waves, to make hypotheses about how light and sound might also move and react as waves.

For theologians, use of analogy was part of the biblical witness, as Jesus' language about God in the gospels drew on the relationship between 'Father' and 'Son'. However, a particular challenge to theology arose when the concept of analogy was

²¹ An assessment of von Balthasar's defence and interpretation of Przywara can be found in James Zeitz's article 'Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy' (in *The Thomist*, Vol.52.3, July 1988)

²² For this section, I have drawn heavily upon Oakes *Op. cit.* in his chapter 'Erich Przywara and the Analogy of Being' pp. 15-44; but on the importance and history of analogy see also Thomas Dalzell *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997) pp.59-75

applied to the concept of being.²³ It had been introduced into this discussion by Plato and Aristotle to try and bridge the gap between being and non-being and worked by proposing a gradation of being, either in terms of a distinction between reality and appearance (as in Plato) or between act and potency (as in Aristotle). Later, under the influence of Plotinus, this led to the Neo-Platonist doctrine of the Great Chain of Being, with the idea of different gradations of being emanating down from the One to the lowest forms of atomic matter. But, however influential this teaching became across the ancient world, it also raised a particular challenge for Christian doctrine. For while Christian theology spoke of a God who had revealed himself in the Old Testament in the name, 'I am what I am', thus implicitly raising the whole issue of being, its doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* understood the created order not as an emanation of the divine but as called into being by God's creative word.

This problem became more acute for Christian metaphysics with the rediscovery and translation of Aristotle's texts in the 11th and 12th centuries, and it was the great achievement of Thomas Aquinas to reconcile the two with his assertion of "the real distinction between essence and being". What Aquinas sought to show was how the act of existing which inheres in each individual is distinct from the essence of what that individual is, since not only does it not have to be, but it owes its existence to an act of being, an *esse* which is not itself derived. However, although this is true for created beings, it is not the case for God, for God's essence *is* to be. This means in turn that in God alone, unlike other beings, there is no distinction between his existence and his essence, his *esse* and his *essentia*.

²³ See also E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, (London: DLT, 1949; Libra edition 1966) pp.92-121.

For Przywara, it was from this distinction drawn by Aquinas that the inevitability of a doctrine of analogy followed. Przywara maintained that unlike God, creatures are not only a mixture of *esse* and *essentia*, they are a mixture in a way which makes their very being analogous, in that they are contingent (which means that they might not exist) and even in their existing they are analogous with God. He put it like this;

‘In this form the creature is the “analogy” of God. It is similar to God through its commonality of unity between its “being-what-it-is” [*Sosein*: that is its essence] and its “being-there-at-all” [*Dasein*: that is, its existence]. But even in this similarity, it is essentially dissimilar to God, because God’s form of unity of essence and existence is an “essential unity” while that of the creature is a “unity in tension”. Now since the relation of essence and existence is the essence of “being”, so God and the creature are therefore similar-dissimilar in “being” – that is, they are “analogous” to one another: and this is what we mean by *analogia entis*, analogy of being.’²⁴

Here we have arrived at Przywara’s controversial notion of the analogy of being, a term which he believed was given its classical expression (and indeed ecclesiastical approval) in the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (cap.2): ‘*Inter Creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit*

²⁴ *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie* (1926) tr. A .C. Bouquet, *Polarity: a German Catholic’s Interpretation of Religion* (London: OUP, 1935) p.32; but here I am using Oakes’ translation, *Op. cit.*, pp.32-33

dissimilitudo notanda – that between the Creator and the creature, however great the similarity, even greater is the dissimilarity to be noted.²⁵

It was also a concept which was to affect deeply the whole of his life. For Przywara, analogy was the only approach which could hold together the tension which must always exist between God's transcendence (God above us) and God's immanence (God in us). This tension is best expressed in the word "polarity", the word used for the title of the English translation (*Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion*) of one of his most influential works, *Religionsphilosophie katholischer Theologie*, from which we have already quoted. Przywara came to believe that this 'polarity' was the key, not just to the interpretation of Catholic theology but also to the whole history of philosophy. 'The primordial metaphysical fact is the tension of the analogy of being, or expressed differently, the tension between "God in us" and "God over us", or once more, the tension between the self-reality and self-spontaneity of the creature and the universal and total reality and spontaneity of God...'²⁶

But at this point Przywara's assertion of the centrality of the analogy of being started to appear to Barth as if a metaphysical concept, drawn from the history of western philosophy, was being used to fit God's revelation in Christ into a mould which was not of the Bible's making. Moreover, as Przywara made the case for this concept to be at the heart of all Catholic theology, particularly in the area of natural theology and the relationship between nature and grace, faith and reason, it seemed to Barth that Przywara's analogy of being represented a Catholic encroachment on the freedom

²⁵ *Polarity* p.31

²⁶ Erich Przywara, *Weg zu Gott* (1926) quoted in Oakes, *Op.cit.* p.33

and sovereignty of God. It was for this reason that in the first two volumes of his *Church Dogmatics* Barth took such a strong stand on the Word of God, as against the assertion of autonomous human rationality or the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church, and for this reason that the analogy of being was condemned in no uncertain terms as the 'invention of the anti-Christ'.²⁷

The details of this debate, we will pick up in our next chapter in von Balthasar's study of Barth. For the time being, the important thing to note is that in seeking to interpret Barth to a Catholic audience, von Balthasar also had a strong personal incentive to defend Przywara's position on the *analogia entis*. As Oakes recognises, von Balthasar appreciated the 'deep pathos', not to say irony, which marked his life over the fate of the term "analogy of being". 'For Przywara advocated it precisely because he saw it as a way of breaking through the closed horizon of modern consciousness and its nearly exclusive concern with either the world or man-in-the-world. Yet Barth accused Przywara (and, because of his encounter with this lonely Catholic priest, all of Catholicism as well!) of precisely bringing about what it had been Przywara's intention of avoiding!'²⁸

Moreover, for all their disagreements, Barth also retained a deep personal respect for his former colleague. He contributed towards a *Festschrift* to mark Przywara's 70th birthday, sending a greeting in which he reflected upon 'my encounters with him in Münster and Bonn, the impression made by his amazing gift and art of being true to the world and his church, not simply to understand everyone and everything, but to

²⁷ CD 1.1 p.xiii

²⁸ Oakes, *Op. cit.* p.40

integrate them within his own relentlessly probing and comprehensive thinking, and yet to remain exemplary Catholic, (these) are for me, through such following exchanges, unforgettable...²⁹

Unforgettable. This is the same word used by von Balthasar, for whom Przywara was not just an 'unforgettable guide and master' but also a man in whom 'never since have I encountered such a combination of depth and fullness of analytic clarity and all-embracing vision'.³⁰ However, for von Balthasar, this all-embracing vision included precisely a proper understanding of the role of the analogy of being. To see what role this debate on the analogy of being would take in his interpretation of Barth, as well as his assessment of what was to be found both of value and concern in Barth's theology, we need now to turn to *The Theology of Karl Barth*.

²⁹ in Siegfried Behn (ed.) *Der Beständige Aufbruch : Festschrift für Erich Przywara* (Nürnberg: Glock und Lutz, 1959) p.48 (own translation)

³⁰ 'In Retrospect' in John Riches (ed.) *The Analogy of Beauty* p.219

Chapter 2) From Dialectic to Analogy; *The Theology of Karl Barth*

2.1) Introduction

From the background explored in the previous chapter it should be clear that, as von Balthasar puts it in his Preface, ‘this book should in no way be considered an “Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth” ‘.¹ Instead, a much more profound engagement is being offered, particularly in light of the continuing progress of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* of which eight volumes had been published by the time von Balthasar’s own study went into print. It is more than an Introduction on two counts; in the first place because it is seeking to identify those profound forces which shape the ongoing development in Barth’s theology, and secondly because the thrust of that development, which represents an explicit challenge to Catholicism, requires a suitably substantial response.

Accordingly, von Balthasar states his objectives as follows. ‘This book will offer a twofold strategy: it will try to interpret the sense of the whole, and then it will give a *possible* Catholic answer to this whole.’² Moreover, he realises that in order for this to happen, there must be a critical engagement at the deepest level possible. There can be no ‘false irenicism’ or ‘contempt for the rational and philosophical moment in theology’³, both of which can serve to water down and relativize the real differences which exist between the different traditions from which he and Barth come. Instead,

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (Cologne: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1951) ET *The Theology of Karl Barth* tr. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) hereafter *KB* xviii

² *Ibid.*

those points of difference must be owned and faced, not merely in terms of those secondary differences over Church order and sacraments which are the usual focus of dispute, but at the deeper level in which they are shaped by fundamental decisions over doctrine.

The structure of the book itself makes von Balthasar's intentions clear. It is divided up into four parts. Part 1, the 'Overture' identifies the basis of this dispute between Protestantism and Catholicism and indicates why von Balthasar as a Catholic theologian is choosing to engage with and respond to Barth. If there were any doubt about what was intended here, it should be dispelled by the titles of the chapters themselves; 'A House Divided', 'Ecumenical Dialogue', 'Barth's Standpoint' 'The Catholic Standpoint' and 'The Formal Principle of the Controversy'. The next two parts are the most substantial sections of the book in length. In Part 2 von Balthasar sets out an Exposition and then Interpretation of 'The Form and Structure of Karl Barth's Thought'. Then in Part 3 he offers a Catholic response similarly entitled, 'The Form and Structure of Catholic Thought'. Finally in Part 4, which is also the shortest section, von Balthasar offers some 'Prospects for Rapprochement'.

This structure makes it clear how von Balthasar is going to undertake the objective identified in his Preface. But it also underlines how what is being offered in this study is far more than a mere 'Introduction' to Barth. The subtitle which he offers is that of '*Darstellung und Deutung*', of 'Exposition and Interpretation', and as we shall see, von Balthasar will seek both to expound the development of Barth's theology in terms

³ KB xix

of his thesis of a 'conversion' from 'dialectic' to 'analogy', as well as interpreting this development in terms of Barth's continued indebtedness to Schleiermacher and the heritage of German Idealism. However, given the structure outlined above, perhaps a more accurate sub-title for what von Balthasar is attempting would thus be, 'The Theology of Karl Barth, an Exposition, Interpretation, and Response', or, reflecting the title of this thesis, 'a Critical Engagement and Response'.

However, even such a subtitle would not do justice to all that is taking place here. For the argument of this thesis is not just that von Balthasar is seeking to engage and then offer a Catholic response to Barth's challenge in *the Church Dogmatics*. It is that in defending Catholic theology against those charges which he finds to be based on an inaccurate reading of the tradition, and in demonstrating those points where Catholic theologians can be seen to make common cause with the central thrust of Barth's thought, von Balthasar is also identifying issues where Catholic insights properly push Barth's themes beyond the constraints of his liberal Protestant heritage into areas where a fuller and more rounded understanding of traditional Catholic concepts are needed to do justice to the fullness of God's revelation in Christ.

Key to all this, is von Balthasar's insistence on the centrality of the proper use of analogy.⁴ He believes that Barth is right to insist that this is interpreted christologically, in terms of God's revelation in Christ. However, to insist on the use of analogy as restricted solely to the moment of revelation fails to account for that christological understanding of creation, in which Christ's taking human nature offers

⁴ For the significance of this in terms of the debate with Barth, see also Edward. T Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994) pp.55-71

the possibility of a profound change in human being as well as to understanding in faith. This means that for von Balthasar to engage and respond to Barth is also to offer indications as to what that more rounded theology will need to include, encompassing Barth's christocentrism but also insisting upon the continuing relevance of the analogy of being. Hence our analysis of von Balthasar's response will conclude with pointers towards his own subsequent theological development.

Accordingly, in this chapter we shall seek first to set out each of the stages in von Balthasar's argument using the headings which are found in his study. We shall do this recognising that the development of this argument is designed not just to interpret Barth but also to establish the grounds for a Catholic response to Barth's criticisms. Given the crucial role von Balthasar's exposition is to play in the development of his own theology, we shall then have to take seriously the contention of Bruce McCormack⁵ that his reading of Barth is inadequate and make our response to some of McCormack's criticisms. Finally, we shall close with a section which seeks to draw together both the insights which von Balthasar has gained from Barth together with the critique which he offer of Barth's works, and see whether even at this early stage we can identify themes which will themselves go on to shape his own subsequent work. Moreover, as von Balthasar has himself demonstrated the importance of a reading and engagement in depth in order to do justice to what Barth is undertaking, we shall begin with what we hope is the same kind of careful reading and exposition as that which he has attempted with Barth.

⁵ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: OUP, 1995)

2.2.1) Part 1 – Overture; a House Divided

The book begins with the fact of the Church's division. Von Balthasar quotes from the *Church Dogmatics* to refer to 'the mysterious split which has divided the Church for four hundred years'.⁶ But why then does this mysterious fact of schism preface von Balthasar's critical engagement with Barth? The opening chapter starts to answer this question. It is because for Barth and von Balthasar this division is not to be watered down or explained away as being part of some as yet unknown part of the providence of God. It is something wrong, something contrary to the wishes of Christ and the essence of the Church which needs to be confronted and challenged, a wrongful state of affairs which needs to be addressed and put right.

Why then does von Balthasar choose to engage with Barth as the means to address this controversial issue? In the content of this opening section, von Balthasar goes on to identify two reasons, both of which will prove significant in the development of his own theology, as this thesis will seek to demonstrate.

The first is that; 'We must choose Karl Barth as our partner because in him Protestantism has found *for the first time* its most completely consistent representative.'⁷ It is not because of the impact of the dialectical theology movement or Barth's subsequent world-wide influence on theology; indeed von Balthasar recognises that there are many who would dismiss the dialectical theology movement as a temporary post-war phenomenon and say that the influence of Barth's theology

⁶ KB p.3 quoting CD1.1 p.99

⁷ Ibid. p.22

among contemporaries is on the wane. But in Barth, there exist at one and the same time two crucial features; on the one hand, 'the most thorough and penetrating display of the Protestant view' involving 'the fullest and most systematic working out of the contrasts that distinguish Protestant from Catholic views' and on the other, 'the closest rapprochement with the Catholic' in so far as 'he formalizes these contrasts in such a way that occasionally the form almost dissolves in the content, so that the Protestant aspect seems reducible to a "corrective" or a "dash of spice" lending piquancy to the Catholic dough.'⁸

The second reason is quite different, but for von Balthasar equally important. It is quite simply because 'his theology is lovely'.⁹ That is not simply a question of literary style, though von Balthasar recognises the power and majesty of his prose. It is also a question of the subject matter about which he writes. 'Barth writes well' because he has 'turned away from the disposition of faith and focused on its content', on the Word of God in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. It is from this concentration on the beauty and glory of God that Barth can begin to appreciate the importance of beauty and aesthetics. In marked contrast to Kierkegaard it shows up in his appreciation of music, particularly the works of Mozart and in turn this reveals itself in the way musical imagery and understanding underlies Barth's exposition of biblical themes. For von Balthasar, convinced that there can be no proper grasp of faith without an appreciation of the beauty and joy which is intrinsic to God's revelation in Jesus Christ, all of this will play a part, as we shall see, in the emergence of his own subsequent *Theological Aesthetics*.

⁸ KB p.23

⁹ *Ibid.* p.25

Von Balthasar judged that Barth's principal achievement was to restore Protestant theology to its roots both in the Reformation and in the Bible, that is to say to its proper object of study, the Word of God. This positive achievement was also an indictment of the false steps taken by Protestant theology in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The impact of Kant and the Enlightenment, then of the Idealist and Romantic movements, had led to theologians misplacing the object of theological study, making humankind the centre of faith and human rationality the basis on which the revelation of God was to be understood. For Barth this served only to deny the freedom and power of God to act. In his tumultuous commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, we can see his indictment of all such theology, indeed through the words of Paul, God's judgement on all such efforts to ground faith on human rationality and subjectivity.

However, Barth's achievement was not simply an assault on the dominant strands of liberal Protestantism. From von Balthasar's perspective it was also quite clearly a challenge to the approach taken by Catholic theology. For whilst, according to Barth, Catholicism had at least managed to preserve an interest and focus on the proper content of theology, namely the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it had done so in a way which made such presumptions about the role of reason and nature that the freedom of God in revelation was made subject to human rationality and ecclesial authority. This was the consequence of the insistence on the role of the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church in determining how God's revelation was to be read and understood. Hence von Balthasar's summary of Barth's position. 'Barth positions his

¹⁰ This is the subject matter of Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (1947) tr. Brian Cozens and John Bowden, (London: SCM, 1972)

Dogmatics between two flanks: on the left he rejects the *content* of liberal Protestantism while admitting its formal principle: and on the right he rejects the *formal* structure of Catholicism, while showing a deep appreciation of many of its doctrines.’¹¹

Moreover, it was precisely at this point that the significance of Barth’s rejection of the *analogia entis*, as he understood Przywara to present it, became crucial. For Barth, however much of the central content of Christianity which Catholicism had retained (in contrast to liberal Protestantism which had thrown it out with the bath-water), this formula represents exactly the kind of philosophically derived presupposition which asserted human rationality over against the revelation of God. It acted as a regulating principle to control the freedom of God to reveal himself in Jesus Christ, an assertion that Barth condemned as a human attempt to ‘lay hands on God’¹² And for this reason Barth rejected it in his *Dogmatics* as ‘the invention of the anti-Christ’¹³ saying that by itself, it was sufficient reason why he could never become a Catholic.

For von Balthasar this made the issue of analogy the ‘formal principle’ of the controversy. His concern was that Barth had misunderstood Przywara¹⁴ and his role as a representative of Catholic theology. In the first place, von Balthasar believed that Barth had misinterpreted Przywara’s concept of the *analogia entis*. Secondly, he wanted to affirm that despite some of the (admittedly confusing) language which

¹¹ KB p.36

¹² *Ibid.* p.51

¹³ *Ibid.* p.49 quoting CD 1.1 xiii (though the italics are von Balthasar’s)

Przywara used to expound his understanding of analogy, his concerns were basically similar to Barth's, namely to assert the majesty and power of God which is always far greater than any human response. Thirdly, he stated that Przywara was in any case only one Catholic theologian amongst many; he could not be held to represent the whole of Catholicism any more than von Balthasar could. And further examination of the writings of other Catholic theologians will, as von Balthasar presents them, find them reflecting the same christocentric concerns and emphases as found in Barth.

This will be the main thrust of the third section of von Balthasar's study. For the time being, von Balthasar's concern is to show how Barth's theology of necessity is moving very close, indeed as he puts it 'at a hair's length nearness to Catholic theology'.¹⁵ The decisive point of difference is Barth's interpretation of the Catholic position on analogy, which von Balthasar identifies as 'the formal principle of the controversy'.¹⁶ If von Balthasar can show Barth is mistaken in this; that the concept of analogy is not the product of antecedent philosophical presuppositions, but is actually a properly theological response to God's revelation in Christ and thus a necessary corollary to christology; then he will have not only made an authentic Catholic response to Barth's challenge. He will also have made his own contribution towards the ending of that division between the churches which both he and Barth so clearly deplore. But to do this, von Balthasar needs to show just how and why the proper use and understanding of analogy is essential to interpret Barth's theology. That is the subject of the second and largest part of his study to which we now turn.

¹⁴ The relationship between Barth and Przywara is also explored in Thomas F. O'Meara, *Erich Przywara, S.J.: His Theology and His World* (Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2002) pp.99-107

¹⁵ *KB* p.53

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.47

2.2.2.1) Part II – The Form and Structure of Karl Barth's Thought: Exposition

It is in this second part of the study that we find what many scholars have come to regard as the most significant aspect of von Balthasar's interpretation, which Bruce McCormack has termed the 'von Balthasar thesis',¹⁷ that of a conversion in Barth's theology from dialectic to analogy. Von Balthasar makes his intentions plain from the start. 'The main lines of our reading will follow his own chronological development, that is from "dialectic" to "analogy".'¹⁸ This will be undertaken in two sections, the first of which is entitled 'Exposition'. Here von Balthasar seeks to identify those stages in the process of change which he identifies through the chapter headings; 'The Dialectical Period', 'The Conversion to Analogy' and 'The Centrality of Analogy'. But as we will return to some of McCormack's criticisms later, it is worth noting also that von Balthasar has a secondary aim in this section. For he continues; 'After showing how this analogy reached the fullness of its concrete form as Barth understood it, we will then ask how much "analogy" overcame "dialectic" or how much, on the contrary, "analogy" managed to preserve and carry along the latter.'¹⁹

The starting point for the chapter on 'The Dialectical Period' is the methodological dead-end which Barth had reached by the publication of the 2nd edition of *Romans*. In contrast to the liberal Protestantism of his day and its preoccupation with culture and progress, Barth wanted to focus on the objective word of God, on that revelation in Jesus Christ, which is a moment of crisis or judgement. But von Balthasar recognised

¹⁷ McCormack, *Op. cit.* p.1

¹⁸ KB p.63

that the dialectical method that Barth was using in *Romans* had the same philosophical roots which originated in Idealism. Dialectic worked by putting forward two separate contrasting viewpoints, then either letting them both stand to highlight the contrast between the two (as in Kierkegaard) or moving into a synthesis which sought to integrate them (as in Hegel).²⁰ Thus as a method it was well suited to highlight the contrast between God's righteousness and the world's sin, as evidenced by the phrase which Barth borrowed from Kierkegaard, the 'infinite qualitative difference' between time and eternity, between God and creature.²¹

But however suitable a method for expressing the distance between God and creation, dialectic was a less than useful tool for establishing how God in his freedom could communicate with the world in such a way that this revelation could be understood. For von Balthasar, this was the great irony in Barth's theology during this period. 'The *Epistle to the Romans* is the very thing against which it itself raged and thundered: a pinnacle of human religiosity. Its insistent cry of "Not I! Rather God!" actually directs all eyes on *itself* instead of on God.'²² Hence the years following the publication of *Romans* saw Barth's search for a more appropriate theological method, one which would allow such a communication to take place.

This is the subject of the next chapter, 'The Conversion to Analogy', in which von Balthasar makes the momentous statement that;

¹⁹ KB p.63

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.73

²¹ *Ibid.* p.82

²² *Ibid.* p.84

‘Just as Augustine underwent two conversions... so too in Barth we may find two decisive turning points. The first, his turn from liberalism to radical Christianity, occurred during the First World War and found expression in *The Epistle to the Romans*. The second was his final emancipation from the shackles of philosophy, enabling him finally to arrive at a genuine self-authenticating theology. This second conversion was a gradual process, indeed a struggle, that lasted nearly ten years, ending at about 1930.’²³

Von Balthasar goes on to quote from Barth’s own words about the significance of his 1931 book on Anselm for his theology. However, von Balthasar is also clear that this was a gradual process in which there were a number of works plotting the progress and that none of these works can stand in isolation if we are to understand Barth.

Of these the most important was his incomplete *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* published in 1927, with its attempt to found a basis for a dogmatic theology on the fact that *Deus dixit*, that God has spoken. Also of relevance were a series of essays in the late 1920’s that he wrote on Culture and Philosophy, on Ethics and on the Church. In all these essays von Balthasar saw Barth as seeking to establish a new basis of connection between God and the world; he was exploring how ‘the concepts of revelation, Church, faith, imply that, between God’s eternal truth... and the religious opinions of the human subject, there is a *middle ground*, a *tertium quid*.’²⁴ But as yet Barth was still imprisoned within the Idealist framework within which he

²³ KB p.93

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.105

was operating, in which the notion of distance between God and the world could only be seen in terms of sin and alienation.

It is from this perspective that von Balthasar drew attention to the significance of Barth's 'second conversion' from 'dialectic' to 'analogy'. But for von Balthasar this conversion was not simply a matter of historical development; it was also a matter of theological necessity. Barth's use of it was gradual and developmental, as von Balthasar recognised. 'Barth did not suddenly replace dialectics with analogy. We cannot isolate any one particular text as *the* sign of this shift, for it happened gradually.'²⁵ However, by the time of the third volume of the *Dogmatics* published in 1940, even Barth recognised that; 'The concept of analogy is in fact unavoidable'.²⁶ His use of dialectic, so powerful in freeing talk of God from human subjectivity and control, had left him without an adequate basis to speak of or to creation. The root of this problem, as von Balthasar saw it, lay in the inadequacy of the Idealist framework, with its inability to relate the world to God except on the basis of some form of identity. When this was demolished so effectively, as had been done in *Romans* with its emphasis upon divine sovereignty and judgement, then the world ceased to have any ontological basis. It was only the concept of analogy, which allowed for differentiation, for both similarity and dissimilarity within a deeper underlying relationship, that would suffice. So what was it that enabled Barth to make this step?

Barth's way out of his dilemma began with christology, and that is the starting point of the third chapter in this section, 'The Centrality of Analogy'. 'The concept of analogy

²⁵ KB p.120

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.109 quoting from CD 2.1 p.236

has already led Barth to acknowledge a compatibility between God and creature. But now Barth establishes this insight on its ultimate foundation: the miracle of the Incarnation.²⁷ The key was to be found in Barth's adoption of a Chalcedonian christology, set out in principle in the second volume of the *Dogmatics* and then developed subsequently. This involved Barth taking seriously the concept of nature as part of what it means for Christ to take human flesh. In turn this meant that the nature of Christ became the authentic truth of human nature, that which grounds and justifies all human nature. It meant that humanity is good in itself and, though abused by sin, that goodness has not been totally destroyed. And while christology cannot simply be equated with anthropology, it did mean that christology offered the basis for what von Balthasar identified in Barth as 'a *theological* doctrine of creation and anthropology'.²⁸

The implications of this were broadened in terms of 'creation and covenant' in Barth's development of the doctrine of election. Von Balthasar sums up what it meant for Volume 5 of the *Dogmatics*: 'creation (that is the order of nature) is the external ground of the Covenant... and the Covenant (that is the order of the Incarnation and redemption) is the internal ground of creation...'²⁹ This theological and analogous understanding of nature, as adduced from Barth's christology, is now being applied not just in terms of anthropology but to the whole created order. Creation is not independent of the Covenant; it is created by and for God and oriented towards grace. That clarifies the role of the human being as being 'God's partner', the one who God has created by and for himself. Von Balthasar is clear on Barth's purpose in

²⁷ KB p.114

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.120

all this; 'we must simultaneously see and assert two things: man has his own created nature, his own proper analogy to God, which stems from grace – insofar as creation is itself grounded in Christ. But human nature is also pointed *toward* grace – insofar as creation is not in itself the Incarnation but its presupposition.'³⁰

Von Balthasar's aim at this particular point was to show not just how analogy became central for Barth's exposition of the covenant in terms of christology. It was also crucial in identifying the relationship between nature and grace, an interrelationship which showed how 'formally' all of creation became 'one vast symbol for grace'.³¹ (This is an area to which he will return in detail when he comes to the Catholic response to Barth, as the existence of a separate and independent order of nature outside the order of grace has historically been a point of issue raised by Barth.)

However, to develop his thesis further, von Balthasar goes on to look at the issue of 'Faith and Reason' since '[e]pistemologically, the question of the relation between nature and grace or between the order of creation and the order of salvation becomes the problem of faith and reason.'³² For our purposes, this section is significant in two ways. Firstly, in terms of the role which Barth's study of Anselm is deemed to have played in his 'second conversion', for this is the area where von Balthasar goes into most depth in his references to Barth's book, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*. And secondly, because this is the area in which von Balthasar deals with Barth's response to the issue of a possible, natural knowledge of God.

²⁹ KB p.121

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.126

³¹ *Ibid.* p.124

Von Balthasar sets the scene for Barth's study of Anselm by acknowledging that as 'the first work to document this change in his thinking' it represents what Barth himself has called 'the real manifesto of his departure from his first period', although he also adds that 'it comes most fully into view in the *Church Dogmatics*', especially in those volumes which deal with faith, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God we gain in creation.³³

Crucially he recognises that for Anselm in the *Proslogion*, the issue is a theological one before it is a philosophical one, in that it is faith which is seeking understanding. As Barth put it; 'The *event* of the recognition of that name entails raising the *problem* of the existence of God.'³⁴ Knowledge of God follows on from the revelation of God and is granted to faith. It is not an irrational faith because it participates in that truth which is grounded in the ultimate truth and rationality of the God who created all things. This is worked out in the series of relationships between the reason or *ratio* of the knowing subjects and the objects to be known, all of which are ultimately grounded in God. Von Balthasar summarises this dense and complex scheme by saying that, 'Only because there are absolute truth and absolute being are there relative truth and relative being; the latter are completely "real and true being" and "real and true truth" but analogous being and analogous truth.'³⁵

³² *KB* pp.136-7

³³ *Ibid.* p.137

³⁴ *KB* p.144 quoting Karl Barth, *FQI* p.138

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp.144-45

Thus it is the reality of the knowledge of God in revelation which opens up the possibility of the knowledge of God in the world. But in turn that raises the question as to how it is possible to deny the existence of God? Barth's response was to say, with Anselm, that in terms of an encounter in faithful obedience to revelation, it is not possible; but in terms of a denial or rejection of that encounter, it is. Moreover, as Barth developed this argument (not just in his study of Anselm but also in dialogue with Descartes and others through the course of his *Dogmatics*) in so far as it was an encounter not with God in the concrete reality of revelation, but rather with an abstract philosophical notion of God derived independently from human rationality, then it was entirely conceivable.

This is also the basis from which Barth began to address the issue of sin in the next section. For Barth sin has its origins in that same human decision to assert its own independent rational knowledge of God in opposition to the gracious revelation of God in faith. And it explains for von Balthasar the apparently contradictory situation in which Barth can appear both to affirm and deny a "natural" knowledge of God. 'Barth denies it where man tries to achieve this knowledge without relying on the Word of God, where he tries to draw out of himself the concept of God, all the while he is stuck in the world of finitude and relativity, and disobediently so. But he grants it where man's potential knows that it has been created for the sake of revelation. For in this case, potential comes alive in accepting revelation.'³⁶

³⁶ KB p.155

From this we can see why Barth's move was to the *analogia fidei*, to the analogy of faith given in God's act of revelation. This was to be developed in express opposition to the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being which, Barth claimed, underpinned the Catholic Church's teaching on natural theology. The analogy of being represented all those things which for Barth denied the possibility of a real knowledge of God based on revelation. It was a 'concept' which subsumed God and creature under a common 'schema'; that common schema denied the freedom and event character of God's revelation; it made that which is relative, that which is held in common, into a false absolute, and most dangerous of all, it encouraged the sinful act of disobedience in which the creature falsely infers from human rationality that knowledge which can only be a gift from God.

By contrast, Barth stood firmly on the *analogia fidei*. 'The analogy of faith expresses the fact 1) that all knowledge of God rests upon a prior revelation by God from above... 2) that man gains knowledge from this revelation only by freely surrendering his own truth in worship in the act of faith...and finally... 3) that God's self revelation must be grasped at the point where it is most unambiguously expressed: at its center, Jesus Christ.'³⁷ This meant that knowledge of God was granted by God in faith and to faith. It remained subject to God's freedom and sovereignty. It permitted God either to disclose or to conceal his Word in revelation. It could not be infringed or presumed upon either by the false authority of human subjectivity or ecclesiastical control. And it meant that theology must focus on the real and concrete word that God has spoken in Jesus Christ, rather than on any abstract philosophical method.

³⁷ KB p.163

Thus outlined, the basis of the dispute seems relatively clear. But von Balthasar did not believe that all hopes for a rapprochement were lost. He had identified that from Barth's perspective there was no insuperable problem with the analogy of being provided it was construed within the analogy of faith. And he recognised that in Barth's theology a space had been opened up between the Incarnation and the order of creation which not only presupposed but was indeed orientated towards a faithful response to God's grace in Christ. So von Balthasar asked the question; Does not this permit of an analogy of being in which, to paraphrase Aquinas, grace may be understood not simply to presuppose but to perfect nature?

It could be said that the whole of von Balthasar's subsequent theological trilogy is an attempt to provide the answer to answer this question. However, in terms of his expressed aims in this study of Barth, the other major issue identified was the need to engage and respond to Barth's critique of Catholicism. The formal aspect of that will be done in Part Three which explicitly offers a Catholic response to those issues raised by Barth. But in reality, this process of engagement and response really begins in the second section of Part Two, under the heading 'Interpretation', in which von Balthasar seeks to identify and engage with the deeper themes which underlie Barth's theology and shape the form and structure of his thought. For in these von Balthasar detects the continuing and constraining influence of Schleiermacher and German Idealism upon Barth. So it is to this area of 'Interpretation' that we now turn.

2.2.2.2) Part II – The Form and Structure of Karl Barth's Thought: Interpretation

This section begins with the recognition that Barth's understanding of predestination is, as McCormack has noted among others, the key to interpreting the whole of his theology in the *Church Dogmatics*. More specifically it is the christocentric foundation which Barth offers to his doctrine of election which gives shape and structure to his whole subsequent theological enterprise.

This is not to be explained in terms of the reconciliation between a detached deity and a separated humanity; for the crucial thing is that 'the same person, Jesus Christ, stands on *both* sides of divine predestination'.³⁸ It is in Jesus Christ that we come to understand the inner logic and the out-workings of creation and covenant. It is in Jesus Christ that we experience both God's love and anger, his judgement and redemption. 'This binary reciprocity entailed by God's election in Jesus Christ, our brother, is the very theme and leitmotif of the whole of salvation history, indeed is the very watermark of creation itself.'³⁹ However, this doctrine is not to be understood in narrowly individualistic terms; for in that space created by the Incarnation it is the Church which has been called to be the vehicle of God's saving grace, hence the rationale for a '*Church*' *Dogmatics*. And yet, at the same time, 'For Barth, the Church is an *open* space, a dynamic concept from the outset. For all its visibility, the earthly Church is but the movement of the Kingdom of God into the world...'⁴⁰

³⁸ KB p.176 quoting CD 2.2 p.146

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.177

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.183

However, because it is such a key, indeed because it is the 'very hinge of Barth's whole theology' where 'Barth's whole doctrine of God and world, of creation and redemption, of man and providence stands or falls according to the tenability of this one point', it also serves to give a clearly identifiable shape to Barth's theology. 'In its extraordinary compactness, this system betrays characteristic traits of a quite definite *form of thought*, a structure that determines his whole world view.'⁴¹ There is nothing wrong in this in itself; all thinkers and theologians must have their own characteristic form of thought. But Barth's form of thought is so distinctive that it is worth asking where it comes from, and for von Balthasar, this means exploring Barth's heritage in terms of Schleiermacher and German Idealism.

Von Balthasar is no doubt that the main difference between Barth, and the tradition of Aristotelian Scholasticism with which he battles in Catholic theology, derives from his insistence upon the importance of 'act' and 'event' as opposed to the categories of 'being' and 'nature'. It leads him to assume the priority of 'reality' over 'possibility' and in turn to focus on what is the *concretissimum*, the most concrete event of all. For Barth this is clearly the event of revelation, the moment where God meets humanity in Jesus Christ. The consequence of all this is a stress on the particular, an avoidance of generalities and abstractions, and a radical unwillingness to allow of a position of neutrality in response to such revelation. This position has been described as one of 'intensive universalism' because 'his method is to bring everything to the point of highest intensity: where God and man intersect in Jesus Christ' and where 'the moment of revelation and the moment of faith are fused together'.⁴² As a help to

⁴¹ KB p.187

⁴² *Ibid.* p.197

explain this, von Balthasar offers the image of the hour glass, where the sand runs down from top to bottom, but where 'everything... depends in the final analysis on the funnel in the center.'⁴³ This is the place where God encounters humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

However, von Balthasar also believes that crucial to understanding the form and structure of Barth's theology is the way in which the heritage of German Idealism was developed for Protestant theology by Schleiermacher. He puts it quite starkly; 'Barth cannot be understood unless we see how his point of departure was determined by Schleiermacher, who gave him during the years of his theological formation the conceptual terms for his own thought.'⁴⁴ What attracted Barth was Schleiermacher's attempt to provide for the first time 'an *utterly amazing and thorough overview* of the scattered limbs (*disjecta membra*) of the historical Christian faith.' Whilst Barth rejected the idea of 'systematization' as a theological concept, there is no doubt in von Balthasar's mind that his 'great style', 'unified vision', and 'personal flair' render his work 'systematic' in the best sense. This leads him to suggest that 'the reason Barth is so thoroughly systematic in this sense is his ambition to do correctly what Schleiermacher tried to do *for the first time* in the history of theology: to develop a comprehensive overview of theology'. Or in other words, 'he borrowed the framework and thought form from Schleiermacher, but this time to fill it with another, genuinely evangelical content.'⁴⁵

⁴³ KB p.198

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.199

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.200

Von Balthasar goes on to trace the various affinities which can be found between the works of these two theologians, and also the influences which, before them, have shaped the development of German Idealism. This in turn leads him to raise the question; If this is the origin of those philosophical tools which Barth is going to use, and recognising that all theology must use some philosophical tools, how adequate for the task is the use which Barth makes of them? This is the subject of the chapter 'Idealism and Revelation' in which von Balthasar examines four issues to see 'whether there is an inner compulsion in Barth's theology to become a system'.⁴⁶

We can only sketch von Balthasar's approach to these issue in outline. The first, 'Systematization versus the Existential Moment', examines the freedom of human response to the revelation of the Word of God, in terms of that 'delicate balance' between the 'totality of victory and the total seriousness of decision', in short between 'essentialism and existentialism',⁴⁷. The second looks at the 'foundational circle' which Barth had developed to explain the relationship between 'Word and Faith',⁴⁸. The third enquires into the relationship between 'Dialectics and Divine Judgement' (and in light of our consideration of McCormack's criticisms to follow, it is worth noting that here von Balthasar explicitly acknowledges the continuing role of dialectics in Barth's theology, and yet also affirms the way in which Barth sought to bring their philosophical origins and use under the guidance and control of theology.) Finally, von Balthasar turns to the issue of 'The Concrete and History', exploring how Barth sought to demonstrate that human freedom and fulfilment are to be found 'in Christ' and not in any abstract or idealist concept of 'History'.

⁴⁶ KB p.220

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.224

Von Balthasar's conclusion to the questions he has raised is as follows. 'If we look back on the problems which Barth has taken up, especially where he has managed to set off theology from philosophical Idealism, then we can grant that Barth has indeed preserved (or won back) theology's autonomy even when it chooses to make use of the terminology and schemata of Idealism.'⁴⁹ It is for theology to choose when and whether it is appropriate to use such philosophical tools and concepts. But then, comes the sting in the tail. If that was true for Barth's use of the tools of German Idealism, why should it not also be true for the use of that concept from another, very different stable; that is Barth's old adversary the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being?

Nor is this for von Balthasar merely an abstract question. For whilst he grants that Barth had not uncritically taken over and used these Idealistic tools, there remain concerns whether they are totally adequate for the task to which Barth had put them. His concerns are summed up in a critical question. 'Have the breadth and depth of revelation been forced into the constraints of a system whose netting is too tight to allow faith to unfold into, and make use of other truths?'⁵⁰ As it happens, this is exactly what von Balthasar fears has happened in three crucial areas.

The first is that 'tendency towards constraint and system' which von Balthasar found 'unmistakable in Barth'.⁵¹ This is the charge of *Engführung*, of christological 'constriction' or 'narrowing', a charge to which Barth was to take public exception.

⁴⁸ KB p.226

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.240

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.241

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

There were no problems with taking christology as the starting point, but this did not mean that everything should be 'narrowed' to that one point. Barth had not left enough 'breathing room' between creation and covenant for the relative but proper autonomy of creation to come into play. 'Revelation does not presuppose creation in such a way that it *equates* it with the act of revelation. In giving ultimate meaning to creation, revelation does not annul creation's own proper and original meaning.'⁵²

The second follows on from this, in that von Balthasar found in Barth 'a tendency... to overstep the legitimate limits and competence of theology'. This was the besetting danger of over-systematization; 'Barth's christological narrowness *is* systematics because it closes the doors on possibilities that are still open to God.'⁵³ A case in point was Barth's attitude towards sin where, in the context of predestination, the appearance was given that Barth is trying to peer beyond the Last Judgement. Von Balthasar asks, 'Are we not really sneaking a look *behind* the mirror that we are only supposed to look *at*? Are we not trying to sneak a look at the hand of cards God holds?'⁵⁴ It is always difficult to hold the tension between grace and judgement, but von Balthasar saw in Barth's tendency to system, a vulnerability to abstraction which led him, despite his best intentions, into a form of metaphysical speculation.

The third is to do with the inadequacy of that space left for the Church to be God's vehicle in the world. For if the triumph of God in Christ is certain, and if Christ is the meaning and purpose for all humanity, then what role is left for the Church other than to be a temporary and provisional entity, in time to merge with the world? Despite

⁵² *KB* p.242 (my italics)

⁵³ *Ibid.* p.243

Barth's counter-assertion that, for the sake of dialectical balance, God could only be heard and recognised within the boundaries of the Church, for von Balthasar this did not ring true to the centrality of Barth's doctrine of election in Christ. From a Catholic perspective, the result was an inadequate ecclesiology, which resonated with Barth's previous suspicion of institutions and support for universal socialism. But it also raised the question whether this was simply the *consequence* of those other shortcomings which von Balthasar has identified. Or whether indeed the other two issues had been *purposefully* shaped in order that they result in such a diminished ecclesiology, specifically to counter the assertions of Roman Catholicism?

Von Balthasar has his suspicions that it was in fact the latter. But for the purposes of this thesis, it raises again the centrality of analogy as an issue for theology. As von Balthasar saw it, the problem with Barth does not relate to his use of christology as a starting point, but with his tendency to equate everything to revelation in Christ. That raises the historic problem of Idealism, in which the basis of any relationship with God can only be conceived in terms of some form of proto- or eschatological unity or identity. As von Balthasar recognised, this was the methodological dead-end which forced Barth to move towards a more analogical understanding, the key to which was to be found in a christology based on the analogous understanding of the human and divine natures in Christ. However, once this christological basis was stretched so that it becomes not just the starting point, but the pattern and framework for all subsequent theological development, then the same methodological problems of Idealism re-occur.

⁵⁴ KB p.244

For von Balthasar, it is only the concept of analogy which, properly and theologically regulated, can permit of a proper understanding of distance; that is where distance is understood not, as for Barth, in terms of sin and alienation, but as that differentiation which allows for the proper but relative autonomy of creation and of human response to God. That is why, in Part Three of his study, he will turn again to the concept of nature, as it is understood in Catholic theology. And why, throughout his own subsequent theology, analogy will play such a central role in the unfolding of God's revelation in Christ.

2.2.3) Part III – The Form and Structure of Catholic Thought

Von Balthasar begins this third part of his study with a chapter outlining some of the difficulties in 'Identifying a Catholic world view' and the problems which make it unfeasible simply to identify a supposedly Catholic 'framework' of thought and set it off against Barth's thought. Initially, some of the reservations he expresses might seem somewhat pedantic. Barth, however significant he may be, is only one of many contemporary Protestant theologians; it is only another theologian who can enter into dialogue with him rather than the Catholic Church; nor can anyone who does, do so other than as an individual rather than behalf of Catholicism as a whole.

However, behind these initial observations there are some deeper theological points being made. The reservations which von Balthasar has already expressed in Part Two have focused on the inner compulsion to system and consequent tendency to

constriction and narrowness which he has found in Barth's theology, a tendency which he believes, as we have seen, has its origins in Barth's debt to Schleiermacher and Idealism. In that sense, there can be no sense of an equivalent Catholic framework, in terms of a distillation or essence of Catholicism. Rather, it is both traditional and characteristic of Catholicism to use all the styles and forms of thought which are available to try and reflect the totality of God's truth.

In this reference to the significance of 'style' and 'form' in the shaping of Catholic thought, we find a brief allusion to issues which will be developed at far greater length in von Balthasar's subsequent *Theological Aesthetics*, particularly in the first volume, *Seeing the Form*. We can see preliminary pointers to his concern for that hitherto largely ignored, third transcendental of being, namely the beautiful, when he writes that, 'Stylistic forms exclude each other so little that actually at their deepest level they presuppose each other; and this, precisely *in* the mystery of their uniqueness, reveals the over-arching validity of the beautiful.'⁵⁵ Moreover such statements have echoes of that recognition of the glory and beauty of God which von Balthasar has found in Barth, as we have already noted.

But in order to perceive and appreciate that glory and beauty in its fullness, Catholic thought can never pretend to offer a 'closed-off and finished system'. It means instead that 'the content of revelation, as the highest *ratio* – the personal, divine Logos himself – needs all the forms of the worldly *logoi* of truth in order to present its inexhaustible fullness as well as the concrete and individual.'⁵⁶ Catholic theology

⁵⁵ KB p.252

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.253

must be ready and willing to use all the thought forms which are available and appropriate, both to theology and philosophy, in order to do justice to the fullness and splendour of God's truth.

It is on this basis that von Balthasar concludes his opening chapter in this section with a brief defence of two theologians most associated with Barth's assault on the Catholic use of analogy. We have seen how in von Balthasar view, Barth's achievement as regards liberal Protestantism had been to liberate God's word from domination by human subjectivity and rationality, whereby in effect theology was subsumed under anthropology. The corresponding danger from the Catholic tradition came from a different direction, even if the ultimate threat remained the same. For Barth it was the insistence of the Church that natural reason of itself could lead a person to the knowledge of the revelation of God. It was this independence of natural theology from the revelation of God, supported as he understood it by the decisions of the First Vatican Council, which meant that the freedom and authority of God was still infringed. Natural theology and the *analogia entis* represented the Catholic attempt to 'lay hands on God' and sufficient reason why he could never become part of the Catholic Church.

Von Balthasar has to acknowledge that in the way analogy was re-introduced as a guiding principle for Catholic theology by his Jesuit colleague Erich Przywara, it could initially appear a 'philosophically constructed system'.⁵⁷ But as Przywara's later works following publication of *Analogia Entis* further clarified his position, von

⁵⁷ KB p.255

Balthasar maintains that his former mentor has just the same concerns as Barth, namely not to impose any abstract system on the concrete freedom of God. He quotes from a later article in which Przywara states 'Since there is only one, single concrete existing order between God and creature in this concretely existing world - that between the original sin in Adam and redemption in Christ – the concretely existing face of philosophy only comes to light from within this order...'⁵⁸ There is thus no question of a natural theology operating outside of revealed theology. And in turn this means that the analogy of being can only be interpreted christologically, a process which von Balthasar maintains is undertaken relentlessly throughout another of Przywara's major works, *Deus semper major*, published in 1940.⁵⁹

Von Balthasar is also aware that there can appear to be a 'certain age-old tension' between two different types of theology; 'between 'a more concrete and positive theology that builds upon the historical facts of revelation and thus makes greater use of the categories that apply to *events*... and a more speculative theology that steps back into a certain contemplative distance from these immediate events and takes for its object the events' rationality or the implied connection between the individual truths of revelation.'⁶⁰ Traditionally patristic theology has been more associated with the first and scholasticism with the second, though von Balthasar maintains that both have their rightful place within Christian theology at all times and places. He recognises the similarity, at least in broad outlines, between Barth's and patristic theology 'insofar as both have couched revelation in the intellectual structure of their time: in the case of patristic Catholicism in the categories of a philosophical,

⁵⁸ KB p.256

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.328

mystical Neoplatonic Hellenism; in Barth's case, in the categories of German Idealism.'⁶¹

However, this brings into focus the significance of Thomas Aquinas and his influence upon the development of scholasticism. Von Balthasar acknowledges that there are aspects of Aquinas' approach which appear very different to Barth. The first is his strong emphasis on using philosophy both '*before* and *within* theology';⁶² the second follows on from this, namely his 'decided predilection for induction (working from below, drawing examples from there for the realm above and finally explaining theology in philosophical terms)'⁶³ and which led him in turn to devote more attention to the 'general, suprahistorical essence (*quidditas*) of things'⁶⁴ rather than the concrete singularities of revelation in salvation history.

At the same time, Von Balthasar is wary of interpreting Aquinas solely in terms of later developments such as scholasticism, the mediaeval Church and the clash with Protestant reformers. Von Balthasar believes that Aquinas' role is a much more transitional one. He stands at a moment of profound change, as perhaps the most important representative of the Church just at the moment when, with the emergence of the schools, natural sciences and philosophy start to assert their autonomy and independence from the Church. His work is an attempt both to articulate and to integrate the proper methods of philosophy and theology in the changing intellectual climate of his time. This means that his work may well have a thrust quite different to

⁶⁰ KB p.258

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.259

⁶² *Ibid.* p.262

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.265

that of Barth's, (and von Balthasar acknowledges that Barth felt much more at home with the '*theological* rationality of Anselm' than with 'St. Thomas' *philosophical* rationality'⁶⁵) but that should not cloud the fact that they both have a similar objective, namely to establish the proper basis on which theology may use the philosophical tools and concepts of their age.

Von Balthasar is in no doubt of Aquinas' influence, both on the development of mediaeval thought and upon the way in which the dispute between Protestant reformers and the Catholic church was to take place. Barth's theology has served to refocus the nature of those disputes around those terms which are associated with Aquinas, namely the role of analogy and the relationship between philosophy and theology, revelation and reason. But it is wrong, von Balthasar believes, to interpret Aquinas and his method of integrating philosophy and theology solely in light of such subsequent developments. It elevates Aquinas' theology to a position of pre-eminence which even it cannot sustain; as von Balthasar notes; 'When the recent popes expressly commended him as *dux studiorum*, they were not canonizing his theological system or holding it up as the only theology for the Church in its every detail.'⁶⁶ It prevents us from seeing where there are actually points of similarity with the apparently so different approach of Karl Barth. And thus it does not permit of that reconciling work concerning the relationship between nature and grace which von Balthasar wishes to achieve through his study of Barth.

⁶⁴ KB p.264

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.265

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.262

In order for him to do that, he must now turn to the heart of the dispute and offer a response to Barth's challenge to Catholic use of analogy and natural theology; namely that the Catholic Church asserts that knowledge of God is attainable by natural reason independent of God's revelation in Christ. And von Balthasar has to acknowledge that some of the decrees of the First Vatican Council would on the face of it, appear to sustain Barth's challenge. For the Council decreed that; 'Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the *natural* light of human reason from the things that he has made.' This is followed by an even more explicit statement; 'Furthermore, the perpetual universal belief of the Catholic Church has held and now holds that there are two orders of knowledge distinct not only in origin but also in object. They are distinct in origin because in one, we know by means of *natural* reason; in the other, by faith. And they are distinct in object, because beyond what *natural* reason can attain we have proposed to us as objects to be believed mysteries that are hidden in God and that, unless divinely revealed, can never be known.'⁶⁷

Do not these suggest that Barth's allegation that Catholicism permits of a natural knowledge, independent of God's revelation in Christ, is well founded? Von Balthasar's purpose in this next chapter is to show that, contrary to their apparent meaning, they do not. And in order to do this, he develops a dense and complex argument, which takes the reader through the development of Catholic theology from Aquinas to Vatican I and beyond to show why.

⁶⁷ KB pp.302-3, quoting *Denzinger* 1785 and 1795

The principal steps are as follows. Firstly, he recognises that Aquinas' starting point is shared with the Church fathers, in that 'he sees the one, indivisible world order, in which nature and grace together form a unity: nature exists for the sake of grace and is ordered to it, having its ultimate finality in it.'⁶⁸ The ultimate aim of human being, as a created being of nature, is the supernatural vision of God, and there is no moment where Aquinas, or any of the mediaeval theologians, even entertains the possibility of a final goal apart from that beatific vision. This position, summed up in Aquinas' dictum that grace does not destroy but rather completes nature, means that a natural theology independent of grace and revelation is inconceivable.

However, all this changed when the Church had to respond to the theses of Baius, Jansen and others in the post-Tridentine period. Von Balthasar recognises that their arguments have their origins in the works of Augustine and similar statements can be found in the Council of Orange in 527 AD. But in the very different context of 16th and 17th century Europe, with the Catholic Church facing both the challenge of Calvinist teachings on predestination and a radical Protestant dialectic which saw human nature in terms of sin and fall, such theses were read very differently. It was 'when Baius chose to derive a *de iure* compulsory right to grace understood as a strict requirement (*debitum*) from nature based on the *de facto* configuration of both orders'⁶⁹ that the nature of the dispute changed. To counter the proposal that what had been understood as linked freely by grace as the gift of God, should instead be linked by necessity, as part of the essence of humanity, the Catholic Church had to maintain that a graceless order of nature or creation was at least possible. Thus, in

⁶⁸ KB pp.268-9

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.269

order to maintain that God did not 'need' to give grace to nature, the possibility of a natural order without grace became conceivable.

It was the taking of this step which gave rise to the possibility of a 'natural theology' of the sort that Barth would later challenge, namely that of a *natura pura* which exists outside of the framework of grace. However, in von Balthasar's view, Catholicism only affirmed this as a possibility so as to be able to refute the otherwise dangerous link which would regard it as part of the essence of being human to participate in grace. He had to acknowledge that within Catholicism there was a 'distinct tendency to protect the concept of nature from the danger of Protestant subversion', a tendency which 'goes so far that post-Tridentine Catholic theologians not only try to set off nature from sin and grace but also feel obliged to prove that the sphere of nature can be isolated and depicted *in fact*.'⁷⁰ But this, von Balthasar argues, was really an exaggerated response to a particular set of questions, even the price which had to be paid in an 'Age of Reason' to preserve a deeper truth.

What was really being discussed was 'the old patristic and Scholastic tension of *natura* and *gratia*, which was always theologically sufficient to characterize creation's distance from the gift of grace it received'.⁷¹ On the *de facto* level, referring to the one concretely existing created order, the position of the Catholic Church remained the same; that is to say that the order of nature remained within the order of grace. This is why von Balthasar believes that the Vatican 1 statements, read in this context, do not propose the kind of natural theology that Barth decries. To support this he quotes

⁷⁰ KB p.289

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

from Michael Schmaus' *Katholische Dogmatik*; 'The Vatican Council asserts the possibility but not the factual actuality of a natural knowledge of God. Human reason possesses, without the additional infusion of grace by God to take it beyond its own powers, the ability of finding ways that lead to God. Human nature is thus capable... within salvation history – and thus even after the Fall – of finding valid reasons for the existence of God from contemplating creation in itself...' ⁷²

This distinction between the possibility and factual actuality is crucial for von Balthasar. He quotes further from Schmaus; 'It is no objection against the Vatican Council's decision if natural reason has never found the way to the living God with certainty outside the sphere of the Bible, or even if we deny that God can naturally be known by those who are not illumined by the light of supernatural revelation.' ⁷³ For from this perspective, von Balthasar maintains that its deliberations simply can not be held to anticipate the whole complex of questions which have given rise to Barth's thought, in which case it can not be held responsible either for the particular form of natural theology which Barth condemns. 'The Council only decided this issue: that *within* this concrete supernatural context, exaltation and transformation, human nature is not destroyed or turned into its opposite. On the contrary, the natural capacity of a human being to know God continues to function.' ⁷⁴

Thus far von Balthasar's concern has been to counter Barth's assertion that Catholicism, and particularly the decrees of Vatican 1, establish a separate and distinct order of nature which allows for a natural knowledge of God by human

⁷² KB p.307, quoting Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik I* (2nd edn. 1948) pp.180-84, 204

⁷³ KB p.308

reason alone outside of the order of grace and independent of God's revelation. Through the arguments developed, complex though they sometimes are to follow, von Balthasar believes that he has shown how they may instead be interpreted very differently; that by contrast in Catholic thought 'the whole order of reason is theologically embedded in the order of faith, just as the order of creation lies embedded in the order of grace...'⁷⁵ However, he also recognises that so far, he has only presented a 'possible' Catholic interpretation of the concept of nature. The task in his next chapter is to show how this is also the 'real' one.

To do this, von Balthasar proposes to take the themes which flow logically from Barth's christocentrism in the *Church Dogmatics*, namely the themes of 'Christ as the ground of creation', 'Nature and History', 'Nature and Grace' and finally 'Judgement and Redemption' and to show how these same themes are picked up and developed by contemporary Catholic theologians. Moreover, it is significant to observe that included within these theologians is none other than his former mentor, and Barth's erstwhile sparring partner, Erich Przywara.

Taking the first theme, 'Christ as the ground of creation', von Balthasar wants to move swiftly beyond the traditional Thomist-Scotist dichotomy, namely the dispute as to whether the Incarnation was necessary because of the fall or whether it was part of God's providential plan from creation. Instead, von Balthasar wants to proceed from the one concrete *de facto* reality of God's revelation and the world as it is, and that is in light of the world as it is illumined by the Incarnation. And it is just this same

⁷⁴ KB p.307

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.325

starting point which von Balthasar finds in Przywara, quoting from a later summary of his own work in which Przywara writes; 'According to his own eternal decree (Eph. 1ff.), God is revealed nowhere else but in Christ... All God's traits, insofar as they are features of the only true and one God, are aspects of the God who steps forth and interprets himself in Christ: the God who is only God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'⁷⁶ For Von Balthasar such statements only serve to confirm the christological interpretation of the analogy of being.

However, Przywara is not the only Catholic theologian to be quoted in this context. Von Balthasar goes on to refer to the christocentric focus of another former teacher Romano Guardini. In his books, Guardini rejects the idea that there is any abstractly defined 'essence' of Christianity because 'the historical person of Jesus Christ is himself this essence from whom all general and abstract categories of being and the world have their measure.'⁷⁷ Similar sentiments are again found in Michael Schmaus' *Katholische Dogmatik*; 'Because the foundation of the supernatural order is Christ, this means that creation from the very first moment of its existence is oriented to the expectation of its being adopted by God, which has been promised to it in God's own first born. God's design of creation is christocentric...' ⁷⁸ Other Catholic theologians referred to support this include Eucharis Berbuir and finally Emile Mersch, from whom von Balthasar quotes the stunningly succinct aphorism that, 'Theology is truly theocentric only when it is christocentric.'⁷⁹

⁷⁶ KB p.328

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.329

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.332, quoting Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II*, (4th edn. 1949) pp.185-86

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.334, quoting Emile Mersch, *La Théologie du Corps mystique I*, p.89

The point of this section is to demonstrate not just that there are some Catholic theologians who can be shown to hold similarly christocentric views to Barth, but that as von Balthasar puts it, such a theology comes not merely from the margins but 'from the very best of the Catholic tradition.'⁸⁰ Moreover, having used this method to make a Catholic response to the Barthian themes of 'Christ as the ground of creation', von Balthasar continues to use the same method, and quotes from many of the same theologians, to show that the same is also true for the themes which follow.

Under 'Nature and History' he seeks to demonstrate that Catholic theologians are just as concerned to show that the 'immanent history of man' can not be separated from 'the transcendent historicity of God's revelation that has entered the stage of world history'; and that "'natural" and supernatural temporality and historicity stand and fall together... founded on the historicity of Christ, in whose two natures the analogy of human and divine history is united...'⁸¹ The same process and many of the same names appear in the section on 'Nature and Grace'. Catholic theology is not concerned to provide definitive answers to highly speculative questions about a hypothetical 'pure' nature; nor does it wish to push too far the human predisposition towards grace that comes from its being a creature of God. 'As far as the question of nature and grace is concerned... we should be content to live in the real world as we actually experience it. We know nature only as it is in reality and our only experience of grace is in its undeservedness as it meets us in the real world.'⁸²

⁸⁰ *KB* p.334

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.336

⁸² *Ibid.* p.357

The last of these sections is entitled 'Judgement and Redemption' and here von Balthasar acknowledges that like Barth, Catholic theology comes before that 'ineffable eschatological mystery', the tension which exists between the pronouncement of God's judgement and salvation in Jesus Christ. There can be no explanation of these mysteries outside of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, or as von Balthasar characteristically puts it, 'Everything converges on the mystery of Holy Saturday when Good Friday and Easter Sunday meet.'⁸³ But the process of trying to expound this theologically remains fraught for everyone. 'We seem caught between a dialectic that renounces unity and one that wants to reduce everything to a unity.'⁸⁴ The temptation is that, in seeking to establish some kind of 'universally valid norm' to enlarge upon, the theologian oversteps the mark and goes beyond what can be said from the biblical witness. But in these areas 'we are not allowed direct or systematic statements'⁸⁵ such as would close off possibilities which remain open to God, (and we have already noted von Balthasar's concerns about those systematising tendencies in Barth which can lead to a christological constriction or narrowing.) By contrast, von Balthasar maintains that Catholic theologians working from the same christocentric traditions have managed to develop these same themes but without turning into Barth's 'dead-end', leaving proper room both for God's gracious judgement and for human decision and response to God.

This leads us into the final chapter of this Catholic response to Barth in which, under the heading 'Sin and Grace', von Balthasar deals with the way in which God's grace

⁸³ KB p.360 – a theme to be picked up in his *Theologie der drei Tage* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1970) tr. Aidan Nichols, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990)

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.361

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.358

in Christ is appropriated by his creation. It is here that all those concerns which von Balthasar has previously raised about Barth's theology, and which we have noted in the previous chapter, come to a more precise focus, and here that the Catholic response is most clearly delineated. Von Balthasar has already drawn attention to the primacy of 'act' and 'event' over against 'being' in Barth's theology, notwithstanding his move towards analogy and a theological understanding of creation.

The problem which he identifies here is that Barth's insistence upon the event aspect of revelation leads him to empty his description of any real ontological basis. Von Balthasar raises the question; If there is not an encounter in which something happens, in which there is not some effect or transformation in human being from their encounter with God, then can this really be understood as an event at all? 'In fact, if nothing actual happens between God and man that can be expressed ontologically, then in fact what happens is ... nothing at all. Then all talk of event and happening must be restricted to the quite separate spheres of activity; God is in his heaven and man wanders here alone on his poor earth.'⁸⁶

That is in effect what happens in Barth's theology as his revelatory framework can only interpret this encounter and what takes place in supra-historical and eschatological terms. For von Balthasar, this means the loss of any ontological meaning or purpose to human being, since such a transformation can only take place beyond the destruction of the created order, or as he puts it more graphically in 'the dialectical disintegration of the creature's own inherent being'⁸⁷. By contrast, 'Catholic

⁸⁶ *KB* p.365

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

dogmatics has taken the consequence of those difficulties seriously: if the *being* of the creature is something that has been willed, founded and created by God, then it is so because God has willed to enter into a real history with it. And history means encounter, mutual influence and exchange of what is proper to each partner. If it is to be a real history made up of real events, then we cannot avoid the real ontological elements in this exchange...'⁸⁸

We are back to the issue which von Balthasar has raised earlier. Having identified a change in Barth's theology, a move from dialectic to theology in the course of his theological development from *Romans* to the *Church Dogmatics*, von Balthasar has also sought to show how Barth's use of the analogy of faith needs ultimately to incorporate a proper understanding of the analogy of being if it is to carry out its theological task. It is in this area, the human appropriation of the grace freely given by God in Jesus Christ, that his form of thought is finally seen to be inadequate for the theological task. Von Balthasar can see pointers in Barth's theology towards what needs to happen to enable a proper analogical relationship in his treatment of time in the second volume of the *Dogmatics*. He quotes Barth's words about how 'The Word spoken from eternity lifts the time addressed by this Word into its own eternity as now *its own* time...The Word gives time a share in the self-sufficient Being of God.'⁸⁹ But for von Balthasar; 'This analogy of time, which describes God's descent into our time in Christ and the consequent elevation of our time into God's, is the crucial expression of the fact that the two forms of time do not intersect tangentially but meet in exchange and mutual influence.' And the consequence of this is that 'God's

⁸⁸ KB p.366

⁸⁹ KB p.369 quoting CD1.2 p.52

gracious self-communication means at the same time that man's being and actions, with all their relativity and provisionality, are relevant for God in this history.⁹⁰

The argument comes to a head in a discussion of that phrase of Martin Luther which has been central to the debate between Protestantism and Catholicism, the notion of Jesus Christ as *simul justus et peccator*. In Barth's interpretation in the *Church Dogmatics*, 'The two things that are "simultaneous" are our past and our future. Our sin has been and our righteousness comes... It is in this relationship of past sin and future righteousness alone that the two spheres are contemporary...'⁹¹ Yet for von Balthasar, herein lies the problem. 'Too much in Barth gives the impression that nothing much really *happens* in his theology of event and history, because everything has already happened in eternity...'⁹² Instead von Balthasar wants to offer a Catholic interpretation of this phrase in a way that combines both a truly christocentric perspective with a truly temporal history. The steps in this process lead him to the conclusion that God's gift of grace in Christ is the opportunity for 'participation' in his inner life, a participation or partaking which is neither purely forensic or eschatological, but involves a real transformation in being of the creature. Moreover, he sums this process up in words which are worth quoting in length, since they take us to the heart of those issues which remain between his interpretation of Barth and an authentic Catholic theology.

'Because of this character of grace (to be an event of transformation), it leaves room for all real events and phases that make up man's way to God: conversion, progress,

⁹⁰ KB p.369

⁹¹ KB p.370 quoting CD2.1 p.627

backsliding, cooperation and obstacles. Redemption is not effected “in one lump”, so to speak, as if all the petty details of daily life were ultimately meaningless (since in this view they have been relegated to a dead past under the gaze of eternity). Redemption comes to us respecting our incarnate lives in time, leaving room for us to continue to change as we follow in the footsteps of the incarnate Lord. The steps we take in this discipleship have their own inherent meaning and weight. God takes our decisions seriously, working them into his plans by his holy providence.’⁹³

2.2.4) Part 4 – Prospects for a Rapprochement

This last part of von Balthasar’s study is the shortest by far of the four, and represents his summary of the state of the argument which Barth has initiated. Von Balthasar’s basic position is that, following his exposition of Barth’s thought and then the presentation of a Catholic response, there is no longer a basic disagreement between Catholicism and Protestantism over the analogy of being; that Barth’s presentation of this formula and its use in Catholic theology is fundamentally mistaken; and that notwithstanding the decrees of Vatican 1, the Catholic Church does not propose that there is a second, alternative way to the knowledge of God, based on a concept of pure nature and outside of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

To that extent, the battle field which Barth has constructed is an ‘illusory’ one. This is not to say that there do not remain differences between Catholic and Protestant thought, just as Barth well knows there remain differences between different

⁹² *KB* p.371

⁹³ *Ibid.* pp.377-8

Protestant theologians and, as he has acknowledged, there is a range of expression held within the totality of Catholic thought. Rather, it is that these difference of themselves do not carry the weight which Barth would ascribe to them, and certainly do not provide any justification for that ongoing division within the Church which both he and Barth deplore, and which he identified at the beginning as one of the principal reasons for his engaging in dialogue with Barth.

However, that is only the negative achievement, so to speak. Von Balthasar, as we have seen, is in no doubt of Barth's achievement as a theologian, and is convinced that there are also positive aspects of Barth's theology which should be at the centre of Catholic theology as it too seeks to respond to the glory of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Von Balthasar identifies these under three headings. These 'insights' are those that 'involve the foundations for a christocentrism, for the historicity of nature and the created character of worldly truth.'⁹⁴ Moreover, as they are put in these terms, we can see how these themes arise out of the dialogue in which von Balthasar has been engaged.

The 'foundations for a Christocentrism' reflects von Balthasar's agreement with Barth's fundamental insight that Christian theology must begin with that which is the most concrete of all events, with God's Word in Jesus Christ. The second follows on from his reflection of Barth's christological exposition of creation and covenant; that rather than any concept of a pure and independent order of nature in addition to that which is encompassed within the order of revelation, there is only the one world as it

⁹⁴ *KB* p.383

is, created and restored in the image of Jesus Christ. Hence his assertion of the 'historicity of nature'. From this also follows the third insight, which is the 'created character of worldly truth' and this third insight encompasses both what von Balthasar has learnt from Barth and the points where he believes theology needs also to break through the constrictions which can afflict Barth's thought. That worldly truth has a created character means that, like all truth, it has to be interpreted in the light of God's revelation, in light of the Incarnation. But at the same time, the very fact of creation means that there is a value and truth to being in the world, and that the categories and thought forms of worldly truth need to be used to explain and articulate their real, albeit relative, truth and meaning.

This is precisely the place where we return to the central issue of analogy. Von Balthasar has identified just how far Barth has moved in his shift from dialectic to analogy. But his conviction is also that, constrained as he is by a flawed understanding of the analogy of being, expressly developed to combat his misinterpretation of the Catholic position on natural theology, Barth has not moved far enough. His use of the analogy of faith, and his determination to restrict this to the act of revelation, does not allow for anything to happen outside or in response to revelation. In short, it does not allow an adequate framework to explain the 'created character of worldly truth'.

In the final section of this chapter, we shall pick up this theme again to explore what the implications of this may be for von Balthasar's own theological development. But for now we shall note how concerns in this area serve to explain the differences

between Barth and Catholicism in terms of their understanding of Church and as von Balthasar sees it, the inadequacy of Barth's treatment of the Church and sacraments. In von Balthasar's view, Barth's actualism is insufficient basis for an ecclesiology since 'a body simply cannot consist of isolated moments of actuality' and the Church is the body of Christ. If it is the traditional language of 'nature' or 'merit' to which Barth and so many Protestant theologians take offence, alleging a human presumption on the free exercise of divine grace, then von Balthasar has an authentically biblical alternative; 'one can make the fact of authentic creaturely cooperation with grace less abrasive and yet no less urgent through the Lord's preferred image: the branch of the vine bearing fruit.'⁹⁵

2.3) McCormack's challenge to von Balthasar's reading

Having undertaken this detailed reading of von Balthasar's study and the development of his arguments, we need at this point to acknowledge and respond to the criticisms which McCormack has made of the whole von Balthasar thesis concerning the interpretation of Barth. For his critique goes right to the heart of von Balthasar's work and centres on two crucial issues; that of a 'turn from dialectic to analogy' in Barth's theology and the significance of Barth's study of Anselm in occasioning such a shift. McCormack thinks von Balthasar's argument is mistaken on both counts.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ KB p.388

⁹⁶ See also my article 'The von Balthasar thesis: a re-examination of von Balthasar's study of Barth in the light of Bruce McCormack' in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 56/3 (2003)

As regards the first, or methodological issue, he identifies four problems that render the turn from dialectic to analogy 'inadequate'. The first is that the imprecision of the terms used can lead to misunderstanding. Is the 'turn from dialectic' the rejection of a particular theological method (von Balthasar's position) or the turning away from a theology grounded in a particular *Realdialektik* (the position of Eberhard Jüngel)? Secondly, and more importantly, the analogy of faith, which Barth adopts in contradistinction to the analogy of being, is itself 'an *inherently dialectical concept*', as can be seen in the dialectic of 'veiling and unveiling' in Barth's exposition of revelation. Thirdly, whereas use of 'dialectic' concerns theological method, the 'analogy of faith' is a gift of God; the latter may have methodological implications for theology, but the two operate on different conceptual planes. Thus to bring the two concepts together is 'to commit a category error'. Finally, too much interpretation of Barth's theology has been undertaken from the perspective of subsequent systematic theology and not enough given to the material context which gave rise to it.⁹⁷

McCormack's concern for the material context leads him also to challenge the significance accorded to Anselm in terms of Barth's theological development. On the one hand recent studies by Spieckermann and Beintker have discovered evidence of analogical thought forms in Barth's work which predate the publication of his study of Anselm in 1931.⁹⁸ For example, in the 2nd Edition of *Romans* in 1922, there is reference to an 'analogy of the cross', and in the unfinished *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* of 1927 there is an analogy drawn between God's speech and human knowing of it. On the other hand, notwithstanding such references to analogy, 'the

⁹⁷ McCormack, *Op. cit.* pp.16-20

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp.8-10

great weakness of the von Balthasarian formula is that it conceals from view the extent to which Karl Barth remained – even in the *Church Dogmatics*! – a *dialectical theologian*.⁹⁹

Instead McCormack posits an alternative paradigm, in which Barth's theology develops as the 'unfolding of a single material insight' in four stages, each responding to 'material decisions in dogmatic theology' and reflected in his published work. Thus Barth's critically realistic dialectical theology develops in the shadow of:

- i) 'a Process Eschatology' (the break with liberalism and publication of *Romans I*)
- ii) 'a Consistent Eschatology' (with the heightened eschatology of *Romans II*)
- iii) 'an Anhypostatic-Enhypostatic Christology, First Stage: Pneumatocentrism', (with his adoption of an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology in 1924) and
- iv) 'an Anhypostatic-Enhypostatic Christology, Second Stage: Christocentrism' (with his modified doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics 2.1* published in 1936)¹⁰⁰

Thus the significant stages in Barth's development are seen to occur both before and after, rather than with, his study of Anselm. For McCormack the 'decisive turn' from the theology of Romans took place in 1924 with Barth's adoption of an anhypostatic-enhypostatic model of christology, together with a doctrine of the immanent Trinity, and 'when it did the major influence was not Anselm of Canterbury but Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*'.¹⁰¹ McCormack's explanation of the significance which Barth himself accords to his book on Anselm, is that it serves to distance him

⁹⁹ McCormack, *Op cit.* p.18

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* pp.20-22

from his former colleagues in the so-called 'dialectical theology movement' at a time of dramatic change in German politics following the elections of September 1930.

As an analysis of Barth's theological development, McCormack's alternative paradigm is both constructive and comprehensive. But his assessment of the 'von Balthasar thesis' is, I believe, deficient on two counts.¹⁰² In the first place it does not do justice to the subtlety and detail of von Balthasar's exposition. And secondly, it does not permit us to see how in his study, von Balthasar was not seeking simply to introduce and interpret Barth, but to engage and respond as a Catholic theologian to Barth's challenge to Catholic theology. Here we will deal with the first of our two criticisms.

There are three problems which McCormack implicitly acknowledges. The first is Barth's own expressed opinion. Von Balthasar quotes from Barth's summary of his development; 'the real work that documents my conversion... from the residue of a philosophical or anthropological ... grounding of Christian doctrine... is not the much-read tract against Emil Brunner but my 1931 book on Anselm of Canterbury's proofs for the existence of God.'¹⁰³ McCormack quotes from a slightly different translation which has 'farewell' rather than 'conversion',¹⁰⁴ and for him the key is context. For Barth goes on to explain the change in terms of 'the *deepening* and the *application* of that knowledge which, in its main channels, I had gained before...'¹⁰⁵ This is hardly

¹⁰¹ McCormack, *Op. cit.* p.23

¹⁰² See also Roland Chia, *Revelation and Theology: the Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1999) p.176 which expresses similar unease without going into such detail.

¹⁰³ KB p.93

¹⁰⁴ McCormack, *Op. cit.* p.1

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.2

the *Umbruch*, the radical change or conversion of which von Balthasar speaks. And yet McCormack has to acknowledge Barth's words prefacing the 2nd Edition of his book on Anselm in 1958, that 'only a comparatively few commentators, for example Hans Urs von Balthasar, have noticed that my interest in Anselm was never a side issue for me... most of them have completely failed to see that in this book on Anselm, one encounters if not *the* key, then certainly *a* very important key to understanding the movement of thought which has urged itself upon me more and more in the *Church Dogmatics* as the only one appropriate to theology.'¹⁰⁶

The second problem is that von Balthasar's understanding of Barth's development is, as McCormack puts it, 'not nearly so tidy'¹⁰⁷ or alternatively, rather more subtle and complex, than has hitherto been indicated. There is, in fact, a 'second' more refined model at work which, rather than insisting on a sudden turn occurring with the book on Anselm in 1931, involves a much more gradual process.¹⁰⁸ There is a 'turn to analogy' in the *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* of 1927 which only emerges as the 'fully developed form of analogy' in 1937, with the christological concentration of the *Church Dogmatics* 2.1. It is this second model that McCormack thinks more closely fits von Balthasar's intentions. But it is the first, more dramatic, model that has had greater influence, particularly in the English-speaking world.

This leads to the third, related issue; namely that it is less von Balthasar's work, but the way the 'von Balthasar thesis' has been taken up and developed by subsequent theologians which has caused the problem. McCormack refers in particular to

¹⁰⁶ McCormack, *Op. cit.* p.422

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.2

Thomas Torrance and Hans Frei, and then to the more recent works of American theologians such as Steven Smith and Stephen Webb. It is here that McCormack's wider concern about Barth's reception as a 'neo-orthodox' rather than a 'critically realistic dialectical' theologian re-emerges. However, this was not von Balthasar's concern in 1951 and closer attention to what he actually wrote might just help us to see just how perceptive his interpretation is (and why Barth so commended him.)

It's not just that McCormack's identification of a second, more gradual model is closer to von Balthasar's intentions. Von Balthasar is clear from the start about the inner consistency of Barth's theology. 'Barth did not suddenly replace dialectics with analogy. We cannot isolate any one particular text as *the* sign of this shift, for it happened gradually.'¹⁰⁹ The *Göttingen Dogmatics* was not available to von Balthasar as it has been for recent scholars; nevertheless, he acknowledges evidence pointing towards an analogy of faith in a lecture, *Faith in a Personal God*, delivered as early as 1913. McCormack maintains that Barth's theology remains dialectical into the *Church Dogmatics*. But von Balthasar recognises this too. 'Dialectics crops up time and again in the very center of Barth's thought...' It's found in the contrasting pairs (light and darkness, right and left etc.) which are used in his account of creation, in his understanding of sin as the 'impossible possibility' and at the heart of the Incarnation where God has in Christ made 'the contradiction of the creature' his own. The difference is that here it is 'a purely theological dialectic, now victorious over a purely philosophical application.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ McCormack, *Op. cit.* p.3

¹⁰⁹ KB p.107

McCormack is concerned about imprecise use of the term dialectic. This is certainly an issue, but hardly one of von Balthasar's making. His study carefully distinguishes between the influence of Hegel's (dynamic) and Kierkegaard's (static) dialectical method on Barth and between the appropriate method and use of philosophical as opposed to theological dialectic. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic to find McCormack accusing von Balthasar of making a 'category error', in that dialectic and analogy are not, as Barth uses them, comparable terms. For this is a philosophical distinction, and at the heart of von Balthasar's critique is the issue of not *whether* but *how* theology should make proper use of philosophical methods and categories. Should confusion over use of the term dialectic still reign, perhaps it only justifies Barth's own decision to separate himself from the so-called 'dialectical theology' movement.

The significant markers of McCormack's alternative paradigm, namely the adoption of an anhypostatic/enhypostatic christology and the centrality of his doctrine of election are both recognised and dealt with at length by von Balthasar. It is in the section looking at Barth's abortive *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* of 1927 that von Balthasar notes; 'It is characteristic for Barth that he came to a balanced Christology earlier than he did to a balanced doctrine of creation.'¹¹¹ Again, von Balthasar is in no doubt about the importance of Barth's doctrine of election; for him it is the '*summa evangelii*'; 'It is *the* key for understanding all of God's revelation in creation, reconciliation and redemption.'¹¹² Moreover, since it is the pivotal position of Barth's study of Anselm, which is in question in all this, it is worth noting that von Balthasar's most extended treatment of this subject comes only after his dealing with those two

¹¹⁰ KB p.228

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.91

central themes, 'the Christological Foundation' and 'Creation and Covenant', with the aim of bringing out the epistemological consequences in terms of the relationship between faith and reason which follow such developments.

Viewed in this light, there is more in common between McCormack and von Balthasar than McCormack's explicitly revisionist thesis might suggest. However, this is still looking at von Balthasar's study in terms of its appropriateness as an 'expository' or 'interpretative' model for Barth. What this thesis is seeking to demonstrate is that there is significantly more going on in von Balthasar's work than simply interpreting Barth. What von Balthasar is doing is offering a profound but critical engagement with the issues which Barth has raised and offering a Catholic response in return. As part of this engagement, he is seeking to identify the steps which Barth has taken thus far and why, in terms of the move from dialectic to analogy.

However, far from denying the ongoing and continuing tension between dialectic and analogy in Barth's work, von Balthasar is going on to say that this is because Barth has, as it were, not moved far enough. The move to analogy was both necessary and inevitable and needs to be worked out more fully so that it can address not just the moment of revelation in faith, but the ongoing transformation in being, both of which have their origin in the fact that the Word takes flesh in Jesus Christ.

¹¹² KB p.174

Viewed in this light, von Balthasar's study is going beyond what Barth has written to pose challenges of its own in response. We have seen how these focus on the constraints which Barth has inherited from Schleiermacher and the Idealist tradition, in the danger of narrowing everything into christology, and a tendency to system which restricts the opportunities which still may be open to God. All these, von Balthasar is suggesting, come not from Barth's correct insistence upon a christocentric starting point, but from his attempt to interpret creation and covenant within an inadequate conceptual framework. Only a properly construed and christologically underpinned concept of analogy will do. Von Balthasar's study of Barth has led him to the point where he must use Barth's insights to move beyond Barth in order to do justice the fullness of God's revelation in Christ. And so our final section in this chapter, must look at the implications which his study on Barth has for his own future theological work, and see if we can find any pointers towards the themes which appear in his subsequent trilogy.

2.4) Implications for von Balthasar's theology

We have already noted how, in his summary of the Catholic response to Barth and the prospects for a rapprochement, von Balthasar has identified certain Barthian themes which contain valuable insights for Catholic theology. These themes, namely the 'foundations for christocentrism', the 'historicity of nature' and the 'created character of worldly truth' arise from his reading and exposition of Barth's thought: 'christocentrism' in terms of Barth's focus upon God's revelation in Jesus Christ; the 'historicity of nature' in terms of his doctrine of election, in which Barth offers the

fundamental insight that creation and covenant are to be interpreted christologically, and thus that nature is to be understood in terms of what God 'has done' in Jesus Christ; finally, the 'created character of worldly truth' in terms of humanity and the world finding their meaning and purpose only in terms of their being created by God.

However, articulation of these themes also suggests that what is being offered is not an uncritical appropriation of Barth's insights. For these themes are being offered only after a dialogue has taken place in some depth with the form and structure of Catholic thought. This dialogue too has served to shape the way in which Barth's insights can be understood and used, particularly in the way the second two insights follow on from the first. When we look to interpret the 'historicity of nature', we have to understand this also in terms of von Balthasar's insistence that Catholicism does not uphold an order of pure nature which is separate and distinct from the order of grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. Rather, it is that within the one all encompassing order of revelation, there is also room for nature with its own relative freedom and meaning, albeit as one fundamentally predisposed to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

It is with the issue of how to interpret this relative freedom and meaning of nature, within an overall framework of grace bounded by creation and covenant, that we come to the third of the themes identified by von Balthasar, namely the 'created character of worldly truth'. Moreover, it is here above all that we sense that what is being offered is both a borrowing from and a corrective to Barth's thought. Von Balthasar has recognised that Barth's appreciation of the value of 'creatureliness' starts from his adoption of a Chalcedonian christology and appropriation of the

doctrine of election, in that humanity finds its purpose and meaning as a creature because God has chosen to share created form in the Incarnation. However, we have also noted von Balthasar's concern that Barth's insistence on revelation as act or event, has limited the extent to which God's grace in Jesus Christ permits of an adequate human response, in which there can be a change not just in the understanding but in the being of the creature.

This suggests that von Balthasar's reading of what needs to be interpreted within the theme of the 'created character of worldly truth' is much broader than Barth will allow. In light of Christ's taking human flesh, there is more to be said about human life and culture than can be encompassed simply within Barth's teaching on revelation. And it is at this point that the concept of analogy, and the contrast between Barth's analogy of faith and von Balthasar's insistence on the analogy of being, becomes absolutely crucial. For whilst von Balthasar agrees with Barth that theological use of the concept of analogy must be undertaken christologically if it is to be done at all, he also maintains that the Chalcedonian christology which Barth has adopted, itself requires an analogous understanding of being, in so far as it rests upon a fundamentally analogous concept of nature.

Von Balthasar argues that to do justice to the Chalcedonian formula of the two natures, human and divine in Christ, we have to recognise that the concept of nature is being used in an analogous way. 'The concept of *physis* was an analogous one even by the time of Chalcedon.'¹¹³ It is being used analogously in two respects. In

¹¹³ KB p.273

the first place there was a philosophical tradition in use of the term which was derived from Aristotle and the Greek philosophers. This looked to interpret nature in light of human experience of the world, statically in terms of categories and essences and more dynamically in terms of ends and goals. But there was also a theological tradition, which saw nature in the context of God's plan of salvation, that is in terms creation, incarnation and redemption, and, as regards human experience, of sin and fall. Linked with these two different traditions came two different approaches. The philosophical tended to focus upon that aspect of nature which stressed the similarities and that which was held in common. On the other hand, the theological stressed the dissimilarity and differences between God and his world, between creation and redemption, human and divine. In this approach nature was seen as that which could be 'set off' and distinguished from grace and the supernatural order.

Both approaches, the philosophical and the theological, were required to interpret the Chalcedonian framework, with its holding together of both the distinction between the human and divine natures and their unity in Christ. 'And so our only option is to recognise a certain kind of *analogy* between the two uses of the concept of nature. This analogy represents the middle ground between two extremes: 1) a metaphysics (which is necessarily pantheistic) that does not distinguish between philosophy and theology; and 2) a radical Protestant dialectic in which the concept of nature actually diverges into and denotes two utterly distinct meanings.'¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ KB p.273

Von Balthasar is not just arguing that only an analogical understanding of the concept of nature can hold these two different approaches together. More than this, he is maintaining that, with their differing emphases upon similarity and dissimilarity, they both depend upon a deeper and more fundamental analogy. As we noted in our earlier section, von Balthasar is determined to preserve a properly Catholic tension between nature and grace; that is one which neither presumes upon God's freedom by assuming that access to grace is somehow inherent in human nature (the basis of Barth's criticism of natural theology); nor by contrast assumes that nature is so fallen and set apart that, by contrast, grace can only be operative outside the world that is. And so, building upon the different approaches of philosophy and theology, von Balthasar seeks to establish what he calls the '*formal concept of nature*'. 'Nature is to be sought in that *minimum* that must be present in every possible situation where God wants to reveal himself to a creature. And that minimum is expressed by the term *analogia entis*... The "nature" that grace supposes is createdness as such.'¹¹⁵

It is not enough to maintain that, in the tension which must be maintained in the relationship between the two, grace points to what is closer and more similar to God, whilst nature reflects what is separate and dissimilar. That would be an oversimplification and run the risk of disintegrating the concept of nature into two separate and distinct meanings, (in terms of 'fallen' or 'redeemed' nature.) By contrast, the analogy of being allows for both similarity and dissimilarity within the same concept of creatureliness, and here von Balthasar explicitly contrasts his own theology with Barth's. 'It is quite right to say, as Barth does, that being *God* and being

¹¹⁵ KB p.285

creature are utterly dissimilar, contrasting with each other in every way... But even here we are already talking about the contrast between *being* God and *being* a creature. So we have already introduced some kind of similarity of the creature with the ever dissimilar God.¹¹⁶ Beyond the differences of similarity and dissimilarity evidenced in the different approaches of philosophy and theology, there is that deeper analogical relationship which is grounded in the Incarnation, in the being of Christ through whom we come to know what it means to be a creature of God.

The significance of these arguments is that von Balthasar has returned to the old battle ground of analogy and sought to show that, even on his own terms, Barth's assertion of the analogy of faith over against the analogy of being does not go far enough. If Barth, correctly as von Balthasar believes, wishes to make christology the starting point for human knowledge of God and the world, then the very christological foundation upon which he builds requires, as von Balthasar understands it, an analogous understanding of nature and, in turn, an understanding of creatureliness which depends on the analogy of being. Moreover, it is this analogical understanding which allows for the full and proper play of theological and philosophical reasoning in their respective spheres of interest and also allows them to interact and shed light on each other. 'Therefore, the theological analogy does not abolish the philosophical one, nor does it fulfil it in such a way that it would no longer be a truly philosophical analogy... the theological analogy shed definitive light on the philosophical one by showing us what similarity can mean (namely participation and adoption) and how far dissimilarity can really go – all the way to God's own abandonment of himself.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ KB p.286

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It is at this point that we return again to the third theme which we identified earlier, that is the 'created character of worldly truth'. Von Balthasar believes that Barth's starting point here is correct, but that the framework provided by the analogy of faith is insufficient for the task. Christ's assumption of human and divine nature requires an analogous understanding not just of nature but of being itself, in order to explain how human beings are to interpret themselves and their world in response to God's gift of grace. To present that understanding and do justice to the fullness of God's revelation, they will need to call upon all the resources of human thought and that will involve both theology and philosophy undertaking their vital and interrelated roles. It will require nothing less than a christological representation of the *analogia entis*.

Barth's theology is a major achievement when seen against the failings of the theological tradition, both Protestant and Catholic, of the previous century. He has refocused theology on its proper object of study; namely the revelation of God's Word in Jesus Christ. In so doing, he has allowed the glory of the knowledge of God to shine through, rediscovering that aesthetic aspect of theology which is so appealing to von Balthasar. And he has identified some critical themes that von Balthasar believes will need to be followed up and explored in any theology which is worthy of the name in the future. This is the task which von Balthasar will undertake in his own magnum opus, though the trilogy that begins with *The Glory of the Lord*, proceeds to the *Theo-Drama* and concludes with the *Theo-Logic*.

But he will seek to do so using a conceptual framework which he believes is more adequate to the task, one which through the analogy of being takes seriously not just the revelation which is given by God to faith, but the life which is shared with the faithful. In response to the God who comes to share human nature in Jesus Christ, and who thus graciously enables humanity to participate in the being of God, it will take as its theme the three transcendentals of being, the beautiful, the good and the true. In light of his concerns about christological constriction and whether there is any room for response if God has already achieved everything in Christ, it will explore where there is space for human beings to play their part in God's saving activity in the second volume, which is the *Theo-Drama*. But since, as we have already noted, it was Barth's recovery of the glory and beauty of God which first attracted von Balthasar to his writings, it will begin with his own *Theological Aesthetics* in *The Glory of the Lord*. It is to this work that we now turn.

Chapter 3) Beauty and Being – *The Glory of the Lord*

3.1) Why begin with beauty?

'Beauty is the word that shall be our first.'¹ To modern eyes it may seem an odd place for a theologian to begin, as von Balthasar recognises. 'Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendour around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.' But that only serves to render its role more important. For, in a world without beauty even the good and the true stand under threat of incomprehension. 'In a world without beauty – even if people cannot dispense with the word and constantly have it on the tip of their tongues in order to abuse it – in a world which is perhaps not wholly without beauty, but which can no longer see it or reckon with it: in such a world the good also loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out.'²

Sadly this had been all too true of von Balthasar's own experience of theological training under the Jesuits at their seminary in Fourvière. Looking back on the arid dryness of his studies while he still remained within the order, he wrote in 1946, 'My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made of the glory of God.'³ But in this struggle, he was to find that he was not alone. For in his meeting with Karl Barth, he was to recognise

¹ *GL1* p.18

² *Ibid.* p.19

³ Quoted in Peter Henrici, 'A Sketch of Von Balthasar's Life' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) p.13

that that there was another theologian who was equally keen to restore the importance of beauty as a theological concept.

As we already have seen, von Balthasar identified two reasons why he felt called as a Catholic theologian to enter a dialogue with Barth. The first was that he found in Barth both ‘the most thorough and penetrating display of the Protestant view and the closest rapprochement with the Catholic’,⁴ and in his theology some uniquely penetrating questions which could not be dismissed with the ‘old arsenal of stock answers’. Indeed, much of our last chapter has explored how von Balthasar has sought to respond to Barth’s challenge to Catholicism. But for von Balthasar, there was also ‘another reason why we want to begin a dialogue with Karl Barth: his theology is lovely.’⁵ This was not simply the matter of his adopting a particular theological style or manner of writing. Rather it came from his objective engagement with the proper object of theology, namely God in his revelation, combined with a passionate enthusiasm, as he is drawn into the beauty and joy of his subject matter. ‘Barth focuses on the Word, fully and exclusively, that its full splendour might radiate out to the reader. Who but Barth has gazed so breathlessly and tirelessly on his subject, watching it develop and blossom in all its power before his eyes?’⁶

As von Balthasar saw it, this was in marked contrast with one of Barth’s Protestant debating partners Kierkegaard; ‘For Kierkegaard, Christianity is unworldly, ascetic, polemic; for Barth it is the immense revelation of the eternal light that radiates over all of nature and fulfils every promise; it is God’s Yes and Amen to himself and his

⁴ *KB* p.23

⁵ *Ibid.* p.25

creation.’ And it means that the two had a radically different attitude to the place of the beautiful, the aesthetic in religious faith. Whilst Kierkegaard sought to separate the religious from the aesthetic sphere, ‘For Barth, the religious sphere is aesthetical because it is religious, because it is in itself the most authentic.’⁷

In light of this recognition, perhaps we should not be surprised to find von Balthasar’s trilogy itself beginning with the subject of beauty, as *The Glory of the Lord* is subtitled *A Theological Aesthetics*. Nor, in light of the background we have explored, should we be surprised to see not just the influence of Barth’s themes upon his work but also the further development of arguments begun in his study of Barth. What this chapter will seek to do is first to note the significance of this beginning with beauty and its origins in Barth, then to see how von Balthasar himself intends to allow beauty to speak, in terms of seeing the form of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and his shaping effect upon Christian experience and response. We will then enter into dialogue with a recent study by Roland Chia which also looks at this same subject area, to examine how far our respective approaches challenge or confirm each other. Finally, we will return to von Balthasar, to see how far in this first part of his trilogy he is still engaging with those themes which he has identified in his study of Barth as being crucial for all subsequent theology.

The influence of Barth upon *The Glory of the Lord* is widely recognised by scholars. However, the way in which the arguments introduced and developed in *The Theology of Karl Barth* serve to shape the structure of the work is less so. In his Foreword to

⁶ KB p.26

⁷ Ibid.

Balthasar at the end of Modernity, Fergus Kerr avers that 'it is not absurd to see Balthasar's magnificent attempt, in *Herrlichkeit*, to expound a theology centred on the glory of God, as an extension of Barth's reflections on the beauty of God in *Church Dogmatics II/1*... in effect, *Herrlichkeit* is a slow, patient and much more elaborate working out of Barth's conception of the divine beauty.'⁸ But recognition of that 'slow, patient and much more elaborate' nature of the relationship is significant. While the debt which von Balthasar's work owes to Barth is no secret, the relationship between *The Glory of the Lord* and the *Church Dogmatics* is not a straightforward one.

In his Introduction to the opening volume of his *Aesthetics, Seeing the Form*, von Balthasar begins by acknowledging 'the great service rendered to theology by Karl Barth of having recognised the imminent danger of shipwreck and of having, unaided, put the helm hard over.' Von Balthasar understands this in terms of Barth's overcoming the either/or between Hegel and Kierkegaard, recognising the need (with Hegel) for an objectively formed dogmatics but also (with Kierkegaard) for this to have as its content the personal faith relationship, mediated through Jesus Christ. In turn his insistence upon the 'real form' of God's revelation in Christ, leads him 'at the conclusion of his treatment of the doctrine of the divine perfections, to restore to God the attribute of 'beauty' for the first time in the history of Protestant theology.'⁹

However, just as important for von Balthasar is the fact that 'Barth arrives at the content of 'beauty' in a purely theological manner, namely, by contemplating the data of Scripture, especially God's 'glory', for whose interpretation 'beauty' appears to him

⁸ Fergus Kerr, 'Foreword: Assessing this 'Giddy Synthesis'' in Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward (eds.), *Balthasar at the end of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999) pp. 9-10

indispensable as ‘auxiliary concept’.¹⁰ This is followed by an extended reference to Barth’s exposition of ‘The Eternity and Glory of God’ in Volume 2.1 of the *Church Dogmatics*. God is ‘beautiful in a manner proper to him and to him alone’ as ‘the one who arouses *pleasure* (*Wohlgefallen*), creates *desire* (*Begehren*) for himself, and rewards with *delight* (*Genuss*)... the one who as God is both *lovely* and *love-worthy*.’ This means both that the concept of beauty must be taken seriously (‘Much too much would have to be deleted... which in the Bible is clearly and loudly proclaimed, if we were to attempt to deny the legitimacy of the concept of beauty...’) and so also ‘the question of form’; (for ‘if revelation’s quality of beaming forth joy is not adequately appreciated, where exactly then – so important is this question of form! – would be the gladness of the Glad Tidings?’)¹¹

In terms of revelation, form can not be separated from content, and Barth goes on to follow Anselm in calling theology the ‘most beautiful of all the sciences’, because of the beauty of its contents, namely its contemplation of God’s being in himself, in the relations of the Trinity, and in the Incarnation of the eternal Son.¹² Moreover, it is through contemplation of the Incarnation that the particular form of God’s beauty is perceived and that carries through to contemplation of the cross; ‘If we seek Christ’s beauty in a glory which is not that of the Crucified, we are doomed to seek in vain.’ ‘In

⁹ GL1 p.53

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp.53-55, quoting from CD 2.1 pp.649ff

¹² The significance of Barth’s “scientific” approach to theology is also dealt with in Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York: OUP, 1999) p.12; he goes on (pp.25-38) to offer his assessment of Barth’s influence on the shape of von Balthasar’s aesthetic task to which we will return (see note 27)

this self-revelation, God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, what we call 'ugly' as well as what we call 'beautiful'.¹³

Von Balthasar believes that Barth has made a significant contribution to theology. In contrast to the main thrust of Protestant theology, which following Luther has largely denied the role of aesthetics, Barth has recovered the concept of beauty in terms of the glory of God. He has rediscovered those roots which underlie the reformers and go back deeper to the patristic period, to the works of Augustine and Pseudo-Denys. But despite this achievement, von Balthasar claims that he has not really altered the trend of Protestant theology as a whole, which 'continues in dutiful subservience to Bultmann's dualism of criticism, on the one hand, and existential, image-less inwardness on the other. Contemporary Protestant theology nowhere deals with the beautiful as a theological category'.¹⁴

Moreover, there is a question in von Balthasar's mind as to whether this is simply because Barth's approach has not been heeded – or whether instead his approach has not gone far enough. Having demonstrated the inadequacy of a theology denuded of aesthetics, and thereby deprived of appreciation of the loveliness of God, that quality which draws humanity close and makes the gospel good news, von Balthasar follows up with an overview of the different ways in which theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, have tried largely without success to reintroduce the concept of beauty and the role of aesthetics. These attempts have been complicated by the

¹³ *GL1* pp.55-56, quoting from *CD2.1* pp.661ff

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.56. More recently, Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty* (London: SCM, 2nd ed. 2002) pp.167ff., has noted an increased interest in theological aesthetics, referring to Richard Harries, *Art and the Beauty of God* (London: Mowbray, 1993) and Richard Viladesau's work, *Op. cit.* (note 12)

development of secular ideals of beauty, particularly in response to the Idealist and Romantic movements in European thought, which have resulted in attempts at an aesthetic theology rather than a properly grounded theological aesthetic.

However the challenge which von Balthasar has posed remains. 'Should we go the way of Karl Barth, who rediscovers the inner beauty of theology and revelation itself? Or (and this is perhaps implicitly included in Barth's position), may it not be that we have a real and inescapable obligation to probe the possibility of there being a genuine relationship between theological beauty and the beauty of the world...?'¹⁵ That is the challenge which he will endeavour to meet, and in our next section, we shall look at how von Balthasar seeks to show how the divine beauty is not simply revealed in Christ's incarnation but speaks to the aspirations of all humanity and thus fulfils the promises inherent within creation.

3.2) Allowing beauty to speak

Von Balthasar's response to the challenge he has set himself is set out in summary form at the end of the Introduction to *Seeing the Form*, under the heading 'The Task and the Structure of a Theological Aesthetics'.¹⁶ It is to build on the exploration of aesthetics found in classical antiquity, but to ground it thoroughly in the form of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and to ally to his exposition something of the passionate yearning which can be found in Pseudo-Denys and other Christian writings.¹⁷

¹⁵ *GL1* p.80

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp.117-127

¹⁷ For another assessment of von Balthasar's aesthetic task see Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) pp. 131-194

Von Balthasar starts with the two aspects which have been used in every exploration of beauty, and which since Aquinas have been termed *species* (or *forma*) and *lumen* (or *splendor*) – that is ‘form’ (*Gestalt*) and ‘splendour’ (*Glanz*). The perception of beauty consists both of an appreciation of the form or shape in which it appears, and of the extent to which that form points towards a deeper reality, the hidden depths which subsist below the object which is perceived. Thus, ‘The appearance of the 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.’¹⁸ Different periods of intellectual history have appreciated one aspect more than the other; the classical approach concentrating more on the form and the Romantic movement more on the hidden depths beneath. However, the truth is that both belong together, and are inseparable in any perception of beauty.

However, because the perception of beauty involves both the form in which it appears and the hidden depths to which it points, there is also a sense in which it is not just in the eye of the beholder, but includes also that movement by which the beholder is drawn into, indeed ‘enraptured’ by, the splendour and glory of being itself.¹⁹ This means that to confront or explain such a structure of perception, which for von Balthasar is an encounter with being itself, there can be no simple or univocal application of philosophical categories used to describe or explain the existence of earthly entities (and here von Balthasar is understanding of those who from a Protestant perspective have been critical of too close an appropriation of pre-

¹⁸ *GL1* p.118

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.119

Christian Greek philosophy.) Instead, what is required is an analogical approach, as is suggested by the form of God's revelation in the world, in its creation, reconciliation and redemption.

Given the centrality of the Incarnation to his thought, perhaps it is not surprising that von Balthasar finds a key to illustrate what is happening in the Christmas preface. '*Quia per incarnati Verbi mysterium nova mentis nostrae oculis lux tuae claritatis infulsit: ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur.*' (Because through the mystery of the incarnate Word the new light of your brightness has shone onto the eyes of our mind; that knowing God visibly, we might be snatched up by this into the love of invisible things.)²⁰ This prayer emphasises how it is by the perception of what we do see that we are drawn into the mystery of that which we cannot see. But it also shows how this is not instigated simply by the act of perception, but that it is the beauty of God's revelation which so enraptures the beholder that we are drawn into the mystery of God's presence.

It also focuses on the role of desire in seeking God's presence and beauty, that *eros* which von Balthasar finds in the writings of Pseudo-Denys (who will be one of the theologians to be examined later in Volume 2) and in whom he finds a resonance with that enthusiasm and longing for the presence of God found throughout the Bible. He is aware of the need to be careful in the use of such classical sources; 'Because God actually effects that which he reveals in the sign, and because in God's order of salvation Plato's idealistic *imago*-metaphysics and Aristotle's realistic *causa-et-finis*

²⁰ GL1 pp.119-120

metaphysics actually come together on a higher plane, we can never approach Christian *eros* and Christian beauty from a merely Platonic tradition and expect to interpret them adequately.' Nevertheless, von Balthasar maintains, 'All divine revelation is impregnated with a sense of 'enthusiasm' (in the theological sense). Nothing be done for the person who can not detect such an element in the Prophets and the 'teachers of wisdom', in Paul and John, to mention only these'.²¹

This enthusiasm, this longing for the beauty and presence of God, is not an idealistic one based on false illusions and misconceptions, the kind of false enthusiasm which von Balthasar finds condemned in the New Testament epistles; rather it is 'an enthusiasm which derives from and is appropriate to actual, realistic Being.' This means in turn, that it is not merely content with the glory of worldly beauty, but can also interpret, indeed transfigure those aspects which a worldly aesthetic regard as ugly. For, 'As Karl Barth has rightly seen, this law extends to the inclusion in Christian beauty of even the Cross and everything else which a worldly aesthetics (even of a realistic kind) discards as no longer bearable.'²²

The conclusions which von Balthasar draws from this for his *Theological Aesthetics* are as follows. In the first place, it must be resolutely christological; for 'just as we can never attain to the living God in any way except through his Son become man, but in this Son we can really attain to God in himself, so too, we ought never to speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of his appearing which he

²¹ *GL1* p.123; all of this runs somewhat counter to that understanding of love in terms of *agape* and *eros* which is to be found in the classic study of Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. Philip Watson (London: SPCK, 1982) and which has been very influential upon much Protestant theology.

²² *Ibid.* pp.123-24

exhibits in salvation-history.²³ But this is not to be done in such a way that the perception of God's beauty is simply *equated* with the manner of his appearing. There is a need both to perceive the form and to be drawn in to those hidden depths which lie beneath the form. As the words of the Christmas preface suggest, this requires in turn both a *theologia positiva* which examines the form and content of revelation and a *theologia negativa* which recognises the mystery of those things which we cannot see. (In drawing this distinction, von Balthasar also recognises that distinction which the Greek Fathers made between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, between the knowledge of God in himself, in terms of the divine attributes and the relations of the Trinity, and the knowledge we have of God from his actions, from God's saving activity in the world to which the Bible witnesses. But he is insisting that to appreciate God's beauty, both of these have to be held together.)

Finally, this means that a theological aesthetics must be developed in two stages. In the first place there is required a 'theory of vision', that is a 'theory about the perception of the form of God's self-revelation' (which von Balthasar categorises as 'fundamental theology'.) But alongside this there is also needed a 'theory of rapture', that is a 'theory about the incarnation of God's glory and the consequent elevation of man to participate in that glory' (which he categorises as 'dogmatic theology'.)²⁴ But these cannot be developed separately or independently of each other, since von Balthasar maintains that there are no 'bare facts' which can be apprehended or interpreted outside of the realm of grace. 'For the object with which we are concerned is man's participation in God which, from God's perspective, is actualized as

²³ *GL1* p.124

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.125

‘revelation’ (culminating in Christ’s Godmanhood) and which, from man’s perspective, is actualized as ‘faith’ (culminating in participation in Christ’s Godmanhood).²⁵

Von Balthasar recognises that to take this starting point for his *Aesthetics* has huge methodological implications. ‘For it would follow that fundamental theology and dogmatic theology – the theory of vision and the theory of rapture – are, in the last analysis, inseparable.’²⁶ Admittedly von Balthasar is here using both terms, ‘fundamental’ and ‘dogmatic’, in his own particular way, as the basis for a theological aesthetic which has at its centre the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to show how in perceiving the form the believer is to be drawn into participating in the divine drama.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is not hard to see how from this starting point, he is seeking to establish just how much he will borrow, and how much he will offer a critique of that sharp distinction between the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, ‘reality’ and ‘possibility’ of revelation which is one of the central tenets of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, particularly those chapters which deal with the knowledge of God in Volume 2.²⁸

Having taken this decision, the structure of the rest of the opening volume reflects the task which von Balthasar has set himself. There are two substantial sections; under the heading, ‘The Subjective Evidence’ he expounds a theory of vision, or fundamental theology, from the perspective of human perception; then, under the

²⁵ *GL1* p.125

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.126

²⁷ However, according to Viladesau (*Op. cit.* pp.35-38), von Balthasar’s work retains a strong element of the dogmatic and systematic in so far as, like Barth, it is so dependent upon revelation and primarily directed towards the Church community. For a truly foundational aesthetic, Viladesau argues instead that a transcendental approach more along the lines of Rahner and Lonergan is needed.

²⁸ A fuller exposition of the role these terms play in Barth is set out in my unpublished M.Phil. thesis, ‘Karl Barth and St. Anselm: the significance of Fides Quaerens Intellectum for the Church Dogmatics’ (University of Birmingham, 1989) especially in chapter 4.

heading 'The Objective Evidence' he sets out the dogmatic basis for this in terms of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Following on from what has already been established in the introduction, in both of these sections he will emphasise the importance of form, both in terms of its human perception, and its divine origins. However in light of the comments which he has already made about the inseparability of the two approaches, we will not be surprised to see that similar material crops up under both headings.

This much is immediately made clear from the beginning of 'The Subjective Evidence', which takes as its key concept that word which is at the heart of the two great New Testament theologies of Paul and John, namely *pistis* or faith. To recognise this is to recognise also that the distinction between subjective and objective can not be too tightly drawn. 'Such an equation presupposes that faith does not primarily mean the subjective act of faith (*fides qua*), but that faith always includes the whole substance towards which this act is directed (*fides quae*), by which the act can be understood and justified.'²⁹ There follows under the heading of 'The Light of Faith', an exploration of the relationship between *gnosis* and *pistis*, between knowing and believing, as it is found in the Bible and subsequently in the theology of the great Alexandrine theologians. The thrust of this is to insist that a properly biblical *gnosis* is not an abstract standing back from the subject matter of faith, but rather a process of participation and engagement which leads to illumination and understanding, so that von Balthasar can posit an underlying unity between seeing (knowing) and believing.

²⁹ GL1 p.131

This has two consequences for von Balthasar's *Theological Aesthetics*. In the first place it means that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding is itself an inherently theological task, which suggests that the early Christian theologians were themselves building on the legacy of pre-Christian philosophers. 'Man's ultimate attitude in response to God's self-revelation can stand only in the most intimate connection with that other ultimate attitude of man which is the philosophic... In this context, theology clearly takes over functions which in the pre- and non-Christian world belonged to philosophy.'³⁰ As a consequence of this, a theological approach to perception must also engage with those attempts made by philosophy to attain that same knowledge and understanding. 'In other words, the formal object of theology (and, therefore, also of the act of faith) lies at the very heart of the formal object of philosophy (along with the mythology which belongs to it)' so that 'the self-revelation of God, who is absolute Being, can only be the fulfilment of man's entire philosophical-mythological questioning as well.'³¹ All this points to the task which will be undertaken in the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Glory of the Lord* in which von Balthasar will examine *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* and *The Modern Age*.

But it also points to that other concept which will play much the dominant role in this examination of the subjective evidence, and that is 'The Experience of Faith', for such a knowledge and understanding can come only from an experience of being drawn into and living the Christian faith. In focussing upon the role of Christian experience von Balthasar knows that he is taking a risk of being misunderstood. He

³⁰ *GL1* p.143

³¹ *Ibid.* p.145

anticipates this from the way in which, since the Middle Ages especially, 'experience' has been subsumed under the category of Christian mysticism and separated from the Christian mainstream. He knows it also, from the way in which the Catholic Church of his own day has found it hard to assimilate and comprehend the kind of experience undergone by his colleague Adrienne von Speyr, whose insights have also been so crucial for the development of his theological trilogy.³²

Accordingly, it is part of von Balthasar's objective to reclaim the role of experience for the mainstream of Christian faith. He does this by examining the role of experience in the New Testament theologies of Paul and John, the way it is treated elsewhere in the Bible, and then the way it occupies such a leading role in the theology of so many of the Church Fathers (not just those leading names such as Irenaeus who will appear later in Volume 2 of *The Glory of the Lord*, but also less well-known names such as Pseudo-Macarius, Diadochus of Photice and Maximus the Confessor) before an extended treatment of how it is treated in the Middle Ages, especially by Aquinas. His conclusion is that whilst the treatment of this concept took its starting point from the 'unreflected unity between mystical experience and 'ordinary' experience',³³ it was the development of Christian mysticism as a separate and distinct vocation apart from the Christian mainstream which has led to its being looked upon with suspicion by the rest of the Christian community.

It is that gap which von Balthasar wants to bridge. 'Precisely because mystical experience remains an experience within faith and because faith in Christ is already

³² On this, see his *Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965) ET *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, tr. Antje Lawry & Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981)

a genuine and objective encounter of the whole man with the Incarnate God, there exists a 'radical homogeneity' between mystical experience and faith.' But because it is so central to the Christian faith, experience is not something which can be restricted to a few experts or vocations; rather it is part and parcel of the life of the whole Church. 'The full Christian experience, however, is not an individual experience which may be isolated from all else; it is, unconditionally, an experience within the context of the Church.'³⁴ Moreover, it is this insistence upon the fundamentally *ecclesial* nature of Christian experience, which leads onto the next and crucial stage in his exposition and that is the role of *archetypal* experience in the experience of faith.

To understand the role of archetypal experience, von Balthasar maintains we must first understand 'the structure of Biblical revelation' which is made concrete in the Incarnation. 'The perception of God, who is imperceivable in himself and yet has become perceivable through his free grace, is realised when God comes into the world, and, yes, *becomes world*. His allowing us to participate in his Godhead, which is above the world, precisely in this and no other way, occurs not in a second process, but in the one and only process. This is the *admirabile commercium et conubium*. In God's condescendence lies man's exaltation.'³⁵ Working back from this, God's revelation to the world must be considered as 'homogeneous from beginning to end', which means that God's creation is 'neither surpassed nor made superfluous for all the revelation of grace and glory'. 'The world is the stage which has been set up for the encounter of the whole God and the whole man – 'stage' not as an empty

³³ *GL1* p.299

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 300

space but as the sphere of collaboration of the two-sided form which unites in the encounter.³⁶

The consequence of this for the enactment of the drama of salvation will be worked out in the second work of his trilogy, in the *Theo-Drama*. But for now, we are concerned with form and this introduction makes it clear that ‘the christological form as such is, absolutely, the form of the encounter between God and man’. This means that those experiences which are recorded in the Old Testament have a ‘proleptic character’, in that their structure reveals an ‘anticipated Christology’, notwithstanding the fact that their ‘very sensoriness and their celestial symbolism is something that cannot be surpassed by the New Testament’.³⁷ (Indeed the relationship between the two Testaments will be dealt with extensively in Volume 6, *The Old Covenant*). But it also means that the role of those who themselves encountered Christ in the course of his life and death have a particular significance for subsequent believers and the form of their encounter with Christ. Von Balthasar maintains that theirs is an archetypal experience which is demonstrated in a number of ways.

First, there is Mary. ‘At the point where all roads meet which lead from the Old Testament to the New we encounter the Marian experience of God, at once so rich and so secret that it almost escapes description.’³⁸ Then, there is the experience of the Apostles, ‘the founders of the Church, officially chosen and called by the Lord,

³⁵ *GL1* p. 302

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 303

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 336

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.338

whose first function will to be eyewitnesses.’³⁹ But these include not just the twelve, but also the apostle Paul who, as a witness ‘*only* to Jesus’ resurrection’, ‘straddles the boundary between the apostolic and ecclesial era’.⁴⁰ However, the significance of these first followers of Christ lies not simply in the experience they have undergone themselves, but in the way their experience is shared with others, indeed with us. ‘The archetypal experience of individual members, however, is but a privileged participation in Christ’s all-sustaining experience of God. And Christ makes the Church as a whole participate in this experience, uniting each member of the Church directly to himself and yet, at the same time, mediating between individual members and uniting them to himself through others.’⁴¹

Thus it is that von Balthasar identifies four traditions that underscore the relationship between Biblical and archetypal experience and ordinary Christian experience in the Church; four traditions which, although they overlap and interpenetrate one another, nevertheless offer different modes of access. ‘First there is the eyewitness of the Twelve, of which Peter is the representative, and which is embodied in the Petrine tradition of the Church. Then there is the unique eyewitness of Paul, whose life-work and written legacy outstrip that of all the others (1 Cor 15.10) and flow into the Church in a current of tradition all its own. Then there is the equally special (ocular, aural, and tactile) witness of the Beloved Disciple, who at the same time is the conscious perfecter of Old Testament prophecy and who, through both these functions, lends the faith of the Church a particular colouration. Finally, at a level

³⁹ *GL1* p.343

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp.347-348

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.350

which is deeper and closer to the centre, there is the experience of the Lord's Mother, which wholly passes over into the Church and renders the Church fruitful.⁴²

It is von Balthasar's conviction that, 'All four archetypal experiences converge in the Church.' However, within this overlapping series of relationships he is also clear that the threefold archetypal experience of the Apostles remains 'permanently sustained and undergirded by the Marian experience of Christ', an experience which, common to all mothers, is both 'bodily and spiritual, inseparably.' Moreover, this has consequences for the Church. 'Because Mary is bodily the Mother of the Lord, the Bride-Church must be bodily and visible, and her visible sacraments and institutions must be an occasion for the spiritual experience of Christ and of God.'⁴³

From this foundation, that of sharing in the archetypal experience of both Mary and the apostles, von Balthasar goes on to develop his position on 'the Spiritual Senses'. In this section he emphasises the importance of both sensory and spiritual perception, echoing the model which he has found in the apostolic witness, and also re-emphasising its proper place within the mainstream of Christian belief, rather than as the preserve of an esoteric minority. Interestingly enough, within this exposition he refers both to the application of the senses within the Ignatian exercises, with which he would be familiar from his Jesuit training and experience of leading retreats, and also offers a sustained treatment of the biblical anthropology found in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* 3.2, with its emphasis upon the 'spiritual-corporeal reality' of man engaged in 'the concrete process of living' and relating to others. Towards the end of

⁴² *GL1* p.351

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp.362-364

this section he concludes that 'ecclesiastical mysticism is proleptically oriented toward the totality of the Church' and that it 'admits not only spiritual but sensory experiences.'⁴⁴ But having explored the subjective evidence for faith, von Balthasar is mindful of the danger of attempting to impose any kind of system upon God. 'All subjective evidence must remain exhaustively open to this freedom of the objective evidence of revelation.'⁴⁵ Thus it is to the 'Objective Evidence' that von Balthasar will turn in the final part of his opening volume, *Seeing the Form*.

It is with this turn to the 'Objective Evidence' that we might expect some of the influence of Barth's christocentrism to shine through. Indeed it is no surprise to find a substantial section under the heading, 'Christ, the Centre of the Form of Revelation'. But this is only after von Balthasar has dealt with the 'Form of Revelation' in such a way as to confront both the 'Fact of Revelation' (in terms of the unity which Christ displays as 'Son of God' and 'Word made Flesh') and as 'Revelation in Hiddenness'. It is in this latter section that von Balthasar seeks to deal with the tension between what is made manifest and what is hidden, as between body and spirit, creation and creator, sinner and redeemer on the cross. His response, like many before him, is to affirm that God's form of revelation is one which also encompasses concealment; 'the revelation in the Incarnation has its place within the revelation of God's Being in man, who, as God's image and likeness, conceals God even as he reveals him.'⁴⁶ In this recognition of this 'dialectic of revelation and concealment', we can perhaps hear echoes of his earlier study of Barth in which, alongside the shift to analogy, there remains the ongoing influence of dialectical theology.

⁴⁴ *GL1* pp. 414-415

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.418

But for von Balthasar, this same tension points towards a different understanding, in that 'the evidence itself points to and indicates the nature of the *analogia entis* within itself' as 'the finite spirit finds itself directed by the analogy of Being beyond itself (since, as spirit, it is after all, finite Being) towards what can be 'given' to its evidence only in the mode of non-evidence.'⁴⁷ He goes on to explore what this problem of 'concealment in revelation' might mean in terms of the classic definition of analogy offered by the Fourth Lateran Council, namely an 'ever-greater dissimilarity however great the similarity' (*in tanta similitudine major dissimilitudo*). This suggests that 'God's incomprehensibility is now no longer a mere deficiency in knowledge, but the positive manner in which God determines the knowledge of faith... This is the concealment that appears in his self-revelation; this is the un-graspability of God, which becomes graspable because it *is* grasped.'⁴⁸

Having acknowledge the mystery which underlies God's revelation, von Balthasar now turns to its form in Christ, which he will deal with under three headings, namely the 'Centrality' of the Christ form, its 'Mediation' in the Scriptures and in the Church, and then its 'Attestation' in terms of the 'Testimony of the Father', of history and of the cosmos. Not surprisingly, it is in the section, 'Christ the Centre of the Form of Revelation' that some of the themes which von Balthasar has identified in Barth come most clearly into view. For unlike the leaders and founders of other religions, Christ is both 'form' and 'content', indeed, 'Christ... is the form because he is the content.' Nor is his just a form to be studied and appreciated intellectually; 'what is at

⁴⁶ *GL1* pp. 458-459

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 450

stake, rather, is the correspondence of human existence as a whole to the form of Christ'.⁴⁹

But this means also that Christ's is a unique form, one which cannot be compared or contrasted with others, but can be measured only by itself. In part this is because of unique sense of 'attunement' or concordance between Christ's person and his divine mission (something which again will be developed further in the *Theo-Drama*). This gives to the Christ form a dynamism and fluidity of which Barth would approve, not least when von Balthasar uses language such as 'the dynamism of event' and refers to the Incarnation being understood 'no longer now as a state but as an event, or , if you wish, as the dynamic and eventful measuring of one's own static reality.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, von Balthasar is concerned to locate this dynamism of the Christ form within a trinitarian framework, and indeed quotes from Barth's *Church Dogmatics 4.1* to support his position, which is that; 'In the Son of Man there appears not God alone; necessarily, there also appears the inner-trinitarian event of his procession; there appears the triune God, who, as God, can command absolutely and obey absolutely and, as the Spirit of love, can be the unity of both.'⁵¹

Moreover, as a unique form, the Christ form has also to be viewed in its entirety, in all its complexity and richness. It can not be perceived if there is an attempt to break it down into its component parts in the manner of the historico-critical method with its separation of the 'Jesus of History' from the 'Christ of Faith', or with Bultmann's

⁴⁸ *GL1* p. 461

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp.463-464

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp.473-474

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.479

project of demythologisation. Nor can there be ignored the reality of hiddenness and concealment within divine revelation or the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the Christ from to be perceived. Von Balthasar is not shy of comparing such disjointed, reductive approaches with what the early Church regarded as heresy. 'It is here that the problem of heresy has its roots; *hairesis*, the selective disjoining of parts' rather than an integrative approach in which '[e]very element calls for the other, and the more penetrating the gaze of the beholder, the more he will discover harmony on all sides.'⁵² He is also clear that this can not happen without faith; what is required is 'con-version' – that is 'a turning away from one's own image and a turning to the image of God.'⁵³

With all this Barth might well agree; however, in the subsequent sections on the 'Mediation' and 'Attestation of the Form', perhaps we shall not be surprised to discover von Balthasar's exposition leading him to positions which are somewhat different to Barth's. Von Balthasar's starting point is that such mediation and attestation are integral to the Christ form itself. If 'His form is in the world in order to impress itself upon it and to continue to shape it', and 'We see what this form *is* from what it *does*' then that means the matter of human agency, both in Scripture and in the Church, is not something which can be regarded as 'something external and alien to the Christ form' but rather as a vital and integral component.⁵⁴

Scripture and Church share two important things in common; 'they are both perceptible expressions of the Christ-form (*corpora Christi*), but equally in both men

⁵² *GL1* p.513

⁵³ *Ibid.* p.522

share in their communication and formation.’⁵⁵ However this remains a complex and overlapping relationship. As ‘the canonical image of revelation, Scripture makes possible and guarantees the uninterrupted birth of the Church.’ Indeed, it is not just scripture alone, for ‘Scripture and Sacrament belong together and constitute the continual and unattenuated presence of revelation in the Church’s every age.’⁵⁶ Von Balthasar is not against scholarly research and study of the Bible, whether in terms of the historico-critical or other forms of literary criticism; but what he insists upon is that these methods, with their supposedly neutral and objective approach, can not ultimately do justice to discern the form which Christ takes in scripture. ‘This is why, in one sense, it is perfectly correct to say that the form of the historical Jesus (his preaching, for instance) which is discovered by the historico-critical method, is not and cannot be a form that is complete in itself and that satisfies faith; for to unfold fully, it needs the sphere of ecclesial faith which really opens up only with Jesus’ death and Resurrection.’⁵⁷

Moreover, this insistence upon an ecclesial reading of Scripture leads on to the second aspect, which is the ‘Mediation of the Form’ in the Church. ‘The Church is not Christ, but she can claim for herself and for the world no other figure than the figure of Christ, which leaves its stamp in her and shapes her through and through...’⁵⁸ It is at this point that we can discern how the mediation through the Church plays a very similar role as regards the ‘Objective Evidence’ in ‘Seeing the Form’, as does that of

⁵⁴ *GL1* pp.527-528

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.531

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.543

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.538

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.559

archetypal experience in von Balthasar's earlier account of the 'Subjective Evidence'. Certainly many of the same key figures appear.

There is the crucial role of Mary whose life offers 'the prototype of what the *ars Dei* can fashion from a human material which puts up no resistance to him',⁵⁹ in whom is to be found 'the archetype of a Church that con-forms to Christ' which is 'Christ-bearing' or 'Christophorous' in essence and actualisation'⁶⁰ and who thereby offers, even to non-believers, 'a treasure of inviolable beauty'. There is the institutional office-bearing aspect of the Church, which finds its representation in the humiliation then exaltation of Peter and in the discovery of Paul that all his honour derives from the strength and weakness which come together in Christ's cross and resurrection. Outside of these personal experiences of the apostles, their sharing in the life of the dying and rising Christ, for von Balthasar there remains no other basis to justify the form of the institutional Church and to render it plausible to the world.

Following on from this, von Balthasar goes on to explore how this form takes shape in the way that the Church is lived and experienced in the world, through the eucharistic cult, which exists 'as birth place and centre of the Church', through other sacramental events, for example baptism and confession, through the doctrinal and credal statements which embody the belief of the Church and enjoin obedience in those who believe, and finally through the Church's proclamation. It is interesting and not surprising to note that proclamation and preaching have a much lower priority in the life of the Church than Barth allows in his *Church Dogmatics*. What is

⁵⁹ *GL1* p.564

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.562

more surprising is to discover that von Balthasar, for all his commitment to the life and form of the institutional Church, takes a similarly sceptical line to Barth as regards the practice of infant baptism. He regards it as 'inadequate as a model for the sacramental event' because 'the subject involved neither perceives nor understands Christ's gesture... a fact so conspicuously alien to Scripture (and to the baptismal practice of the Old Testament and of John) that it must without question be regarded as an exception.'⁶¹

Notwithstanding this proviso, von Balthasar's summary of this section is that 'in their power to express Christ, both Sacred Scripture and the holy Church together constitute the work of the Holy Spirit'; indeed they might have been entitled 'the testimony of the Holy Spirit'⁶². This points to the last major section of this opening volume in which he will deal with 'The Attestation of the Form' in terms of the testimony of the Father, of history (particularly of salvation history as evidenced in the Bible) and of the cosmos.

The testimony of the Father draws heavily on the relationship between Father and Son which is witnessed in John's gospel. 'The Father is ground; the Son is manifestation. The Father is content, the Son form – in the unique way shown by revelation.'⁶³ For von Balthasar, this all points towards a trinitarian understanding of God, into which mystery it is the divine purpose to draw all believers. 'By his prayer

⁶¹ *GL1* p.579

⁶² *Ibid.* p.602

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.611

and his suffering, the Son brings all his disciples – and through them all mankind – into the interior space of the Trinity.’⁶⁴

The testimony of history looks at the relationship between Old and New Testaments as the eternal God in Christ enters human time; ‘theological aesthetics culminates in the christological form (taking this word seriously) of salvation history, in so far as here, upon the medium of man’s historical existence, God inscribes his authentic sign with his own hand.’⁶⁵ This raises the issue of continuity across the biblical witness. Von Balthasar wants to affirm the basic unity of revelation to be found across both testaments; but for all the exploration of ‘figure’ and ‘type’ which can be found in the writings of Paul and of the Church fathers, he is conscious too that the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ is more than simply the fulfilment of what was promised in the Old Testament. Rather, the Old Testament points to something, or rather someone, beyond the conflicting categories and expectations of its own time, to a fulfilment which be seen and understood only in retrospect.

Finally the testimony of the cosmos refers to the way the divine glory is reflected in the response of the created order. It is revealed in the miraculous signs and authority over the powers evidenced during Jesus’ ministry on earth and equally by the honour and glory accorded him in heaven. Both come to a climax in the resurrection. ‘The same royal power, the same divine *kabod* is expressed in the dominion over creation as over the cosmic ‘powers’, and at the resurrection what takes place is a

⁶⁴ *GL1* p.618

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.646

simultaneous victory over both...'⁶⁶ And in this vision of the divine glory, the angels too come to share; for 'just as the angels of the little ones on earth always behold the face of the Father for them in heaven (Mt 18.10) so, too, men on earth behold for the angels the beauty of the God who has concealed himself in flesh.'⁶⁷

So far in this chapter we have seen how von Balthasar takes his starting point from Barth, both in terms of the rediscovery of the role of the divine glory and the beauty of theology. We have also seen how von Balthasar will maintain that, to do justice to its subject matter, his *Theological Aesthetics* will attempt to deal with the manifestation of the glory of God not just as it relates to divine revelation but as it points towards the mystery of being itself, as beauty is viewed as one of the transcendentals of being, together with the good and the true. And we have begun already to see how von Balthasar, in drawing upon the christocentric foundations which he has adduced from Barth, is nevertheless broadening out the ecclesial implications of the Christ form so as to strengthen those aspects of Barth's theology in which he has identified weaknesses, in particular Barth's understanding of Church.

All this has been done in some detail but only as regards Volume 1 *Seeing the Form*. This volume is significant because it establishes the principles which von Balthasar will use to develop his aesthetics and outlines the material which will be developed more fully in the later volumes. We will need to return to look at how the material in these later volumes is developed and how it is shaped by the ongoing debate with Barth. But at this point, we need also to recognise that there are other scholars who

⁶⁶ GL1 p.674

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.677

have researched into the relationship between Barth and von Balthasar, to see how far this study confirms or challenges the conclusions which they have reached from studying similar material.

3.3) Beauty and revelation – engaging with Chia

From the material which is being covered, both here and in the previous chapter, it will be clear that this study covers similar ground to that found in Roland Chia's book *Revelation and Theology: the Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth*.⁶⁸ But whilst the two studies address similar material and there is agreement on particular points, the structure of this work and the thrust of our argument is very different.

As the subtitle of his work suggests, Chia's study examines the relationship between Barth and von Balthasar from the perspective of their theological epistemologies, that is in terms of their approach to revelation and the knowledge of God. This Chia undertakes in three parts. In the first, he offers an account of 'The Theological Epistemology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', which draws extensively, though not exclusively, upon *The Glory of the Lord*, in particular the opening volume, *Seeing the Form*. This picks up, as we have already seen, the importance of beauty as a starting point, the centrality of form, the recovery of aesthetics and the influence of Barth. Chia also identifies the crucial role of analogy, in particular the understanding of the analogy of being which von Balthasar has interpreted in the light of Przywara, notwithstanding Barth's critique.

⁶⁸ Roland Chia, *Revelation and Theology: the knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1999)

Chia's starting point echoes that of the American scholar Louis Dupré; 'The vision behind Balthasar's aesthetics is the re-integration of grace and nature, culture and theology within a comprehensive theological reflection of form.' More than that; 'The analogy of being is the dominant principle that motivates and guides this vision.'⁶⁹ This reflection on form has its focus on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Chia sets out von Balthasar's account under two headings, 'The Unfolding of the Form' which stresses the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ, and its mediation in the Church and in Scripture, and then 'Perceiving the Form'. He picks up on the role von Balthasar assigns not just to faith and knowledge but to Christian experience, in particular the importance of the 'archetypal' experience of Mary and the apostles, which will give an inescapably ecclesial role to such experience. Chia registers his own concerns about the adequacy of this approach⁷⁰ and recognises that this is an area which will lead to controversy with Barth, for whom such experiences can only be exemplary rather than archetypal.⁷¹ But a more extensive comparison between the two theologians will only follow after Chia's exposition of Barth which follows next.

The second part is entitled 'The Knowledge of God according to Karl Barth'. This traces the main presuppositions behind Barth's theological epistemology, with particular reference to Volume 2 of the *Church Dogmatics*. These include Barth's rejection of natural theology and the idea that human beings can independently come to a knowledge of God either through the exercise of practical reason (Kant) or through the feeling of ultimate dependence (Schleiermacher); Barth's assertion that,

⁶⁹ Chia, *Op. cit.* p.42

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.80

by contrast, knowledge of God is dependent upon God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, in which objective revelation is subjectively appropriated in the power of the Holy Spirit (and thus integrated into Barth's exposition of the Trinity within his doctrine of God); and the influence of Anselm upon Barth's theological method, in particular his interpretation of Anselm's proof for the existence of God, insisting that it is granted in faith to faith, and thus represents the rational exploration of what God has revealed (or, as Chia quotes T. F. Torrance on this subject, 'the activity of the reason within the knowledge bestowed on man by God...'⁷²)

This setting of the scene leads to the third part of Chia's book in which he puts the work of these two theologians into dialogue with one another. This is done in two sections; in the first 'Karl Barth and Catholic Analogy', Chia sets out the way in which Barth develops his understanding of the analogy of faith in express contrast to the catholic understanding of the analogy of being, as he finds it is Aquinas. This is followed by an evaluation as to how far Barth's interpretation of Aquinas, as mediated by his debates with Przywara is accurate, how far a more dynamic understanding and christological understanding of being, as evidenced by more recent Catholic theologians (including von Balthasar), can serve to close the gap between these two positions, and whether this reassessment can serve to address the strong criticisms which Barth has to make of the position on natural theology taken by Vatican 1.

This in turn leads to the final section, entitled 'Balthasar and Catalogical Analogy.' Here Chia traces the development of von Balthasar's use of analogy, both in its

⁷¹ Chia, *Op. cit.* pp.81-82

origins under the influence of Przywara and its reformulation following the christocentric focus inherited from his dialogue with Barth. Picking up on the terminology used in an important article by Wolfgang Treitler, Chia describes von Balthasar's development of the concept of 'catalogical analogy',⁷³ which takes as its forming principle the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of God in the Incarnation. This *kenosis* takes place on 3 levels. It begins in the divine interrelations of the Trinity, in the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. But from this comes a second *kenosis*, as in creation God gives of himself to allow the free emergence of what is other to himself. Then in time, as creation turns away from its creator, comes the third level of *kenosis* as the Son enters the world and goes to the cross, to take on himself the pain of the world's rejection.

This represents the descent, the *condescensio* of God. But there is also another movement anticipated. The self-emptying of God in the Incarnation also presupposes the raising of Christ in glory. Following von Balthasar's use of analogy, the same humanity which in creation shares in that descent, comes also to share in the co-rising or analogical return to be with the Father. There is a dual movement at the heart of the Incarnation, and 'since the Incarnate Word is the totality of the absolute analogy, theology is a form of catalogical/analogical integration.'⁷⁴ Moreover, Chia argues that for von Balthasar it is this integration which upholds the legitimate concerns both of the analogy of faith and the analogy of being. 'On the one hand catalogical analogy avoids the danger of the formation of any analogy that has the

⁷² Chia, *Op. cit.* p.189, quoting from Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962) p.184

⁷³ Wolfgang Treitler, 'True Foundations of Authentic Theology' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) pp. 181ff.

power to sustain itself outside the historical becoming of God. Rather it locates itself within the event of the covenant in salvation history which culminates in Jesus Christ... On the other hand, this way of thinking helps us to understand the relationship between creation and salvation history, a relationship which is emphasised in Karl Barth's theology.'⁷⁵

Having compared their respective positions and critique of each other on the subject of analogy, Chia's conclusion is that 'Balthasar's catalogical analogy is a very serious and tenable response to Barth's concerns. Balthasar has taken the objections of Barth with utmost seriousness. He has developed his understanding of analogy from the standpoint of Christology. Furthermore, by insisting on the glorious form of Christ as the measure of all things, Balthasar's theological aesthetics is transposed from a Christocentrism to a Trinitarian theocentrism.'⁷⁶

Such a conclusion, that von Balthasar appears to have the last word on the subject of revelation, may appear surprising to some, as Professor Colin Gunton notes in his foreword.⁷⁷ It does not mean that Chia does not have his own queries about some of the positions which von Balthasar takes up. Indeed we have noted concerns about the prominence given to the role of the archetypal experience of the apostles and to the approach adopted by Vatican 1 on natural theology. Nor do we, in this study seek to take a radically different line in terms of how Barth's doctrine of God in Volume 2 of the *Church Dogmatics* has been developed to counter his understanding of the

⁷⁴ Chia, *Op. cit.* p.231

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* pp.231-232

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.238

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.12

analogia entis. Or to dissent from the thesis that von Balthasar is seeking, through a dynamic and christological reinterpretation of the analogy of being, to counter Barth's critique, a theme which runs right through his own theological trilogy.

However, the way Chia offers this conclusion and the structure of his argument does highlight the difference between our respective theses. In particular, there are two questions which we would want to raise. The first is historical. For if von Balthasar's approach is indeed to be read, as Chia allows, as in many ways a response to particular questions which Barth has raised concerning the understanding of revelation and the use of analogy, then it is somewhat surprising to find that it is von Balthasar's position which is set out first, followed by an exposition of Barth's theology (which itself is influenced by von Balthasar's study of Barth) and only then an engagement of the critical relationship between the two. Admittedly, Chia's study is undertaken from a systematic perspective, in which the respective approach of the two different theologians, in terms of their understanding of the revelation and the knowledge of God, is compared and contrasted. It is recognised that Barth and von Balthasar are in dialogue with each other and examination of their theology is undertaken to see how their respective epistemologies answer the questions which they raise of the other on issues like the relationship between the analogy of faith and the analogy of being, between nature and grace, faith and reason.

The approach which this thesis takes is somewhat different. For we are looking at the emergence of von Balthasar's theology in terms of its historical development, to see how it is shaped by the nature of his critical engagement with Barth. From this

perspective, there is something profoundly unhistorical in the way which Chia sets first a summary of von Balthasar's position, then a summary of Barth's and then proceeds to see how the two interact and question one another. For in terms of theological development it is von Balthasar's theological work which has been developed in critical response to Barth, rather than the other way round. And whilst we have taken issue in the previous chapter with some points made by McCormack about the validity of his critique of the von Balthasar thesis in terms of the interpretation of Barth, we note his reservations about the way in which study of Barth has been overlaid by the subsequent concerns of systematic theologians. Thus our approach thus to von Balthasar, has been to see how his work has been shaped by the nature of his engagement and critical response to Barth.

But this difference of approach, historical as opposed to systematic, leads in turn to a difference of perspective which is profoundly theological. Chia's study looks at the positions which von Balthasar and Barth take up concerning revelation and the knowledge of God, to see how they inform and contrast with one another. There is also a sense in which both theologians are being measured to see how adequate is their final position in terms of the issues which must be addressed in any theological epistemology. Indeed there are times when one feels that the positions which they offer are being held up and compared against a more comprehensive model. As for example, when Chia suggests, à propos of his introduction to an examination of Jesus Christ as 'the form of God's revelation', that 'the time has come to take a closer look at Balthasar's understanding of revelation in terms of the older classifications of

‘general’ and ‘special’ revelation, or, to use von Balthasar’s own terminology, the ‘revelation of creation’ and the ‘revelation of grace’.⁷⁸

By contrast, our study, focusing on a historical perspective and on von Balthasar’s critical response to Barth, offers a very different reading. It is not just that, as Chia recognises following von Balthasar’s reading of Barth and appreciation of what he calls ‘the historicity of nature’, there is the one natural order created and redeemed in Jesus Christ so that the themes of ‘general’ and ‘special’ revelation can be seen to be one and the same. It follows on from that, in light of the form of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ uniting creation and redemption through the Incarnation, there is more to theology than just revelation. There is the call to participate in the life of Christ which requires an understanding of being and the possibility of an ontological transformation of humanity. Indeed one of the criticisms which von Balthasar makes of Barth is the danger of appearing to ‘equate’ theology with revelation;⁷⁹ that everything is so summed up in Christ that there is no room left for the role of human response to the divine initiative.

If that is the case, then to undertake an analysis and comparison of their respective positions simply from the perspective of revelation and theological epistemology is, we would suggest, to miss one of the central points which von Balthasar is making in the construction of his own trilogy. Revelation is important, and as Chia rightly notes in von Balthasar’s *Theological Aesthetics*, ‘perceiving the form’ in terms of its mediation and attestation in Jesus Christ is critical. But revelation is not everything.

⁷⁸ Chia, *Op. cit.* p.51

⁷⁹ KB p.242

The form of God's revelation also embodies a response, modelled in the archetypal experience of Mary and the Apostles. And that is a call to participate in the saving drama of God's activity in the world, which is what von Balthasar will address in the next volume of his trilogy, the *Theo-Drama*, to which we will turn in our next chapter.

But for now we are concerned with *The Glory of the Lord*. This section has sought to demonstrate how although we are addressing much of the same material as does Chia, the thrust of our argument is very different. In terms of his analysis and comparison of Barth and von Balthasar's respective epistemologies, there is little disagreement between us. But there are two very different points which this thesis wishes to make. The first is historical; not just that there is a relationship between them but that von Balthasar's work is consciously developed in critical response to Barth and that the nature of the debate between them shapes the structure of his own trilogy. The second is theological; that at the heart of Balthasar's critique is the contention that there is more to theology than revelation, (even in terms of a developing a theological aesthetics). The biblical witness to God's revelation leads to a response and participation in Christ. This means in turn that epistemology is insufficient without ontology, both in terms of the transformation of the believer and ultimately of the whole created order, as the Incarnation makes knowledge of God an engagement with being itself.

However, to demonstrate how this is undertaken, we need to return to our reading of *The Glory of the Lord* and see how the shape of its development is influenced by von

Balthasar's engagement with the themes picked up in his study of Barth. That will be the subject of our next section.

3.4) Beauty and being – the ongoing debate with Barth

In the earlier sections of this chapter we have looked at the significance of Barth's rediscovery of the divine glory and the role of beauty in theology for the development of von Balthasar's *Theological Aesthetics*. We have seen how von Balthasar takes the christocentric focus which he finds in Barth and yet insists on this being shaped and mediated by Christian experience so as to give it an essentially ecclesial form, in the process addressing one of the major weaknesses in Barth's theology which he has identified from his study. And we have examined how far our approach is consistent with, and how far it seeks to move beyond, the interpretation of their relationship offered by Roland Chia.

One of the points at issue here was how far their respective theological approaches could be compared and contrasted simply in terms of revelation and the knowledge of God. For one of the differences which von Balthasar himself explicitly identifies in his project is the need, as he sees it, to offer an exploration of beauty which goes beyond revelation and depicts it as one of the transcendentals of being itself. This means that the concern for beauty is, for von Balthasar, at the heart of not just the theological but the whole philosophical enterprise too. What he will attempt to do then, in the remaining 6 volumes of his *Theological Aesthetics*, is to examine the role beauty and aesthetics has played in theology and in philosophy before offering his

own interpretation as to how the divine glory illuminates the biblical witness and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

We shall not undertake for these remaining volumes the level of detailed exposition which we have undertaken for the first volume, in which von Balthasar has in any case offered a programme in outline for the task ahead. But we will seek to establish the architecture, as it were, which governs the structure and relationship between the remaining volumes. Moreover, in doing this we shall not be surprised to discover the re-emergence of that other great point of controversy between these two theologians, namely the role of the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being.

Von Balthasar's concern is that the role of and desire for beauty has been lost. This is true even in the place where it should be most pre-eminent, in Christian theology. One of von Balthasar's translators, Edward Oakes, has offered his own summary of the structure of the remaining volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*. Under the heading 'The Archaeology of Alienated Beauty', he writes, 'If *Clerical* and *Lay Styles* may be said to display the symptomatics of this alienation, the next two volumes *Metaphysics in Antiquity* and *Modernity* may be called its diagnostics, while the last two volumes *Old and New Covenant* attempt to offer the cure – the "prognostics" we might say.'⁸⁰

Given von Balthasar's christological focus and insistence upon the importance of form, perhaps we should not be surprised to discover that he chooses twelve theologians from whom to explore how aesthetics can play its proper role in theology.

⁸⁰ Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.176

The reasons for the particular choices are outlined in his introduction. His aim is to present 'a series of Christian theologies and world-pictures of the highest rank, each of which, having been marked at its centre by the glory of God's revelation, has sought to give the impact of this glory a central place in its vision.'⁸¹ There has been much discussion as to the rationale behind von Balthasar's selection, as he himself acknowledges; 'This is naturally, not to deny that, between these twelve figures picked out as typical, there is not a host of others who could have clarified the intellectual and historical relations and transitions between them and would in themselves also have been worthy of representation.'⁸²

Many of the names, in the first volume especially, are either giants of the Western tradition, such as Irenaeus and Augustine, or else those whom he has referred to extensively in the opening volume, such as Denys the Pseudo-Areopagite. Moreover, given the significance which von Balthasar recognises of Barth's study of Anselm, there is a particularly interesting section on Anselm's 'Aesthetic Reason' (and we in a subsequent chapter we shall look more closely at both the similarity and differences in their interpretation.) But what is more significant for the purpose of this chapter is the way these studies are divided into two volumes under the headings, *Studies in Theological Style* first in terms of *Clerical* and then *Lay Styles*.

That there is more to this distinction than merely the matter of ordination becomes evident when, after the names of Irenaeus, Augustine, Denys, Anselm and Bonaventura in the second volume, we find included in the third, and supposedly 'lay'

⁸¹ *GL2* p.13

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 20

volume, the names of St. John of the Cross, the Carmelite friar, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Catholic convert and Jesuit priest. Von Balthasar's introduction makes it clear why this should be. 'In the main we have chosen official theologians, so long as such were available, who were able to treat the radiant power of the revelation of Christ both influentially and originally, without any decadence; but after Thomas of Aquinas theologians of such stature are rare.'⁸³ The dividing line between the two volumes, which corresponds roughly to the year 1300, refers to the 'unfortunate but incontestable fact' that after this date, those who wish to assert the beauty and glory of the divine revelation find themselves in the position of being exiled and on the margins, almost an ecclesiastical 'opposition' 'protesting against a narrowing down of Christian theology merely to the training of pastors or to academic specialization and the timeless pursuits of the schools...'⁸⁴

St. John and Hopkins have been chosen, together with the poet Dante, the mathematician and philosopher Pascal, the Lutheran pastor Hamann, the Russian theologian and writer Soloviev and the French novelist and poet Péguy, because each of them in their writings maintain a concern not just for the knowledge but also for the beauty of God. That their work must be categorised under the heading 'Lay styles' is for von Balthasar but a reflection of the fact that in the Church for which they wrote, the concept of beauty had all too sadly been lost within the accepted theology of their day, so that the vision which they offered was one which had to be maintained from the forgotten margins and perimeters of faith. And marking the

⁸³ *GL2* p.15

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

boundary between these two volumes, it is the role of Aquinas which von Balthasar identifies as crucial – not for the first time as we have seen from his study of Barth.

Aquinas marks just a boundary between different theological styles, between a time when the divine beauty could legitimately be regarded as a central concern of the mainstream Church as opposed to a few individual theologians on the margins; his is also a crucial role on the border which divided the next two volumes, those which examine *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* and then in *The Modern Age*. We have already seen how, in that part of his study on Barth which seeks to offer a Catholic response to Barth's critique, von Balthasar identifies the pivotal role which Aquinas plays in the history of theology, in that he seeks to make sense of the yearnings of pagan philosophy and the classical world in the light of Christian revelation but in such a way as to establish a unified vision of reality around the transcendentals of being.

Here in *The Glory of the Lord*, von Balthasar has to acknowledge that, 'Beauty is seldom a central concern for St. Thomas Aquinas';⁸⁵ but nevertheless he maintains that it is Aquinas' theological achievement which establishes the basis for a theological aesthetic to be undertaken at all. For 'Thomas' doctrine of the real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is a philosophical thesis but it enables us once again to make a clear distinction between the 'glory' of God and the beauty of the world.'⁸⁶ According to von Balthasar, it is this distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, between that unique existence which pertains to God alone, and that sharing in being

⁸⁵ *GL4* p.393

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p.395

which is common to the rest of his creation, which allows for the development of the analogy of being. And it is just such an understanding of analogy, enabling the whole creation to share in the divine beauty without being identified or subsumed within it, which, as we have seen, is central to von Balthasar's whole approach to theology.

Aquinas stands at a moment of transition, just as the schools start to assert their independence from the Church (with the resulting fragmentation of the relationship between theology and philosophy) and as the study of theology separates from the practice of Christian spirituality. 'Thomas is a *kairos* in so far as ontology here shows itself to be a genuine philosophy' which 'builds upon the 'theological' ontology of the Greeks and early Scholastics who had understood being, together with its properties, as dynamically transparent to divinity.' But his is also a *kairos* 'in the sense of being an historically transient stage between the old monistic world of thought which, whether Greek or Christian, saw philosophy and theology as a unity and the approaching dualistic world which, whether Christian or non-Christian, will try to rend philosophy and the theology of revelation asunder and to make of each a totality.'⁸⁷

For von Balthasar, it is the breakdown of that unified vision of reality which serves to undermine the role of the beautiful as one of the transcendentals of being. This represents the principal reason why aesthetics ceases to be a central focus for theology or philosophy, with the disastrous results which he has already begun to outline. And it is Aquinas' pivotal role in this which is stressed by the structure of the next two volumes.

⁸⁷ GL4 pp.395-96

In line with the task which he set himself in the opening volume, von Balthasar seeks to offer a theological aesthetic which addresses the beauty and glory of God, not just as it is perceived in divine revelation, but as it can be construed as one of the transcendentals of being itself. That means his work is not restricted to the realm of theology alone; it must also deal with those aspects which are the concern of philosophy, particularly as philosophy was construed in the ancient world as an attempt to construct a framework of ultimate meaning or metaphysics. This is what he attempts in *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*. In short, von Balthasar will endeavour to show how Christian theology through the Church fathers and into the Middle Ages sought to build on and offer a christological interpretation of the framework constructed by the classical pagan philosophers and poets.

The range of material from which he makes this argument is vast, but a recent commentator, Aidan Nichols offers an admirably concise summary of the route he will take in this volume; 'From a period dominated by *myth*, where the human being encounters *to on*, 'what is' in, above all, the form of dramatic *images*, we pass into an age where *wisdom* predominates, as the nascent discipline of philosophy begins to produce instead *concepts* of reality, prior to entering an epoch of renewed *religiosity* (with Virgil in the West, Plotinus in the East) when concepts are relativised through a pointing to *mystery*.'⁸⁸ Moreover, Nichols also recognises not just that there is an apologetic thrust lying behind this undertaking, in that von Balthasar is seeking to interpret the biblical glory in terms of the resources of the classical tradition, but also

⁸⁸ Aidan Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad: A Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) p.130

how it coheres with that metaphysical framework, based on the role of analogy and the transcendentals of being, to which von Balthasar is committed. 'It is only when there is an analogy (be it only distant) between the human sense of the divine and divine revelation that the height, the difference and the distance of that which the revelation discloses may be measured in God's grace.'⁸⁹

Von Balthasar is well aware that there are those who will take issue with this method of engaging with classical thought, and in particular with the notion that Christian theology must enter into dialogue with the human constructions of myth, religiosity and philosophy. He recognises that there are those 'announcing with Karl Barth in tones of loud conviction that Christianity is not a religion, or, with Kierkegaard, that it is not a philosophy, or, with Bultmann, that it is not a mythology. But God would not have become human if he had not come into positive inner contact with these three forms of thought and experience.' For von Balthasar, the conclusive evidence for all this is to be found in the pages of the Bible itself. 'Paul quotes Aratos, John speaks of the Logos, the Epistle of James uses the convention of Stoic diatribe, the Deutero-Pauline letters take over the terminology of contemporary religious, cultic and political conceptions of *parousia* and *epiphaneia* without a trace of apprehension – to take only a few instances...' The only conclusion that von Balthasar can draw from this is that, 'Those who want to 'purify' the Bible of religion, philosophy and myth want to be more biblical than the Bible, more Christian than Christ.'⁹⁰

⁸⁹ GL4 p.14

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp.243-4

This enterprise, common to most theologians of the patristic and mediaeval periods reached its apogee with the work of Aquinas. For von Balthasar, the metaphysics of Thomas, as 'the philosophical reflection of the free glory of the living God of the Bible', thus represents 'the interior completion of ancient (and thus human) philosophy'.⁹¹ But, as we have seen, for von Balthasar Thomas is also a *kairos*, a turning point. His work points forward towards developments which von Balthasar will describe in his next volume, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*. Here the delicate balance which underpins Aquinas' metaphysics starts to unravel as the rise of the natural sciences leads to the assertion of the independence of human rationality from divine revelation and this is accompanied by the growing separation between the theology of the schools and the spirituality of the mystic tradition. All these developments have disastrous consequences for subsequent Christian metaphysics, which split off into different directions, described by von Balthasar as 'The Parting of the Ways'.

As in his previous volume, von Balthasar is dealing with a vast period of time and range of sources in a way which is both highly original and unusually ordered. He is not offering a history of Western metaphysics; however, he is seeking to identify trains of thought which establish for him the crucial themes and decisions which must be taken for Christian theology to regain its bearings. In his mind there are 'three great movements'; the first is that of Scotus and Eckhart who, (with their descendants, Ockham on the one hand, Tauler and Nicholas of Cusa on the other) 'determine both the scientific and religious self-understanding of Europe'; the second

⁹¹ GL4 pp.406-7

is that of Luther and the Reformation which, 'itself standing on the shoulders of mysticism... offers its own shoulders to the third intellectual event, that which extends from Kant to Hegel and Marx.'⁹² The scale and complexity of this volume makes it one of the hardest to read, and, with its strong 'Germanic' influence, no doubt reflects some of the studies which von Balthasar undertook for his doctoral thesis. All we can do at this point is to highlight the main themes and suggest why they are important.

The 'Parting of the Ways' begins with two developments. On the one hand, there is the advent of the Scotist tradition which insists that being is 'univocal', namely that 'being' is the same thing, whether applied to God or to humanity, and in turn renders it totally transparent and accountable to human rationality. On the other, there is the re-emergence through Eckhart of the mystic tradition, a tradition in which the individual is drawn into a relationship which blurs the distinction between divine and human so that, ultimately, being is held to be identical with God. In both instances the delicate balance which sustained Thomas' ontology is lost. In the one instance being is reduced to a dull and prosaic rationalism in which all sense of wonder and awe is lost, the kind of reductionism which von Balthasar believes prevails in much of modern science. In the other, the distinction between divine and human is lost altogether, so that the two merge into an indefinable blur of identity where there is no room or space left for the world to have its own ontological basis.

This risk is heightened with the next stage in the process, in which the individual and pietist concerns of the mystic tradition are picked up together with the existential

⁹² *GL5* p.14

concerns concerning judgement and damnation which formed the backdrop to the Reformation. The significance of Luther and the Protestant Reformation, with their emphasis upon the dialectic of judgement and justification grounded in a theology of the cross, lies in their stress upon a personal salvation and assurance of grace, rather than any wider notion of metaphysics. Together with the philosophical writings of Descartes, this paves the way to the third stage, to Idealism, in its modern and German context. Building on the framework of Kantian metaphysics, the writings of Fichte and Schelling come to focus on the rational subject, the supreme 'I', as the only basis for knowledge and belief. The logical progression of this is, in turn, the dialectic of Idealism, whether in terms of the supreme spirit or mind in Hegel, or alternatively the materialist reductionism of Marx.

In all these developments von Balthasar sees the loss of that concept of form and beauty which is grounded on an analogical concept of being. It is replaced by an inadequate philosophical framework, in which all distinction is lost as everything merges together in an undifferentiated unity or identity and there is no place left for glory. This is a consequence of the loss of that unified concept of being provided by Thomas' ontology. "Glory" stands or falls with the unsurpassability of the *analogia entis*, the ever greater dissimilarity to God no matter how great the similarity to Him... In so far as the German Idealism begins with the *identitas entis*, the way back to Christianity is blocked; it cannot produce an aesthetics of 'glory' but only one of 'beauty': and the 'aesthetics as science', which was rampant in the nineteenth century is its fruit.⁹³

⁹³ GL5 pp.548-9

Here we have returned to that critique of Idealism and its metaphysics of identity which was so crucial, as we have seen, to von Balthasar's critique of Barthian theology and its inheritance. It was this deficiency which required Barth to move from dialectic to analogy although, as we have seen, von Balthasar did not believe his 'conversion' was as thoroughgoing or sufficient as it needed to be. By contrast, it is an analogical understanding of being which von Balthasar will insist is the only basis for a properly biblical understanding of divine glory. And it is back to the biblical witness that he turns in the final two volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, in the volumes on *Theology*, first *The Old Covenant* and then *The New Covenant*.

The outline for the programme he will here undertake has already been set out in his opening volume *Seeing the Form*. Von Balthasar will demonstrate how the Old and New Testaments must be seen as part of the one witness to the divine glory, even though the nature of the different strands within the Old Testament testimony is such that they cannot be fully understood, except in so far as they point beyond the boundaries of their own experience and understanding to the Word made flesh. But as he develops his material in more detail, it becomes evident how much his exposition of the divine glory has its origins in that section from the *Church Dogmatics* Volume 2.1 in which Barth portrays 'The Eternity and Glory of God' as part of 'The Perfections of the Divine Freedom'.

The Old Covenant begins, as Aidan Nichols rightly recognises, with von Balthasar 'at his most Barthian – God's Word and its truth are their own witness: there is no

neutral plane where man can dialogue with God on the topics of ethics and religion.'⁹⁴ The beginning, and indeed end, of Christian religion is the gracious self-communication of the totally other God. The fact that this evokes a human response in terms of a 'fear of the Lord' and a 'commitment to love our neighbour', does not detract from the fact that it originates solely from the revelation of God, rather than from any prior framework of human knowledge or relationships. To suggest anything else, as von Balthasar himself acknowledges, 'would rightly fall victim to the criticism of Karl Barth.'

'If God speaks his word to created men and women, surely it is because he has given them an understanding which, with God's grace, can achieve the act of hearing and comprehension. But if it is really *God's* word and self-communication that they are to hear and understand, then this can surely not occur on the basis of a neutral foreknowledge of what 'words' mean or what 'truth' is. Such encounter with God cannot take place on a dialogical plane which has been opened in advance; it can only occur by virtue of a primary sense of being overawed by the undialogical presupposition of the dialogue that has started, namely the divinity or glory of God.'⁹⁵ (It is this understanding which the German title of his work conveys in a way which the English translation cannot match, for it combines both the aspects of 'sublimeness' (*Hehrsein*) and 'lordliness' (*Herrsein*) within the 'glory' (*Herrlichkeit*) of the self-communication of God.)

⁹⁴ Nichols, *Op. cit.* p.188

⁹⁵ *GL6* p.11

Von Balthasar will then go on to look at this self-communication of God under three headings, namely 'glory', 'image' and 'grace and covenant'. His use of these themes corresponds to the approach set out in *Seeing the Form*, in which a theological aesthetics requires both a theory of vision, reflecting on the splendour of the objective form to be perceived, and a theory of rapture, in which the human recipient is transformed and drawn into the divine glory. In his treatment of the divine glory or *kabod* of God in the Old Testament, von Balthasar groups these experiences of the presence of God under various headings; those theophanies which are part of the salvation-history of Israel (such as the events on Sinai), those which relate to the experience of being called by the prophets (for example Isaiah and Ezekiel) and those which are interpreted through the cosmos as part of the wisdom tradition (in Job and the Psalms). Under the heading of the 'image', von Balthasar focuses upon humanity, as the partner which God has created for himself to share in a portion of his glory. And then, under the heading of 'grace and covenant', he explores how this relationship of divine revelation and human response takes a distinct and yet representative form through the history of Israel.

In each of these themes, the influence of Barth remains visible. Nichols rightly notes how von Balthasar's approach in the first section consciously follows Barth's model, in treating such glory or *kabod* as one of the 'attributes' of God by which his majesty and power are known, rather than, as in other theologians, for example Gregory Palamas, 'divine energies', behind which the 'divine essence' remains unknowable.⁹⁶ That in such manifestations of glory 'God's inner being is disclosing itself more richly'

⁹⁶ Nichols, *Op. cit.* p.193

remains true, even if 'the paradox that in his self-disclosure God becomes ever more manifest as the Incomprehensible One must retain its full vigour.'⁹⁷

Again in the second theme, in the 'image' which focuses upon the creature, von Balthasar's treatment leans heavily on Barth's anthropology and his interpretation of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1, that humanity is to be God's co-respondent partner in creation. Humankind has a share with God in dominion over the rest of creation, and von Balthasar is to explore how the stories of Israel's kings reflects something of the archetypal experience of the kingly rule of God. But it also means that 'the creature is also granted a certain space to be at home within itself before God; indeed, a sphere of autonomy is allowed it over against God, that it may be a 'world' of its own with respect to God.' For at the same time, this creature is created by and for God, and this leads onto the third theme which is to do with that which governs the relationship between God and creature, namely 'grace and covenant'. Von Balthasar himself acknowledges where his treatment of the relationship between the two comes from; for 'Karl Barth has captured this priority in the now classical formula which says that creation (and, with it God's image in man) is the outward ground of the covenant and the covenant, in turn, is the inner ground of creation.'⁹⁸

However, von Balthasar then has to explain how these themes, which allow humanity to share in a portion of the heavenly glory, deal with the breakdown of that covenant relationship and the reality of evil. For von Balthasar, this is the role of the prophets, witnessing to the encounter between evil and the divine glory, a foretaste of that

⁹⁷ GL6 p.54

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.88 note 3

deeper conflict which will be experienced on the cross. In the midst of all that threatens to shadow and hide the glory of God, von Balthasar finds three elements in the closing pages of the Old Testament which point beyond the darkness to the glory which is to come. There is 'messianism' ('Glory ahead') which looks beyond the experience of present impotence to a new and glorious king; there is 'apocalyptic' ('Glory above') which looks beyond earthly suffering to a heavenly kingdom and resurrection; finally there is 'wisdom' ('Glory anticipated') which, encouraged by the growing influence of Greek philosophy upon Jewish thought, looks beyond the historic tradition to see the signs of God's immanence in the surrounding cosmos.

All of these are ways in which glimpses of the glory of God are kept alive in troubled times. But in each case they point to a fulfilment which can not be comprehended within the thought forms or framework from which they come. In that sense, the witness of Israel as a whole points toward what is to yet to be, as the only way of interpreting that which can not be fully comprehended within its own tradition. And what they point to is the subject of the next and final volume, *The New Covenant*.

Von Balthasar's introduction to this final volume recognises it to be the climax of *The Glory of the Lord*; 'We make ready with nervousness to scale the final slope, the ascent which was the goal of all the earlier advances forward.' For the task which is set is to 'describe the ineffable final matter of the definitive meeting which unites God and man (the world), and here least of all we can forego the concept of 'form'.'⁹⁹ As with the previous chapter, the approach has been established in outline in the

⁹⁹ GL7 pp.13-14

opening volume; now is the time to explore the fullness of what St. Paul describes as 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4.6), although von Balthasar's approach will be to focus initially upon the Johannine tradition as the place where the glory of God in Christ is most definitively accorded.

However, in this introduction von Balthasar again acknowledges that such an approach to theological aesthetics has its origins in Karl Barth. He offers his own summary of Barth's treatise on God's glory in the *Church Dogmatics* 2.1; Glory is 'God himself in the truth, in the capacity, in the act which he makes himself known as God': this comes to fulfilment in Christ who is both the perfect image of the glory of the Father and 'the archetype of all creaturely participation in the glory of God': from this derives our concept of beauty in that 'we speak of the beauty of God only to help in the explanation of his glory' and it is this, rather than any general or metaphysical concept of beauty which provides the basis for a biblical-theological aesthetics.¹⁰⁰

But Barth does not offer an aesthetics which runs through the entire *Dogmatics*. Instead he offers three central examples as to how the glory, and thus beauty of God is to be known: first in 'the wonderful unity – now puzzling, now clear in itself – of identity and non-identity, of simplicity and multiplicity, of inner and outer, of God himself and the fullness of that which he is as God': second as this becomes visible at a deeper level in the relationships of the Trinity of order, relationship and form, so that 'the Trinity of God is the mystery of his beauty': thirdly as the Trinity comes into view for us in the Incarnation as the 'centre and goal, and thus also the hidden

¹⁰⁰ GL7 pp.21-22, quoting from Barth *CD*2.1 pp.608-677

beginning of all God's ways' so that in Jesus Christ 'God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, that which we would call ugly, as well as that which we would call beautiful'.¹⁰¹

Von Balthasar sketches this outline 'not only because it agrees with our overall plan, especially as regards the relationship between glory and beauty, but also because it offers at the beginning an overview that we ourselves can approach only slowly.' For what von Balthasar is doing, rather than offering an 'isolated treatise', is to construct a theology of the new covenant in which, as with the old, 'everything is ordered around the guiding concept of glory'.¹⁰² This project is one which will be undertaken in three parts. 'First we must speak of the matter itself, which bears the name not of 'glory', but of Jesus Christ; then we must follow on to speak of the application of the affirmation of glory to him and to all that concerns him; and third, we must speak of the response of the world, as this is changed in the New Testament – the glorification of the glory.'¹⁰³

The 'matter itself' is the subject of the first section, entitled '*Verbo Caro Factum*', (the Word made flesh). Here von Balthasar deals with what might be regarded as the 'event' of the Incarnation, in that it addresses those aspects of Jesus' life and ministry which are recorded in the synoptic gospels but in which, at least for the time being, the issues of Christ's 'glory' are not explicitly raised. However, throughout this section von Balthasar is also addressing another issue. How this event, in which God becomes man, not only picks up and fulfils all those inexplicable questions which had

¹⁰¹ GL7 pp.22-23

¹⁰² *Ibid.* pp.23-24

been raised by the testimony of Israel as a whole in the old covenant; but also how the events of Jesus' death and resurrection offer an understanding of glory which can comprehend the reality of sin and alienation from God, precisely those issues which the old covenant left in suspension.

The title of the second section '*Vidimus Gloriam Eius*' (We have seen his glory) reveals the thrust of the argument which von Balthasar will take. It will be to look at the ascriptions of 'glory' in the New Testament – and the fact that the title is a quotation taken from the prologue to John's gospel reflects von Balthasar's view that in the Johannine tradition is found the fullest and deepest contemplation upon the glory of God. Indeed, this is where his account begins with the mutual glorification of Father and Son in John's gospel chapter 17. Not that his approach is restricted to John; indeed, as Nichols observes, one of the intriguing things that von Balthasar does in this regard is to 'resituate' Pauline language about justifying faith within a Johannine understanding of glory, and thus to re-express it in theologically aesthetic terms.¹⁰⁴

In the final section '*In Laudem Glorae*' (To the praise of his glory) von Balthasar examines what comprises a Christian response to the glory which has been revealed. Following the example of Jesus in John's gospel, in which not only is glory offered back by the Son to the Father but also extended into the life of the disciples whom the Son has chosen, so too they are to offer back glory to God, and in so doing come to share in that life and relationship which belongs to the Trinity of

¹⁰³ GL7 pp.27-28

¹⁰⁴ Nichols, *Op. cit.* p.238

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But this offering back of glory is not something which is restricted to praise and doxology alone; glorification involves all aspects of Christian living. Sharing by the power of the Spirit in the life of Christ through which the glory of God the Father has been revealed, 'we must praise him through our existence, inasmuch as this is an existence that is in him and therefore what it truly ought to be: an existence in the love that hands itself over.'¹⁰⁵

What this 'pneumatology of Christian existence' will mean is filled out by von Balthasar under the headings 'Giving back the fruit to God' and 'The Brother for whom Christ died'. It will involve service and solidarity as much as worship and praise, not simply following the model which Christ set forth but allowing Christ to live in us in the power of the Spirit. However, for the purpose of this thesis, what is significant about von Balthasar's approach here is the fundamentally ecclesial nature of this process of glorification; 'since Jesus prays to the Father to permit those who belong to him to dwell where he is and to see his glory (Jn 17.24) and the Church is already the place where he is, the personal and social life of the Church permits one to see into the glory of Christ and of the triune love.'¹⁰⁶

It is here that we revisit that discussion of the role of 'merit' within the context of fruitfulness that we first found in von Balthasar's study of Barth and his critique of the inadequacy of Barth's treatment of Church. And it is here that we find von Balthasar again stressing the importance of the image of the vine in John 15; 'It is the personal Jesus – his word, his love and his self-giving, his prayer – that dwells in the

¹⁰⁵ *GL7* p.397

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.467

‘branches’ and thereby generates the fellowship of life.’¹⁰⁷ It is the Church which embodies the solidarity between fellow Christians, in terms of recognising in our fellows the brother for whom Christ died; and as the fruitfulness which enables the life of Christ to transform human lives, so too it is the Church which embodies hope for the world. For as in his study of Barth, so too in his *Theological Aesthetics*, it is to a christologically centred Church that von Balthasar allows his last word, as

‘... it is precisely from the risen Lord that the earthly visibility of the Church has her soul and her spirit, so that she has as it were a form that is already alien to the world that is passing away, a form that has its home elsewhere... And the Church, as body and bride, is never the midpoint of the form to which we have wished to point here. She is the moon, not the sun: the reflection, not the glory itself. Put more precisely, she is the response of glorification, and to this extent she is drawn into the glorious Word to which she responds, and into the splendour of the light without which she would not shine. What she reflects back in the night is the light of hope for the world.’¹⁰⁸

3.5) Summary and conclusions

This chapter has sought to explore the impact of von Balthasar’s study of Barth upon the first part of his own great theological trilogy. We have noted, like many scholars before us, how von Balthasar’s appreciation of the element of beauty and joy in Barth’s treatment of the divine glory has triggered his own more detailed exposition in

¹⁰⁷ GL7 p.463

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.543

his *Theological Aesthetics*. However, at the same time we have also recognised that in this work von Balthasar is not just acknowledging his debt to Barth but is consciously looking to take an alternative route; one which examines the role of beauty not just in terms of the glory of divine revelation, but that beauty which resides in the whole of creation and evokes a response in theologian and philosopher alike, drawing them into the mystery of being itself.

In taking this alternative route, von Balthasar is not just responding to the fact that Barth's theology has, despite its enormous impact in other regards, been largely overlooked in terms of its impact on the aesthetic consciousness of mainstream Protestant theology. He is also looking to address two major weaknesses which he has identified from his study of Barth's theology.

The first of these weaknesses is, he believes, the inadequacy of Barth's treatment of the Church, an inadequacy which derives from his insistence upon act or event and his polemic against the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church. This criticism is raised explicitly in von Balthasar's study as part of his response as a Catholic theologian to Barth's critique. But his response is carried on into the pages of *The Glory of the Lord*. In particular, it is seen in the way in which von Balthasar broadens the christological focus so that the form of the Christ event is seen to include not just the earthly ministry and heavenly ascension of Jesus Christ, but also the experience of those whom he met and drew into discipleship. By emphasising both the role of archetypal experience and its fundamentally ecclesial dimension, von Balthasar's theology makes the emergence of the Church a christological event. In turn, this

means that the shape and form of the Church are not to be regarded as a product of historical accident, but rather as part of that fruitfulness by which the spirit of Christ transforms human lives and becomes evident to the world.

Inextricably linked with this is the second area of weakness, namely the controversy over the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being. We have seen how von Balthasar's study of Barth identifies the movement in his theology from dialectic to analogy and yet how, according to von Balthasar, development of the analogy of faith in opposition to the analogy of being fails ultimately to do justice to God's revelation in Christ. For in taking on human flesh and sharing human nature von Balthasar argues that there is an analogical element which is integral to the Incarnation itself. Von Balthasar's conclusion is that only such an analogical approach, allied to the christological focus which Barth has rightly emphasised, can do justice to God's act of creation and plans for redemption.

The significance of this can be seen in the way that von Balthasar insists throughout *The Glory of the Lord* that the analogy of being is crucial to his theological enterprise. It is the analogy of being which requires him, *contra* Barth, to develop a theological aesthetic which encompasses not just the divine revelation but also the beauty and glory which is to be found throughout the whole of creation.¹⁰⁹ It is the analogy of being which brings together and regulates the proper relationship between theologian and philosopher, as both are drawn by the beauty of God in the mystery of being. And it is the loss of that analogical approach, following the break-up of that unified

¹⁰⁹ Similarly Viladesau (*Op. cit.* p.30) argues that von Balthasar's work is also a "correction" to Barth in that Protestant theology's tendency to reject aesthetics results from its refusal of the analogy of being.

vision of reality offered by Aquinas, which has resulted in the dull, image-less and unattractive Christianity which has been offered by much mainstream theology, Catholic and Protestant ever since.

It is in reaction to this that von Balthasar has offered his own *Theological Aesthetics*. However, it would be wrong to emphasise the influence of von Balthasar's critical engagement with Barth to the exclusion of other influences. Clearly there are other factors which can be seen to be at work. Biographical accounts and reminiscences of von Balthasar have drawn attention to the importance of his rediscovery of the early Church Fathers for his theological development, and various scholars have drawn out the significance of his patristic studies for the development of *The Glory of the Lord*.¹¹⁰ Louis Dupré has stressed the importance of von Balthasar's reading of the classical and patristic traditions upon his *Theological Aesthetics*,¹¹¹ whilst more recent studies by Kevin Mongrain¹¹² and Mark McIntosh¹¹³ have identified the impact upon von Balthasar's work of the theologies of Irenaeus and Maximus the Confessor respectively.

Likewise, we have also drawn attention to the emphasis which von Balthasar has given to the role of Christian experience. Looking back at the context of his life and ministry, there are strong reasons why this should be so significant. Reflecting on his assessment of the role and teachings of Ignatius, we should recall that von Balthasar

¹¹⁰ See for example Deirdre Carabine, 'The Fathers: The Church's Intimate Youthful Diary' in McGregor and Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) pp.73-91

¹¹¹ *The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987) especially p.236

¹¹² *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroads, 2002)

himself trained as a Jesuit, founded a secular order, and was himself a noted leader of retreats using the Ignatian model. Nor can we discount the influence of the mystical experiences of his colleague Adrienne von Speyr; von Balthasar's decision to leave the Jesuit order was in no small part in response to the inability of the Catholic Church to accept the validity and insight of her experience and he was to maintain throughout his life that the theological works published in his name owed as much to Adrienne as to himself; 'Her work and mine cannot be separated from one another either psychologically or theologically. They are two halves of one whole, with a single foundation at the center.'¹¹⁴

Notwithstanding these other influences, the argument of this chapter remains that the structure and form of *The Glory of the Lord* are in large part due to the thrust of von Balthasar's critical engagement with the theology of Karl Barth. We have explored how von Balthasar's dialogue with Barth has served to shape its development, and compared our assessment of its influence upon him with the studies of other scholars, particularly Roland Chia.

That there is a tension between his work and Barth's as well as a debt has been noted by other commentators, notably Noel O'Donoghue, who writes that '*Herrlichkeit* is in some ways a rewriting of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and a lot of the excitement of the book comes from the tension between the Barthian theology of discontinuity (and the total Otherness of God in Christ) and that Platonic and Aristotelian strand in

¹¹³ *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000)

¹¹⁴ *Rechenschaft 1965*, quoted in Peter Henrici, 'A Sketch of von Balthasar's life' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) p.28

Catholic theology which sees nature and grace as somehow continuous, and so defends the basic goodness and beauty of human life. From beginning to end the book is balanced on a razor edge between these two fundamental options...'¹¹⁵ The image of a 'hair's breadth distance' is one which von Balthasar had himself used in terms of his relationship to Barth, and O'Donoghue's assessment also picks up that thrust which we have already noted, namely the conscious effort in von Balthasar's work to offer a theological aesthetic which integrates both theology and philosophy.

But to return to von Balthasar's original study, there is one other area where he remained somewhat critical of Barth's work. This is the allegation of christological 'constriction' or 'narrowing', the charge that Barth has so summed up all things in Christ that there is no room for human involvement or response to God's gracious act of redemption. Since it is this, the saving drama of God's activity in his world, which is to be the subject matter of the second part of von Balthasar's great trilogy, the *Theo-Drama*, it is to this subject that we will now turn. And in looking at this second part of von Balthasar's trilogy, we shall also examine the work of Ben Quash, another recent scholar who has researched into the relationship between Barth and von Balthasar and, in particular, the role which each theologian allows to human freedom in response.

¹¹⁵ Noel O'Donoghue, 'A Theology of Beauty' in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) p.3

Chapter 4) Participating in the Action – the *Theo-Drama*

4.1) Introduction – Setting the stage

Running to some 5 volumes and more than 2000 pages, originally published over a ten year period between 1973 and 1983, the *Theo-Drama* represents a massive theological undertaking in its own right. Indeed for many scholars, it marks the high-point of von Balthasar's theological work. In a *Festschrift* published to mark von Balthasar's 80th birthday (and involving many of those involved in translating *The Glory of the Lord*) the editor John Riches adjudged that; 'Balthasar's own most sustained theological reflections are to be found in the second part of his projected trilogy *Theodramatik*.'¹ Similarly, Edward Oakes, the translator of *The Theology of Karl Barth* and another leading interpreter of von Balthasar, has written that; 'I regard the last three volumes of the Theodramatics as the culmination and capstone of his work, where all the themes of his theology converge and are fused into a synthesis of remarkable creativity and originality, an achievement which makes him one of the great theological minds of the twentieth century.'²

The argument of this thesis has been that it is von Balthasar's critical engagement with Barth, culminating in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, which served to shape the development of von Balthasar's emerging theology and determine the structure of his emerging trilogy. However, it must be admitted that on first sight the *Theo-Drama*

¹ John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986) p.192

appears to assume a starting point quite independent of any debt to or influence from Barth. The first volume was not published until some five years after Barth's death, and the structure and argument developed, unlike *The Glory of the Lord*, make little explicit reference to Barth as a point of departure (although there will be numerous references on detailed points in later volumes as we shall see.)

Instead, von Balthasar makes it clear that this work has been planned as the middle-piece of a 'triptych' or trilogy. The opening volume of the *Theo-Drama*, the *Prolegomena*, sets the scene with an examination of the role of 'Dramatic Theory between Aesthetics and Logic', offering a rationale for why the *Theo-Drama* follows naturally on from *The Glory of the Lord*. The 'theological drama' has already begun with the *Aesthetics*, since 'catching sight' of the glory is inconceivable without being 'transported' by it. But perceiving, indeed being enraptured by the form is only a prelude to the action, and here von Balthasar may have been conscious of some criticism that his approach has thus far offered simply a quietist and contemplative theology. 'For God's revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence "understand", through action on *its* part.'³

The *Theo-Drama* will be where we get down to the action. In terms of von Balthasar's grand scheme of approaching theology in terms of the transcendentals of 'being', the beautiful, the good and the true, it will be concerned with the *good*, for that is at the heart of what God has done for us in Christ, just as his *Aesthetics* dealt with the

² Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.230

beautiful, with the glory of the divine Word. But it is not a good to be observed passively; 'The *good* which God does to us can only be experienced as the *truth* if we share in performing it...' and this is possible because God 'has already taken the drama of existence which plays on the world stage and inserted it into his quite different "play" which, nonetheless, he wishes to play on our stage. It is a case of the play within the play: our play "plays" in his play.'⁴ It is this divine but humanly involving drama of salvation which will be the subject of the *Theo-Drama*.

Given von Balthasar's recovery of a theological role for the aesthetic in *The Glory of the Lord*, his own academic background in German literature and philosophy, and his life-long interest in culture and the arts (his friend Henri de Lubac once wrote that 'This man is perhaps the most cultivated of his time.'⁵) perhaps we should not be surprised at his adoption of such a literary and cultural category. Admittedly, his initial encyclopaedic survey of dramatic form and theory across the centuries in Volume 1 has to acknowledge that the Church's attitude towards theatre and the acting profession has at best been ambivalent. In addition to deeper theological concerns about 'play-acting' and 'performing roles', von Balthasar also recognises that there have been longstanding practical and moral concerns about the licentiousness which can accompany festivals and theatre. But at the same time, as other commentators including Oakes have noted, this very ambivalence leaves von Balthasar with a great deal of relatively unexplored material to shape and use in his own distinctive way.

³ *TD1* p.15

⁴ *Ibid.* p.20

⁵ 'Witness of Christ in the Church' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) p.272

However, what this chapter will suggest is that, in choosing to adopt a theo-dramatic model for this second part of his trilogy, the shape and structure of von Balthasar's theology is still being influenced by the nature of his debate with Barth. We have already noted in our chapter on *The Theology of Karl Barth* how von Balthasar recognises that the argument about the analogy of being is crucial to their discussion and how in turn he will assert that the proper use of analogy, christologically interpreted, will enable human beings to make their appropriate creaturely response to God. We have noted also in the previous chapter on *The Glory of the Lord* how von Balthasar consciously makes the concept of 'being' central to his exposition of the divine glory, so that the earth is capable not only of recognising but also of being taken up and transformed by the glory of God.

In this chapter on the *Theo-Drama* we will seek to show how von Balthasar's choice of a theo-dramatic theory, which allows for the presence of human characters alongside Christ on the world's stage, implies also an ongoing criticism of Barth's approach. Von Balthasar is offering an alternative model in which 'God takes our decisions seriously, working them into his plans by his holy providence' – as he noted in his study on Barth.⁶ And in his establishing of a theo-dramatic role for the Church, in the life of which individual believers discover and enact their own role within the divine drama of salvation, we shall see how von Balthasar continues to offer a corrective to what he has identified as a defect in the otherwise impressive and christologically secure theological foundation which Barth has offered.

⁶ KB p.378

It is this task which we will undertake in the following three sections of this chapter. In section 2 we shall offer an overview of von Balthasar project in the *Theo-Drama*, seeking to identify both the structure of his exposition and to show how far this is shaped by the ongoing debate with Barth. After that, in section 3, we shall pick up and explore those areas in the *Theo-Drama* where von Balthasar himself either explicitly engages with Barth or revisits arguments which have been picked up earlier, to illustrate how far these remain live issues which shape the structure of his work. Then, in section 4, we shall engage with the work of another modern scholar, Ben Quash, who has both explored and reflected upon the nature of their ongoing relationship, to see how far our approach accords with his and in particular to see whether any criticisms which he may offer in terms of von Balthasar's response to Barth resonate with our own (and whether von Balthasar's charge against Barth of 'christological constriction' might equally be answered by a counter-charge of 'ecclesiological constriction' in his own approach!) The chapter will then finish with a summary drawing together the conclusions reached thus far.

4.2) Getting down to the action – a Theodramatic theory

4.2.1) Introduction: the Prolegomena

It is in Volume 1, the *Prolegomena*, that von Balthasar seeks to establish the key concepts which will be used in his theological dramatic theory. But prior to this undertaking, he first identifies some trends in current theological discourse which will need to be addressed, even if an over-emphasis upon any one of them will only

serve to distort the theological enterprise as a whole. Interestingly, the very first of these categories is that of 'event', and here von Balthasar is quite explicitly engaging with the thought of both Bultmann and the 'young Barth'. There is a proper concern for the 'here and now', the *kairos* of God's appointed hour, but this does not mean that all of time is to submerge into the one decisive event. Instead; 'Here the vertical event has unfolded into a series of times of salvation comparable to the acts of a play... It is not as if there is *only* the fifth act, or even *only* the crucial scene of the peripeteia: God plays the whole piece right through with the individual human being and the human race.'⁷

Following on from this, von Balthasar warns against going to the other extreme. There is also a proper concern for 'history', but against this, he warns against any understanding of history that fails to appreciate the decisive significance of God's revelation in Christ and seeks to interpret this as a series of unfolding acts over time. Other important themes which he identifies include: the concern for 'orthopraxy', for right practice in response to the glory, the *doxa* of God (perhaps revealing a sensitivity to allegations made against the contemplative mode of his *Aesthetics*); for 'dialogue' as an approach to truth; for 'political theology' in terms of engagement with the world; for 'futurism' in rediscovery of the importance of eschatology and for 'function' in response to the challenges and insights of structuralism.

With all the themes thus far, we sense that von Balthasar has some, but only limited sympathy. However with the last two, we arrive at themes which are going to play a

⁷ TD1 p.28

crucial role throughout the *Theo-Drama*, namely the concept of 'role' and personality, and the problem of 'creaturely freedom', including the 'possibility of evil'. It is von Balthasar's conviction that a properly theo-dramatic theory will have a better chance of holding all these concerns together in a theological whole than the alternatives have managed to do. The rest of the *Prolegomena* offers a survey of the resources which are available, including von Balthasar's own and sometimes idiosyncratic review of the history of western drama. From this survey come a number of key concepts which will be put to use in later volumes of the *Theo-Drama*. Some of these are hardly original. The idea of the 'World Stage', epitomised by the inscription on the Globe Theatre (which itself originated in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*) that '*totus mundus agit histrionem*',⁸ is itself hardly original. Indeed von Balthasar traces its origins back to the dramatists and philosophers of ancient Greece.

Much more significant are three other concepts which he draws from this survey of the resources available and upon which von Balthasar does put his own highly individual stamp and cast. In the first place, a play requires an 'author' to write the script, an 'actor' to perform, and a 'director' to guide the performance. In von Balthasar's theo-dramatic theory, a trinitarian and soteriological dimension is introduced to this process, in which the Son as 'actor' places himself at the disposal of the Father, the 'author' of this saving drama, subject to the direction of the Holy Spirit. These represent what von Balthasar calls 'the Three Elements of Dramatic Creativity'⁹. But this is not the end of the matter, for in addition to the writing of the play, there is also the performance of the drama. This involves a second triad of

⁸ 'The whole world acts a play', quoted in *TD1* p.162

⁹ *TD1* pp.268ff

concepts, which von Balthasar calls ‘the Three Elements of Dramatic Realization’.¹⁰ These involve the ‘presentation’, the ‘audience’ and the ‘horizon’ of meaning by which a play can come to be understood. For the drama to be realised, it has to be presented before an audience, and as the audience are engaged in the drama, the performance opens up a new horizon of meaning, through which the audience gains a fresh understanding of itself and its situation in the world.

Finally he comes to the crucial concepts of ‘role’ and ‘identity’. Von Balthasar recognises both the variety of roles which human beings can play and the significance which they have upon our understanding of identity. Much of the latter part of this volume is a survey of psychological insights into the understanding of personality, drawing on such sources as Freud, Jung and Adler. But von Balthasar’s critical insight is that what unites the concepts of role and identity is an understanding of ‘mission’ – and this is what is fulfilled in Christ. ‘Once and for all the duality of “being” and “seeming”, which goes through man’s entire structure is absolutely overcome in the identity of person and mission in Christ.’¹¹ It is only in Christ that role and identity find their complete unity as the Son obeys the Father’s call. Nor should we underestimate the significance for von Balthasar that theological accounts of the Trinity should use such dramatic terminology, namely *prosopon* and *persona*, both terms which are drawn from the classical stage.

Following on from this exploration of concepts, von Balthasar sets out to establish the approach his theological dramatic theory will take. ‘Our aim is to present the same

¹⁰ *TD1* pp.305ff

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.646

fundamental themes – God and the creature, the structure and situation of the world and man, the Mediator and his presence (the Church and all that is associated with her) and the movement of history – in three stages. The first stage is the *point of departure* (the “*dramatis personae*”, as it were); the second is the *course of the action*; and the third is the *final play*.¹² And in light of our previous chapter on *The Theology of Karl Barth*, perhaps we should not be surprised to note how these ‘fundamental themes’ resonate with those major themes which von Balthasar identified in Barth as ones which Catholic theology would have to take seriously in future, namely the foundations for christocentrism, for the historicity of nature, and the created character of worldly truth.

The first stage, the *Dramatis Personae*, is dealt with in the next two volumes of the *Theo-Drama*. However, von Balthasar recognises that there are two issues which he has to address first before his list of dramatic characters can be properly understood. The first is a generic one, which is that in order for any list of characters to be meaningful for an audience, it needs to know the kind of role and the kind of drama in which they are involved. The second is a specifically theological one, which is the issue of how human beings can play a part in this divine drama which starts and ends with God; or as von Balthasar states it very boldly; ‘who else acts, who else *can* act if God is on the stage? ... Where is there any room for man’s “something” if God, by nature, must be “everything” (Sir 43:27) if he is to be God at all?’¹³

¹² *TD2* p.11

¹³ *Ibid.* pp.17-18

4.2.2) Anthropology: Man in God

Accordingly, in Volume 2, von Balthasar sets out to address these preliminary issues in terms of a theo-dramatic anthropology, *Man in God*. Not surprisingly, given the christocentric focus which von Balthasar has learnt from Barth, the answer to his question, as to who can act if God is on the stage, is found in Christ. 'Within the drama of Christ, every human fate is deprivatized so that its personal range may extend to the whole universe, depending on how far it is prepared to cooperate in being inserted into the normative drama of Christ's life, death and Resurrection'¹⁴ which in turn means that this is a play wherein 'all the spectators must eventually become fellow actors, whether they wish to or not.'¹⁵

In the first part of this volume, von Balthasar looks at what he regards as the failure of various human or 'intramundane' attempts to explain the drama of existence, which point towards the 'convergence' of a theo-dramatic theory. He also offers a survey of those biblical themes which themselves offer a genuinely dramatic element to the unfolding of God's revelation, highlighting the significance of 'God's Lawsuit' with his people through the prophets, 'Christ's Dramatic Struggle' and the 'Drama of Discipleship' for his followers.¹⁶ Indeed, he even goes so far as to borrow Markus Barth's synopsis of what this might mean for a five act play: the first, 'the court of judgment of God's wrath'; the second as 'God sends his Son as the Advocate'; the third, 'the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead'; the fourth, 'the sending and work of

¹⁴ *TD2* p.50

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.58

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp.151-168

the Spirit' leading to the fifth, 'the visible manifestation of salvation – in the form of the Last Judgement.'¹⁷

But having sketched the area for this dramatic engagement, von Balthasar has still to deal with the fundamental question he raised at the beginning, namely who can act if God is on the stage? This raises the crucial issue of freedom, in terms of the relationship between the infinite and unlimited freedom of the Creator and the finite and limited freedom of the creature. He has already identified this issue of 'creaturely freedom' as a key theme in modern theology (and we shall examine later in this chapter how this has been picked up by other scholars such as Quash as part of his critical engagement with Barth.) But to address this second question here, von Balthasar draws on two older understandings of freedom, drawn from the writings of the Fathers; the notion of freedom as 'autonomous motion', as actively willing to pursue a chosen course, and freedom as 'consent', as joyfully and obediently agreeing to that which is in our best interests.

It is Balthasar's contention that true freedom is found when the two freedoms conform, when we actively choose to consent to that which is best for us. For him, the supreme example of this is Jesus Christ, who freely consents to be obedient to the Father's will. This means in turn that human beings, who find their life in Christ, likewise find their fullest freedom in obedience to his calling; for in theo-dramatic terms, there is no conflict between these different approaches to freedom. And it is note-worthy that von Balthasar, who does not usually refer overmuch to English

¹⁷ TD2 pp.155-159

speaking theologians, here quotes from C. S. Lewis' *Letters to Malcolm*. 'The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, but not at all the less ours. Rather, most ours, when most His.'¹⁸ It is this freedom in Christ which gives human beings the freedom to act in the divine drama.

It is also this freedom which enables them to overcome those tensions which make up the drama of human existence, and here von Balthasar makes reference to those 'polarities' which exist between spirit and body, man and woman and individual and community.¹⁹ This reference is doubly significant; his use of this framework and terminology suggests the continuing influence of Przywara, von Balthasar's erstwhile mentor and a key figure in his ongoing debate with Barth. But it also points towards the ecclesiological significance of his resolution of the tension between finite and infinite freedom in Christ. For if the fulfilment of human freedom is to be found in life in Christ, by sharing as part of the body of Christ in the life of his Church, and this is the way in which Christians are to play their part in God's drama of salvation, then it follows that there is an inherently ecclesiological dimension to this divine drama. This points the way towards the idea of the Church as a theo-dramatic character in her own right, which is a theme which von Balthasar will pick up in his next volume.

4.2.3) Christology: Persons in Christ

If in Volume 2 von Balthasar was establishing the preconditions for human participation in the divine drama, then Volume 3 is where the roles are made clear,

¹⁸ Quoted in *TD2* pp.193-4

¹⁹ *TD2* pp.355-394

as *Man in God* is followed by *Persons in Christ*. Moreover, given that God in Christ is to be the principal actor in this drama, we should not be surprised to find that the focus on a theo-dramatic anthropology in the previous volume is here followed by a more extensive focus upon christology. (Indeed, Volume 3 begins with a hundred page section on 'The Problem of Method'²⁰ in which von Balthasar engages with the results of New Testament scholarship and gets closer to an academic treatment of christology than perhaps anywhere else in his writings.) But once again, there is to be a key theme around which his exposition is constructed. Whereas in the last volume it was the issue of 'creaturely freedom' in enabling human being to participate in the action, here is the last of those watchwords in modern theology which he identified first in his *Prolegomena*, namely the uniting of 'personality' and 'role' in the concept of 'mission'.

Von Balthasar's analysis of modern biblical scholarship leads him to the conclusion that there is what he terms a "Continuity in Discontinuity";²¹ that far from being 'projected onto' an earlier historical Jesus, the development of christological titles in the New Testament is itself 'rooted' in the experience of the first Christians and the early Church from the very beginning. For him, this is summed up in Jesus' unique sense of 'mission', of being 'sent' from God, and he argues that it is impossible to interpret Jesus' life and death without an appreciation of this concept. It is integral to who Jesus is and to how he understands himself and his ministry. In that sense his is both a christology of 'being' and of 'consciousness', in that von Balthasar is affirming

²⁰ *TD3* pp.59-148

²¹ *Ibid.* pp.78ff

that the events surrounding Jesus' life, death and resurrection cannot be understood outside of his own understanding of having been sent from God.

In terms of classical christology, there is nothing radically new in von Balthasar's approach. However, when taken up fully into his theo-dramatic theory, then there are some new developments. In the first place, it grounds the theo-drama firmly in God, as it begins with the eternal decision of the Father to send the Son and the eternal willingness of the Son to hand himself over in obedience to his Father's mission, all of which is born witness by the Spirit, as the one 'breathed forth from the one love of Father and Son as the expression of their united freedom'.²² Moreover von Balthasar will here introduce what he terms the "Trinitarian Inversion",²³ whereby the Spirit who is breathed forth from the Father during the time of the Son's incarnation, in his *status exinanitionis* or time of self-emptying, becomes the Spirit who is breathed forth by the Son into his Church and the world during the time of his ascension or *status exaltationis*, thus offering a trinitarian framework to account for the so-called "two-stage Christology" evidenced in the New Testament documents.

More than that, it also serves to demonstrate how a drama, which begins and ends in God, can go on to include and involve the whole of the world. Von Balthasar's argument is that it is in the identity between person and mission in Christ in which we find the most perfect realisation of what it means to be a dramatic character, as Christ fulfils his role in free obedience to his Father's mission. But it also points to the way in which other characters can discover their part and play their role as fully

²² TD3 p.187

²³ *Ibid.* pp.183ff

human beings. For von Balthasar's argument is that it is only in Christ that human beings can become real persons and act as theo-dramatic characters in their own right. And the rest of this volume will seek to offer just such a christological basis for the whole of creation to play its part in the drama, under the heading of "Theological Persons".²⁴

Given the nature of his debate with Barth, we should not be surprised that his theo-dramatic theory should have such a christocentric focus; nor given his concerns about Barth's ecclesiology, will we be surprised at the role which will be accorded to the Church in the role call of theo-dramatic characters. We have already seen how for von Balthasar, it is the role and person of Christ which enables there to be other characters in the drama at all. But in setting out just how believers are to discover and play their part in the great drama of salvation, von Balthasar takes a very distinctive Catholic and Marian approach. As we have already seen in *The Glory of the Lord*, Mary has a prominent role as an archetype in the shaping of Christian experience. Here in the *Theo-Drama*, she is to play a central role in the shaping of Christian character. For just as her obedient response to the angel allowed for Christ's physical body to be born in her womb, just so her willingness to receive the Beloved Disciple at the Cross allows for the birth of Christ's spiritual body in the form of his Church.

Mary's response epitomises that fruitfulness which is enabled by free and feminine obedience to the divine call. For von Balthasar, hers is also the prime example of that

²⁴ TD3 pp.263-461

creaturely response to the divine initiative in creation and redemption, a principle which he regards as distinctively feminine and complementary. Mary is called both as 'Mother of Christ' to be the 'Type of the Church' and as 'Mother of Believers' to be the 'Bride of the Lord'.²⁵ This leads von Balthasar to show how it is that Mary's experience offers a model for that of the other apostles; and in turn, mindful of how some had alleged a lack of attention to Mariology in the decisions of Vatican II, to offer his own restatement of the Catholic position, as to why the Marian doctrines adopted in 1854 and then in 1950 concerning her Immaculate Conception and bodily Assumption are really to be understood as theologically necessary developments of the beliefs of the early Church to which the Gospels bear witness.²⁶

For our purposes, this is not the time to debate such doctrines; rather it is to note how von Balthasar's emphasis upon Mary's 'fruitfulness' enables the generation of other characters able to play their role in the drama. Moreover, in stressing Mary's distinctive role in the birth of the Church, von Balthasar is providing the basis by which the Church can operate, not simply as the vehicle for individual Christian believers to exercise their discipleship, but also as a genuinely theo-dramatic character in her own right. For in her life as an institution, in the apostolic succession of gifts and graces across the centuries, as well as in her liturgical life, in the drama of the sacraments, especially in the representation of Christ's passion in the eucharist, the Church portrays the ongoing tension between the drama of Christ's saving act on the Cross and its summation in the Last Judgement.

²⁵ *TD3* pp.300-312

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 316ff

All of this is not to say that Mary and the Church are the only creaturely characters in the *Theo-Drama*. Reflection on what it means to be Church will include attending to the role of 'Israel',²⁷ as the community blessed by God's original covenant with Abraham, as well as the 'Nations',²⁸ those who stand outside that original covenant, as there are many who similarly remain outside the covenant of grace mediated through Jesus Christ. Here von Balthasar takes a very similar line to Barth as regards the challenge posed to Christianity by the continuance of Israel, namely that this is a mystery which is not to be resolved nor revealed before the end. At the same time, his firmly christological approach to the Church leads him decisively to reject that approach to the challenge of other religions which he believes to be characterised by Karl Rahner's notion of 'anonymous Christianity'. Moreover, attention to the biblical witness leads him to spend much more time on the roles of 'Angels and Demons',²⁹ the parts played by spiritual beings both positively and negatively to God's saving activity, than do many modern theologies.

But this third volume ends with a reminder that all these characters have their role to play only because of that divine drama which begins within the persons and relationships of the Trinity. Von Balthasar closes this volume by reflecting on what his theo-dramatic theory means for traditional understandings of the 'economic' and the 'absolute' or 'immanent' Trinity. His conclusions are characteristically inclusive, seeking to combine both a concern for the inner relationships of God as Trinity, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and for the outcome of these relationships in terms of human being and the life of the world. He takes a similar line to Rahner in affirming

²⁷ *TD3* pp.371-401

²⁸ *Ibid.* pp.401-421

that; 'We know about the Father, Son and Spirit as divine "Persons" only through the figure and disposition of Jesus Christ. Thus we can agree with the principle, often enunciated today, that it is only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity and dare to make statements about it.' But at the same time, the economic and the immanent Trinity cannot simply be 'identified' with each other, 'otherwise the immanent, eternal Trinity would threaten to dissolve into the economic' and 'God would be swallowed up in the world process...' ³⁰

What von Balthasar is proposing is something entirely different, a theo-drama enacted on the world stage which finds its ultimate meaning as it is drawn into the eternal relationships of the divine Trinity in heaven. To this end he returns to the two dramatic triads which he outlined in the first volume. In the first triad of 'Dramatic Creativity', in the relationship between author, actor and director, von Balthasar suggests that we find 'a perfect metaphor for the economic Trinity in the theo-drama'.³¹ But this cannot be separated from the second triad of 'Dramatic Realisation' of presentation, audience and horizon, enabling us to see how God is not simply *above* the drama but is also present *within* it. 'No longer does the Father sit unmoved, as Judge, on his throne high above the play; now his "script" is his own bending-down to the suffering creature in the form of Son and Spirit.' And 'Thus the two triads of the *Prolegomena* merge into each other. The first triad, lit up with inner radiance, reveals the immanent-economic Trinity; the second is simply the way in which this Trinity, guiding and fashioning the world drama, draws it into itself.'³²

²⁹ *TD3* pp.465-501

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.508

³¹ *Ibid.* p.532

³² *Ibid.* p.535

4.2.4) Soteriology: the Action

These two volumes dealing with the *dramatis personae* have shown von Balthasar's theo-dramatic approach to anthropology and christology. Now, in Volume 4, von Balthasar offers his account of *The Action* and it is here that we find his soteriology. It is immediately apparent that this account is strongly influenced by his reading of the Book of Revelation. For von Balthasar, Revelation offers the most clearly theo-dramatic perspective to be found anywhere in the biblical witness. It offers a vision of God's salvation which encompasses heaven and earth, time and eternity, mercy and wrath, the Old and New Covenants, all of which is centred upon the worship of the Lamb who was slain. As Aidan Nichols rightly observes, 'Revelation is theodramatic because it shows a God who is simultaneously 'superior to history and involved in it'.³³ Moreover, it is also supremely theo-dramatic in that the tension between Christ's atoning death on the Cross and its fulfilment in the coming of a new heaven and earth is yet to be fully resolved, as the apocalyptic vision of the struggles over the scrolls and seals bear witness.

This theo-dramatic tension is characterised by what von Balthasar terms the 'specifically theological law of proportionate polarization', a description of that theological reality whereby 'the more God intervenes, the more he elicits opposition to him.'³⁴ It is this ongoing tension, experienced by Jesus on his way to Jerusalem and shared by the Christian believer still in daily life and worship, which will give a

³³ Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000) p. 142

specifically theo-dramatic character to the life of Christ's Church – but to this we will return later.

For in his account of *The Action* von Balthasar seeks to do three things. In the first place, he picks up some of the themes which have arisen from his theo-dramatic anthropology in Volume 2, to show where the action can and must take place in terms of 'the *Pathos* of the World Stage' arising from the drama of human existence. Then he goes on to show how it is that Christ, 'acting from within God's *Pathos*', intervenes to overcome the inability of human efforts to resolve these issues and discover their true freedom and purpose. Finally, he endeavours to demonstrate how this saving drama can be accepted and appropriated by faithful Christians in the life of the Church and in the world. Or as von Balthasar himself puts it; 'In the first, Adam, man, unfolds his action, both as an individual and as community. In the second, God acts; first he prepares the way for Jesus Christ, then he acts in him, and then – most of all – he acts in him on the Cross and in his Resurrection. In the third, God and man encounter one another in history, in what the Book of Revelation has described as the Battle of the Logos.'³⁵

For von Balthasar, the crucial paradox at the heart of human existence is our inability as finite and limited creatures to comprehend the issue of infinite and absolute being. This is manifest in human attempts to find meaning by reaching beyond our own finitude and to transcend the boundaries of time and death; 'Everything we shall say here concerning man's time and man's death will only reinforce the paradox of

³⁴ *TD4* p.51

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.67

existence, namely the endeavour to express the absolute through the relative.’³⁶ The same paradox is thrown up in the complex relationship which exists between human freedom, power and evil. The freedom which has been granted to human beings as creatures is intended for them to discover the fulfilment of that created and limited freedom in obedience to the unlimited and absolute freedom of God. But in so far as it also allows them to assert their independence and freedom of choice, it also allows for that pursuit of individual autonomy which results in the pursuit of power and emergence of evil. It is this development which von Balthasar characterises as ‘man’s revolt against his essential structure’, as ‘the self tries to prescind from its rootedness in God and establish its own autonomy’ and in so doing rather than consolidating its freedom is instead ‘attempting to seize power’.³⁷

It is this experience of existence which provides the human background to the action, what it looks like ‘from the perspective of finite, time-bound man, in his subjection to death, free to commit evil and implicated in the world’s suffering’. From such a predicament von Balthasar is clear that humanity is unable to extricate itself. ‘His attempt to manufacture a redeemed existence out of all this – and this is the attempt of all nonbiblical religions that try to break out of the structures that govern earthly existence – is bound to lead, if it is consistently followed through, to man’s self-dissolution.’³⁸ Who then can save humanity from itself, and in such a way that the realities of finitude, time and death, the conditions of creatureliness, are not simply negated but given a new value and meaning?

³⁶ *TD4* p.95

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.147

The answer to all this is given when the chief Actor appears on stage (and as we shall see later in chapter 6, the fact that he is introduced by reference to Anselm's *Cur Deus homo?* is not without significance.) For from what has been outlined so far, it is clear that it is only someone willing to take on himself those same constraints of finitude, time and death who can help save human being from what St. Paul calls 'the law of sin and death'. But at the same time it is only a divine initiative which can free humanity from the unresolved predicament of human existence, in the person of God-man, Jesus Christ. Von Balthasar's approach to the atonement thus draws on all that he has previously set out in terms of anthropology (man in God) and christology (persons in Christ).

Moreover, Von Balthasar's account of the atonement itself is governed by five themes which he finds to be central to the New Testament witness: namely that 1) God's "only Son" has "*given himself up* for us all" 2) 'to the extent of *exchanging places with us*'; thus 3) (negatively) *freeing* us from sin and death and 4) (positively) *drawing* us into '*the divine trinitarian life*' 5) all of which, 'the entire reconciliation process is attributed to God's merciful *love*.'³⁹ Having established these biblical themes, he then proceeds to examine how they have been treated by subsequent theologians, for it is his judgment that the whole history of soteriology (and indeed the relative success of the various accounts to explain it) depends on the ability to keep all these different themes in play and in relationship with each other.

³⁸ *TD4* p.201

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp.240-244

In the patristic period, von Balthasar observes that it is the second of these themes, that of the *exchange* which dominates, largely because of the need, following the christological heresies, to affirm both the full divinity and humanity of Christ. However, turning to the mediaeval period, particularly under the influence of Anselm, it is the third of the motifs, that of *ransom* or *satisfaction*, which emerges as most influential. Coming to the modern period, von Balthasar identifies the two dominant themes as being those of *substitution* and *solidarity*. Solidarity takes its cue from Jesus' humanity and public ministry; substitution from Jesus' divinity, his atoning death and resurrection. As part of his survey, von Balthasar includes a lengthy excursus on Rahner's soteriology, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of his approach in terms of the theme of 'solidarity'. Interestingly, he also addresses Barth's approach, as one of a series of Protestant theologians who have followed on from Martin Luther's radicalising of the substitutionary motif, in the development of the theory of *penal substitution*.

However, von Balthasar's concern is not just to show that both elements are required to be integrated to provide for an adequate soteriology, but also that only a theo-dramatic theory of the atonement will suffice to allow all five themes to play their proper role. 'For no element may be excluded here: God's entire world-drama is concentrated on and hinges on this scene. This is the theo-drama into which the world *and* God have their ultimate input; here absolute freedom enters into created freedom, interacts with created freedom, and acts as created freedom.'⁴⁰ And such a theo-dramatic theory requires, as we have seen, three things: a doctrine of the

⁴⁰ TD4 p.318

Trinity, which, in the relationship of mutual self-giving and trust between Father and Son through the Spirit, allows for the integration of solidarity and substitution in the life and death of Christ for us; an understanding of covenant, as the affirmation of the created order as part of the plan and purpose of the divine creator; and finally an appreciation of sacrament, as the example of self-offering and sacrifice, which is so characteristic of the life of the divine Trinity, is taken up and appropriated in the life of the Church and of the world.

From this it becomes clear that von Balthasar's theo-dramatic account incorporates both of those elements which modern theology have termed 'objective' and 'subjective' accounts of the atonement. And it leads to the third and final section of 'the Action' in which he goes on to address how Christ's atoning death and resurrection is appropriated and made fruitful in Christian faith. Moreover, from what has been set out thus far, we should not be surprised to discover this will have a strongly ecclesial and Marian dimension. Von Balthasar has already noted how Mary's 'Yes' to the birth of her son at the Annunciation includes a 'Yes' also to his atoning death on the Cross, when that sword will come to pierce Mary's heart also. But her reception of Jesus' words from the Cross, 'Woman, behold your son' and 'Son, behold your mother' are also a pointer to the reception of his resurrection life, as the community gathered around Mary becomes the Church, Christ's gift of himself to the world; 'thus the Word finally and definitively becomes flesh in the Virgin-Mother, Mary-Ecclesia.'⁴¹

⁴¹ TD4 p.361

This reception of Christ's atoning death and resurrection takes on a theo-dramatic character as it takes shape in the life of his Church, a church which is both Christ's spiritual body and the fellowship of his saints, the *communio sanctorum*. The dramatic nature of the Church is lived out in two ways: in the first place as Christians share in the sacramental life of the Church, dying and rising with Christ in baptism, and then, in the celebration of the Eucharist, both recalling and representing Christ's offering of himself for the sins of the world;⁴² and secondly as through the fellowship of Christ's spirit their shared, corporate life goes on to inform and transform the lives of others in the world around them.

However, since this life which believers share is shaped by the life of Christ who calls and sustains them, it is not to be supposed that it will be any more smooth and successful than was the life of their Saviour. And it is here that we return to von Balthasar's 'law of proportionate polarization' which we recognised at the beginning of this volume. For just as the arrival of the 'Prince of Peace' also brought forth 'fire and the sword' which intensified every step along the road to Jerusalem, even so the emergence and growth of his Church serves to 'separate' and 'sift' those who now must decide whether to accept or reject his claims.⁴³ Thus the Christian Church has to encounter both the emergence of other religions which deny Christ's sovereignty and also the rise of philosophical traditions which assert instead the autonomy of human rationality.

⁴² *TD4* pp.389ff.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp.433-442

More damaging even than this, it has also to address the reality of heresy and schism in its own ranks, for whatever the progress made in terms of ecumenical relationships and goodwill, the fact of Christian disunity remains a scandal. 'In concrete terms, Christ only exists together with the community of saints united in the *Immaculata*, together with the communion of the ministerial office visibly united in Peter and his successors and together with the living, ongoing tradition united in the great councils and declarations of the Church. Where these elements of integration are rejected in principle, it is impossible to return to unity, however much good will is played by the partners.'⁴⁴ Here with the scandal of schism, we have returned to where von Balthasar started in his critical engagement with Barth, to the brute fact of Christianity divided since the Reformation. And in all this, in the struggles between Christians, with those of other faiths, and in the assertion of the autonomy of human rationality, humanity is drawn into what von Balthasar calls 'The Battle of the Logos'. 'This is no mere battle of words and ideas between human beings: here mankind is drawn into the theodramatic war that has broken out between God, in his Logos, and hell's anti-logos.'⁴⁵

4.2.5) Eschatology: the Last Act

It is this struggle which reaches its culmination in the final volume of von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* and which deals with what would in most theological works be addressed as eschatology. However, since von Balthasar's is a theo-dramatic theory, it is not so much about *ta eschata*, the last things, as *The Last Act*. As with his

⁴⁴ *TD4* p.456

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.463

account of the action in the previous volume, it is heavily influenced by his reading of Johannine theology, which von Balthasar regards as the most thoroughly theodramatic in the New Testament and which, in the Book of Revelation, is most clearly borrowing from and reinterpreting themes and motifs from the Old Testament. But it is also, perhaps more so than any of the other volumes, heavily influenced by the mystical visions of his companion Adrienne von Speyr, which von Balthasar spent much of his time committing to writing and which he insisted was to play an equal and inseparable part alongside his own work.

The impact of von Speyr's insights is evident from the extensive quotations and references to her work which are found throughout the volume. But this does not detract from the fact that there also remain evident strong themes which run on from previous volumes and from the shape of the *Theo-Drama* as a whole. In particular this volume maintains the strongly christocentric focus which we have found throughout von Balthasar's work, and which we have argued is part of what came out of his critical engagement with Barth. Moreover, it is precisely here that von Balthasar's reading of Johannine christology, with its emphasis upon that realised eschatology inaugurated by the presence of Christ, serves to underpin his own theological enterprise. 'For John, the Christ-event, which is always seen in its totality, is the vertical irruption of the fulfilment into horizontal time; such irruption does not leave this time – with its present, past and future – unchanged, but draws it into itself and thereby gives it a new character.'⁴⁶

⁴⁶ TD5 p.25

At the heart of this last volume lies the question which is summed up in von Balthasar's chapter headings; how is it that 'the world' which has come 'from God' can become 'the world in God'? Naturally, von Balthasar's answer is a resolutely christocentric one, which is that it is 'in Christ', or as his chapter heading terms it, 'Existence in the Life/Death of Christ'.⁴⁷ For it is in Christ that the normal constraints which contain human existence can be taken up and transformed by the breaking in of the divine. It is this 'irruption' which takes place in the presence of Christ that brings a new understanding of time and space, in which the patterns of creaturely existence are transformed by the divine and it becomes possible to see how heaven, far from being a state to be hoped for at some time in the future, can by the grace of Christ be present in the world today. As part of his survey of Christian eschatology, von Balthasar examines the writings of the French Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin and the German Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. In both of these he finds an attempt to offer a theological basis for Christian hope. But in both attempts he finds their work compromised by the presence of assumptions which come from other sources, from the attempt to correlate his theology with developments in evolutionary biology in Teilhard de Chardin, and with the materialism of Ernst Bloch in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*.⁴⁸

From von Balthasar's perspective, only a resolutely christocentric approach will do. However, at this point we should note that such an approach has consequences for two areas of his theology, both of which we have drawn attention to already. In the

⁴⁷ TD5 p.321

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp.152-180

first place his christology must be seen within a trinitarian context and secondly, it will also have strong ecclesiological consequences.

The central question of this last volume is how can a world which is 'from God' come to be a world 'in God'. But for von Balthasar, the world from its very beginning owes its existence to a God who is Triune. For it is in the relationship between the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit that the possibility of distinction and difference is effected, which enables the world to come into existence and allows for there to be a created order at all.⁴⁹ It is only from the abundant self giving and receiving, that *Selbstlosigkeit* or selflessness which is the fountain of generosity and characterises the divine life together, that there comes the possibility of there being something other than God, a created and contingent existence which draws its origins from God. We have already noted in earlier chapters the significance for von Balthasar of the Thomistic distinction between Being and essence, between *esse* and *essentia*, which is crucial to his interpretation of ontology and the role of the analogy of being. What is significant here is that von Balthasar establishes a trinitarian origin for his ontology, so that the whole created order owes its being to the relationships which underpin the Trinity. In turn this means that the same created order is to find its fulfilment in an *Einbergung* or homecoming to that from which it came, as it shares in the life of the divine Trinity. Or, as Aidan Nichols puts it, 'the mystery of the Three-in-One is the ultimate framework both of divine revelation and of the human good. *To eschaton* can only mean, in the truly final analysis, the Trinity itself.'⁵⁰

⁴⁹ TD5 p.247

⁵⁰ Nichols, *Op.cit.* p.189

This leads on to the second consequence of von Balthasar's approach, in terms of a response to his question as to how human beings, as part of the created order, can come to share in the triune life of God. From what has already been said, it will come as no surprise to discover that for von Balthasar, the answer is an ecclesial one. It is as part of the Church.⁵¹ It is in the life of the Church that Christians are shaped by the archetypal experience of Mary and the Apostles and come to share in the communion of saints. It is by sharing in the sacraments that they participate in the eternal drama of salvation through which Christ's salvific presence transforms the life of the world. It is in the Church that Christians come to share in the life of Christ.

All of which is no easy or straightforward matter, either for individual Christians or for the life of Christ's Church. The ongoing drama persists because the 'law of proportionate polarisation' still pertains. For now the Church has to share in that process of gathering and sifting, drawing together and dividing, as the love and mercy of God encounters ever stiffer rejection and resistance as the Final Act approaches. 'The world, both inside and outside the Church, is always resisting being transformed into the Body of Christ; this means that crucifixion and the piercing of the heart are always going on, and God is ceaselessly wooing man in the Person of the Crucified who, for his part, can do nothing but take "all who receive him" with him into his Cross.'⁵² However, this is the divine drama in which we are called to play our part, by sharing in the life of the one who made it all possible.

⁵¹ See the section on 'Reciprocity: Heaven to Earth and Earth to Heaven' in *TD5* p.411-423

⁵² *TD5* p.478

Inevitably, such a summary can not do justice to the extraordinary scope of von Balthasar's exposition nor to the wide range of theological opinions with which he is engaged. But we trust that this overview suffices to show how throughout the *Theo-Drama*, von Balthasar is still engaged with those themes which he identified in his study of Barth, and that the structure of his own work is shaped by the need to respond to particular challenges which arose from that study. In particular, he is determined to uphold two factors which are part of his continuing debate with Barth; namely the continuing importance of the analogy of being (christologically re-interpreted) in reconciling divine and human freedom so that Christians can play their part with Christ in the divine drama; and the role of the Church as a dramatic person in her own right, through whom the saving grace of God in Christ is re-enacted in the world. But now, having looked at the shape and thrust of the *Theo-Drama* as a whole, we will turn to examine in more detail those specific areas where von Balthasar's exposition draws him into explicit discussion with Barth.

4.3) Dramatic tension with Barth

In Volume 1 von Balthasar set out the *Prolegomena* to his theological dramatic theory and, as we have seen, listed some nine trends in modern theology with which his *Theo-Drama* will contend. The first of these was 'event', and this is significant because we have earlier registered how von Balthasar remains unhappy about Barth's overwhelming 'actualism'. This category is not without its theological virtues. Specifically, von Balthasar acknowledges that it has 'delivered the biblical revelation of God from the clutches of both orthodox and liberal rationalism' as 'in the "now" of

the kerygma, the event flashes like lightening between the hidden cloud where God is and the hidden heart of man' and 'the lightning bright word can be seen as attaining its full evangelical meaning in the Word-made-man, Jesus Christ'.⁵³

But at the same time there is also a danger, and here von Balthasar refers explicitly to 'the thought of the young *Barth* or in *Bultmann*'. For 'there is something timeless and context-less in this concentration on the pure event, which does not do justice to the genuinely historical nature of biblical revelation',⁵⁴ such as von Balthasar maintains is found in the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and its New Testament fulfilment or in Paul's theology of history in Romans chapters 9-11. 'Here the vertical event has unfolded into a series of times of salvation comparable to the acts of a play.' What is important is not that 'vertical event-time' is 'dissolved into a merely horizontal time of successive saving acts' but that it 'overtakes and refashions horizontal time, using it so that the event may spread itself out in dramatic form'.⁵⁵ There is more to God's saving drama than simply the last act, and here we return to von Balthasar's concern over what he alleges to be a 'christological constriction' in Barth, and which we have argued is a determining influence on his whole theo-dramatic theory. 'It is not as if there is *only* the fifth act, or even *only* the crucial scene of the peripeteia; God plays the whole piece right through with the individual human being and the human race.'⁵⁶

⁵³ *TD1* p.26

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.27

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.28

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Having placed this marker, so to speak, right at the beginning of the *Theo-Drama*, the rest of this volume continues to explore the component parts of a theo-dramatic theory, and does so largely without reference to Barth, save for a couple of minor footnotes which pick up on the dramatic possibilities occasioned by the Catholic position on the tension between nature and grace and the emergence of dialogue as a theme in theology. However, this changes when von Balthasar turns to address the subject of anthropology, in Volume 2, *Man in God*.

At the heart of this volume is the question, ‘Who can act if God is on stage?’ which, as we have noted, brings into focus the issue of human freedom in the relationship between divine and unlimited freedom and the limited freedom of the creature. Von Balthasar commends Barth for his assertion in the *Church Dogmatics* that heaven and earth can be understood only as part of the one cosmos which God has created, and goes on to affirm that ‘the heaven/earth tension is the presupposition of all theodramatic action, both from God’s side and from man’s’.⁵⁷ He also acknowledges the fact that Barth is one of only a few modern dogmatic theologians to take seriously the issue of the “image and likeness of God” found in Genesis chapter 1. But in a detailed excursus on this subject,⁵⁸ von Balthasar goes on to reject Barth’s interpretation of this, specifically Barth’s argument that male/female complementarity reflects the community of relationships within the divine Trinity, arguing instead that it points towards a relationship between God and creature that can only be understood in terms of analogy.

⁵⁷ *TD2* pp.177-178

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp.316-34

Von Balthasar argues against that ‘premature interpretation’ which Barth adduces. ‘From the fact that, apparently in one breath, Scripture says that “God made man in his own image; male and female he created them” (1:27) Karl Barth tried to conclude that the core of the image was the man/woman relationship and human relationships in general, pointing to a (trinitarian) community in God himself.’⁵⁹ More important for von Balthasar is the fact that it is here in his argument that the centrality of analogy, specifically the *analogia entis* reemerges. The reality is that the human and divine are ‘essentially ordered to each other’ which ‘can be expressed by the word *analogia* (which also implies a mysterious, irreducible “similarity in dissimilarity”).’ Von Balthasar agrees with Barth that this quality of “image” should not be lost. But; ‘Since it is a case of uncreated and created reality, it is hard to see how the expression *analogia entis* could be avoided here. In order to circumvent it, Karl Barth understands it as an analogy of (abiding) relationship; just as man, in order to be man, must necessarily relate to his fellow men, God, in order to be God, must necessarily relate to himself in a trinitarian way (*analogia proportionalitatis*). But even according to this relational definition, it is still a case of reality, *ens*.’⁶⁰

By contrast, von Balthasar wants to argue that use of the *analogia entis* leads not only to ‘an integration of philosophical reflection (in so far as it sees correctly) into theological anthropology’⁶¹ (thus picking up on a theme which we found throughout *The Theology of Karl Barth*) but it leads also into the possibility of ‘defining the “image” of God in man as finite freedom (which is naturally only conceivable in a rational nature) and locating it in the essence of this freedom; it must act as such,

⁵⁹ TD2 p.318

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp.320-21

that is, it must decide to move toward God – and thus realize the “likeness” it already possesses – or away from God, so losing this likeness.’⁶² It is at this point we can see most clearly how the structure of the *Theo-Drama* continues to be shaped by his critical engagement with Barth, in that the crucial theme of the theo-dramatic relationship between infinite and finite, or divine and human freedom is still being shaped by his debate with Barth over the analogy of being.

The debate continues as von Balthasar moves onto the subject of christology in Volume 3, *Persons in Christ*. His Introduction refers to Christ’s being the ‘consuming protagonist... of the entire drama’. But the language in which this role is portrayed suggests that von Balthasar’s critique of the ‘christological constriction’ which he finds in Barth is still very much in mind. ‘If we are to realize the extent to which he expands the acting area rather than narrows it, we would need to look back at the fullness of Christology. Then we would see that he simultaneously opens up the greatest possible intimacy and the greatest possible distance (in Christ’s dereliction on the Cross) between God and man; thus he does not decide the course of the play in advance but gives man an otherwise unheard-of freedom to decide for or against the God who has so committed himself.’⁶³

Here, in a nutshell, is von Balthasar’s response to the flaws he identified in his study of Barth,⁶⁴ even to the extent of using the same language of ‘expanding’ rather than ‘narrowing’. And indeed later in this volume, when von Balthasar goes on to address

⁶¹ *TD2* pp.322-323

⁶² *Ibid.* pp.326-327

⁶³ *TD3* p.21

⁶⁴ *KB* pp.241ff.

the issue of Christ's predestination, a note on the work of Rudolph Haubst makes it clear that this issue is still very much on his mind. Von Balthasar refers to the way in which Haubst 'opposes every form of "christological constriction" that (like Karl Barth... H. Küng in his *Justification*... and in certain places, K. Rahner...) gives the order of grace a priority over the order of creation or places such one-sided emphasis on God's will to give himself in Christ that the human response pales into relative insignificance.'⁶⁵

But this reference to the (simultaneous) 'greatest possible intimacy' and 'distance' moves us onto another key point in the argument. For this is the language of the *analogia entis*, as articulated so forcibly by von Balthasar's mentor Erich Przywara (although von Balthasar acknowledges that Przywara may have at times overstated his case.⁶⁶) Our previous section has already shown how crucial the role of 'mission' is for his interpretation of the person of Christ. Here, in the section "'*Analogia entis*' in Christology",⁶⁷ it will become clear just how much von Balthasar's exposition of christology, in particular the relationship between the human and divine natures in Christ, is based on this understanding. 'As E. Przywara tirelessly urged (even to the point of exaggeration) this all embracing law of being' which 'both limits and acts as a stimulus to all philosophical and theological thought' enables us to 'discern the knife-edge between Nestorianism and Monophysitism that Christianity has to negotiate.'

⁶⁵ TD3 p.253, note 71

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.221 note 51. This refers to Przywara's use of an older reading in Denziger of the Fourth Lateran Council statement on analogy which states, "*Inter Creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*"; that *however great* the similarity, the dissimilarity is *even greater*. Von Balthasar notes the omission of the *tanta* in later editions of Denziger and goes on to intimate; 'It is no accident that Przywara never produced a Christology.'

It is this analogical relationship, as articulated by the Fourth Lateran Council, which affirms both the dependence and the distance between God and the creature. It preserves the distance, in that ‘the absolute infinite God cannot be compared with the finite creature who is entirely dependent on him.’⁶⁸ But it also affirms the intimacy and likeness and means that it is in only in Jesus that we can find God’s communication to humanity. Moreover, this communication is to be undertaken in Jesus, in ‘a fully human conscious subject who simultaneously brings to light the full truth of man, and – since he primarily reveals the truth of God – the truth of man as God sees him.’⁶⁹ In terms of christology, von Balthasar’s conclusion is that ‘Jesus experiences his human consciousness entirely in terms of mission’ for ‘the Father has commissioned him, in the Holy Spirit, to reveal God’s nature and his disposition towards man.’⁷⁰ But this also has consequences for soteriology; for it is only through use of the *analogia entis*, which brings together the mission and person of Christ, that we can begin to understand our own role in the divine drama.

We have picked upon these two themes because in them we can see most clearly how the ongoing development of the *Theo-Drama* continues to be shaped by the debate with Barth. However, they are not the only references to Barth to be found in this volume. There a number of references to Barth in von Balthasar’s section on ‘The Problem of Method’, in which he offers some criticism of what he alleges as Barth’s dismissal of the historico-critical approach in its entirety.⁷¹ On the other hand, he agrees with Barth that the theological problem of the continuity of Judaism (and

⁶⁷ *TD3* pp.220-29

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.222

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.225

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.224

Israel) is one which will only be resolved eschatologically, even if the practical consequences will have to be lived out in history.⁷² He is also at one with Barth on the need to address ‘angels’ as dramatic characters in their own right, as part of the New Testament witness, even if they represent a mystery which can only be approached ‘speculatively’. He notes too that Barth does not allow ‘demons’ a similar role, in that, as those who have turned away from God to evil, they have lost their true freedom and thus with no ontological basis they exist only in ‘nothingness’.⁷³

However, one final area where von Balthasar again engages explicitly with Barth is that of the Church. We have seen in our previous section how crucial it is for him that the Church exists as a theo-dramatic character in her own right. This raises the issue of the plurality of different churches – or rather that of division within the Church. And here von Balthasar returns to the theme which he picked up right at the start of his study of Barth; namely that we should heed Barth’s words that ‘we should not try to explain the plurality of churches at all... We should understand the plurality as a mark of our guilt.’⁷⁴ On this, albeit rather gloomy, ecumenical verdict, Barth and von Balthasar agree, even if they disagree on the consequences to be drawn from it.

The references in these two volumes serve to demonstrate just how von Balthasar’s ongoing debate with Barth has affected the structure of his *Theo-Drama*. In Volume 4, *The Action*, the references continue but their impact is less profound, as Barth’s account of the atonement serves for von Balthasar more as one of many, rather than

⁷¹ TD3 pp 60,62,68

⁷² *Ibid.* pp.367-369

⁷³ *Ibid.* pp.471-473, 478-488

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.444 (quoting from Barth, *Die Kirche und die Kirchen*. Theol. Ex. Heute 27 (1935), pp. 9-10

the model to be examined. (Interestingly, in this volume there are far more references to Anselm than Barth, as we will address later in Chapter 6.) However, what remains of interest is the way in which references to Barth continue to pick up themes which we have noted before.

In a section dealing with the existence of pre-Christian religions, addressing the question as to why it should be now that a theo-dramatic theory might emerge, von Balthasar notes Barth's dismissal of 'religion' as a product of human *hybris* or pride.⁷⁵ Indeed, he compares the role which the *analogia entis* plays in Barth's theology with the critique which the French sociologist René Girard offers of religion as a 'covert scapegoat mechanism'.⁷⁶ For both, 'there is no such thing as a "natural" concept of God...' or indeed, desire for God. 'In Girard, as in Barth, it must be totally corrupt, for at the very start of human history it unleashes a war in which everyone is struggling against all...' But for von Balthasar such an approach has disastrous consequences. 'The dramatic tension between the world and God is so overstretched that the link breaks, rendering impossible a drama that involves the two sides.'⁷⁷

When he addresses the subject of the atonement, von Balthasar notes how Barth stands as one in a long line of Protestant theologians since Luther who have emphasized the theme of 'solidarity' in their account of the atonement. 'Karl Barth has done this in the simplest way, describing the average man as "man *with* others" and Jesus as "the man *for* others".⁷⁸ Von Balthasar observes how this emphasis on

⁷⁵ TD4 pp. 65 & 221

⁷⁶ *La Violence et le sacré* and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation* (Paris: Grasset, 1972 & 1978)

⁷⁷ TD4 pp.308-309

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 267, referring to Barth's CD 3.2 pp. 203-324

solidarity, and on the 'penal suffering' of Christ for others, is developed in Barth and other Protestant theologians (for example Wolfgang Pannenberg) into the theory of 'penal substitution', that Christ dies on the Cross not just 'for us' but 'in our stead'.⁷⁹ However, at the same time, von Balthasar also uses Barth as a corrective against what he regards as overly political accounts of the atonement, as found in the works of Jürgen Moltmann,⁸⁰ and also affirms his resolutely christological approach to the problems of sin and judgement. On these matters, he declares that 'we can agree with Barth's oft-repeated assertion: "We can only see how *serious* this opposition [between God and man] is, and how utterly unbearable the reality of sin is, when we ponder the fact that it is God *himself* who, in the life of Jesus Christ, undertakes to carry out the wrathful judgment upon sin."⁸¹

But, as in previous volumes, when it comes to the Church and her role in the 'Battle of the Logos', that appropriating of and enacting the life of Christ in an often hostile world, von Balthasar reminds us once again that he shares Barth's rejection of any attempt to explain the multiplicity of churches and denominations as being somehow part of God's plan; 'schism and heresy is always due to the sin and guilt of Christians. For its chief effect is always to obscure the person and mission of Christ himself, since, as the origins of both the community and the gospel message show, he can only put forth his influence in history in tandem with the faith of his disciples.'⁸²

⁷⁹ *TD4* pp.293-294

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* pp.296 and 323

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.161, quoting Barth, *CD 4.1*, pp.407ff.; see also *TD4* pp.345-346

⁸² *Ibid.* p.455

The final volume of the *Theo-Drama, The Last Act*, addresses the subject of eschatology and does this, as we have noted, very much in terms of the perspective offered by the Johannine corpus, especially the Book of Revelation. Accordingly, this volume begins with an extended discussion of eschatology, in the course of which there are a number of passing references to Barth, where von Balthasar comments on his christological focus and his emphasis on the future event in comparison with other modern theologians such as Teilhard de Chardin and Jürgen Moltmann.⁸³ We also find reference to Barth in consideration of the role of the Devil, which echoes very much the discussion which took place on the role of angels and demons in the previous volume and in which von Balthasar echoes Barth's conclusion that we cannot have 'a transparent doctrine of the demonic' because, as Barth puts it; 'The mysteries of God are much more exposed to us than the mysteries of evil.'⁸⁴

However, for von Balthasar the key to eschatology is how a world that is 'from God' can become a world that is 'in God', and it is surrounding this issue that the references to Barth become more significant again. For his approach to eschatology is thoroughly trinitarian, as he argues that the events which result in creation, incarnation and redemption through Christ must have their origins within God himself, in the relations of the divine Trinity. This leads him on to discussion of a particular issue which very much occupied the Fathers, namely the divine *apatheia*, the impassibility of God. Moreover, this is done very much in conversation with Barth, whose own approach is used as a dialogue partner to engage with the Fathers, for example the position taken by Gregory Thaumaturgus, whose questions, von

⁸³ *TD5* pp. 27, 164 and 171

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.207, quoting from Barth, *CD* 3.3 pp.477ff.

Balthasar argues, 'anticipate the solution proposed by Karl Barth.'⁸⁵ The dialogue continues with more recent theologians, for example with those of the 'Death of God' school, the 'Crucified God' of Moltmann, and the 'Dying and Rising God' of Gerhard Koch,⁸⁶ before von Balthasar moves on to a very positive assessment of Barth's own contribution, namely 'God's Trinitarian suffering in Christ'.⁸⁷

In this section von Balthasar wants to affirm Barth's central conviction (which he believes goes back to Barth's particular understanding of the doctrine of election and which we addressed in chapter 2) that 'the suffering of Christ interprets the whole essence of God'⁸⁸ and that in the suffering death of Christ on the cross it is God who acts decisively to remain faithful to his original decision and redeem the world which he has created. However, this does not mean that von Balthasar is entirely uncritical of Barth. For there remains the issue as to how there can be room for a legitimate and valid human response to Christ's atoning death, and von Balthasar does not believe that Barth goes far enough in exploring the issue of the procession of relations within the divine Trinity to allow for a full understanding of the space which God allows for his creation to take shape. This is the task which von Balthasar will, as we have seen, set himself to do for the rest of this final volume.

Consequently, for the remainder of the volume there is little direct reference to Barth, except for the section in which von Balthasar addresses the challenging question of 'Universal Salvation', whether all of humanity and the created order will be included

⁸⁵ *TD5* p.219

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 224f., 227f. and 230f.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp.236-239

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.238

in God's saving grace. Von Balthasar's approach to this controversial subject clearly owes a debt to his studies of Origen; but it is also noteworthy that his exposition claims Barth as one of those who stand in the tradition that refuses to put a limit upon the mercy of God. And once again von Balthasar draws on Barth's teaching about the 'double predestination' in Christ to emphasise his thesis 'that Jesus Christ, the Chosen One from all eternity, is also the Rejected One on behalf of all others, so that all the rejected can become chosen ones through him.'⁸⁹

Von Balthasar's own answer to the question 'Can all be saved?' is that, just as the New Testament lives with the inherent tension between grace and judgement, so too must we; although he recognises, with Barth, that there cannot be any "complete balance"⁹⁰ on this subject and that 'the appropriate attitude will be a hope that is not without a certain fear'.⁹¹ Moreover, for von Balthasar, Barth is not just one of a line of theologians who, while remaining a minority, nevertheless continue to represent the New Testament witness to the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things in Christ.⁹² Barth's decisive contribution is to enable this discussion to continue within the framework of a thoroughly trinitarian theology. 'Whatever one may think of Karl Barth's great "doctrine of election", it represents the breakthrough which brought the discussion into being.'⁹³

In summary, what this survey of the references to Barth in the *Theo-Drama* has shown is not that at every stage of his exposition von Balthasar has either drawn on

⁸⁹ *TD5* p.272

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.277

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.321

⁹² *Ibid.* p.319

or departed from a Barthian model. Rather it is that at crucial stages in his argument, for example on the relationship between finite and infinite freedom, and on the human and divine natures in Christ, he has returned to the substance of his initial debate with Barth and drawn on the conclusions reached from it, in particular over the centrality of the analogy of being. When this is allied to the overall structure and shape of his work examined in the previous section, we believe it makes a very strong case for the continuing influence of Barth upon the whole *Theo-Drama*.

4.4) In company with Quash

We are not the first to question whether von Balthasar's adoption of a theo-dramatic model is not in itself a critical response to Barth's work. The work of Ben Quash, whose own doctoral research focused on von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*, would suggest the same. 'Von Balthasar, it seems, is the advocate of a far more radical existential irresolution: an area for human possibilities to determine themselves in various directions. It might be said that the project of *Theo-Drama* is partly an attempt to achieve a corrective of this kind to the Barthian project.'⁹⁴ On this reading, von Balthasar's *Dramatics* is an attempt not simply to offer an account of God's great drama of salvation, but also to counter the sense that in Barth all things have already been achieved in Christ and show how a theo-dramatic approach can set the stage for human beings to play their own part in response to God's saving activity in Christ.

⁹³ TD5 p.270

⁹⁴ 'Von Balthasar and the dialogue with Karl Barth' (*New Blackfriars* Vol. 79 No. 923, January 1998) p.51; hereafter *Dialogue*

Quash's most recent work, *Theology and the Drama of History*,⁹⁵ takes this issue concerning the relationship between theology and history a stage further. It seeks 'to examine the value and potential of a 'theodramatic' concept of history' as a 'way of thinking theologically about historical process and the historical character of human agents and environments that emphasizes their dramatic features.'⁹⁶ It does not attempt a straightforward account or interpretation of von Balthasar's work. Rather, in it Quash sets out to explore how such a 'theodramatic concept of history' might work, taking as his principal conversation partners not just von Balthasar's *Dramatics*, but also Hegel's aesthetic categories of the epic, lyric and dramatic and Karl Barth's insistence upon the dramatic character of God's act as 'event'.⁹⁷

In the process of this conversation, whilst being largely sympathetic to the theological project on which von Balthasar has embarked, Quash does arrive at a substantial critique of his *Theo-Drama*. In particular he is concerned about the extent to which von Balthasar, despite his own critique of Hegel's tendency towards the epic, himself displays some of the same characteristics in that his imposition of an over-arching framework of meaning serves to reduce the freedom of 'dramatic irresolution', in terms of 'freezing'⁹⁸ the dramatic possibilities open to subject and stage. Ironically, it is here that Barth's emphasis upon act and event which, Quash believes, can offer a corrective to von Balthasar's more systemic tendencies. And in his closing chapter, Quash goes on to offer some suggestions of his own as to how a theodramatic approach might show more respect for what he has earlier described as the

⁹⁵ *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005) hereafter *Theology*

⁹⁶ *Theology* p.1

⁹⁷ Though Quash also acknowledges pointers towards the relationship to be found between theology and tragedy in the writings of Donald Mackinnon and Rowan Williams amongst others.

‘unframeability’⁹⁹ of divine involvement in the life of the world, in terms of allowing both time and human agency their own ethical and existential ‘space’.¹⁰⁰

Quash’s objective in *Theology and the Drama of History* is thus to take the theo-dramatic project beyond its starting point in von Balthasar, Hegel and Barth. But, as becomes clear (and as Quash himself acknowledges in his Introduction¹⁰¹) his study draws heavily on a critical interpretation of von Balthasar developed in a number of previously published articles, and so it is to these articles that we turn first.

In ‘Von Balthasar and the Dialogue with Karl Barth’,¹⁰² Quash frames the dialogue between the two theologians in terms of a subject which we have already found to be crucial to von Balthasar’s theology, namely the issue of ‘creaturely freedom’. Given his focus upon von Balthasar’s theo-dramatic theory, he draws on an appropriately dramatic analogy to illustrate both the similarities and differences between their respective approaches, by means of the contrast between Petruchio and Lucentio, two characters from Shakespeare’s play, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Barth’s approach to the reclaiming of theology, during the crisis of dialectical theology in the inter-war years, Quash likens to the approach of Petruchio wooing Katherine. ‘He invades this hostile world in the name of the Word of God; he elects to be ‘rough,

⁹⁸ *Theology* p.194

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.168

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.24

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* xii-xiii

¹⁰² *Op cit.* This paper arose from a Conference on von Balthasar organised by the Catholic Theological Association in 1997, although much of the material appears also in John C. McDowell and Mike Higon (eds.) *Conversing with Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); see also the article co-written with John Riches in David Ford (ed.) *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn. 1997)

and woo not like a babe'.¹⁰³ Barth rejects the language and culture of the liberal establishment, in thrall to bourgeois complacency, in order to challenge and confront theology with the utter difference of God's ways, God's time and God's holiness. Von Balthasar's approach is very different. Like Lucentio, he adopts the role of a teacher, offering lessons in language, music and culture which in time become vehicles for his declaration of love. For Quash this analogy has parallels with the way von Balthasar argues that theology must enter into the various schools of thought and metaphysical systems which express worldly reality. 'Von Balthasar is, it seems, like Lucentio, far more concerned to make himself at home within the household of his beloved. He does not feel the need to turn her world entirely on its head by removing all her usual points of reference and disrupting all her expectations.'¹⁰⁴

Quash acknowledges that such a distinction in theological approaches between the Protestant 'either/or' and the Catholic 'and' will fit in with long-standing caricatures and suspicions. However, when examined in more detail, he finds that there is actually much more that the two have in common, and that the differences which remain are more ones of degree and emphasis. Despite their formal dispute over the *analogia entis*, Quash argues that both theologians have learned a great deal from Erich Przywara. In terms of his doctrine of God, Barth was very much taken by Przywara's emphasis on the *von Gott her*, and Przywara's criticism of the lack of an adequate doctrine of the Incarnation was to provide a major impetus to the development of a more mature christology based on a more rounded approach to creation in his *Church Dogmatics*. 'The maturer incarnational christocentrism of

¹⁰³ *Dialogue* p.45

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.47

Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, a christocentrism which was to be one of the things which Barth and von Balthasar most vigorously held in common, owes a lot, therefore, to the influence of this rather complex Silesian priest.'¹⁰⁵

For Quash, this is particularly evident in the way they approach the vexed issue of human freedom in response to God. Both adopt an essentially Augustinian position, in that freedom is not seen in terms of the activity of an abstract free will outside of God, but rather as the active and willing fulfilment of that freedom for which human being was intended within the purposes of God. However, within that approach, von Balthasar wants to argue that the inadequacy of Barth's ontology of the creature does not allow sufficient space for a properly human response to God. 'The creature – the human being – can exercise no really significant initiative. He or she is posited by God as a largely formal presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of what he has elected to do in Christ... The divine-creaturely relationship is thus entirely subsidiary to the unified working of the divine will.'¹⁰⁶

Quash's analysis of von Balthasar's critique of Barth is one we share. Indeed, in this thesis we have gone on to argue how it continues to shape the structure and development of von Balthasar's great theological trilogy. But what is also interesting is to note how Quash's article shows how in practice, the distinction which von Balthasar wants to make in his critique of Barth is not so clear-cut, and indeed is more one of 'tone'. He summarises their position in the formula, 'Barth wants in the creature the *obedient* embrace of *freedom*. Von Balthasar wants the *free* embrace of

¹⁰⁵ *Dialogue* p.49

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.50

obedience'.¹⁰⁷ The difference emerges when Barth goes on to address the concrete situation of the creature who hears and responds to the word of God. Then it is more than dutiful obedience which is required. Instead there is a joyful embracing of God's truth, so that, 'We can live life with head held high, with a free heart and a clear conscience, proclaiming to God, "Lord, how good are your works!"',¹⁰⁸

By contrast when von Balthasar, whose theology has appeared to emphasise the importance of human decisions and initiative, comes to address the issue of the creaturely response, his concern is much more to dwell upon the creature's need to cultivate receptivity, that acceptance of the divine will which von Balthasar describes as *Gelassenheit*. Moreover, this has strong implications in terms of ecclesial obedience. According to Quash, 'Von Balthasar, in my view, says 'freedom' in a rather more general way in order then to be able to say 'obedience' rather specifically, i.e., rather ecclesially.' This shows up in the lives of the saints whom von Balthasar offers as examples of those who have exercised self-denial and received the imprint of Christ. 'Renunciation is tremendously important, and so is respect for the shaping structures of objective Spirit, that is, the institutional Church.'¹⁰⁹

Quash's conclusion on von Balthasar is that his 'defence of formal human autonomy, therefore, issues in a much more specific call for ecclesial obedience than we ever find in Barth.'¹¹⁰ This has implications for the illustration which he has used from Shakespeare, in terms of the characters Petruchio and Lucentio. 'Petruchio and

¹⁰⁷ *Dialogue* p.52

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* quoting from Barth, *CD* 3.3, in turn quoted in *KB* p.112

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.53

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Lucentio have not left us. In the final scene... Petruchio 'frees' Katherine to give her voice, while Lucentio must moodily enjoin his wife to come when he calls her.' But it also has implications, not just for the dramatic characters, but for the play itself. For if the purpose of the *Theo-Drama* is to allow for a genuinely human drama of response and decision, von Balthasar's emphasis upon receptivity and ecclesial obedience raises concerns for Quash as to whether in practice he allows that 'more radical existential irresolution' to take place; or whether he has a similarly predetermined *schema* or pattern of resolution such as he alleges in Barth.

It is this issue which Quash addresses in a subsequent article entitled 'Drama and the Ends of Modernity'¹¹¹ (published as one of a series of articles on von Balthasar in the collection *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*.) He begins by looking at the way in which von Balthasar re-appropriates Hegel's understanding of aesthetics in terms of the categories of epic, lyric and dramatic. Von Balthasar has already offered an overview of Hegel's approach to drama in the *Prolegomena*. But in establishing his own approach at the beginning of Volume 2, Quash suggests that we find 'Balthasar taking Hegel's dramatic theory, without being bound to the letter of its original formulation, and creatively reapplying it for highly suggestive theological ends'.¹¹²

Quash shows how von Balthasar takes up Hegel's distinction between epic, lyric and dramatic, as different ways of categorising God's action in the world. The 'epic' approach is one which looks to the broad sweep of history, and which discerns the overall pattern which interprets the specific detail. By contrast, the 'lyric' approach is

¹¹¹ Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward (eds.), *Balthasar at the end of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) pp.139-171; hereafter, *Drama*

much more subjective; it focuses on the experience of those who are involved, and gives importance to the experiential moment and its expression. Both are important and have their part to play in terms of the witness of faith. 'At a very early stage, therefore, the river of Christian utterance splits into two streams: the lyrical, edifying utterance in the bosom of the Church, from faith to faith, and the epic mode used for "external" relations, that is, at councils and in the theological and polemical treatises, dealing with heretics or the threat of error.'¹¹³

However both approaches also carry their own risks. The danger of the epic approach is that it can serve to objectify and promote a false sense of distance between those who observe and those who are involved in the events, the danger of what Quash terms 'reification'. Conversely, the danger of the lyric approach is that it overplays the role of the subjective and the experiential, in that the importance of history is lost in the ever-present now. In Quash's view, von Balthasar's conclusion is itself a typical piece of Hegelian dialectic, in that he regards the first two as important but incomplete without the presence of the third, dramatic perspective. 'We shall not get beyond the alternatives of 'lyrical' and 'epic', spirituality (prayer and personal involvement) and theology (the objective discussion of facts), so long as we fail to include the dramatic dimension of revelation, in which they alone discover their unity.'¹¹⁴

It is this understanding of drama which will form the foundation of von Balthasar's theo-dramatic approach to theology. Moreover, the key to this resolution lies with the

¹¹² *Drama* p.146

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p.148, quoting *TD2* pp.55-56

apostolic witness, the one who both heightens and unifies lyric and epic approaches in bearing witness to a faith in which they participate as well as observe. 'The faith of the apostle speaks to those within faith *and* to those outside faith... Paul's letters put God's action at the centre, but include himself (taken over by this action on the Damascus road) as *part* of the testimony to the truth of revelation.'¹¹⁵ And in turn this means that for the Christian in the life of the Church, the role of bearing witness is inherently the dramatic activity 'of personally handing on the drama of Jesus' life even as it lives in oneself' which thus 'overrides the epic/lyric distinction'.¹¹⁶

At this point Quash avers that 'Balthasar is here living and breathing Hegel's analysis of drama.' But this heritage is not without its dangers. 'Despite providing so rich and subtle a typology of genre, Hegel's characterizations of drama, so Balthasar seems to imply, never make the grade, and this is because they can never break free of certain epic undertones.'¹¹⁷ For von Balthasar, there is always the danger that Hegel's dramatic persons are shown to be subordinated to some higher end and so cease to be fully dramatic characters in their own right. When this happens, his understanding of tragedy becomes merely epic in its immanence.

Quash recognises that von Balthasar is determined to try and avoid this pitfall. 'The resources yielded by analogy are Balthasar's key safeguards against that presumption of an identity between human consciousness and the self-

¹¹⁴ *Dialogue*. p.149, quoting *TD2* p.57

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.150

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.152

consciousness of Spirit which he suspects has been perpetrated by Hegel...'¹¹⁸

Quash here returns to a discussion of von Balthasar's use of the analogy of being in terms of the debate with Barth and Przywara and in light of the formula of the Fourth Lateran Council. But the irony which he finds is that it is precisely here, in the application of analogy, particularly as it relates to time, that von Balthasar is imposing just the sort of overarching, epic model which he has warned against in Hegel.

For von Balthasar, the truth of revelation is found 'in movement', the 'continuous forward striving' to bridge the '*diastasis*' between God and his world. '[This *diastasis*] is the source of the *cor inquietum*, of hope and love for what is absent. It is into *this* human experience that the divine truth comes to inbed itself. This delicate network of temporal relationships is strong enough to hold the absolute truth, which is itself a truth of eternal relations in an eternal life.'¹¹⁹ Quash's argument is that von Balthasar here makes explicit what his theology elsewhere seems to imply, namely that the incompleteness of human temporality is somehow to be fitted within the analogical expression of God's otherness, as if human relations emerging in time have to be made 'accountable' within a framework or matrix determined by God's timelessness. 'Analogy, wrongly understood in terms of 'valorizing intervals', represents precisely that kind of grid which interferes with a full, free differentiation between God and humanity in history.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Drama* pp.153-54

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.156 quoting von Balthasar, *Skizzen zur Theologie*, Bd.I: *Verbum Caro* (Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1960) ET *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, tr. Brian McNeil, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) p.80

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.158

It thus appears that von Balthasar is in danger of falling into the same trap which he warned against in Hegel, that is of subsuming the dramatic contingency and uncertainty of human existence within an epic framework governed by an overarching model of 'harmonious resolution'. Quash's concern over the outworking of von Balthasar's theology becomes evident 'when one begins... to be sensitive to the way in which a dynamic conception of analogy can turn into an act of reification; time's movement can end up being construed as bad metachronic architecture; the pluriform nature of creaturely reactions can end up being obscured by a matrix that contains in itself (in logically prior fashion) all the relevant possibilities for human relationship.'¹²¹ In short, it is as if everything that mattered had already been fixed in advance – precisely the criticism which von Balthasar had made of Barth's christology.

In particular, Quash focuses on the impact which this has on von Balthasar's approach to ecclesiology, suggesting that 'this is what enables Balthasar in his ecclesiology to structure atemporally what is a phenomenon that ought to have an irreducibly temporal aspect, namely the Church itself.'¹²² We have drawn attention elsewhere to the role of Mary and the Apostles, in terms of their presenting an archetypal experience for the Church. In Quash's view, this 'is a vision in which the (analogically) unfolding transposition of Christ's form into the lives of countless saints in history is 'contained' by the placing of something like a grid (or net) of exemplary relations at its source.' Apart from the theological reservations expressed above, Quash maintains that it is also 'an intuited unity, that in order to give itself any

¹²¹ *Drama* p.159

¹²² *Ibid.* p.160

legitimacy must sit fairly light to traditional exegetical concerns and must depend on some decidedly idiosyncratic interpretations of New Testament passages' (and he goes on to instance the inferences which von Balthasar draws about the relationship between the charismatic and the institutional following the account of the two disciples running to the Empty Tomb and which one gets there first.)¹²³

For Quash, this focus upon the apostolic witness as archetypal for the outworking of the mission of Christ means that a more static and institutional model of the Church takes over from what in theory is intended to be a genuinely dramatic encounter. Instead of that fixed and static form of Church, which he terms as 'crystallised love', Quash wants to argue for a more fluid and less resolved model of Church, which would be truer to the theo-dramatic theory which von Balthasar set out to offer. In contrast to that 'abstract depiction of the Church which removes it from its situatedness in a 'poetic' history of Christian practice', Quash argues instead 'that the kind of 'totality' imparted to the Church by the Crucified One is a 'form' mysteriously traced by his corpse-like obedience in Hell, which *still waits for its full revelation*' and that 'the analogies drawn from any kind of dramatic resolution or harmony of form ought to be disciplined and limited by this intuition of the christological super-form, which... is as yet unfinalizable.'¹²⁴

Quash is suggesting not just that von Balthasar fails to avoid the danger to which he drew attention in Hegel, but that he has fallen into the same trap which he identified in Barth, namely of subjecting God's gracious gift in Christ to a philosophical system

¹²³ *Drama* p.160

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* pp.163-64

in which, as we have seen, 'a dynamic conception of analogy can turn into an act of reification'. And so, the verdict which Quash offers on von Balthasar and Hegel might also reflect back on his dialogue with Barth. 'In sum... the consequences of this tendency to impose resolution are a serious undercutting of the effectiveness of Balthasar's use of analogy as a safeguard against Hegel's assumption of identity, by making the field of analogical relation into too finalised and too incautious a middle ground for depicting the interaction of God and the creature; by making it into a field where too much is assumed to be perceptible. And where the doctrine of analogy is thus debilitated, the doctrine of the Church is bound to suffer too.'¹²⁵

Following on from this is Quash's introduction to the *Theo-Drama* in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* published in 2004.¹²⁶ In this article he draws attention to a number of factors which we have already identified: to the way in which von Balthasar's *Dramatics* builds and follows on from his *Aesthetics*, in that contemplation of the glory of God draws the believer on into participation in God's saving drama; to the manner in which the volumes are structured to cover the great doctrines of Christian faith, in terms of christology, anthropology, soteriology and eschatology, all from the perspective of a distinctively Marian and ecclesiological focus; and of the extent to which the 'dramatic character' of Barth's theology (in that 'God acts in radical freedom, and is known in his acts'¹²⁷) continues to exert a major influence upon von Balthasar's exposition (taken together with the influence of the

¹²⁵ *Drama* p.164

¹²⁶ 'The theo-drama' in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) pp. 143-157; hereafter, *Companion*

¹²⁷ *Companion* p.145

Fathers, the spiritual visions of Adrienne von Speyr, Ignatian spirituality and the wide range of literary sources deployed in the *Prolegomena*.)

What is of particular interest to our thesis is the way in which even in this introductory article, Quash picks up on some of the same themes which we have identified as crucial to von Balthasar's theology, namely his 'treatment of created freedom' and 'theology of the Incarnation' in terms of the 'hypostatic union'. Moreover in developing these themes, it is von Balthasar's christological re-interpretation of analogy which enables the link to be made between human being and participation on the divine life. 'In Jesus Christ's attitude of total, free availability, we also glimpse the utter perichoretic self-donation (and simultaneous mutual constitution) of the trinitarian Persons in the perfection of their love. The analogy between human obedience and trinitarian self-donation must be disciplined by the principle of immeasurable dissimilarity between creature and Creator, human and divine; but there is nevertheless a correspondence between the two things when viewed in Christ.'¹²⁸

Returning to his *Theology and the Drama of History*, we can now see how Quash is developing the arguments set out in his previous articles in a more comprehensive and systematic form, offering both a critique of what has been achieved in the *Theo-Drama* and outlining the task which remains for a theo-dramatic concept of history. He re-affirms the danger, in von Balthasar as much as Hegel, of the truly dramatic being subsumed into the epic, as the arena of human inter-action is determined by an over-arching framework of 'harmonious resolution', under the influence of the

¹²⁸ *Companion* p.151

State (for Hegel) or the Church (for von Balthasar). He re-visits the issue of creaturely freedom, suggesting that von Balthasar's (typically Ignatian) emphasis on 'indifference' or *Gelassenheit* too readily assumes the form of ecclesiastical obedience and needs a good dose of the Barthian emphasis upon the free and joyful response of the creature as a corrective. He again demonstrates how von Balthasar's emphasis upon the archetypal experience of Mary and the saints serves to give the Church too fixed and fossilised a form, a kind of 'crystallised love' which denies the prospect of any real dramatic movement and engagement. And it leads him to conclude that 'the advocacy of 'indifference' on the one hand (with its effect on the 'subjects' - or 'cast' - of the theodrama) combines with an advocacy of the 'objective holiness' and mediating power of particular Church structure and offices on the other (with its 'structuring' of the stage and the action of the theodrama) in order to squeeze the real drama in the middle...' ¹²⁹

But whereas his articles posited that these developments sometimes arose from forced or idiosyncratic readings of the biblical texts, in *Theology and the Drama of History* Quash suggests that this is also true of von Balthasar's reading of literary and philosophical texts. He offers examples of this from von Balthasar's readings of Euripides, Shakespeare and Calderon and from them concludes that whilst he is a 'sensitive and sincere reader' with 'an intimate knowledge of a huge number of literary works', there is nevertheless 'a *compromised strain* to his readings', in that from time to time he 'imposes a set of alien concerns on his material'; 'in short, that he succumbs to a form of 'theoretical reduction.' ¹³⁰ In this respect Quash finds his

¹²⁹ *Theology* p.164

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.137

criticisms resonate with those offered by Martin Simon of von Balthasar's reading of Hölderlin's poetry in *The Glory of the Lord*,¹³¹ in that he has a tendency both to 'universalize' and to 'Christianize' his interpretation in a way which is invasive of the actual text. (Perhaps we should note that similar criticisms have also been made of his interpretation of Przywara and the analogy of being; for according to a recent study by O'Meara, 'Balthasar interpreted Przywara as he would like to see him.'¹³²)

In Quash's view, it is to a more sensitive and existentially aware reading of texts that a theodramatic theory of history must turn, if it is to avoid the weaknesses which he has identified in von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*. And ironically, the example of this which he offers in his closing chapter is a reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, written to commemorate the death of five nuns in a shipping accident in the North Sea. For Hopkins was one of the twelve theologians chosen by von Balthasar to illustrate an awareness of the divine beauty in the second volume of *The Glory of the Lord*. In his study, Quash contrasts Hopkins' theological and literary sensitivity to the suffering involved in this tragic event with the simplistic and historically inaccurate eulogy offered by Cardinal Manning at the funeral, as an example of a truly dramatic as opposed to merely epic reading. But he also contrasts these with von Balthasar's interpretation of the work, in which he adjudges von Balthasar's sacramental reading to render the whole poem 'dependent on just the immaculate paradigmatic form of Mary's relationship to Christ that we have seen to underwrite his own ecclesiology and much of his theological anthropology.'¹³³

¹³¹ Martin Simon, 'Identity and Analogy: Balthasar's Hölderlin and Hamann' in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986) pp.77-104

¹³² Thomas F. O'Meara, *Erich Przywara S.J.: his Theology and his World* (Notre Dame: 2002) p.133

¹³³ Quash, *Theology* p.210

It would take another thesis to assess the validity of Quash's call for a more sensitive and literary reading of texts to fulfil the promise of von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory. For our purposes what matters is the extent to which his critique reinforces our argument about the crucial impact of his dialogue with Barth. Quash's verdict, that 'His theology – and particularly his great trilogy – are inconceivable without a distinctive understanding of analogy',¹³⁴ reaffirms the crucial importance of the debate with Przywara and Barth over the analogy of being. Analogy is also the area where Quash (with Barth) identifies weaknesses in his theology. 'A tendency to impose resolution represents a serious undercutting of the effectiveness of von Balthasar's use of analogy' so that 'the doctrine of the Church suffers in this way because a debilitated doctrine of analogy allows it to.'¹³⁵ On both counts, Quash's work confirms the argument of this thesis, that the shape of von Balthasar's theology is determined by the substance of his critical engagement with Karl Barth.

4.5) Summary and conclusions

Our argument is that von Balthasar's construction of a theo-dramatic theory has been undertaken in such a way as to ensure that the key issues remain those which are still in contention between Barth and himself. These include the centrality of the *analogia entis* for understanding human being in the light of Christ, the concern about 'christological constriction' and the place for human response to God's saving act in Christ, and the role of the Church as the drama of salvation is played out..

¹³⁴ *Theology* p.166

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p.192

This chapter has shown how throughout the *Theo-Drama* it is possible to detect the same underlying themes which have occurred in both *The Theology of Karl Barth* and *The Glory of the Lord*. The *Theo-Drama* as a whole continues to reflect the centrality of the *analogia entis* in von Balthasar's consideration of the transcendentals of 'being'. In this case, in terms of the saving drama of God's activity in Christ, it is the 'good' that has been the focus of attention. Given his concern whether there is any significant space left by Barth for human decision and response in light of God's pre-determined election in Christ, the fact that von Balthasar should choose to account for the good in terms of a 'drama' is significant. Nor have we been surprised to find his most extensive discussions with Barth taking place in the interplay between divine and human freedom; namely what is the role, and how is it to be fulfilled, for human and finite freedom in the context of divine and infinite freedom?

But we have also seen how within von Balthasar's exposition of theo-dramatic theory there remains his own tendency to system (identified by Quash in terms of a model of 'harmonious resolution') and its consequences in rendering static what should have been a more dynamic use of the analogy of being and account of the Church. And at this point we cannot ignore Barth's own counter-criticism towards the end of the *Church Dogmatics*. For, after acknowledging the impact of what he calls a 'christological renaissance' in Catholic theology and affirming von Balthasar's study of his own work, he goes on to respond to von Balthasar's question about 'christological constriction' with a question of his own. He poses the question in light of his concern that in von Balthasar's fine account of that 'whole field of possible and

actual representations of the history of Jesus Christ, the repetitions or re-enactments of His being and activity by the saints or by those who achieve some measure of sanctity... that the One whose being and activity is supposedly reproduced obviously fades into the background as compared to His saints.’ Barth continues;

‘I now have an inkling of something which at first I could not understand: what is meant by the “christological constriction” which my expositor and critic urged against me in mild rebuke. But we must now bring against him the counter question, whether in all the splendour of the saints who are supposed to represent and repeat Him Jesus Christ has not ceased – not in theory but in practice – to be the origin and object of Christian faith.’¹³⁶

Where does this leave those who, as Oliver Davies puts it, ‘lack the ecclesial gaze?’¹³⁷ If ‘christological constriction’ means not allowing his focus on the ‘origin and object of Christian faith’ to fade into the background, then Barth is not going to recant. And, as Quash has suggested, it may be that there is something in Barth’s counter-charge to von Balthasar of ‘ecclesiastical constriction’ for which a response is needed.

¹³⁶ CD4.1 p.768

¹³⁷ ‘Von Balthasar and the Problem of Being’ in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 79 No. 923, 1998, p.16

Chapter 5) 'Speaking the truth in love' – The *Theo-Logic*

5.1) Introduction

In his study of von Balthasar's theology *Pattern of Redemption*, Edward Oakes refers to the 'ripple effect'; how when a stone is dropped into a pond, the ripples extend in concentric circles outwards from the point of disturbance. He uses this to explain how the impact of Jesus can extend both forwards and backwards in time, so that for example the prophecies of the Old Covenant can be fulfilled 'retroactively' in Jesus, whilst at the same time the story of Jesus' life and death goes on to affect not just the history of revelation but indeed the whole future of humankind.¹ To take the analogy further, it's also true that the intensity of the waves diminishes the further they get from the point of disturbance. This may not be what Oakes (or von Balthasar) had in mind to explain the impact of Christ upon history. But it may serve to help interpret Barth's continuing influence on the final 3 volumes of von Balthasar's trilogy, the *Theo-Logic*, published between 1985 and 1987, almost 20 years after Barth's death.

For whilst an initial impression would suggest that this final work in the trilogy bears the least evidence of any engagement with Karl Barth, the reality is more complex than this relatively late publication date would suggest. The first volume is essentially a re-print of von Balthasar's 1947 book, *Truth of the World*.² As such it predates the publication of *The Theology of Karl Barth* in 1951 and there is notably not a single direct reference to Barth in the course of its 250 or so pages. (Although it should also

¹ *Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans U. von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p.196f.

² *Wahrheit der Welt* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1947)

be noted that von Balthasar was at this point attending Barth's seminars in Basel and would, in the following year 1948, give a series of ten lectures on Barth which would form the basis of his 1951 study.) Instead, as is argued in Thomas Dalzell's study, *The Divine Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*,³ it can perhaps best be read as a response to the transcendental approach of his Jesuit colleague Karl Rahner. In particular, it offers a response to some of the issues raised by Rahner's book, *Spirit in the World*,⁴ for which von Balthasar wrote an extensive review when first published in 1939.

What this chapter will seek to do is to demonstrate how the position which von Balthasar takes up, partially in response to Rahner's work, shows evidence of those same themes which will be established more clearly in his study of Karl Barth and then taken up in the development of his theological trilogy. It will thus focus more closely on the first volume, written at a time when von Balthasar was developing his approach in the context of his relationship with Barth. Attention to the two later volumes will be more limited and seek mainly to show how the shape of von Balthasar's work continues to reflect the nature of his debate with Barth as it has shaped his trilogy, and the continuing presence of those themes developed in response to Barth's challenge.

³ *The Divine Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997) pp.37-8

⁴ *Geist im Welt* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1939) ET *Spirit in the World* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968)

5.2) Truth of the World

Von Balthasar has much in common with Rahner, not least in terms of their Jesuit training and grounding in Thomist philosophy. He shares Rahner's concern for the centrality of being in coming to a knowledge of God and for a properly integrated understanding of the relationship between grace and nature, as opposed to the much challenged 'extrinsicism' of scholastic theology. But von Balthasar also had his criticisms of Rahner and, for all that this criticism took public form much later in his assault on the notion of 'anonymous Christianity' in the aftermath of Vatican II,⁵ his concerns, as both Rowan Williams⁶ and Karen Kilby⁷ have shown, go back much earlier. They center on von Balthasar's reading of Rahner's re-interpretation of Aquinas, in the light of Kant and the Idealist tradition, in his *Spirit in the World*. In particular he was critical of the way in which Rahner's focus on human subjectivity, following the work of Maréchal, appeared to downplay truth's dependence on the transcendent rationality of God. As Kilby summarises it; 'Both thinkers were trained in neo-scholasticism and both found it inadequate, but they moved away from it in different directions—very crudely put, Rahner moved away in the direction of the subject, and Balthasar in the direction of the object'.⁸

⁵ Most notably, and polemically, in *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (1966) ET *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)

⁶ 'Balthasar and Rahner' in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986) pp.11-34

⁷ 'Balthasar and Rahner' in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) pp.256-268

⁸ *Ibid.* p.263

Von Balthasar's concern was that such a narrow focus on the subject could obscure that wider vision of the totality of being upon which truth was grounded. His response was to offer an epistemology of his own, focused on truth as one of the transcendentals of being. He sets out the two stages of his task as follows. 'The first considers truth as we first encounter it in the world, as the truth of things and of man, a truth that ultimately points back to God the Creator... The second part considers the truth that God has made known to us about himself through revelation and which, once positively revealed, becomes the ultimate norm of all truth in the world.'⁹ The first stage will use largely philosophical concepts and results in *Truth of the World*. The second stage will be delayed for some forty years, until the publication of what will become the final two volumes of the *Theo-Logic*, in *Truth of God* and *The Spirit of Truth*. These will be much more explicitly theological; indeed they will include a theological exposition of the relationships between the different persons of the Trinity which have undergirded his account in the *Theo-Drama*.

However, notwithstanding his philosophical intentions, even in *Truth of the World* there is a strong theological thrust. Von Balthasar is clear not just that our understanding of truth comes out of a reflection on the nature of being, in which the limited and finite aspect of human knowledge and consciousness point towards the unlimited and infinite nature of being itself, but that such reflection inevitably leads to the conclusion that truth is part of God's gracious self-communication to his creation, and that to participate in truth is to come to share in God's own being.

⁹ TL1 p.30

Von Balthasar will explore the nature of this truth under four headings, truth as 'Nature', as 'Freedom', as 'Mystery' and as 'Participation'. In 'Truth as Nature', he starts from the basis that truth cannot be proved but is self-evident and must be assumed; 'Truth is as evident as existence and essence, as unity, goodness and beauty'.¹⁰ He goes on to explore the notion of truth in terms which express what he calls its 'two-sidedness' or 'double nature'. Truth is the measure between being and appearance, its role expressed in the double relationship of 'unconcealment' (the Greek *aletheia*) and 'trustworthiness' (the Hebrew *emeth*). It depends upon the awareness and inter-relationship between subject and object, each of which in opening up to the other, becomes aware of its own self-consciousness, and at the same time of its own limited and finite existence in contrast to unlimited and infinite nature of being itself.

This emphasis upon relationship and reciprocity in truth is picked up in the next section, 'Truth as Freedom'. In themselves, subject and object each have the freedom as to how much they choose to disclose or to hide, both in their self-communication to each other and in their willingness to accept the reliability of the truth they have received. This highlights the role of trustworthiness and the willingness of love to take responsibility for the fullness of truth, as opposed to that narrowing or partial truth which is less than the whole. In turn this leads on to the subject of the next section 'Truth as Mystery', in which the consequence of this emphasis upon truth as personal and relational are explored, using such headings as 'perspective', 'situation' and 'personality'. Reflecting on the interplay of 'word',

¹⁰ TL1 p.35

‘significance’ and ‘image’, von Balthasar suggests that the language used to communicate and refer to appearance, points also towards that deeper mystery of being which lies behind, and how it is that ‘Truth can be found only in a floating middle between the appearance and the thing that appears.’¹¹

The final section, ‘Truth as Participation’ is the most explicitly theological of the four, in so far as it sets out the basis, following von Balthasar’s exposition thus far, of the relationship between worldly and divine truth. Von Balthasar’s conclusion is ‘that if there is finite being and truth at all, it is only because of a free creative deed and utterance of God’ and that ‘this ontological dependence of finite truth can be inferred immediately from its “creatureliness”, that is, from its contingency.’¹² Any affirmation of worldly truth has its ground in the free gift of God who chooses to communicate something of his truth in creation and thus enables his creatures to receive and to respond to that knowledge. Moreover, as human beings come to share in this disclosure of worldly truth, they discover pointers to the divine truth which lies behind and underpins all language and communication. All this is grounded in the supreme act of loving self communication, which is God’s revelation of himself in the Word made flesh. And it is this which makes speaking the truth an act of love. ‘The truth is the measure of being, but love is the measure of truth.’¹³

The examination of that truth will take up the second part of von Balthasar’s task, as identified in his introduction. For various reasons, (which include his study of Barth, his leaving the Jesuit order and his writing the twelve volumes which will make up the

¹¹ *TL1* p.138

¹² *Ibid.* p.229

first two parts of his trilogy!) it will not be undertaken for another forty years. However, what he has written thus far is sufficient to map out some of the key decisions which will shape the structure of his emerging trilogy and reflect the course of the debate with Barth in which he is already engaged. For even without explicit references in the text, it has become apparent how von Balthasar is drawing upon the kind of arguments which will appear later in his *The Theology of Karl Barth*. This is evident, first in the way he draws on the key concepts which he has learnt from his mentor Przywara (namely the *analogia entis* and the concept of polarity), secondly in the position which he takes on the relationship between nature and grace (and in turn faith and reason), and finally from the shape which he determines his future theology will take, one which is based on the transcendentals of being,

Polarity represents that tension between finite and infinite, personal and universal, spirit and matter, revealed and concealed which sums up much of human existence. Understood in philosophical and existential terms, for Przywara at least, such tensions represented a potentially explosive mix; however, when interpreted through the analogy of being, they point instead towards the absolute truth and being of God. 'This inner worldly polarity and analogy affecting the criterion of truth is rooted ultimately in a transcendent analogy between the divine and the worldly subject within the act of knowing itself.'¹⁴ This points the way towards the truth of God, as 'The truth of the world is grounded in the truth of God that reveals it', and to the proper interdependence of philosophy and theology, the significance of which for von Balthasar we have picked up previously. For '...in the order of creation, this

¹³ *TL 1* p.264

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.261

revelation remains indirect; the medium in which God appears is the creature, which as such is not God. Consequently, this creature has a real creaturely truth of its own which is no more identical to God's truth than creaturely being is identical to the Divine Being. Rather there is an analogy between both relations.'¹⁵

This grounding of the relationship between the divine and created order points to the position von Balthasar will take on the relationship between nature and grace, (and which will subsequently prove such a significant part of his engagement with Barth in the disputed question over the interpretation of Vatican 1 and the role of natural theology.) Von Balthasar is clear from the start that 'the world as it concretely exists is one that is always already related either positively or negatively to the God of grace and supernatural revelation. There are no neutral points or surfaces in this relationship.'¹⁶ This means in turn, that there is no standing outside of the grace of God and claiming that human rationality has access to the divine independently of God's revelation in Christ, the issue which is at the heart of Barth's allegations against natural theology and the *analogia entis*. But it also means, as von Balthasar will maintain at length in his study of Barth, that the position of Vatican 1 allowing human rationality a natural knowledge of God *is* sustainable, when viewed in the context of a world shaped and upheld by God's revelation in Christ.

Admittedly, this argument is conducted without direct reference to Barth. But, in so far as this work offers an implicit critique of Rahner's transcendental method in terms of its preoccupation with human subjectivity rather than the transcendence of God,

¹⁵ *TL 1* p.244

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.30

and that in response von Balthasar develops the central concepts of polarity and the analogy of being which he has learnt from Przywara, we can perhaps see pointers towards some of the themes which will emerge in his subsequent study of Barth. These he will identify as key themes for Catholic theologians to engage with, namely the 'foundations for a christocentrism, for the historicity of nature, and for the created character of worldly truth'¹⁷.

The significance of all this is recognised in Thomas Dalzell's study to which we have already referred. He underlines the importance of von Balthasar's christological re-interpretation of the analogy of being; it is not, as it can appear in Przywara, just a fundamental principle of Catholic religious theory but rather an encounter with divine revelation. 'An examination of the dispute with Rahner not only situates Balthasar's theology, but it highlights his position on the absolute transcendence of God with regard to any activity of the human spirit and his firm belief that the diastasis between the two poles of the creature-God relationship may only be adequately bridged in virtue of an encounter with the historical form of Jesus Christ.'¹⁸

5.3) *Truth of God and The Spirit of Truth*

Within *Truth of the World* there are already some indications of the direction which von Balthasar's subsequent theological work will take. In his treatment of the reciprocity between subject and object needed to allow truth to unfold, there are echoes of material he will return to in the *Theo-Drama*; for unless the object displays

¹⁷ KB p.383

¹⁸ Dalzell, *Op.cit.* p.37

itself, allowing the subject to transform its cognitive potential into actual knowledge, 'The stage has been set but remains empty; the drama of knowledge is not acted.'¹⁹ Again, at the end of his section on 'Truth as Mystery', von Balthasar feels that the only way in which he can explain the mysteriousness immanent in truth is to refer to the way the three transcendentals of being are interwoven and interpenetrate each other. 'Truth, goodness and beauty are so fully transcendental properties of being that they can be grasped only in and through one another.' And in words which encapsulate the theme to be explored in *The Glory of the Lord*, he writes that; 'Beauty is the pure irradiation of the true and the good for their own sake.'²⁰

However, it is only following the exposition of the beautiful and the good as they are developed more fully in *The Glory of the Lord* and the *Theo-Drama* (and in which as we have argued, von Balthasar does explicitly and actively engage with Barth's work) that he is able to return to the matter of truth. By means of a re-written and expanded General Introduction, *Truth of the World* is recast it so that it fits into his grand plan. It now appears as the first volume in the concluding part of his trilogy, the *Theo-Logic* which takes as its starting point the transcendentals of being and uses the analogy of being as its core concept. However it is in the two new volumes which follow that von Balthasar will undertake that second stage of the task which he first identified some forty years before, namely to explore the truth of God's revelation to the world in explicitly theological terms.

¹⁹ *TL* 1 p.67

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp.224-225

In the light of all that he has written in his *Aesthetics* and *Dramatics*, von Balthasar realises that his approach must be both christological and trinitarian. As Aidan Nichols reminds us, 'For von Balthasar, it is only when truth is apprehended in a way at once Christological and Trinitarian that it can be presented as really a truth that has fullness... the splendid goodness of truth is disclosed not only in the fateful career, up to Easter, of the Word made flesh but also in the gift at Pentecost of the entire relationship between Father and Son, a gift communicated by the Holy Spirit.'²¹ This is reflected in the titles chosen for these next two volumes, namely *Truth of God* and *The Spirit of Truth*.

Truth of God will examine the truth of God's Word, both in terms of *ana*-logic, that is in terms of those perceptions drawn from creaturely truth which point upwards towards the divine, and *cata*-logic, that which is revealed in the Son's coming down to earth. Much of the analogical task has already been mapped out in *Truth of the World*, in the sense that any perception of finite or worldly truth already points towards the greater and infinite truth of being itself, though here von Balthasar also goes further to explore how the notions of otherness and difference themselves implicitly point towards an understanding of the distinct relationships which make up the Trinity. This leads on to the catalogical task, which is to explain the *kenosis*, the self-emptying or self-expression of the divine love, the place of the Logos in God and his procession from the Father as the Father's 'Word', 'Son', 'Image' and 'Expression'.

²¹ *Say it is Pentecost: A Guide through Balthasar's Logic* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001) p.65

Von Balthasar's decision is to approach it in both christological and trinitarian terms. He is resolutely christological in that Jesus Christ is the divine self-expression in human or creaturely terms. Christ is the Word, through whom the world came to be, and the one who is able to speak a truth which is recognisable in creaturely terms. Above all this is to be seen in Jesus' use of parables in his teaching of the Kingdom, which has its basis in what von Balthasar terms an 'analogy of language' (and is itself based on the analogy of being that is fulfilled in the God-man, Jesus Christ.) 'Perhaps no example shows so clearly as do Jesus' practically ordered parables... how divine logic can and will express itself in human logic on the basis of an *analogia linguae* [analogy of language] and, ultimately – in spite of all objections – an *analogia entis*, fulfilled in Christ, who is God and man in one person.'²²

Yet at the same time there is a difference, a transcendence about Jesus, which is also part of the Gospel witness. This can be interpreted in terms of the Lateran Council injunction on analogy, namely that alongside any similarity to God, there is also a deeper dissimilarity to be acknowledged. But for von Balthasar this is also a pointer to the fact that the difference between Creator and created also has its roots in the Trinity; that as the relationships between the persons of the Trinity provide for an understanding of difference and distinction which is not simply about distance and disobedience and allows for the possibility of loving communication, so they enable God freely to create a world which is other than himself, yet which is still capable of recognising and responding to him. 'For how could worldly difference in its *maior dissimilitudo* with respect to the divine identity not ultimately be deemed a

²² TL2 p.81

degradation, rather than something “very good”, if this difference did not have a root in God himself that was compatible with his identity..?’²³

A similar approach also marks the third and pneumatological volume of the *Theo-Logic*. *The Spirit of Truth* examines the role of the Holy Spirit both as the one who attests to the truth revealed in the Son and as the fulfilment of that truth, as humanity comes to share in the life of Christ through his body which is the Church. Von Balthasar again insists upon a thoroughly trinitarian framework, in which christology and pneumatology co-inhere and inform each other. It is the Spirit, as the overflow of love between Father and Son, which bears witness to the truth of the Father revealed in the Son. But it is also the Spirit which, in bearing witness, so shapes and sustains the created order that it may be taken and transformed in the life of the Son. Thus von Balthasar is able to take up Irenaeus’ image of the ‘two hands’ of the Father, acting together but distinctly. In response to the challenge to the truth of christology, ‘How can an historical person claim universal validity?’ von Balthasar’s reply is that; ‘This dilemma... can only be solved along trinitarian or, more precisely, pneumatological lines. The Father works not with one hand, but with both.’²⁴

As regards the vexed question of the *filioque* clause, von Balthasar will take a very similar position to Barth, insisting on the theological validity, if not the historical priority, of the Western position. But in his exposition of how the Spirit works to establish the universal truth of Christ, then we can see the emergence of other critical factors which have emerged before. Von Balthasar establishes the Spirit as the one

²³ TL2 p.184

²⁴ TL3 p.196

who both 'interprets' Christ and in so doing 'introduces' people into the Christian life, using three key themes for this mission of the Spirit, namely 'Gift', 'Freedom' and 'Witness'. For each of these themes he establishes a biblical basis. But behind this there is a broader plan being pursued, in that he is looking to show how the Spirit is at work trinitarianly (and thus in creation and redemption) in both objective and subjective terms. In subjective terms, this witness to the truth is seen in the life of individual Christians in prayer, forgiveness, in the gifts and discernment of the Spirit, and in the witness of a 'Christian life'. But equally, not to say more importantly, it is also evidenced in objective terms, namely in the tradition, in scripture and above all in the apostolic ministry of the Church.

In this approach, von Balthasar is clearly engaging with the work of Hegel and his philosophy of Spirit, as he has also done previously in the *Theo-Drama* (and again von Balthasar is concerned that the overview he presents must do better justice to the physical form and hard facts than Hegel often allows.) But it also flags up another issue which arises from his critical debate with Barth, namely the role and place of the Church in Christian experience. Von Balthasar is in no doubt that the truth to which the Spirit leads is one which takes a strongly ecclesial form. 'Theologically speaking, the ecclesial "objectivizations" (the word, understood as Scripture; sacrament; tradition; office) will be nothing other than forms fashioned by Christ's Holy Spirit in order to guide the subjective spirit of believers through the process of self-surrender towards that purity and universal expansion which it had always signified.'²⁵

²⁵ TL3 p.154

From this, 'it will become immediately apparent that it is quite impossible to make a clean separation between "objective" and "subjective" in the Holy Spirit's structuring and sanctifying of the Church.'²⁶ Instead, for von Balthasar 'all the objectivity of ecclesial holiness ministers to the incorporation of believers, with their subjective love, into the Body of Christ'.²⁷ It is possible to read these words as a critique of post-conciliar developments within the Catholic Church and von Balthasar's concern about the undermining of ecclesial authority. But it is also true, as we have seen, that such a concern for the essentially ecclesial role of the Spirit is of a piece with his emphasis upon the ecclesial nature of Christian experience in the *Aesthetics* and the dramatic role of the Church in the *Theo-Drama*, both of which, as we have already argued, draw on the context of his debate with Barth on the role and place of the Church.

5.4) With reference to Barth

We have already acknowledged that in the first volume of the *Theo-Logic* there are no explicit references to Barth. However, in the remaining two volumes there are a number of references, although, in line with the argument which we have made, we recognise that these are not as significant as those which are found in the earlier works of the trilogy. These references pick up themes which we have identified in previous chapters, such as commendation of Barth's approach to the economic and immanent Trinity²⁸ and position on the *filioque*,²⁹ affirmation of his stance on the one

²⁶ *TL3* p.308

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.312

²⁸ *TL2* p.138

²⁹ *TL3* p.218

covenant of God with his people in the light of Romans 9-11,³⁰ as well as questions about his interpretation of Genesis 1:27 in terms of male/female complementarity.³¹

However, there is one extended reference which shows that the issues which we have identified are still very much present even in the later volumes. In his treatment of metaphor and symbol in the section 'The Word was made Flesh' in *Truth of God*, von Balthasar refers to the work of Eberhard Jüngel on metaphor, acknowledging the attempt which he has made to 'ease the feud' between Barth and Przywara over the *analogia entis*. Von Balthasar notes how Jüngel draws on this, together with the work of Aristotle, Thomas and Kant, to offer a radical reinterpretation of the teaching of Lateran IV, affirming that in the 'evangelical analogy' offered by God in Christ, particularly through the parables of Jesus, 'in the midst of increasing dissimilarity there is increasingly greater similarity between God and man.'³²

Von Balthasar recognises the importance of Jüngel's work. 'Jüngel's incorporation of the tradition of analogy into the Barthian *analogia fidei* is a great intellectual achievement, and his critique of negative theology hits on something central.' But von Balthasar is not totally convinced. 'Nevertheless, he does not seem to have made it sufficiently clear that when the light of revelation shines (kata-logically) upon created nature, it thereby confirms the true essence of the latter's ascending ontological-epistemological analogy (the creature as *imago*).'³³ This reservation is amplified in his next section, *Factum Est*, where von Balthasar goes on to affirm Przywara's

³⁰ TL3 pp.280-81

³¹ TL2 p.173

³² Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1977) tr. Darrell L. Guder, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983) p.288, quoted in TL2 p.273

teaching on analogy in terms of its christological focus, as ‘the “analogy” that occurs as event in *Verbum-Caro* becomes the measure of every other analogy, whether philosophical or theological.’³⁴ Indeed, from a Barthian perspective, there is something of an irony about von Balthasar’s whole approach in the *Theo-Logic*. For in his exposition of Jesus as ‘the Trinitarian Son made man’, von Balthasar is offering ‘an audacious attempt at a really *integrated* theology of God’, a task which a recent commentator Aidan Nichols recognises is ‘not the least of the enterprises which he approved in Karl Barth’.³⁵ But at the same time, such an enterprise rests firmly and squarely upon an approach to the analogy of being, which, as we have argued, is precisely the subject of his debate with Barth.

5.5) Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, we have suggested that the first volume of the *Theo-Logic*, whilst not mentioning Barth directly, does through its engagement with Thomism, and the re-interpretation of this tradition offered by contemporaries such as Rahner, map out some of the positions which will be taken up and developed more fully as a result of his debate with Barth. We have also demonstrated how, albeit from a greater time and distance, the two subsequent volumes pick up and reflect those same themes.

Perhaps the best way to summarise this somewhat diffused influence is to quote from von Balthasar’s General Introduction, re-written to accompany the re-publication of the first volume in light of the later ones to come.

³³ *TL2* p.273

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.314

‘From first to last, the trilogy is keyed to the transcendental determinations of being, in particular to the analogy between their status and form in creaturely being, on the one hand, and in Divine Being, on the other. Thus, there is a correspondence between worldly “beauty” and divine “glory” in the *Aesthetics* and between worldly, finite freedom and divine, infinite freedom in the *Drama*. By the same token, our task in the present theological *Logic* will be to reflect upon the relationship between the structure of creaturely truth and the structure of divine truth. This reflection will set the stage for an enquiry into whether God’s truth can exhibit and express itself (in various forms) within the structure of creaturely truth. 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 can be no theology.’³⁶

For with the reappearance of these themes, the structures of creaturely and divine truth, their analogous form in the being of the world and the Being of God, and the proper relationship of theology to philosophy, we have returned to the heart of von Balthasar’s critical engagement with Barth. We are back to the *analogia entis*, the analogy of being which has been the foundational principle throughout the trilogy from *The Glory of the Lord* to the *Theo-Drama*. It may be that in the *Theo-Logic* there is less explicit reference to Barth than in the other two works; but the flow of von Balthasar’s argument continues the themes outlined in *The Theology of Karl Barth*.

³⁵ Nichols, *Op.cit.* p.84

³⁶ *TL1* p.7

This much is recognised by Aidan Nichols in his commentary on the last part of von Balthasar's trilogy; 'the analogy between the world's being and God's... is not abolished by Christologic. Balthasar's aim is, as always, to integrate with a Christocentrism rivalling Karl Barth's, the traditional ontological cosmology of Catholicism.' For von Balthasar, this is not to deny the infinite, qualitative distinction between God and humanity; but it is to recognise that, as all things are summed up in Christ, the distance between God and humanity 'loses its bitterness' and 'now becomes that spacious ground where the children of wisdom can play, caught up in the inner relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to which the way of the Lord Jesus has led them.'³⁷

³⁷ Nichols, *Op.cit.* p.118

Chapter 6 – Anselm, a case study in the approaches of Barth and von Balthasar

Thus far in our thesis, we have been looking at the influence of Barth upon the development of von Balthasar's own theological trilogy. Throughout *The Glory of the Lord*, the *Theo-Drama* and the *Theo-Logic*, we have sought to identify the way in which themes and arguments first identified in his study of Barth emerge to influence and shape von Balthasar's trilogy. But given the sheer size and scale of this trilogy, running to 15 volumes and comparable in size with Barth's own *Church Dogmatics*, there has inevitably been a sense in which this has been done in terms of summary or overview, reflecting upon the shape and structure of von Balthasar's works.

What this chapter will offer is something a little bit different. It will attempt a more detailed study of one small aspect which has influenced Barth and von Balthasar, but this will be done in such a way as to highlight and throw more sharply into focus the shapes and contours which have been identified elsewhere as structuring their work as a whole. If we were to put this in economic terms, we might say that whereas before we have been looking at things from a *macro* viewpoint, here we shall offer a *micro* perspective to help clarify the bigger picture. Moreover to do this, we shall look at the respective ways in which Barth and von Balthasar both draw upon, and to some extent offer a critique of a common source, namely the theology of Anselm.

6.1) Why Anselm?

Why then should it be Anselm who is the focus of such a treatment? There are three reasons which we can give. The first derives from Barth's own recognition, both of the significance of Anselm for his own work and of the fact that this was picked up by von Balthasar. For in his forward prepared for the second edition of *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* published in 1958, he wrote that; 'Only a comparatively few commentators, for example Hans Urs von Balthasar, have realized that my interest in Anselm was never a side-issue for me or – assuming I am more or less correct in my historical interpretation of St. Anselm – realized how much it has influenced me or been absorbed into my own line of thinking'.¹ Secondly, although the validity of the von Balthasar thesis as an interpretation of Barth has been challenged by Bruce McCormack's recent study, we have already argued in this thesis² that the dialogue between Barth and von Balthasar around the subject of Anselm was to play a crucial role in von Balthasar's own theological development and in identifying the themes which would run throughout his own trilogy. Then thirdly, as the rest of this chapter will seek to show, Anselm continues to play a significant role throughout the major works of each theologian, both in the *Church Dogmatics* and in von Balthasar's theological trilogy.

The influence of Anselm upon Barth has long been recognised³ (and I have argued elsewhere for the significance of Barth's study of Anselm upon the structure of his

¹ *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, tr. Ian Robertson (London: SCM, 1960) p.11, hereafter *FQI*

² See 'Chapter 2; From dialectic to analogy, *The Theology of Karl Barth*'

³ See for example Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962) pp.182ff.

Church Dogmatics; in particular how it is that the name of God revealed to Anselm, in faith and in response to prayer, affects Barth's approach to epistemology and leads to his trinitarian exposition of revelation in the 'Doctrine of the Word of God'.⁴)

However, Anselm also plays a key role in von Balthasar's trilogy. He appears as one of five theologians serving the Church who have grasped the vision of the divine beauty and to whom von Balthasar devotes an extended study in Volume 2 of *The Glory of the Lord: Clerical Styles*. He then re-emerges as an important source for von Balthasar's theodramatic account of the atonement in the *Theo-Drama*, in particular in Volume 4, *The Action*, where Anselm serves as one of the theological models upon which von Balthasar builds his own account. However, for all that they agree on the significance of Anselm, what this chapter will argue is that the thrust of their interpretations and the theological deductions they make are quite different.

6.2) Barth on Anselm

Barth's focus in *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* is mainly epistemological and his study is structured in 2 parts. In Part 1 Barth sets out what he terms Anselm's 'theological scheme', dealing in turn with the 'necessity', 'possibility', 'conditions', 'manner' and 'aim' of theology.⁵ For this he draws on the whole range of Anselm's works, seeking to show how throughout his writings Anselm is concerned to demonstrate the inherent rationality of faith. But this is done on the basis that it is

⁴ See my 'Karl Barth and Anselm: the significance of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* for the *Church Dogmatics*', an unpublished M.Phil. thesis for the University of Birmingham, 1989; also my 'Karl Barth and St. Anselm: the influence of Anselm's 'Theological Scheme' on T. F. Torrance and Eberhard Jüngel' in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Volume 46/1 1993, pp.327ff.

fides quaerens intellectum, that it is faith itself which seeks understanding. Indeed for Barth, Anselm's approach to understanding is based on its being a deeper reading and contemplation, an *intus legere*, of the object of faith itself. Barth maintains that for Anselm, the possibility of faith can only be understood from the reality of its existence in the Christian life. This means that the method of theology is thus to assume the reality of some articles of faith in order to prove others, so that theological enquiry moves in a virtuous circle, as it were, from *credo* to *Credo*, from individual belief to the faith of the Church. Moreover, in all these things the theologian must approach the subject prayerfully, believing that it is God's gracious pleasure to reveal himself, and ready to give thanks for the joy and beauty of God's revelation.

It is this epistemological framework which provides the basis of Anselm's 'theological scheme' and which, Barth maintains, enables a proper understanding of the arguments for the existence of God set out in Anselm's *Proslogion* chapters 2 to 4. Accordingly, Barth devotes the second (and major) part of his study to a detailed and radically different exposition of these chapters.⁶ For although they have been widely interpreted (at least since Descartes) in philosophical terms as an ontological argument for the existence of God, this is for Barth severely to misinterpret what Anselm was about.

For Barth, the key to Anselm's argument is that the proof discovered, (the God who is '*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*', something than which nothing greater can be

⁵ *FQI* pp.15-72

⁶ *Ibid.* pp.73-171

conceived⁷) is not an abstract formula derived from philosophical reasoning, but instead a name of God revealed to his faithful servant Anselm in response to prayer. Barth goes on to show how the arguments in the chapters 2 and 3 of the *Proslogion*, in which God is required to exist not just in the mind, but in reality as well, in order to be 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', are incomplete without proceeding to chapter 4. Then how this chapter, far from being a re-iteration of those arguments already put forward, moves on to demonstrate how the special and unique existence of God is such that God, unlike other beings, can not even be thought not to exist.

In Barth's eyes, this is sufficient to show that Anselm, rather than seeking to draw upon a general understanding of being in order to prove the existence of God, is actually using the unique and supreme existence of God in order to ground the existence (and indeed rationality) of other and ordinary beings. From this conclusion, Barth sets forth a theological basis for knowledge based on a three-fold ordering of *ratio*, *necessitas* and *veritas*, in which the *noetic ratio* of the knowing subject is drawn into the *ontic ratio* of the object to be known, all of which is grounded in the *ratio veritatis*, the ground and grammar of all knowledge and understanding which is to be found in God alone. (Furthermore, in my M. Phil thesis I argue how this goes on to inform Barth's trinitarian exposition of revelation in the *Church Dogmatics I* and *II*, in which the Son is the objective reality and thus possibility of revelation, and the Holy Spirit the subjective reality and thus possibility of revelation, all of which is grounded in the Father, who exists as the source of all truth and knowledge.)

⁷ *FQI* pp.73-74 and 102 quoting from Anselm's *Proslogion*, Chapter 1

In light of his polemic against natural theology and the *analogia entis*, we can see how attractive such an interpretation would be for Barth, in that it rejects the notion that Anselm's argument is based upon a philosophical concept of being accessible to autonomous human reasoning and makes it dependent upon God's gracious revelation in faith and to faith. Indeed Barth closes his study by dismissing such philosophical interpretations in typically trenchant terms; 'That Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God has repeatedly been called the 'Ontological' Proof of God, that commentators have refused to see that it is in a different book altogether from the well-known teaching of Descartes and Leibniz, that anyone could seriously think that it is even remotely affected by what Kant put forward against these doctrines – all that is so much nonsense on which no more words ought to be wasted.'⁸

6.3) Anselm in von Balthasar

With such an emphasis upon the importance of revelation in the knowledge of God, von Balthasar would certainly agree. But to place Anselm's work in the context of a presumed conflict between natural and revealed theology is for von Balthasar profoundly misleading. 'The question whether Anselm is a philosopher or a theologian is therefore quite superfluous and fundamentally misconceived...' Indeed von Balthasar goes on to assess his role in a way which summarises much of what he will himself be attempting in *The Glory of the Lord*. For von Balthasar, 'Anselm stands in the *kairos*, for the Biblical revelation can be understood simply as the

⁸ FQI p.171

transcendent consummation of ancient philosophy, which never was a philosophy in the modern sense but was rather in its fundamental concerns theology: speech about God, about the eternal, about the being of the one who is.’⁹

Von Balthasar takes a similar approach to Barth concerning the beauty of theology, the importance of prayer in its pursuit, and the joy which accompanies discovery of more of the truth about God, as it is found in Anselm’s work. But for von Balthasar, this is more than just a matter of theological method; it is something which involves the whole of Christian life and experience. Typically for von Balthasar such Christian experience is to be understood ecclesially, for he never forgets that Anselm was a Benedictine monk whose reasoning was contemplative but equally communal and dialogical. Accordingly he sets out his interpretation of Anselm’s ‘Aesthetic Reason’ under three headings. ‘The understanding of the total (philosophical-theological) truth demands... the total commitment of a man: 1. a life established on the truth and set free for it, to which there belongs for the Christian the wrestling of prayer; 2. the struggle for conceptual understanding so as to achieve in-sight, *intel-lectus*; 3. the pure joy and blessedness (*delectatio, beatitudo*) in the truth thus found, which accrues to man through grace and merit alike.’¹⁰

In this interpretation von Balthasar shares with Barth a recognition of Anselm’s insistence upon the rationality of faith (in terms of the universal Christian demand to *intelligere fidem*) as well as of the joy which accompanies such comprehension when attained (*‘ut eorum quae credunt intellectu et contemplatione delectentur*, that they

⁹ GL2 pp.213-214

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.215

might be delighted by the understanding and contemplation of the things which they believe.')¹¹ But it is in the second section, entitled 'The Radiance of Freedom', where von Balthasar shows how what is at stake is much more than a matter of epistemology. For von Balthasar, it is freedom that is the key concept around which so much of Anselm's theology works and to understand freedom in the Bible means thinking analogically. 'Everything springs from an utterly simple vision of the analogy between God and the creature as an analogy of freedom. For the creature, freedom can only mean being allowed to enter into communion with the other (and thus participation in God's independent personal being), something, however, which can only be perfected as, through grace, creaturely freedom is drawn ever more strongly into absolute freedom, to the point where the creature achieves its final freedom, when it is free with God and in God, and simply wills, in freedom and not through being overpowered, what God wills...'¹²

It is that relationship between finite and infinite freedom in God and in human being which will provide the basis for von Balthasar's account of God's saving activity in the *Theo-Drama*. For him it means that in turn, 'the eschatological analogy of freedom between God and the creature can be realised in no other way than in grace as participation in the triune life.'¹³ This is significant because it makes clear how even in his interpretation of Anselm, von Balthasar is insisting upon the crucial importance of analogy. Moreover, since Anselm's theology is as much about being as about understanding, it requires also the analogy of being, the *analogia entis* to interpret it. 'For him the philosophical *analogia entis* becomes the *analogia personalitatis* or

¹¹ GL2 p.234 quoting from Anselm's *Cur Deus homo* 1.1

¹² *Ibid.* p.237

libertatis, and correspondingly the perfection of the creature is found in its perfect liberation in the absolute divine freedom as it is taken up into the divine will.¹⁴ What matters is not just the knowledge of God, but a growing participation in the divine life.

The third and last section in von Balthasar's exposition of Anselm is entitled 'The Victory of Prayer'. Throughout this section Balthasar shares Barth's concern to highlight the importance of prayer in leading to understanding, both in terms of its reminder as to where human beings start in their quest for comprehension (that is to say, prayer as 'the place where one is lost, hell as existential reality'¹⁵) and also of their ensuing dependence upon the grace and love of God in light of God's revelation. There follow many moving quotations and illustrations from Anselm's Prayers and Meditations. But in von Balthasar's reading of Anselm, it is important also to recognise that prayer has not just an existential but also a strong ecclesial dimension. For in Anselm, prayer is the 'eschatologically fulfilled point of freedom', the place where 'the free will of men – in the Church and her saints, supremely in Jesus Christ – is made one with the free will of God.'¹⁶

Indeed, that same ecclesial dimension gives perhaps a greater sense of historical context to von Balthasar's interpretation of Anselm as a whole. More so than Barth, he seeks to interpret the development Anselm's theology in light of the times and situations in which he lived, and in particular in the light of his being not just an eleventh century Benedictine monk but also a renowned Archbishop of Canterbury.

¹³ *GL2* p.238

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.245

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.254

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.253

Reflecting on that ‘strange logic of fate in the fact that the same man who had to defend Christian freedom against all the gloomy clouds of an unbiblical doctrine of foreknowledge, predestination and original sin, had to spend his best efforts in struggle for the freedom of the Church in the English investiture controversy’, von Balthasar goes on to note how; ‘The older and more experienced Anselm becomes, the more the accent on aesthetic reason of his early works (*Monologion* and *Proslogion*) with their, as it were, immediate apprehension of theological necessities, shifts to the defence of Christian freedom – in the individual and the Church, from whose unfathomable glory all necessities are derived.’¹⁷

This emphasis upon freedom will reoccur in von Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama*, especially in Volume 4, ‘*The Action*’, in which von Balthasar offers his exposition of the atonement. Having established what he regards as the ‘five main features’ of the atonement as they are found in the biblical witness (namely that God’s only Son has “*given himself up for us all*”, to the extent of “*exchanging places with us*”, so that humanity may be “*liberated*” from slavery to sin, also “*drawn into the divine, trinitarian life*”, and all this through “*God’s merciful love*”¹⁸) von Balthasar goes on to engage with Anselm, recognising that he is ‘the first to develop a systematic soteriology, endeavouring to bring together motifs inherited from Scripture and the Fathers, and to integrate them.’¹⁹ Moreover, von Balthasar believes that in Anselm’s undertaking of this task ‘the dramatic dimension of the world’s redemption in Christ came out in his theology as never before, in terms not only of content but also of form.’²⁰

¹⁷ GL2 pp.258-259

¹⁸ TD4 pp.240-244

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.255

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.257

What is it that provides for this dramatic tension? Balthasar has been keen to defend Anselm from criticism by modern scholars that his understanding of the atonement, based on the concept of *satisfactio* taken from the Latin Fathers, is overly 'juridical'. Already in *The Glory of the Lord* (in the context of his discussion on freedom) he has made much of Anselm's emphasis upon the word *sponte*; that it is the free will of God in Christ which makes the difference. 'The fact that freedom cannot be coerced, its incomprehensible spontaneity – *sponte* is the key word of the Anselmian doctrine of redemption – gives to its applications that costliness which belongs only to love and which determines the meaning of what takes place between God and the world.'²¹

This is a theme which is repeated in his account in the *Theo-Drama*. 'This recurrent *sponte* is the leitmotif of the dramatic action.'²² The drama of God's salvation in Christ derives not from an external tension between a God of love and the requirement of justice, but instead from that inner tension between love and justice which arises from the nature of the characters involved. Anselm 'describes an action that takes place between God and the world; through the unity of "freedom" (on God's side) and "necessity", this action has the vibrancy of a closed dramatic action with an inner logic that comes, not from the necessity of a fate that overwhelms freedom (*necessitas antecedens*) but from a necessity arising from the free characters of the parties concerned (*necessitas sequens*).'²³

²¹ *GL2* pp.243-244

²² *TD4* p.258

²³ *Ibid.* p.257

In offering an account of how it is that that God in Christ (and thus in man) provides that recompense or satisfaction which sinful humanity of itself cannot undertake, von Balthasar recognises in Anselm 'a necessary transition in theology from an aesthetic to a dramatic view of the world... Anselm's "*honor*" is the "glory" of God in a contemporary form...' But at the same time Anselm's dramatic account does not lose the aesthetic dimension; rather 'it brings out the dramatic dimension in the "beauty" of the divine world plan – a dimension that was latent hitherto. In fact, the interplay of this interlocking necessity (*necessitas*) and God's perfect unabridged freedom... brings out the aesthetic dimension that is preserved and nurtured by the dramatic.'²⁴

All of which is not to say that von Balthasar finds his account to be totally satisfactory. 'Anselm's interpretation of the mystery of redemption fascinated all who came after him, but it has its flaws.'²⁵ In particular he has in mind the way that the focus of Anselm's account appears almost exclusively on Christ's suffering death on the cross, rather than on his entire life, work and ministry. For von Balthasar, this means that it is not so clear how Christ's atoning death can be appropriated as 'for us', as part of the way in which human being comes to share in the life of God, (particularly in light of Anselm's rather strange view that, in the New Testament, Christ's sufferings are not to be interpreted as expiatory but rather exemplary.) However, the fascinating thing in this respect is to see just where von Balthasar alleges that such flaws have their origin, namely in Anselm's self-conscious methodological decision to argue *remoto Christo* – with Christ removed, as if nothing were known of him.²⁶

²⁴ TD4 p.258

²⁵ *Ibid.* p.260

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.255

For it is precisely this phrase, and concern over what he believed to be fundamental misreadings of it, that goes right to the heart of Barth's radical re-interpretation of Anselm. In his study, he was quite clear that this phrase and way of arguing could not be construed so as to allow a legitimate role for philosophical reasoning over against theological argument. When he refers to what he admits is 'the much disputed rule which Anselm adopted for his work *Cur Deus homo*', Barth goes on to say that 'not for a moment do Scripture and *Credo* cease to be the presupposition and object of his thinking, only that whenever he comes up against a particular problem where he is concerned with its scientific answer, he refrains from drawing upon the statements of the Bible or the *Credo* for his answer or basing his answer upon their authority.'²⁷

That is to say that for Barth, Anselm's phrase refers simply to a theological approach, the methodological bracketing out of some aspects of faith which are yet to be proved by deduction from others, while all of them remain subject to God's revelation in Scripture (and thus to the biblical witness to Christ.) That such a phrase (together with Anselm's other disputed term *sola ratione*) does not give validity to an independent human rationality and allow for the claims of a natural (rather than revealed) theology is a point to which Barth will return time and again throughout the *Church Dogmatics*.²⁸

Von Balthasar's attention to this phrase is rather different. His concern is that such a 'methodological restriction' effectively rules out much of the content of salvation history, from the historical covenant which God makes with Israel (and through Noah

²⁷ *FQI* p.43

²⁸ Examples can be found in *CD1.1* p.16f., *CD1.2* p.8f., *CD2.1* p.92f., and *CD4.3* pp.346 and 369

with all humankind) all the way through to the vision of the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem. The lack of such a context to draw on thus serves to obscure the reality that the sufferings of Christ on the cross can be comprehended fully only in light of the Incarnation, something which is crucial to the teachings of the Fathers. What is important about God in Christ coming to take on human flesh is that it involves also God in Christ coming to share our common humanity and point the way by which human beings can come to share in the life of God. 'What is lacking is the link with the Son's trinitarian *missio*, his "sending" by the Father on the basis of his *processio*... What is also missing is the organic connection between Christ and all other human beings, which is established by the Incarnation and on which the Fathers lay such stress.'²⁹

This is a theological point which von Balthasar is making, but it is one which extends far beyond the epistemological and methodological considerations which so preoccupy Barth in his study. And highlighting the differences in their respective interpretations of this particular phrase helps to draw out the broader differences in their approach to Anselm's theology as a whole.

6.4) Summary and Conclusions

What Barth discovers in Anselm is a properly theological method which nevertheless affirms the inherent rationality of faith (and beyond that of reality as a whole.) Moreover, following his study of Anselm, Barth goes further in his *Church Dogmatics*

²⁹ TD4 p.261

to use the presuppositions of Anselm's 'theological scheme' as partners in his polemic against natural theology (and the Catholic Church) on the one hand and the claims of autonomous human rationality (and liberal Protestantism) on the other.

Von Balthasar likewise is sensitive to the profoundly theological basis of Anselm's work, even when it appears most philosophical in nature. He recognises how Anselm's analysis of the relationship between faith and reason has helped provide a firm foundation for Barth's subsequent theological work. However, he cannot accept Barth's attempts to draw Anselm into what he regards as a thoroughly anachronistic antagonism between natural and revealed theology because, as *The Glory of the Lord* will make clear, Anselm writes at a time before the rise of the natural sciences increasingly forced theology and philosophy to go their separate ways, meaning that theologians could no longer rely upon a unified theory of being.

For von Balthasar, the significance of Anselm cannot be restricted to the spheres of epistemology and theological method, however important they are. For with Anselm it is impossible to comprehend something of the beauty of God's truth without being taken up into the transforming reality of God's life. There can be no analogy of faith without an analogy of being, in which the believer is drawn into the transforming love of God. For von Balthasar, as for Anselm, this is not simply about the individual experience of living the Christian life; it involves nothing less than participation with Christ and his saints in the life of his Church.

Moreover, with the emergence of these themes, namely the transformation of being and the role and life of the Church, we are back to that work in which von Balthasar first identified the significance of Anselm and began his dialogue with Barth, namely *The Theology of Karl Barth*. We have *in nuce* replayed the argument of our whole thesis – that reaction to Barth is a key shaper of von Balthasar's theology as it emerges in his theological trilogy.

Chapter 7) Epilogue and concluding reflections

7.1) *Epilogue*

In his short work *Epilogue*,¹ published in 1987 after the last volume of the *Theo-Logic*, von Balthasar gave his intention to offer not a 'digest' or summary of the arguments set out over the course of his great trilogy, but rather an explanation of why he had adopted the approach he did, taking as his starting point not the fundamental doctrinal themes of Christian faith (the Trinity, christology, eschatology etc.) but instead the transcendentals of being, the beautiful, the good and the true.

The book is set out in three parts, using the metaphor of a building or cathedral. In the 'entrance-hall' (or *Vorhalle*)² we hear the competing claims not just of Christianity but of other religions and philosophies. But to von Balthasar's mind, there is one underlying question which modern positivist philosophies simply do not ask; that is concerning the meaning of a being which of its essence asks after meanings. For von Balthasar it is this question which suggests that being is the central issue, and it leads him across the 'threshold' (or *Schwelle*). The key to his approach to this issue will be a simple one; 'whoever sees (more of) the truth, is (more profoundly) right'³ and the three characteristics which bring out the fullness of being are its capacities for 'self-showing' (*Sich-zeigen*) for 'self-giving' (*Sich-geben*) and for 'self-saying' (*Sich-sagen*). These qualities lead naturally to an association with the beautiful, the

¹ *Epilog* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987) tr. Edward T. Oakes, *Epilogue* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004) hereafter *EP*

² The translator here uses what is perhaps a more American term, namely 'forecourt'.

³ *EP* pp.15 and 43

good and the true, and in turn set the scene for von Balthasar's exposition of his *Aesthetics*, followed by the *Dramatics*, and concluding with the *Theo-Logic*.

They also establish the route for drawing together all the questions raised by the various religions and philosophies, thus enabling the enquirer to cross the threshold of faith and enter into the 'cathedral' (or *Dom*). There, in the inner sanctuary of Catholic Christian faith, will be found the 'sacred "public" *arcana* of Christian revelation',⁴ the three inter-connected doctrinal themes at the heart of Christian faith, namely 'Christology and Trinity', 'The Word becomes Flesh' and 'Fruitfulness'. Given what we have already set out in our earlier chapters on the trilogy, the re-emergence of such subjects should come as no surprise. But it is significant that here again von Balthasar returns to the central themes which, as we have seen, were at the heart of both what he learnt from Barth (namely the foundations for a christocentrism) and what he challenged in Barth (namely the inadequacy of his doctrine of the Church) which led von Balthasar to centre on the image of the vine and the theme of fruitfulness. And all of these are held together by the analogy of being. 'This is possible only because all that is true in the world "hold[s] together" in him (Col 1:17), which in turn presupposes that the *analogia entis* is personified in him, that he is the adequate sign, surrender, and expression of God within finite being.'⁵

Moreover, it is also fascinating to see how here in the *Epilogue* von Balthasar uses an architectural metaphor (in terms of the entrance-hall, threshold and sanctuary) to help articulate his theology. For the argument of this thesis has been that it is von

⁴ *EP* p.89

⁵ *Ibid.*

Balthasar's critical engagement with Barth which was to exercise just such a structural influence upon the development of his own theology; and that it was the debate over the analogy of being which led von Balthasar to re-affirm the centrality of ontology alongside revelation and to construct his own great trilogy in terms of the transcendentals of being.

The opening chapter of this thesis began by examining the relationship between these two great twentieth century theologians, exploring how their meeting and the friendship and discussions which emerged from it would go on to influence von Balthasar's theological development. Clearly there was an important geographical context to this encounter as von Balthasar came to be Catholic chaplain at the University of Basel, the university to which Barth had returned after being ejected from his previous appointment in Germany. But more than that, there was an equally important intellectual and theological context to their meeting. This was epitomised in the person of Erich Przywara, the Jesuit colleague and former mentor of von Balthasar, who had become one of Barth's principal Catholic debating partners whilst in Münster, and whose ideas had prompted Barth to rethink and reformulate his theology in that process which gave rise to the *Church Dogmatics*.

Moreover, it is also significant that during the time of their meeting and emerging friendship both theologians were at something of a crossroads. For Barth, having left behind his companions in the so-called 'dialectical theology movement', there was the prospect of a new and Catholic colleague equally concerned to abandon the dead ends of nineteenth century philosophy and restore theology to its proper roots

in the scriptures and christology. For von Balthasar, there was a distinguished, ecumenical colleague willing to dig beneath the arguments dividing Christianity since the Reformation and to uncover their common roots in the Bible and the Church Fathers. Furthermore, the fact that this was happening at a time when von Balthasar's own relationship with the Catholic Church was under pressure (as his determination to proceed with the plans which he and Adrienne von Speyr had developed for a secular community led him to leave the Jesuit order) meant that this was both a challenging and yet deeply fruitful time of development.

7.2) *The Theology of Karl Barth*

The result of their encounter was of von Balthasar's seminal study *The Theology of Karl Barth*. In our second chapter we have sought to show both why this was such a significant work for the interpretation of Barth and why it was to prove such a landmark in von Balthasar's own subsequent theological development. In his study von Balthasar was acclaiming Barth as *the* theologian who had returned Protestantism to its proper roots in the reformers and in the Bible, and at the same time offering a response as a Catholic theologian to the challenge which Barth had laid at the door of Catholic theology. But the key to all of this, in von Balthasar's eyes, lay in a proper understanding of the role and use of analogy. For it was with the move beyond the constraints of dialectical theology towards the use of analogy that von Balthasar identified the key development which enabled Barth to leave behind his hitherto abortive attempts and begin his monumental *Church Dogmatics*. And it was in Barth's distinction between the *analogia entis* and the *analogia fidei*, between the

analogy of being and the analogy of faith, that von Balthasar both located and responded to his challenge to Catholic theology.

We have recognised that such an interpretation of Barth has recently been challenged, not least by McCormack's recent work. McCormack alleges that the 'von Balthasar thesis' both overplays the importance of Anselm in the development of Barth's theology and underplays the extent to which Barth remains throughout his work a 'critically realistic dialectical theologian'. Our argument is not so much with McCormack's revisionist interpretation of Barth (although we have argued that von Balthasar's own interpretation was more subtle and nuanced than McCormack always allows); but it is to say that von Balthasar's assessment of the importance of analogy, which arose from his study and response to Barth, was to become a crucial factor in his own development and in the emergence of his own theological trilogy.

For in focusing his study on Barth on the centrality of analogy, von Balthasar was concerned to do two separate things. On the one hand, he was concerned to defend his mentor Erich Przywara (in whom Barth had located the source of the dispute) from what he regarded as Barth's misinterpretation of the concept of the analogy of being (and in so doing to reaffirm a more general Catholic position on the relationship between nature and grace.) And on the other, he was concerned that Barth's own conversion to analogy, in his case to the analogy of faith, was as yet incomplete. For in concentrating so narrowly upon the revelatory aspect of God's grace in Christ, Barth's approach did not allow sufficiently for that same grace, both within human being and the life of the Church, to be present and transform the whole of creation.

Barth had moved towards the use of analogy – but he had not moved far enough. It was only with a proper (and admittedly christologically refocused) use of the analogy of being that theology could properly articulate God's saving activity in Christ.

Our chapter on *The Theology of Karl Barth* sought to demonstrate what von Balthasar regarded as Barth's significant achievement. Barth's challenge had served to re-focus the attention of all theologians upon what should be their central concern, namely upon God's revelation in Christ rather than on notions of human, social and religious development under the influence of nineteenth century liberal Protestantism. Moreover, in so doing, Barth had also recovered something very precious, something which von Balthasar believed had been lost not only to liberal Protestantism but to the Thomist influenced scholasticism of his own Catholic training, namely a sense of the glory of God. In Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, von Balthasar discovered a proper theological aesthetics, a sense of the beauty of God and the sheer joy accompanying the knowledge of God's revelation. Von Balthasar wanted to draw on that insight and to affirm its importance for Catholic theologians too. Indeed the conclusion to his study was to assert that, following Barth's influence, the central themes for all future Catholic theology should include 'the foundations for a christocentrism', for 'the historicity of nature' and for 'the created character of worldly truth'.

But this chapter also sought to show where von Balthasar identified shortcomings in Barth's approach. For despite the move away from dialectic, he still saw the abiding influence of German Idealism in 'the inner compulsion in Barth's theology to become

a system'. Just as with another of Barth's debating partners Schleiermacher, there was the temptation to try and draw everything together under one guiding concept.

The example which von Balthasar took was Barth's christological re-interpretation of the doctrine of election. Despite all the wonderful theological insights which it offered in terms of the relationship between creation and covenant, there were also dangers. In particular, there was the very real danger that since everything appeared already to have been done in Christ, there was no room or place for human response, no sense in which it really made a difference whether Christians took up the cross and lived the life of faith. It is this concern which formed the basis of his allegation of *Engführung*, of christological constriction. But it was also a weakness which von Balthasar claimed ran into his doctrine of the Church. For all that Barth was offering a *Church* dogmatics, his doctrine of the Church was simply inadequate, in light of the scriptural evidence, to allow her to serve as God's gift through which believers came to bear fruit as they shared in the life of Christ and the transformation of the world.

Moreover, for von Balthasar, all of this was linked to the key debate over analogy. The biblical witness was not just concerned with God's revelation in Jesus but with the transformation of believers in Christ. To explain how that transformation, that human participation in the divine life could take place, theology required an adequate concept not only of revelation but also of being, and for von Balthasar it was this which the analogy of being, christologically reinterpreted, offered. It did not seek to claim an identity between God and humanity (which was the problem which Barth inherited from Idealism) nor to argue that was no ontological relationship between the

two (which would deny the reality of creation); instead it affirmed that analogical relationship of 'similarity in dissimilarity' which allowed for human growth and development within the life of Christ.

This thesis has argued that the role of analogy was central to von Balthasar's study. However, this was not just the 'conversion to analogy' as a model for the interpretation of Barth (which McCormack's study has criticised), but something much broader; for the analogy of being to be a central principle for all Christian theology. The substance of this thesis is that through his defence of the concept (which he learnt from his mentor Przywara) von Balthasar had come to appreciate in a new way just how crucial this principle was, not merely to rebut Barth's challenge to Catholicism, but to ensure the adequacy of all future Christian theology. Thus it should come as no surprise to find that von Balthasar took the concept of 'being' as the controlling theme around which the whole of his theological trilogy was to be structured, and it is to this development that our subsequent chapters have turned.

7.3) *The Glory of the Lord*

The task which von Balthasar set himself in his Theological Aesthetics, *The Glory of the Lord*, was, in a sense, to do more thoroughly that very important job which Barth had begun in his *Church Dogmatics*, namely to recover that sense of the divine beauty in the glory of God. But however significant the start which Barth had made, for von Balthasar his approach was bound to be limited, in that his unwillingness fully

to engage with ontology and the concept of being meant that his understanding of theological aesthetics was limited to the act of God's revelation in Christ.

This was no less important for von Balthasar, but for him it was only a starting point. What was just as crucial was that transformation of being which began in Christ but then went on to transfigure the whole of creation, thus enabling it to share in the revelation of the divine glory. With this objective in mind, as our third chapter has demonstrated, the analogy of being was to play a key structural role throughout *The Glory of the Lord*, and in two very important and distinctive ways.

In the first place (and similarly to the way in which Barth had alleged that a loss of focus on the Word of God has bedevilled much of liberal Protestant theology) von Balthasar alleged that the loss of a unified concept of 'being', in which the use of analogy played such a central role, crucially weakened all subsequent Christian theology from about the thirteenth century. For von Balthasar, the critical figure at this moment of transition was Aquinas and his concern was to re-interpret and defend him, both from Barth's criticism and from the subsequent scholasticism which von Balthasar (and his colleagues Przywara and de Lubac) so abhorred. For with the loss of a unified concept of 'being', and the subsequent separation of theology from spirituality with the development of the schools and the increasing assertion of autonomous human reason, von Balthasar argued that theology lost its ability to rejoice in the beauty of God. This is reflected in the structure of *The Glory of the Lord*, with the division of the two volumes of *Studies in Theological Style* into *Clerical* and *Lay Styles*, as appreciation of the beauty of God was relegated to the periphery

of the Church. It is this same development which marked the distinction between *The Realm of Metaphysics* in *Antiquity* and in *The Modern Age* in volumes 4 and 5, as the loss of aesthetic vision came to weaken not only theology but the philosophical enterprise as well.

However the analogy of being was being used not just in a negative role, in that its absence showed just where theology and philosophy had gone so badly wrong. As it was christologically re-interpreted in light of the debate with Barth, analogy also had a positive role to play in terms of bridging the gap between revelation and transformation, between epistemology and ontology. Von Balthasar's use of the analogy of being enabled him to interpret God's coming in Christ as much more than a revelatory event. In light of Christ's coming to share in human being, it opened the possibility for believers to participate in the divine life. Moreover, in utilising the concept of 'archetypal experience', we have seen how von Balthasar argued that the apostles, and above all, Mary, the mother of Jesus, went on to shape the pattern of all Christian experience and thus model the life of the Church.

This approach enabled von Balthasar to do two things. In the first place it enabled him to 'extend' his christological focus, so that the Christ event now continued to include the life of the disciples. Secondly, by showing how it was not just the lives of individual believers but the corporate life of the institutional Church which was being taken up into and transformed by the life of Christ, von Balthasar was offering a perspective from which the Church could more clearly be seen for what she is. The Church is not just the Body of Christ, the various limbs which take their meaning and

purpose from the Head, but also the Bride of Christ, God's chosen partner and the vehicle for revealing his glory to the world. Thus it is that the analogy of being, which allowed for the life of individual Christians to be shaped by the archetypal experience of the apostles and thus to be drawn into the life of Christ, at the same time enabled von Balthasar to offer a christologically based model of Church which addressed many of the shortcomings which he had alleged in *The Theology of Karl Barth*.

7.4) *The Theo-Drama*

However, it was not just Barth's doctrine of the Church which von Balthasar reckoned to be deficient. Inextricably linked with this was his concern with 'christological constriction', his charge that Barth had so accounted for God's saving activity in Christ that there was no need or room for human response to God's grace, a position which, on the face of it, would appear to rob creation of its meaning and purpose. Our chapter on the *Theo-Drama* has sought to show how von Balthasar's adoption of a consciously dramatic approach has its roots in the assertion that human beings do have a real and relevant, if subsidiary, part to play in God's great act of redemption. Nor are we alone in this, for have noted how scholars such as Ben Quash have similarly suggested that there is a sense in which the *Theo-Drama* can be construed as a response to the restrictions on human agency that von Balthasar found in Barth.

Once again the concept of analogy occupied a central place, creating the characters and establishing the stage directions for human beings to play their part. As von Balthasar established the role call of *dramatis personae*, it became clear that it was

‘Man in God’ and ‘the Person in Christ’ who would act. What was offered to human beings was a share in the divine drama taking place between the persons and relationships in the divine Trinity. Human beings developed their role in the drama as they discovered their mission and purpose in Christ, since it was only by coming to share in the life of Christ that they were able to discern their true character or what it meant truly to be human and made in the image of God. It was the analogy of being that served to account for that similarity in dissimilarity which enabled the lives of individual Christians to be transformed as they were drawn into the life of Christ.

But von Balthasar was not just concerned with the transformation of the lives of individual Christians. Following on from his earlier criticisms of Barth, he was concerned also to show how the Church had a role to play, as what he termed a ‘theo-dramatic character’ in her own right. That is to say that the Church was more than just the accumulation of the lives of individual Christians; she was also the body which shaped the life of believers and created the stage upon which the drama of salvation continues to be acted out, in that ongoing dramatic tension which continues between the decisive event of the cross and the ‘Last Act’. Moreover the Church also had a crucial role to play as witness to the truth of God (as we would see in the third part of his trilogy, namely the *Theo-Logic*.)

At the same time we also discovered that there were issues surrounding von Balthasar’s treatment of the Church. In particular, we noted Quash’s concern that for there to be a real dramatic tension, there needed to be some uncertainty about the outcome, some space left upon the stage for the actors to play their part and realise

their roles. Quash's conclusion is that von Balthasar's over-arching model of 'harmonious resolution' in the institutional life of the Church appeared to preclude some of these possibilities. Indeed, we wondered whether von Balthasar's approach in this regard might need to address the counter-charge of 'ecclesiological constriction' hinted at by Barth towards the end of his *Church Dogmatics*.

7.5) *The Theo-Logic*

In our chapter on the *Theo-Logic* we recognised that the publication dates alone suggested that this work is less directly influenced by engagement with Barth than the previous ones. However, we argued that the position that von Balthasar took up in the opening volume revealed many of the themes which would form a central part of his critical engagement with Barth in the years to come. For in offering a critique of Karl Rahner's re-interpretation of Aquinas and the 'turn to the subject' of his transcendental method, von Balthasar instead emphasised the objectivity of divine truth encountered in the meeting with God. Key to this exposition were the concepts drawn from Przywara (and the subject of his subsequent debate with Barth) namely the analogy of being and the role of polarity in providing a dynamic tension to the encounter with God. It was not surprising then that the conclusions of this first volume would be strikingly consistent with the key themes which would be identified in his study of Barth, not least his emphasis on the created character of worldly truth and insistence that the truth of the world could not be understood outside of God's revelation in Christ.

What this would mean for the truth of God would not be worked out in detail until the last two volumes, by which time the direct influence of Barth would be, as we have recognised, considerably diffused. However, in the reworked general introduction which placed his earlier work in the context of his overall trilogy, we have noted how von Balthasar, by taking truth as the third transcendental of being after beauty and goodness, is once again reaffirming his central assertion that theology must have a proper ontology, based on the analogy of being. The last two volumes in turn reflect upon the objective and subjective aspects of God's truth, like Barth from within a consciously trinitarian framework. But once again it is noticeable that von Balthasar, even when dealing with the subjective witness to God's truth in the Holy Spirit, nevertheless emphasised the objective role of the institutional Church. The dramatic character of God's revelation in Christ must allow for human beings to play their part in response to God's gracious activity. Yet for von Balthasar this took place above all as individuals are drawn into the life of the Church and their lives transformed as they come to participate in the life of Christ. It is here that we have returned to that counter-challenge with which von Balthasar ended his study of Barth.

'The Church as the Body of Christ has always owed her generation to the vertical event of the grace of Incarnation. This grounds her mission as the Body of Christ... to lead her members into the event of faith and encounter with her divine Head. Because of this, the Church is embedded between event as origin and event as goal. But as a Body, she must endure between these two events, and endure both in her supernatural as well as in her natural aspects...

Protestantism hesitates to acknowledge the disappearance of grace in nature... It prefers to see the Church on earth according to the image of the heavenly eschatological Jerusalem to come. But we must allow grace this foolishness of naturalizing itself. This is indeed the very pinnacle of grace: revealing its sheer gratuity in this moment of alienation – in the cry of forsakenness on the Cross, when Christ gave up his Spirit to the Father and the world. For it is this Spirit, poured out from a dead body, that is renewing the face of the earth.’⁶

7.6) Other recent interpretations

The glory of God, which takes as its starting point the divine beauty revealed in Jesus Christ and which is present not just in revelation but in the transformation of creation; the role of the Church as a theo-dramatic character in her own right, in which individual Christians are called to make their own response and play their part in the drama of salvation; the centrality of the analogy of being, which enables human beings to participate and be drawn up into the divine life; all these are themes which we have explored, using the debate between Barth and von Balthasar as the starting point from which we can see more clearly how von Balthasar’s theology developed. However, all this is not to say that Barth was the *only* source from which von Balthasar draws or the only theologian who would influence his work. As the secondary literature on von Balthasar has grown, so too have the number of recent works which have identified other influences on his work, and sought in their own way to show how these have been decisive for the development of his theology.

⁶ KB pp.388-89

Two important studies in this regard are Mark McIntosh's *Christology from Within*⁷ and Kevin Mongrain's *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*.⁸ What is notable about each of these two studies is the way in which they emphasise both the importance of the Church Fathers upon von Balthasar and the way in which his interpretation of this tradition has been influenced by his Jesuit experience and the writings of his contemporaries.

For McIntosh, the key to understanding von Balthasar is that he offers a christology not so much from 'above' or 'below' as from 'within'; that is to say, 'an analysis of Christ from the perspective of those women and men who have mystically entered *within* the life of Christ'.⁹ In such a 'christology from within', von Balthasar is operating within a Chalcedonian framework, but the two key influences which McIntosh identifies are those of Maximus the Confessor and Ignatius of Loyola. From Maximus the Confessor, von Balthasar draws the insight that the eternal Son possesses the divine essence according to his mode of existence, so that Christ's humanity is lived out according to a pattern of life which is the perfect enactment in human terms of the Son's eternal mode of existence. From Ignatius, von Balthasar is able to draw on that spirituality characterised by the 'framework of Ignatian election and obedience to mission',¹⁰ so as to draw out the implications of Chalcedonian christology in more human and existential terms.

⁷ Mark McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000)

⁸ Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: an Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002)

⁹ McIntosh, *Op. cit.* p.2

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.7

Putting the two together enables von Balthasar to locate the life of discipleship within the mission of Christ, so that 'as Christ draws others into his existence, then we could say for von Balthasar the Incarnation is a communal event with an individual centre, Jesus of Nazareth.' At the same time, this exposition also enables McIntosh to acknowledge the importance of von Balthasar's "dramatic" analogy; how Jesus, in von Balthasar's reading, 'becomes a stage for the drama of human existence' and how 'the new shape and dynamic which he gives to humankind's relationship with God becomes the free space that each human being needs to enact her or his particular mission and so come to personal fulfilment.'¹¹ Moreover, within this mystical and corporate christology, McIntosh also recognises the influence of Origen, in particular his three-fold concept of the Incarnation of the Word, that is as revealed in scripture, as embodied in the flesh, and as dwelling in the life of the Church.

This insight is significant for two reasons; in the first place because it reminds us of that theme in von Balthasar which we have already noted, which is to use the analogy of being to affirm 'the identity in distinction' of the historical Christ and his mystical body which is the Church; but secondly because it is a theme which is also picked up extensively by Kevin Mongrain in his study. However, for Mongrain, what is much more important is the way in which this concept of the *corpus triforme*, the three-fold Incarnation of the Word, however much it may be associated with Origen, actually begins with, and is developed by, another of the Church Fathers, namely Irenaeus of Lyons.

¹¹ McIntosh, *Op. cit.* pp.131-2

The central theme of Mongrain's book (which is subtitled 'An Irenaean retrieval') is that the key influence upon von Balthasar is Irenaeus, as interpreted by von Balthasar's colleague in the whole *ressourcement* project, Henri de Lubac. 'My thesis is that von Balthasar came to see Irenaeus of Lyons' theology of the mutual glorification of God and humanity in Christ as the best articulation of the theological vision presented by de Lubac. Irenaeus, read through de Lubac's lens, therefore became von Balthasar's primary critical resource from the patristic archive for reforming contemporary Catholic theology and challenging various modern intellectual movements in theology, culture and politics.'¹²

For Mongrain, von Balthasar's 'foundational theme', which is 'Irenaeus' paradoxical and doxological theology of the mutual glorification of God and creation', is allied to Irenaeus' understanding of a *corpus triforme* christology. This doctrine 'sees the Body of Christ as a temporal sacrament symbolising the Word's incarnation in a three-phase historical process', the first of which occurred in the old covenant, the second in Jesus of Nazareth, and the third which is currently unfolding in the new covenant.¹³ The 'doxa-logic' of this argument continues as von Balthasar 'follows Irenaeus's lead in asserting this Christology's three logical corollaries: the unity of the old and new covenants, the unity of creation and redemption, and the unity of the Spirit of the risen Christ and the institutional church'.¹⁴ It is this structure which Mongrain will follow as his study seeks to interpret the systematic argument of von Balthasar's theology as a whole.

¹² Mongrain, *Op.cit.* p.16

¹³ *Ibid.* pp.28-29

Mongrain recognises that such an interpretation of von Balthasar requires 'attentive reading' because 'it is easy to overlook the presence of the Irenaeian paradigm in the midst of the panorama of theologies he discusses.' Specifically, he has to admit that von Balthasar 'does not explicitly identify Irenaeus as the most important figure for interpreting his theology', and that 'the order of his argument for unifying beauty, goodness and truth does not follow an obviously Irenaeian pattern, nor do his forays into aesthetics and dramatic theory have an Irenaeian precedent.' Nevertheless, his argument is that the three essays which von Balthasar wrote on Irenaeus (of which two appear in the trilogy, namely the chapter on Irenaeus in Volume 2 of *The Glory of the Lord* and the long *excursus* on *Against Heresies* in Volume 2 of the *Theo-Drama*) 'provide the template for reading his work as a whole'.¹⁵

Viewed from this perspective, Mongrain argues that the influence of Barth can be overstated. Whilst not denying the mutual respect, even fascination, which these two theologians had for each other, he avers that '[Barth's] influence on von Balthasar has been greatly overstated' and that von Balthasar 'was fascinated by Barth's theology only to the extent that he saw it as a friendly rival to de Lubac's program of theological reform'.¹⁶ On Mongrain's reading, Barth's influence was important only in so far as he accorded with the general patristic consensus (and was reproved and corrected when not.) Their theological debates were significant not so much in their own right but rather as a 'dress rehearsal' for the major theological projects to come.

¹⁴ Mongrain, *Op. cit.* p.51

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.27

By contrast, McIntosh has a much more positive reading of Barth's influence on von Balthasar, even when interpreted through a patristic lens and allowing for that perspective. For him, the significance of the way in which von Balthasar's used the insights of Maximus the Confessor (and thus transposed his discussion of christology from essentialist to actualist terms) is that he is 'in this way following Karl Barth in trying to capture the historical movement, the *eventful* quality of Jesus' existence'.¹⁷ Similarly, elsewhere in his work McIntosh refers to Barth, together with Maximus, as 'two of von Balthasar's favoured conversation partners' and 'more often than not a springboard for von Balthasar'.¹⁸

This thesis does not deny that Balthasar is drawing on a wide range of sources, of which the Fathers, including Irenaeus, Maximus and indeed Origen are all going to have an important role to play. How could it, when Irenaeus is one of the twelve theologians chosen for particular study in *The Glory of the Lord*; or again when his approach is one of the models for patristic accounts of the atonement offered in the *Theo-Drama*?¹⁹ When studies of Origen and Maximus the Confessor (and indeed Gregory of Nyssa and other patristic figures) will be among the first of his published works? Or when the whole thrust of von Balthasar's theological enterprise is to offer a comprehensive account of theology and philosophy from pre-Christian times right up to the renewed quest for the historical Jesus in the twentieth century?

¹⁶ Mongrain, *Op cit.* p.10

¹⁷ McIntosh, *Op.cit.* p.5

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 86 and 138

¹⁹ Though equally a similar case could be made, for example, with Anselm of Canterbury who plays a similar role both in *The Glory of the Lord* and the *Theo-Drama*, as we have argued in Chapter 6.

However what this thesis does argue is that it is the *form* of von Balthasar's debate with Barth (centring on a christological re-interpretation of the analogy of being) which provides the *key* influence which in turn goes on to govern the *structure* of von Balthasar's subsequent trilogy. We have argued that von Balthasar's decision, consciously to structure his whole theological trilogy around beauty, goodness and truth as the three transcendentals of being, is itself a reflection of his abiding concern that Barth's exposition of the analogy of faith in the *Church Dogmatics* is inadequate without reference to the analogy of being. And that for von Balthasar, Barth's very proper christocentric focus on epistemology and revelation is incomplete without an accompanying ontology which allows for the transformation of humanity, and indeed all creation, in Christ.

7.7) 'Concluding unscientific postscript'

Such a thesis, focusing as it does upon historical figures, their meeting, mutual influencing and development, may appear somewhat old-fashioned and 'historico-critical', particularly when so much of recent scholarly discussion about von Balthasar is taking place in the context of the post-modern concern for 'difference' and 'otherness'.²⁰ Moreover, it is offered at a time when the ecumenical origins and impact of von Balthasar's work (at least in terms of the debate with Barth over analogy) may appear to be somewhat diluted.²¹ In recent years appreciation of von

²⁰ See the articles in Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward (eds.), *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1999) especially Rowan Williams 'Afterword: Making Differences' pp.174-179. See also the recent study by D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) especially pp.1-95

²¹ The publication of Rodney Howsare's very recent study, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of His Theological Style* (London & New York: T & T Clark Int'l., 2005)

Balthasar's contribution has grown within the Vatican and the Catholic hierarchy, especially after the death of Adrienne von Speyr removed some of the historical complexities around his career, and as the reforms following Vatican II led to a reaction not just among conservatives but also among those who had hoped for a renewed engagement with the tradition of the Church.

Aidan Nichols recognises something of the changed status accorded von Balthasar in the later stages of his life, when he writes that, 'Separated from Adrienne... his intellectual stature increasingly self-evident, he was exactly the kind of anti-liberal but reforming theologian, neo-patristic in his sympathies, with whom the Roman see in the later years of Paul VI's pontificate and that of John Paul II liked to do business.'²² This influence was marked with the award of the International Paul VI Prize in 1984 and his appointment as a Cardinal shortly before his death in 1988.

Nor has that influence diminished since his death. The election of Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 marks the appointment of a man who was a colleague, co-author, and collaborator in the setting up of the International Catholic Review, known as *Communio*. One prominent commentator upon Vatican affairs has gone so far as to state that 'the basic options in Roman Catholic theology after the second Vatican Council (1962-65) can be expressed in terms of a choice between two German-speaking sons of Ignatius Loyola: Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von

came too late for detailed discussion in this thesis. His study reasserts the ecumenical origins of von Balthasar's work, in terms of the influence of Barth and Luther, although his view of the ecumenical implications is addressed less to their confessional differences than to the current methodological differences (correlational vs. revelocentric) between the Chicago and Yale schools of theology.

²² Aidan Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) xix

Balthasar.’²³ Moreover, John L. Allen Jnr. goes on to say that ‘if the Rahnerians held the upper hand for the first 20 years, the Balthasarians dominate today, at least in terms of official Church teaching and policy.’

It was as Cardinal Ratzinger that Benedict, now remembered for his homily at the funeral of Pope John Paul II, had earlier given the homily at von Balthasar’s funeral in the Hofkirche in Lucerne in July 1988. In this address, although there were plenty of references to von Balthasar’s teaching on the Church, in all its Marian, Petrine and Johannine aspects, there were no references to what von Balthasar had learnt from his friendship with the great Reformed theologian in Basel. Given this more recent context, it may appear surprising to find such a strong case being made for the crucial importance of Barth’s very Protestant influence upon this most Catholic of theologians. But there remain two reasons for offering this thesis.

The first goes back to von Balthasar himself. He remained in no doubt of Karl Barth impact upon his life’s work. In his article ‘In Retrospect’, a survey of his own works published in 1965 (just three years before Barth’s death in 1968), he finished by admitting the difficulty of attempting to thank all those who have helped and influenced him - but then went to offer a short list of names ‘because without them obviously nothing of what has been sketched out here would have been possible.’²⁴ His short list included many of those we have encountered in this study: his early companion, the Viennese doctor Rudolf Allers; his Jesuit colleagues, and mentors at

²³ John L. Allen Jnr., writing in the *National Catholic Reporter* on 28th November 2003

²⁴ Von Balthasar, ‘In Retrospect’ in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986) p.219

different stages in his life, Peter Lippert, Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac; his declared inspiration and co-founder of the Community of St. John, Adrienne von Speyr; the writer, Albert Béguin and his close friend, Gustav Siewerth. And above all, it included *Karl Barth*. Von Balthasar's verdict was that, 'It is almost unnecessary to set out how much I owe to Karl Barth: the vision of a comprehensive biblical theology, combined with the urgent invitation to engage in a dogmatically serious ecumenical dialogue, without which the entire movement would lack foundation.'²⁵

Such a task may be 'almost unnecessary' – but not quite. For the argument of this thesis is that setting out what von Balthasar's great theological trilogy owed to his critical engagement with Karl Barth, will help us to read him better and understand more clearly the theological task that he was undertaking. Moreover, it will also serve to clarify the ongoing challenge facing all those who wish to continue the theological enterprise in the footsteps of these two twentieth century theological giants – from whichever theological traditions and church communities they come.

This is my second reason, and it is a deeply personal one. It is not only to recognise that their contribution to the theological task can be better understood and applied when it is seen how their theology grew and developed out of a particular historical context and relationship. It is also to suggest that our own engagement with Barth and von Balthasar in the ecumenical context of today will be better informed and more fruitful if we recognise the impact which their critical engagement had upon each other. This is similar to the view of Ben Quash, who offers a caveat about 'what

²⁵ *Ibid.* in Riches (ed.), *Op.cit.* p.220

might be called the 'eulogistic' genre of Balthasarian studies, often associated with the journal (and movement) *Communio* of which von Balthasar was a co-founder, and which 'avoid raising the really critical challenges to von Balthasar which would allow new developments of his thought, and open him to a wider audience.'²⁶

This has certainly been my experience. My background and tradition is very different to both Barth and von Balthasar. I am an ordained minister of the British Methodist Conference, serving as Superintendent of the Cardiff Circuit in South Wales. I come from a tradition which, whether in terms of Wesley or his antecedents in the Church of England, is largely ignored by both these theologians. I was born into a generation and a country that was largely spared the tumultuous events of the two World Wars which so shaped both of their experience and raised such specific issues about the relationship between Christianity and Western culture. I minister in an ecumenical climate where it is unlikely that reference to the analogy of being would be recognised, let alone adjudged an 'invention of the anti-Christ'.

Yet for all that, the issues raised by the debate between Barth and von Balthasar do have a deep theological resonance for me. I come from a long line of distinctively Free Church and non-conformist ministers. My great-uncle Revd. Henry T. Wigley was General Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council in the 1940's. He was a noted preacher and author of books such as *The Distinctive Free Church Witness To-day* in which he claimed for the Free Churches, including Methodism, a distinctive role in maintaining such essential truths of the Protestant reformation as the freedom

²⁶ Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, p.22, note 31

of the gospel from Church or state control. I have a copy of the 1975 *Methodist Service Book*, occasionally used by my grand-father Revd. Alfred Wigley, which has asterisks marked against sections he deemed to be taken from 'Catholic ritualism' (such as prayers for the dead) and thus unsuitable for use in Methodist worship.

My formative, teenage years in the 1970's were spent alternating between terms at Kingswood School, the boarding school founded by John Wesley for the sons of Methodist ministers, and holidays in Rome, where my parents had moved following my father's work. Worship at school was in the best Methodist tradition, with high standards of music and thoughtful (if sometimes lengthy) sermons. But Sundays in Rome involved worship at Ponte Sant'Angelo, the eclectic, international Methodist congregation just across the river from the Vatican, alongside exposure to the mediaeval and baroque churches in Rome with their rich decorations and rituals, their pictures and frescoes, and their association with the lives of the saints. It meant gazing in wonder at the elaborate *praesepio* or crib scenes on the Campidoglio at Christmas, running across the bridge to join with pilgrims and visitors from all over the world at St. Peter's Square for a papal blessing on Easter Sunday, and taking the opportunity to enter through the Holy Door in 1975 and thus earn a few years' relief from purgatory. It involved also Christmas trips to see pantomimes at the English College in Rome, playing cricket with young priests-in-training at the Palazzuolo in the hills by Lago di Albano, and youth club weekends in the same Catholic setting.

This was a vision of a very different kind of Christianity. In contrast to the plain and simple worship in which I had grown up, here was a vision of Church which was

colourful and celebratory, even gaudy, full of elaborate buildings and rituals and even more elaborate stories and legends. Here was an aesthetic dimension which I could not ignore, for at times it was almost overwhelming; a sense, notwithstanding the all too familiar details of human frailty and decay which were and are everywhere to be found in Rome, of the presence of the glory of God. And in the midst of it all this ecclesiastical grandeur, I became aware too of ecumenical bible studies and prayer groups, some of them taking place in our own home, with my grand-father discovering, after all his years of ministry in non-conformist chapels across the North of England, that he could meet to pray the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, with young Catholic priests in training.

How could such an earthy and incarnate Catholic vision of the glory of God be squared with my Protestant, even Puritan, heritage of that simple dignity which adorns the life and worship of the people of God? In a sense, that is a question which has remained with me throughout my life, not least in the seventeen years of ordained ministry which have followed since my training at the (ecumenical) Queen's College in Birmingham. It is a question which raises its head again as I share in von Balthasar's sense of excitement at Barth's rediscovery of the beauty and joy of the divine glory – and his urgency to press the issue further, as if to ask, 'Can we not allow our human response, in all its divinely inspired creativity, to reflect back to God that glory which God has shared with us? Isn't this what Christ's Church is for?'

I want to say 'yes' – but it can't be an unequivocal 'yes', a 'yes' without reservation or sense of apology and confession. For it is equally impossible to grow up in Rome (or

to attend the 'pomp and circumstance' of the Methodist Conference for that matter) and not be aware of those very human imperfections which intrude upon the giving of glory to God. The very buildings which inspire awe and reverence are themselves memorials to papal intrigues and aspirations; the places of prayer are equally a source of revenue to local traders and a useful rendezvous for foreign tourists. The history of the Church in Rome, as evidenced by the names of places and piazzas, includes families like the Borgias as well as the Borromeos.

How can the Church be the people or the place in which the glory of God is revealed? It's not an easy question (whether in baroque Rome or in the Victorian Gothic characteristic of so many Methodist churches I have known) or one to which Barth or von Balthasar would offer the same answer. But it is a question which goes to the heart of their relationship and critical engagement with each other. And it is a question to which I can find, from the resources of my own tradition, at least the beginning of an answer.

For each year, worship in the Methodist Church begins with a special service called the Covenant service. Its origins go back to John Wesley, though much of the material he borrowed from William Law and the early religious societies. It's a serious and solemn service in which the Methodist people are asked to re-commit themselves to the worship and service of God, and it reaches its climax in the Covenant Prayer which the minister introduces, saying;

“Lord God, holy Father,
since you have called us through Christ
to share in this gracious covenant,
we take upon ourselves with joy the yoke of obedience
and, for love of you,
engage ourselves to seek and do your perfect will.
We are no longer our own but yours.”²⁷

In its way, this service is the liturgical expression of Wesley’s characteristic (and controversial) doctrine of Christian perfection, his conviction that if the faithful Christian does respond to God’s offer of grace in Christ, then God will indeed take that life and transform it, sanctifying the believer through his perfect love.

Coming as it does at the beginning of January, Covenant Sunday often coincides with the feast of Epiphany, that festival in which we celebrate the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – as it did a few years ago when, as a minister in Swansea, I was preparing a service to be broadcast live on Radio 4’s Sunday Worship. At the same time I was writing the first draft of my chapter on *The Glory of the Lord*. Both themes, those of Covenant and Epiphany, combined in my mind to address that same question regarding the role of the Church as the vehicle for God’s glory. And although his name was not mentioned once (despite its being for a Radio 4 audience!) it was with von Balthasar I was engaging in my sermon;

²⁷ *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: MPH, 1999) p.290

“Now it’s a long way from Rome to South Wales, and in liturgical terms it may seem an equally long way to travel from the Feast of the Epiphany to the sober challenge of a Methodist Covenant service. For this is the tradition, going back to the days of John and Charles Wesley, whereby at the beginning of each year Methodist people are called to renew their relationship with God. And we do so taking up the biblical image of the Covenant, the agreement which God established with his people in the Old Testament and which, despite their hesitations and failures, God fulfilled in the New Testament, with the new covenant sealed by the blood of his Son Jesus Christ.

It’s a solemn occasion, in which we can’t avoid our failings or be ignorant of our dependence on the grace of God. Yet despite this we shall be challenged to pledge our whole self, our time, our talents, our hearts and souls to be used in God’s service. The culmination of the Covenant Prayer will leave us in no doubt of where we stand; “I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.” And such a straightforward summary of our obligations, encountered regularly at the beginning of each year, has led many a Methodist preacher to explain the Covenant service in terms either of an ‘annual spiritual health-check’ or as a religious version of the ‘New Year’s resolution’.

But in truth, it’s much more than that. Indeed it may have more in common with the Epiphany theme than we might first think. For, as we have heard the story of the Wise Men in our hymns and carols, we have been made aware

that the glory of God is not just about Kings and their caravans or angels in the heavenly host. Their significance in the story derives not from their own status but from their willingness to recognise and adore the Christ child and then to offer him their gifts. In that regard, they are no different from the humble shepherds or even the animals in the stable. And in this, as the carols remind us, lies their message for us, whether it be the majestic chorale of Peter Cornelius, with its climax

The star of mercy, the star of grace,
Shall lead thy heart to its resting place,
'Gold, incense, myrrh thou canst not bring,
Offer thy heart to the infant king. Offer thy heart.'²⁸

Or, as we shall hear shortly, the simple Welsh carol 'Poverty', addressed to

'All poor men and humble, all lame men who stumble,
Come haste ye, nor feel ye afraid.
For Jesus our treasure, with love past all measure,
In lowly poor manger was laid.'²⁹

²⁸ Peter Cornelius, *Die Könige*, ET *The Kings*, tr. H.N. Bate, in Martin Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Carols*, (Oxford: OUP, 1964) p.193

²⁹ Anon., *O Deued Pob Cristion*, ET *Poverty*, tr. K.E. Roberts, in Martin Shaw (ed.), *Op. cit.* p.34

When I was a young boy in Rome, it wasn't just the Good Witch Befania we thought about. There was an old Bulgarian woman called Mara. With her bent back, hooded eyes and bitter imprecations, we were all sure that she was a witch. The story was that she had been a silent movie star who had lost everything when she was stranded during the War. But as she was adopted by our little congregation, invited into other people's homes and fixed up with her own little apartment, her mood started to soften. Sometimes there were smiles as well as curses, and from her collection of plastic bags would come little presents for us kids. In moments like these, with her eyes sparkling, perhaps touched by the glory of God, it was possible to see in this bent old woman the film star who had danced with Charlie Chaplin.

Now on the whole Methodist congregations are not full of silent movie stars. We tend to be much more ordinary, at least on the outside. But appearances can be deceptive. I remember characters like my great aunt Mary in Glasgow. She had to come back from a promising career in America to run a bakery business after her parents died, selling 'tatti-scones' and looking after the family in the tough years of the Depression in Glasgow. But she was also the heart and soul of a lively and loving chapel community in Shettleston. Perhaps today there might be all kinds of other opportunities open to a woman with her capabilities; but those who knew her then testify now to the way she made practical use of the gifts she had – and to the difference it made in their lives.

Most of us still seem pretty ordinary today. We come as teachers and nurses, cleaners and shopkeepers, retired, self-employed and unemployed. Our gifts are not gold, frankincense or myrrh and a lamb would hardly fit on our collection plates. But this Covenant service reminds us that we do have our time and talents to offer and that they too can make a difference.

For it speaks of the way mundane human lives can be taken up and made into heavenly treasure, part of the glory of God. It's the same story as revealed in the Adoration of the Magi, as the kings and the worldly wise come to worship and adore alongside the humble and poor; and realise that their gifts are neither more nor less valuable. And when each of us realises that we have a part to play, a share in the glory of God, that's an Epiphany too – a revelation of the power and the glory. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: a critical engagement

Bibliography

1) Karl Barth

a) Principal works

Fides Quaerens Intellectum (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1931) ET *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931) tr. Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM, 1960; Reprint edn. Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1975)
Die kirchliche Dogmatik (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1932 and Zürich: EVZ, 1938-65) ET *Church Dogmatics* (1932-67) tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2nd edn. 1975)

b) Other relevant works

Der Römerbrief (2nd edn.) (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1922) ET *The Epistle to the Romans*, tr. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: OUP, 1935)
'*Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*', ii. *Die Lehre von Gott / Die Lehre vom Menschen 1924/1925*, ed. Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zurich: TVZ, 1990) ET *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, vol. I, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991)
Die Theologie Schleiermachers: Vorlesung, Göttingen, Wintersemester 1923/24, ed. Dietrich Ritschl (Zürich: TVZ, 1978) ET *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures Winter Semester of 1923/24*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982)
Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1924) ET *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, tr. Sidney A. Weston (London: Hodder, 1928; re-issued Harper Torchbooks, New York: 1957)
Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947) ET *Protestant Theology in the 19th century*, tr. John Bowden and Brian Cozens (London: SCM, 1972)

2) Hans Urs von Balthasar

a) Principal works

Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie (Cologne: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1951) ET *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, tr. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)
Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961-69) ET *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982-89)

- Bd.1: *Schau der Gestalt* (1961) ET Volume I: *Seeing the Form*, tr. Erasmo Leivà- Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982)
- Bd. II: *Fächer der Stile*, Teil 1: *Klerikale Stile* (1962) ET Volume II: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, tr. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984)
 Teil 2: *Laikale Stile* (1962) ET Volume III: *Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, tr. Andrew Louth, John Seward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)
- Bd. III/1 *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, Teil 1: *Alterium* (1967) ET Volume IV: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, tr. Brian McNeil, Andrew Louth, John Seward, Rowan Williams, and Oliver Davies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989)
In Raum der Metaphysik, Teil 2: *Neuzeit* (1965) ET Volume V: *In the Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, tr. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Seward, and Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- Bd. III/2 *Theologie*, Teil 1: *Alter Bund* (1967) ET Volume VI: *Theology: the Old Covenant*, tr. Brian McNeil and Erasmo Leivà-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
Theologie, Teil 2: *Neuer Bund* (1969) ET Volume VII: *Theology: the New Covenant*, tr. Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, & San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989)
- Theodramatik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973-83) ET *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-98)
- Bd. I *Prolegomena* (1973) ET Volume I: *Prolegomena*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988)
- Bd. II *Die Personen des Spiels*, Teil 1: *Der Mensch in Gott* (1976) ET Volume II: *Dramatic Personae: Man in God*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990)
- Bd. II *Die Personen des Spiel*, Teil 2: *Die Personen Christus* (1978) ET Volume III: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992)
- Bd. III *Die Handlung* (1980) ET Volume IV: *The Action*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)
- Bd. IV *Das Endspiel* (1983) ET Volume V: *The Final Act*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998)
- Theologik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985-87) ET *Theo-Logic* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000-05)
- Bd. I *Wahrheit der Welt* (1985) ET Volume I: *Truth of the World*, tr. Adrian J. Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000)
- Bd. II *Wahrheit Gottes* (1985) ET Volume II: *Truth of God*, tr. Adrian J. Walker, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004)
- Bd. III *Der Geist der Wahrheit* (1987) ET Volume III: *The Spirit of Truth*, tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005)

Epilog (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987) ET *Epilogue*, tr. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)

b) Other relevant works

- Kosmische Liturgie: Höhe und Krise des griechischen Weltbilds bei Maximus Confessor* (Freiburg: Herder, 1941) ET *Cosmic Liturgy: the Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (1940) tr. Brian Daley, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003)
- On the tasks of Catholic philosophy in our time* (1946), tr. Brian McNeil, (*Communio*, Vol. XX No. 1, 1993)
- Unser Auftrag: Beriff und Entwurf.*(Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960) ET *Our Task: a Report and a Plan*, tr. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)
- Skizzen zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960-74) ET *Explorations in Theology, Volume 1: The Word Made Flesh* (1960) tr. A. V. Littleale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989)
- Explorations in Theology, Volume 2: Spouse of the Word* (1961) tr. A. V. Littleale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963) ET *Love alone: the Way of Revelation*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968)
- Rechenschaft 1965* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965) ET *My Work: in Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)
- Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965) ET *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, tr. Antje Lawry and Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981)
- Theologie der drei Tage* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1969) ET *Mysterium Paschale: the Mystery of Easter* , tr. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990)

3) Secondary works consulted

- Allchin, Donald, *Praise in All Things* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991)
- Bieler, Martin, 'Meta-anthropology and Christology: On the philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar' (in *Communio*, Vol. XX No.1, 1993)
- Block, Ed. Jr., (Ed.) *Glory, Grace and Culture: the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005)
- Bouillard, Henri, *The Knowledge of God* (1967) tr. Samuel Femiano (London: Burns & Oates, 1969)
- Bromiley, Geoffrey W., *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979)
- Busch, Eberhard, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts* (1975) tr. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1976)
- Carabine, Deirdre, 'The Fathers: The Church's Intimate Youthful Diary', (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
- Chapp, Larry, 'Revelation' (in (eds.) Oakes and Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004))
- Chia, Roland, *Revelation and Theology: the Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1999)

- Dalzell, Thomas G., *The dramatic encounter of divine and human freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997)
- Davies, Oliver, 'Von Balthasar and the Problem of Being' in (in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 79 No. 923, 1998)
- 'The theological aesthetics' (in (eds.) Oakes and Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004))
- Dickens, W. T., *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: a Model for Post-Critical Interpretation* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003)
- Dupré, Louis, 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetic' (in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- Eco, Umberto, (Ed.) *History of Beauty*, tr. Alastair McEwen, (New York: Rizzoli Int'l., 2004)
- Foley, Grover, 'The Catholic critics of Karl Barth', (in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.14, 1961)
- Ford, David F., *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981)
- Henrici, Peter, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of his Life' and 'The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar' (in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991))
- 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Cultural and Theological Education' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
- Gardner, Lucy, (Ed. with Moss, David; Quash, Ben and Ward, Graham) *Balthasar at the end of modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999)
- Gavronski, Raymond, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995)
- Gorringe, Timothy, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: OUP, 1999)
- Howsare, Rodney, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of his Theological Style* (London/New York: T&T Clark Int'l., 2005)
- Hunsinger, George, *How to read Karl Barth: the Shape of his Theology*, (New York: Oxford, 1991)
- Jones, Gareth, *Critical Theology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995)
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *God as the Mystery of the World* (1977) tr. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983)
- Karl Barth, a Theological Legacy*, (1982) tr. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986)
- God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1986) 2nd edn. tr. John Webster (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001)
- Kehl, Medard, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar; A Portrait' (in *The von Balthasar Reader* (1980) (eds.) Medard and Löser, tr. Robert J. Daley and Fred Lawrence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982))
- Kerr, Fergus, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: SPCK, 1997)
- 'Foreword: Assessing this 'Giddy Synthesis' (in (eds.) Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward, *Balthasar at the end of modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999)
- Kevern, John R., 'Form in Tragedy; Balthasar as a correlational theologian' (in *Communio*, Vol. XXI No.2, 1994)

- Kenny, Anthony, *Reason and Religion: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987)
- Kilby, Karen, 'Balthasar and Karl Rahner' (in (eds.) Oakes and Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004))
- Lash, Nicholas, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986)
- Leahy, Brendan, 'Theological Aesthetics' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
- Lindbeck, George, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984)
- de Lubac, Henri, *The Discovery of God* (1956) tr. Alexander Dru (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986)
- McCormack, Bruce L., *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)
- McDowell, John C., and Higton, Mike, (eds.) *Conversing with Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004)
- McGregor, Bede, (Ed. with Norris, Thomas) *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994)
- McIntosh, Mark A., *Christology from within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000)
- Macken, John, *The autonomy theme in the Church Dogmatics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)
- McKim, Donald K., *How Karl Barth changed my mind* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986)
- MacKinnon, Donald, 'Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar's Christology with Special Reference to *Theodramatik* II/2 and III' (in (ed.) Riches, *The Analogy of Beauty: the Theology of H. U. von Balthasar*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986))
- Themes in Theology: *The Three-fold Cord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987)
- McQuarrie, John, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM, 1963/1971)
- Mascall, E. L., *Existence and Analogy* (London: DLT, 1947; Libra Books, 1966)
- Meyendorff, John, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974)
- Moloney, Raymond, *The Knowledge of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 1999)
- Mongrain, Kevin, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002)
- Murphy, Francesca A., *Christ the Form of Beauty: A study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995)
- Nemoianu, Vergil, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Traditions of Christian Humanism' (in (ed.) Block, *Glory, Grace and Culture* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005))
- Nichols, Aidan, 'An introduction to Balthasar' in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 79 No.923 1998
- The Word has been abroad: A Guide through Balthasar's Aesthetics*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998)
- No Bloodless Myth: A Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000)
- Say it is Pentecost: A Guide through Balthasar's Logic* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001)
- 'Balthasar's Aims in the "Theological Aesthetics"' (in (ed.) Block, *Glory, Grace and Culture* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005))

- Przywara, Erich, *The Divine Majesty* (1925), tr. Thomas Corbishley (London: Collins, 1971)
Polarity: A German Catholic's Interpretation of Religion (1926) tr. A. C. Bouquet (London: OUP, 1935)
Analogia Entis: Metaphysik (Munich: Verlag Josef Kösel, 1932)
- Oakes, Edward T., *Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994)
 Ed. (with Moss, David) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004)
 'Balthasar's critique of the historico-critical method' (in (ed.) Block, *Glory, Grace and Culture* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005))
- O'Donoghue, Noel, 'A Theology of Beauty' (in (ed.) Riches, *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986))
 'Do we get beyond Plato: A Critical Appreciation of the Theological Aesthetics' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
- O'Donnell, John, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Form of his Theology' (in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991))
Hans Urs von Balthasar (London: Chapman, 1992)
- O'Hanlon, Gerard, *The immutability of God in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)
 'Theological Dramatics' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
- O'Meara, Thomas F., *Erich Przywara S.J.: his Theology and his World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002)
- Philips, D.Z., *Faith after Foundationalism* (London: Routledge, 1988)
- Quash, Ben, 'Von Balthasar and the dialogue with Karl Barth' (in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 79 No. 923, 1998)
 'Drama and the Ends of Modernity' (in (eds.) Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward, *Balthasar at the end of modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999))
 'The theo-drama' (in (eds.) Oakes and Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004))
Theology and the Drama of History (Cambridge: CUP, 2005)
- Rahner, Karl, *Spirit in the World* (1939) ET (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968)
Foundations of Christian Faith tr. William Dych (London: DLT, 1978)
- Riches, John, (Ed.) *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986)
 'Balthasar and the Analysis of Faith' in *The Analogy of Beauty* (above)
 'The Biblical Basis of Glory' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994))
 (with Quash, Ben) 'Hans Urs von Balthasar in (ed.) David Ford, *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn. 1997)
- Roberts, Louis, *The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987)

- Roberts, Richard, *A Theology on its way: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991)
- Saward, John, *The Way of the Lamb: The Spirit of Childhood and the End of the Age* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999)
- Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Church: the Human story of God*, tr. John Bowden, (London: SCM, 1990)
- Schindler, David L., (Ed.) *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- Schindler, D. C., *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004)
- Schönborn, Christoph, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar's Contribution to Ecumenism' (in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991)
- Scola, Angelo, *Hans Urs von Balthasar, A Theological Style* (1991) ET (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995)
- Sherry, Patrick, *Spirit and Beauty: an Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*, 2nd edn. (London: SCM, 2002)
- Simon, Martin 'Identity and Analogy: Balthasar's Holderlin and Hamann (in (ed.) John Riches, *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986)
- Strukelj, Anton, 'The Theo-logic of Hans Urs von Balthasar' (in *Communio*, Vol. XX No.4, 1993)
- Sykes, Stephen, (Ed.) *Karl Barth: Centenary essays* (Cambridge: CUP 1989)
- Thompson, John, 'Barth and Balthasar; an Ecumenical Dialogue' (in (eds.) McGregor and Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994)
- Torrance, Thomas, *Karl Barth, an Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962)
- Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990)
- Tracey, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1981)
- Treidler, Wolfgang, 'True Foundations of Authentic Theology' (in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991))
- Viladesau, Richard, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art* (New York: OUP, 1999)
- Wainwright, Geoffrey, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth, 1980)
- Webster, John, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998)
- 'Balthasar and Karl Barth' (in (eds.) Oakes and Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004))
- Wigley, Stephen, 'Karl Barth on St. Anselm: the influence of Anselm's Theological Scheme" on T. F. Torrance and Eberhard Jüngel', (in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 46/1, 1993)
- 'The von Balthasar thesis: a re-examination of von Balthasar's Study of Barth in light of Bruce McCormack' (in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 56/3, 2003)

- Williams, Rowan, 'Balthasar and Rahner' (in (ed.) Riches, *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986))
'Afterword: Making Differences' (in (eds.) Gardner, Moss, Quash and Ward *Balthasar at the end of modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999))
On Christian Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)
Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love (Continuum: London, 2005)
- Yeago, David S., 'Literature in the Drama of Grace and Nature: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Paradigm for a Theology of Culture' (in (ed.) Block, *Glory, Grace and Culture* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005))
- Zeitz, James, 'Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy' (in *The Thomist*, 52/3, 1988)