Hidden Treasure: The Epistemology of Love According to Hans Urs on Balthasar

Timothy John Squier
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/691

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2013 Timothy John Squier
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

HIDDEN TREASURE:
THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF LOVE
ACCORDING TO HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY
TIMOTHY J. SQUIER
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2013
Copyright by Timothy J. Squier, 2013
All rights reserved.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While many people thank their life partner at the end of acknowledgements, I must begin by thanking my wife Kris. I am indebted and deeply grateful to her for the love, support and encouragement she has provided throughout this process. Without her strength and guidance I would not have finished this project. I am also profoundly thankful for my children Elizabeth and Aidan who both endured a lot of times when dad was busy researching and writing. Their hugs, kisses and “daddy you’re home” moments continually inspired me to get this thing done. My entire family-at-large continually cheered me on and encouraged me to stay the course. They have been my village and their abiding love has helped raise me to this moment.

Certainly I must thank the parishioners of Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church where I am blessed to serve as their priest. Their abiding support, prayers, encouragement and patience persistently reminded me why I love theological education. To God be the glory for all your support for me and my family on this doctoral pilgrimage.

Of course, I must express a special word of thanks to my dissertation committee. Mark Bosco, my director, guided me through this process with insightful care. His pastoral support especially in those times of despair gave me remarkably spiritual nourishment. He, indeed, embodies the gift of theological aesthetics as he cares for students. I also want to thank Dennis Martin and Mark McIntosh for their sagaciously
advice as my readers. Their constant support and counsel always opened my eyes to new ways of seeing.

Thank you to Catherine Wolf and Marianne Wolfe whose practical and administrative support are what get students (and faculty) through all the “requirements.” I am grateful for their support throughout this whole doctoral program.

And, thank you to the entire theology department for being a place of powerful and thought-filled academic engagement. My time spent here was fulfilling.

Finally, I must thank all my theology colleagues. Our time together as community was invaluable to my growth as human being. I am especially grateful for Brock Bingaman, Tim Yoder and Charles Allen. Brock, your prayers and support were a constant. Tim, agonizing together over Balthasar made me a better theologian. Charles, as my mentor you have walked with me through good times and difficult times. My life is blessed because of your care. God blessed my life by putting the three of you in it.

Thank you!
To Kris
But we have the mind of Christ.
Apostle Paul

God wants to be recognized; he must be known.
Hans Urs von Balthasar
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

iii

## CHAPTER ONE: WHY A BALTHASARIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

1

- Chapter Two: Difference as the Foundation for a Balthasarian Ontological Structure
- Chapter Three: Unveiling the Ontological Structure of the Human Creature
- Chapter Four: The Hidden is Revealed: Jesus is the Form of the Divine
- Elizabeth of the Trinity: A Living Embodiment of an Epistemological Encounter

## CHAPTER TWO: DIFFERENCE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR A BALTHASARIAN ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

28

- Historical Influence
  - The Patristic Period
  - The Scholastic Period
  - The Modern Period
  - The Analogy of Being

## CHAPTER THREE: UNVEILING THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BEING

60

- Meta-Anthropology
- Subjects, Objects and the Transcendental Truth
- Distinctive Qualities of being: subjectivity and objectivity
- Subject/Object Interrelationality
- Begetting the Form: The Object’s Image as the Revelation of Truth

## CHAPTER FOUR: UNVEILING THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE TRINITY THROUGH THE FORM OF JESUS CHRIST

95

- The Depth of Form: God’s Being as Act
- Incarnation: Jesus Christ is the Form of the Divine
- The Form of Jesus Christ: His Mission is Our Mission

## CHAPTER FIVE: ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY: A LIVING EMBODIMENT OF AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

127

- The Holy Spirit as Person
- Gift, Freedom and Testimony: The Unselfing Power of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit: Unselfing Power within Finite Being
- The Communion of Saints: Unity, Obedience and Fruitfulness
- Elizabeth’s Life: Setting the Stage
- Elizabeth’s Life: Predestined by Love for Unity with God
- Elizabeth’s Life: Obedience as an Epistemological Act of Adoration and Praise
- Elizabeth’s Life: An Epistemological Act of Fruitful Service
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: WHY A BALTHASARIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

In the following chapters, I attempt to construct a theological analysis of an epistemological structure implicit in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The larger framework is a consideration of metaphysics, contemplation and theological task embodied in a doctrine of revelation. Within such a framework I will consider the following question, what does it mean for a human person to know? Specifically, this dissertation will investigate what is actually involved in the human ability to know something, where knowing comes from and how it is influenced. I will reflect on this basic epistemological question from the perspective of a Balthasarian philosophical theology. In other words, I intend to seek responses to this question by way of Balthasar’s teaching on the subject matter. In fact, I will argue that Balthasar not only gives us some important insight into questions of knowing, but that he gives us radically life shaping answers.

Why a Balthasarian epistemology? Lately, certain contemporary theologians have challenged modern philosophy’s dislike of metaphysics. Juxtaposed to this critique is a renewed focus on, a reclaiming of, contemplation as significant for the Christian life. Lewis Ayres states,

Claims about the metaphysical bondage of Christian thought are not simply part of modernity’s dislike of metaphysics per se: they are also closely related to post-Enlightenment thought’s suspicion of the idea that contemplation of the divine might be the goal and root of theology, wanting instead to focus
Christian attention on the ‘practical’ and on the narrative of Christ’s ministry as transformative of human possibility. On the one hand, suspicion of the contemplative—and a concomitant suspicion of a conception of the text of the Scripture as intended to draw Christians towards contemplation—feeds suspicion of any attempt to systematize accounts of God in Godself. On the other hand, there is a sense that ontological categories placed at the heart of a basic summary of faith can only take away from an appropriate focus on Jesus’ supposed lack of metaphysical speculation. This last trope reveals a fascinating set of modern concerns: theological practice begins not from the plain sense of Scripture but from reconstructions of Jesus as a human being like us; all that Scripture says to offer a cosmology and an account of God’s action within that must be a secondary accretion to the particular life of the man Jesus.¹

If it is true, as Ayres would argue, that modern philosophy is suspicious of metaphysics per se and also true that certain contemporary thinkers have challenged this suspicion, then this dissertation aims to analyze critically Balthasar’s work as an inherent theological response to a modern philosophy’s disdain for the metaphysical.

Balthasar challenged much of modern philosophy’s dislike of metaphysics; particularly modernity’s radical turn to the subject. In fact, common knowledge at least within academic circles argues Balthasar’s capacious trilogy (*Glory of the Lord, Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic*) serves as a remarkable response to much of modern philosophy’s focus on the human subject. Balthasar argues,

‘Glory’ stands and 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 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 of science,’ which was rampant in the nineteenth century, is its fruit.²

---


Balthasar’s entire theological project seeks to reclaim the metaphysical reality of Christian truth from the detrimental shift toward *identitas entis* he believes is the heart of modern philosophy’s influence on theology. He seeks to reclaim a metaphysical reality that shifts humanity back toward a primary focus on God’s Being as the heart of the matter. By taking notice of Balthasar’s regard for metaphysics one discovers something hidden. Balthasar’s theological endeavors contain an implicitly epistemological structure. Upon this structure he builds an ontological argument for how human knowing is transformed by the form of Jesus Christ. In other words, Balthasar’s central Christological tenant claims that through an encounter with Jesus Christ we find revealed the transformative power of God that actually shapes human knowing.\(^3\)

---

1991), 548-549. Balthasar refers to *identitas entis* in light of Descartes, Spinoza and their eventual shaping of German Idealism via Kant. As Stephen Wigley, *Balthasar’s Trilogy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010) states, “The philosophical writings of Descartes, with its emphasis upon the knowing and thinking subject, and then Spinoza and Leibniz, pave the way for the Idealism in its modern and German context. Here von Balthasar shows how, 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. Their approach wants ‘to conceive of man within the wholeness of the Absolute, as its centre’ (*GLS*: 547). But in so doing, ‘’critical Idealism’ no longer permits space for an experience of worldly Being as an epiphany of God’s glory’” (61-62).

\(^3\) My research has made it abundantly clear that to understand Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation one must examine the relationship between ontology and epistemology. Simply put, Balthasar develops a thorough doctrine regarding how God is revealed in the form of Jesus Christ. To understand the relationship between the Divine and the human in a Balthasarian system, one must wade through his intricate argument for the ontological structure of the human creature and also the speculative ontological structure of the Divine within the Trinitarian Being. This ontological examination of creaturely and divine being leads us to the critical point that disclosedness is transcendentally fundamental to the relationship between God and humanity. Balthasar states, “Unveiledness is, first of all, an absolute property inherent in being as such.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, Vol. I (*TL I*), *The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 37. Once we understand the ontological structures of the Divine and the human we are able to discern more succinctly how Balthasar considers the epistemological act in the relationship between God and humanity. In other words, we discover that within the very structure of being is the act of knowing as revealed in the inherent quality of disclosedness within being.
Fergus Kerr elaborates on Balthasar’s claim that in our contemporary era, Christians are called to be the guardians of metaphysics. Kerr provides a distinct analysis of Balthasar’s idiosyncratic claim that juxtaposes metaphysics and theology. He writes,

In virtue of the biblically grounded awe at the divine glory which is made available to Christians, liturgically and in ascetical practice, it becomes possible to retrieve the ‘experience of being’ which, historically, philosophers from the beginning have sought to articulate, and with which any serious philosopher today should wish to engage. In short, the true guardians of the experience of being are those philosophers who have faith to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Kerr’s exploration of a Balthasarian metaphysics highlights the notion that within the “experience of being” of every human one finds, from a Christian perspective, something critical to the life of every person. This being the case, Kerr argues that Balthasar challenges Heidegger’s notion that the question of being is closed for Christian believers. In fact, it becomes brilliantly evident that Balthasar’s critical reflection on Christ and the Trinity by way of a doctrine of revelation is founded upon a Christian metaphysics. This dissertation examines the cornerstone of this Christian metaphysics upon which Balthasar builds: the gift of knowing (epistemology) that exists between the human and the divine.

---


5 Ibid., p. 224.

6 Mark McIntosh in his essay “Christology” and Larry Chapp in his essay “Revelation” provide luminous and succinct insight into Balthasar’s Christological and Trinitarian thoughts as revealed within the Christian tradition. See these essays in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edward T. Oakes, S. J. and David Moss, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
From the outset I must note that a Balthasarian epistemology gives luminous thought to the transcendentals: beauty, goodness and truth. These transcendentals are key to how Balthasar conceptualizes ontology and epistemology. In light of the transcendentals I offer the following questions: What are the implicit assumptions regarding the experience of being in Balthasar’s metaphysical thought? How are we to appropriate a being’s experience in light of Balthasar’s claim to revelation within the form of Jesus Christ? By way of Balthasar’s ontological vision, how does an epistemological structure implicit within Balthasar’s consideration of the form of Jesus Christ give shape to a Christian way of life? In other words, how do we comprehend human knowing within an ontological model especially one that argues for divine knowing (which is the essence of divine Being) that transforms human knowing? The crux of the argument for this dissertation focuses on the interrelational reality of human knowing and divine knowing. By way of these questions, it becomes important for this constructive project to consider how Balthasar understands the relationship between epistemology and ontology in the relationship between the infinite and finite. To put it another way, Balthasar’s metaphysics encourages Christian thought to reexamine the divine way of knowing (how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit know each other in their eternal relationality) in relation to the human creature’s contemplative encounter of this divine knowing. Balthasar states:

In this progress of knowledge the human mind is usually most helped if its natural intelligence is strengthened by a new light: the light of faith and the gift of wisdom and understanding, by which the mind is elevated above itself in contemplation, insofar as it recognizes that God lies above and beyond everything that it can know by nature. And since it cannot press forward to the vision of the essence, one may say that it is reflected back on itself through
the superior light, and so Gregory’s gloss on Jacob’s saying ‘I have seen God face to face’ (Genesis 32:31) can run ‘When the eye of the soul turns towards God, it is thrown back by the lightning flash of the Infinite.’

Balthasar challenges Christian theology to reclaim the notion that in the form of Jesus Christ God reveals the fundamental sum and substance of the consciousness of the human knower.

In response to modernity’s primary focus on the human consciousness Balthasar returns us to a human knowing grounded within the divine life. As Balthasar contends:

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 overpowering and overwhelming inconceivability of the fact that God has loved us so much that he surrendered his only Son for us, the fact that the God of plentitude has poured himself out, not only into creation, but emptied himself into the modalities of an existence determined by sin, corrupted by death and alienated from God. This is the concealment that appears in his self-revelation; this is the ungraspability of God, which becomes graspable because it is grasped.

I believe Balthasar’s answers to the questions above suggest a knowing within the divine life that gives rise to his teaching on the heart of revelation and its transformative truth for the human creature. In so doing, Balthasar reveals to us rather subtly an epistemology critical to the very actuality of a Christian life. This belief shapes my thesis.

Furthermore this dissertation will assist the reader in understanding more fully how Balthasar goes about luring the Christian believer away from human consciousness as the primary center of our theological task and back towards the triune God as the heart of all

---


theological responsibility. Of course it can be overwhelming to consider the exhaustive way in which Balthasar makes this shift. Therefore this project follows a particular road upon which I begin our tour.

Taking into consideration all that has been said to this point I propose the following thesis: by analyzing the epistemological structure of revelation in Balthasar’s theology one discovers that human consciousness is truly understood by way of its re-creation in its encounter with the Trinitarian divine knowing embodied in the form of Jesus Christ. Otherwise stated, Balthasar’s teaching on the form of Jesus Christ claims that, in knowing each other in an eternal act of circumincessio, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Trinitarian divine knowing) transform human consciousness. The form of Jesus Christ radiates the transformative power of the trinitarian life. I will examine Balthasar’s work seeking evidence for such a claim. This dissertation investigates: first, Balthasar’s argument that the form of Jesus Christ transforms human consciousness; and second, Balthasar’s proof for such a transformation in the life of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Consequently, there are two specific tasks for the undertaking at hand. The first task of this project is to examine how Balthasar thinks we know. Or, more directly I will investigate how Balthasar argues that our encounter with God shapes our knowing, even

---

9 It is important to note at the outset that my examination of an epistemological structure within Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation requires one to recognize the fact that Balthasar does not make a clear and concise delineation between metaphysics and epistemology like many contemporary philosophers and theologians. My project centers on the implicit epistemological structure that is present within his overwhelmingly detailed analysis of metaphysics. Consideration of Balthasar’s metaphysics is a monumental endeavor and is not the primary task of this dissertation. However, reference to his examination of metaphysics is necessary for one to gain clarity and insight into the epistemology taken for granted within all of his work. By sifting through his metaphysical constructs (the foundational blocks of this theological house, so to speak) we are able to discern more directly the way in which Balthasar’s understanding of how the form of Jesus Christ reveals or gives expression to how God’s knowing transforms human knowing. This allows us to then examine specific examples within the lives of particular Christians (e.g. Elizabeth of the Trinity among others) to discover or uncover the way in which the human encounter with God shapes our knowing and actually makes our knowing possible.
makes it possible to know anything. Therefore, the first three chapters explore the following respectively: first, Balthasar’s argument for “difference” or “otherness” as the foundation to an ontological structure; second, the ontological structure of the human creature; and, third, the ontological structure of the Trinitarian divine life as it is revealed in the form of Jesus Christ. Within this examination of the ontological structures I will investigate the hidden epistemological elements that are central to both the human and divine ontological compositions. The interrelationality within Balthasar’s speculative developments establishes his claim that the form of Jesus Christ transforms human knowing.

Having explored Balthasar’s philosophical concepts regarding human and divine ontological structures and the epistemological principles hidden within; the second task of this dissertation will be to examine Balthasar’s notion that Jesus is the form of the divine in relation to the person of the Holy Spirit. Alongside the consideration of form in chapter four, chapter five constructively dissects Balthasar’s argument regarding the Holy Spirit’s role as Interpreter of the Truth (the Word made flesh), the One who makes

10 See John O’Donnell’s article, “Truth as Love: the Understanding of Truth according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, Pacifica 1 (1988), 189-211. I would argue that O’Donnell makes the case that Balthasar’s Theology is structured in such a way as to demonstrate philosophically and theologically the relationship between the human creature and the Trinity. Volume I intricately deals with the structure of being within the human creature. Volume II examines the structure of God’s Being. Volume III emphasizes the role of Holy Spirit in “opening our eyes” (p. 194) to Jesus’ transformative power for the human consciousness. One might call this a phenomenological anthropology from above.

11 I would argue that Balthasar’s understanding of Gestalt plays a critical role in understanding the encounter between the Divine and the human. Balthasar states, “For Gestalt is more than image; it is the unity encountering the perceiver that is also simultaneously manifest in the experience of self (in the contemplated reality of the cogito/summ), so that the object encountered and the ‘I’—in spite of the variety of our ever unique essences—truly communicate in the all-one depth of reality (esse). Only in the depth of this communication does genuinely spiritual knowing occur.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, Epilogue, trans. by Edward T. Oakes, S.J., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 63. See also Epilogue for a discussion of “self-showing.”
Jesus continually present for human creatures individually and as the body of Christ, the Church. The second task of this project contains two critical pieces: first, the role of the Holy Spirit as the radiating transformative power of God within the form of Jesus Christ; and second, a concrete example of a particular saint, Elizabeth of the Trinity, whose life demonstrates the radiating power of the Holy Spirit from within the form of Jesus Christ that enraptures and transforms Elizabeth’s mind via the divine gift of love.

Chapter five takes the speculative concepts developed in chapters two through four and brings them to life by way of Balthasar’s examination of a certain contemplative thinker. This chapter is the culmination of all that is considered philosophically and theologically by way of the life of a specific human being. To achieve this end, I will examine Balthasar’s spiritual study of Elizabeth of the Trinity. For Balthasar, Elizabeth demonstrates the way in which divine knowing (the mind of Christ) actually shapes or (re)shapes the human mind. Studying Balthasar’s work on this particular saint verifies how Balthasar sees the encounter with God shaping human knowing. By examining the life and thought of Elizabeth, Balthasar provides lucid evidence for how the form of Jesus Christ shapes human knowing.

Once I have illustrated how God’s knowing (the relational structure of knowing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit) re-creates human knowing (e.g. the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity) the dissertation epilogue will argue for how Balthasar’s consideration of the form of Jesus Christ and the epistemological structures hidden within are significant for the post modern theological task. I will reiterate the importance of this project, what I hoped to accomplish and how this research might shape future conversations and further
investigations of epistemology within Christian theology. To set the stage for this exploration I will now briefly highlight more specifically the chapters for this project.

**Chapter Two: Difference as the Foundation for a Balthasarian Ontological Structure**

Balthasar is famous for his work on the transcendentals: beauty, goodness and truth. He formulates an epistemology and ontology by way of these “determinations of being.”\(^\text{12}\) As Aidan Nichols notes, “Balthasar...puts the human subject – and that by virtue of its created nature – in immediate relation with the truth that lies outside itself. The self-conscious subject exists, knowing that he or she exists as just a unique subject, yes. But this is always *in relation to other manifestations of being.*\(^\text{13}\) Thus, critical to this thesis is an examination of the ontological basis that serves as the starting point for Balthasar’s epistemology of love.

Balthasar begins his ontological thoughts with what he calls “the authentic metaphysical question: ‘Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?’”\(^\text{14}\) Balthasar makes it quite clear that much of contemporary philosophy has lost the ability to appreciate this question because it has lost the ability to “wonder” why anything rather than nothing. Being, for contemporary philosophy, is a presumed necessity. It may be scrutinized for its beauty and order yet many contemporary philosophers only appreciate Being as something examined not something from which wonder radiates. Balthasar sees


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 2.

this question and the miracle of Being differently. Balthasar’s argument that a sense of wonder is critical to how we appropriate a sense of Being becomes a major point in understanding the difference between God and creatures. To get at the heart of this major point we must first examine, Balthasar’s use of real distinction. By way of this investigation we see how Balthasar sets the stage for the difference between God and creatures. This difference becomes a central part of Balthasar’s discussion of the essence and existence of God and of creatures. Such a concept regarding difference paradoxically becomes the place wherein Balthasar finds the power of God as transformative for human knowledge. Therefore in chapter two I begin by mapping out Balthasar’s understanding of “difference” via his historical analysis of Christian thought. Examining his analysis of this history gives us insight into how he shapes a unique claim for ontological reality of revelation in Jesus Christ. This ontology gives shape to his argument for an epistemology of love in the encounter between the human creature and the divine. Once we have examined how Christian thought influenced Balthasar’s own thinking we then examine his novel development of real distinction and follow that path toward a central piece to Balthasar’s metaphysics, “The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Difference.”

Chapter Three: Unveiling the Ontological Structure of the Human Creature

While much has been written and said about Balthasar’s fourfold distinction I want to make the basic point that Balthasar is seeking the creation of a metaphysical

---

15 See Balthasar, GL V, 613.

platform upon which he sets the stage for a complex ontological structure of the
subject and object, the I and thou, the created being and the Uncreated Being.\textsuperscript{17} Gaining insight in chapter two into how this platform is built leads us toward the ultimate goal of this dissertation, that is, the way in which Balthasar argues that God’s Being as Trinity is a transformative power for created being.\textsuperscript{18} For this project, the critical point is the concept of an I-Thou relationship and the essence of being upon which this relationship is built. However in chapter three I go to the heart of this relationship, that is the conceptualization of “act of existence” and relationality on the human side of the equation. Such an analysis is significant to considering how Balthasar sees the relationship between God and the human creature. Chapter three unpacks Balthasar’s thinking regarding the concept of relationality and it becomes a key link in understanding how “knowing” takes place in the encounter of being between a subject and object. Balthasar establishes the ontological structure of living things within the fourfold difference. Then he eventually makes an analogical move from the relational structure of

\textsuperscript{17} A key to understanding how Balthasar deals with metaphysical questions is found in his own investigative work on theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus. Therefore part of chapter four will analyze Balthasar’s writings on Gregory and Maximus. Such analysis will shed light on those building blocks that were significant to Balthasar’s constructive ontology and epistemology.

\textsuperscript{18} In my dissertation I hope to expand on Balthasar’s fourfold distinction showing how this metaphysics shapes Balthasar’s development of the transcendental property of truth. I believe Balthasar’s metaphysical project is the foundation (briefly presented in the great scheme of his entire trilogy) of what he does in excruciating detail throughout the trilogy yet quite specifically in \textit{Theo-Logic}. I simply use an examination of his metaphysical concepts to set up the argument for his larger ontological moves that are, I believe central to his work with the transcendentals beauty, goodness and truth. It is also important to note that many scholars offer a wide array of critiques regarding Balthasar’s metaphysics and his ontological concepts. An example of such a critique is Oliver Davies, “Von Balthasar and the Problem of Being,” \textit{New Blackfriars}, Vol. 79, Issue 923 (January 1998), 11-17. While I have my own opinion it is important to state here that I am not agreeing or disagree with Balthasar’s constructive arguments I am simply presenting the case in support of the dissertation’s claim that Balthasar argues that human consciousness is re-created in its encounter with the Trinity revealed in the form of Jesus Christ. No matter where a scholar stands regarding Balthasar’s metaphysics or his ontology it is important to examine this philosophical concepts with his work to discover the epistemological structure hidden within his doctrine of revelation.
finite things and moves to the relational structure between finite creatures and the infinite Trinity. His conversation around Being is part of the establishing link to how we can conceive of relationality between the finite and the infinite. This chapter examines this ontological structure of the human creature. It investigates how the concept of knowing serves as a core element within this ontological structure and as a central piece to relationality within Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation. This analysis of the fourfold distinction sets the stage for an examination of Balthasar’s argument regarding the transcendental property of Truth.

Once we have looked at Balthasar’s metaphysical foundation the next step is to go deeper into how Balthasar perceived the interrelational capabilities of the human being. Therefore we must examine Balthasar’s speculative work regarding the transcendental Truth. For Balthasar, the truth of any subject or object is found not only in how a subject perceives something but also in how the something discloses itself.19 “The truth found in beings is both in the disclosure and in the understanding of the observer.”20 Balthasar argues that every created thing unveils itself to the world. This is the transcendental truth of a thing; it contains within the fiber of its being the ability to disclose to an other. Because this ability to disclose itself is the transcendental truth of all being then all

---

19 See O’Donnell’s fruitful analysis of Truth as aletheia in the article noted above. O’Donnell argues that the key to understanding Balthasar’s logic is to realize that truth for Balthasar is the act of unconcealedness. According to O’Donnell, Balthasar understands the Christ event as the unveiling of truth, which is ultimately the unveiling of love. The Holy Spirit continues as the unveiling of this Truth in the life of the church. Basically for Balthasar, argues O’Donnell, Christian logic is the logic of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is this love revealed that is transformative of the epistemological structures of human existence. Chapter three looks at this structure from the human side of the equation.

beings have this ability to disclose as part of the “whatness of their existence.”  

Balthasar argues, “The intimate character of being, which reaches its completed end in the conscious spirit, has its preliminary stages in unconscious nature. There is no being that does not enjoy an interiority, however liminal and rudimentary it may be.”  

This means that any encounter between objects, a form of “unveiling” always takes place. However, no “thing” reveals itself in its entirety. There remains an element of mystery. And, the subject that receives what is disclosed by the object must be open to what is revealed. An element of freedom must be respected in order for the truth to happen. 

“The object surrenders itself to the subject and the subject in an attitude of receptivity surrenders to the object. Balthasar says that without this attitude of selfless surrender, truth cannot happen.”  

This is especially true in our case as we consider the ontological structure of the human creature. As Balthasar argues:

In man, consciousness attains greater interiority and so becomes self-consciousness. His inner dimension is not only luminous, as it is in the case of the animal, but also light for itself. Man is the first entity that possesses itself and, because of this self-possession, is free. It is not just that his interior space, like that of the animal, has certain features of consciousness; he is himself substantially spirit. To the extent that man is spirit, he can dispose of himself. Hence, he can decide whether and

---

21 Ibid., 115.

22 Balthasar, TL I, 84.


24 Ibid. For a brief outline of how truth works in Balthasar’s philosophical examination of created being see Nichols’ description of Balthasar’s examination of truth. Basically, it is the combination of the Hellenic notion of aletheia (unveiledness or revelation) and the Hebraic notion of emeth (fidelity). This combination of ideas becomes a critical link to understanding the detailed way in which Balthasar philosophical describes the encounter of subject and object. In the overall project it will become evident how important aletheia and emeth are for Balthasar. Aidan Nichols, “The theo-logic,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed. Edward T. Oakes, S. J. and David Moss (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161.
how he shall make his utterances [Äußerungen]. Freedom enters between the spirit’s self-possession and its self-expression, between the interior and the exterior word; it becomes an integral component of the truth. Man freely disposes of truth, for it has been placed in his hands and committed to him to administer self-consciously.²⁵

From a Balthasarian perspective, the human way of knowing is founded upon the structure of unveiling and the faithful receptivity of what is unveiled. Therefore as Nichols comments, “authentic knowledge is as receptive to unveiling as it is spontaneous in its engaging fidelity.”²⁶ Nevertheless, the ability to grasp the central reality of “unveiledness” for Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation, one must take seriously the elemental property of Truth as a transcendental. Having done this we are able to see more clearly how the concept of unveiling is key to Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation. Once a person understands more fully these aspects she can better grasp the ontological structure of the human creature and its ability to encounter and be encountered by other beings especially the Divine Being itself. Consequently, two questions take us deeper into the search: first, “What lies at the heart of unveiling?” The second, “what purpose does veiling as a property of ‘to-be’ serve?”

Chapter three seeks to answer these questions by dissecting Balthasar’s idea that truth as freedom contains within it the reality of self-surrender. Of course for Balthasar the idea of self-surrender is the heart of the trinitarian life. This same idea applies to the human creature. In fact, the difference between human creatures and all other living things is the ability in freedom to self-communicate. Balthasar argues:

²⁵ Balthasar, TL I, 93.
Even though man is predisposed to communication in general, he is not compelled by nature to any one conscious communication in particular. He does not have to say what he knows. He has the command of his treasury of knowledge, so that he can make a free gift of every particular disclosure. No one can wring his truth from him or manipulate it without his knowledge and consent. Truth as self-unveiling is, in the case of man, a free, hence responsible, ethically consequential act.27

A critical component to this piece of research is how Balthasar makes a distinct shift from the unveiling that happens in all living things to the unveiling that happens with human creatures. Interestingly enough, Balthasar gets us to this point by first arguing for the freedom of the object.28 God has bestowed on all creatures the ability to manifest, in accordance with the sort of being, that which is the interiority of the creature.29 What appears to be happening in Theo-Logic I is the construction of a framework that emphasizes truth as freedom for all living things. However, Balthasar makes a critical move wherein the idea of freedom rises up in a particular way for the human creature. This rising up is the place where the ontological configuration of the human creature has the infinitely designed framework for heaven and earth to meet, this the place where Word becomes flesh. Balthasar walks us through all these ontological building blocks so we can eventually consider how the divine is able to be revealed by way of a finite embodiment.


28 As Aidan Nichols states in his analysis of freedom in Theo-Logic I: “Here his concern is with the freedom of some being to let itself become an object of knowledge to others. . .To share one’s substance with knowing agents is to give, to serve.” in Say It is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Logic (Washington D.C.:The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 23.

Accordingly the critical piece in this chapter is the basic idea that truth as freedom follows an interesting path from the freedom of an object to that of the freedom of the subject. As Nichols points out, how can the objective become the subjective?\(^\text{30}\) The key here is understanding the difference between the unveiledness of a creature without self-consciousness and the *self-conscious* creature. The difference between both is that human creatures reveal themselves by way of *testimony* whereas the unveiledness of non-human creatures is that of natural expression. As Nichols makes clear, “Spirit’s possession of a truth all its own, which others can only enjoy with its consent, is at once something qualitatively new when compared with the rest of life, and yet also the fulfilment of an ever-clearer tendency within nature itself. When human beings reveal themselves in freedom, the result is a *testimony*, not just an expression.”\(^\text{31}\) The difference between unveiledness in all things and the unveiledness of the self-conscious human being becomes the place we seek to arrive in chapter three. Once we have an understanding of Balthasar’s concepts around the ontological reality of the human being we can then make our move to the other side of the equation: the ontological structure of the Trinity.

**Chapter Four: The Hidden is Revealed: Jesus is the Form of the Divine**

Earlier in this chapter I briefly stated that the form of Jesus Christ unveils the ontological structure of the trinitarian life. Once we have examined the ontological structures of the human (chapter three) from a Balthasarian perspective, chapter four

\(^{30}\) See Ibid., 24.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 25.
investigates how the form of Jesus Christ, revealing the ontological structure of God to the human creature is the ground for the transformation of human consciousness.

A central idea within Balthasar’s theological project is the notion of Gestalt (Form). As Oliver Davies states, “Balthasar follows Thomas Aquinas in delineating the dual structure of the beautiful in terms of the principle of form (the root of the Latin formosa, meaning ‘beautiful, is forma) and of glory, radiance, or splendour. This distinction between ‘form’ and ‘expression’ is fundamental to Balthasar’s theology.”

Specifically, what becomes central is Balthasar’s insistence that incarnation is the critical element to the Christian faith. For Balthasar, the materiality and particularity of a thing is where we find the depth of its expressiveness. This is significant to how God reveals God’s Self. The form of Jesus Christ is that material and particular way in which the hiddenness of God is unveiled. However, essential to understanding form in Balthasar’s thought is realizing that the materiality and particularity of a thing as it appears is comprehended through the way it signifies. Balthasar states:

The form as it appears to us is beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating. The appearance of form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths. In different periods of intellectual history, to be sure, one or the other of these aspects may be emphasized: on the one hand, classical perfection (Vollendung: the form which contains the depths), on the other, Romantic boundlessness, infinity.

---


33 Ibid., 134.
(Unendlichkeit: the form that transcends itself by pointing beyond to the depths). Be this as it may, however, both aspects are inseparable from one another, and together they constitute the fundamental configuration of Being. We ‘behold’ the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being. We are ‘enraptured’ by our contemplation of these depths and are ‘transported’ to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths.  

implicitly evident in our examination of Balthasar’s notion of form is the level of expressiveness that is at play. Balthasar emphasizes over and over the interactive encounter that takes place between a subject and an object. To grasp the reality of an epistemological structure in Balthasar’s work one must develop a fuller understanding of Gestalt as an expressive reality in the midst of relational experiences.  

Earlier I highlighted that Balthasar’s philosophical consideration of truth is founded on the notion that being unveils itself. As Barbara Sain points out, this unveiling has two poles: the image or appearance and the deep hidden mystery of being that is manifested via the image. In chapter four I unpack Balthasar’s description regarding how the form of anything is twofold: the sensible image and the deeper reality that that sensible image points to. Unpacking this idea becomes critical for how we consider Balthasar’s central theological claim that in the form of Jesus Christ the hiddenness of God is revealed. In other words, one must examine how the essence of God radiates forth through the form of Jesus Christ. Once a person has considered the philosophical within this form structure

---


they can then examine how the function of form and that which radiates from within actually have transformative effect on the human creature. Simply put, the person and work of Jesus Christ is that through which the essence of the Trinitarian life actually becomes unveiled or expressed as the transformative truth for the world. By way of this chapter we move deeper into the theological structure of Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation discovering that how human’s know is radically shaped by the encounter with the trinitarian divine knowing expressed in the form of Jesus Christ.

Another way of conceiving this chapter is by recognizing that Balthasar’s work on the phenomenological relationship between subject and object moves us toward the greater consideration of the expressive structures (human and divine) through which creaturely logic is able to receive in the flesh divine logic. These structures are the medium through which the form of Christ radiates forth the truth of the trinitarian life.36 Balthasar contends:

We must wait until Jesus Christ for the identity of unity and difference described above, an identity that, for Christian faith, leads unmistakably into the mystery of the Trinity. By affirming the unity of the divine essence while clearly attesting, through antithetical statements, to the presence of dialogical opposition [Opposition] in it, Jesus gives us the key to the mystery of the living God, a mystery that truly appears in all mysteriousness precisely when we are given access to it.37

The form points us to the depth of the trinitarian life. Through the form the ontological structure of the divine and the ontological structure of the human creature encounter one

---

36 See Ibid., 303-309 for a detailed presentation on the idea of expression in the Theo-Logic. Her argument is clear and concise developing a thorough argument for how Balthasar finite and infinite structures and how this structures are key to understanding Jesus Christ as that form through which the hiddenness of God is expressed to humanity while remaining hidden.

another. This becomes the linchpin to Balthasar’s understanding of revelation. It is also that central point where an epistemological structure becomes evident especially in the way that divine knowing is able to transform human knowing.

Chapter Five: Elizabeth of the Trinity: A Living Embodiment of an Epistemological Encounter

After considering Balthasar’s idea regarding how the form of Jesus Christ reveals the ontological structure of the divine, the next move is to investigate how Balthasar understood the re-schematizing power that is able to transform the human consciousness. Chapter five examines that which radiates from within the form of Jesus Christ. That is, the transforming Truth of the Holy Spirit.

For Balthasar, one cannot do Christology without a Pneumatology. Thus, to understand more fully Balthasar’s consideration of what is revealed in the Christ event we must look at Balthasar’s insight into the Holy Spirit as the interpreter of that which radiates from within the form of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit as interpreter becomes key to the argument that human consciousness is re(created) in its encounter with trinitarian divine knowing that radiates from within the form of Jesus Christ. We have considered the ontological structures of both the divine and human. We have thoroughly investigated what is necessary ontologically for the form of Jesus Christ to carry out its mission in the world. Having established the ontological building blocks we can now examine the epistemological edifice that is built upon the ontological structure. Chapter five analyzes Balthasar’s argument that the Holy Spirit is interpreter of the form via the tangible life of Elizabeth of the Trinity.
Balthasar argues for the Spirit’s work as the transformative power in the circumincessio of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit as interpreter is the power of God radiating from within the relationship between the Father and the Son. Balthasar states:

Christ is present to faith as an indivisible and hence believable figure or form \([\textit{Gestalt}]\) (including the formlessness \([\textit{Gestaltlosigkeit}]\) of the cross); yet it is the Spirit who gives believers eyes to discern God’s revelation as a integral, organically differentiated form \([\textit{Gesalt}]\).

Not from the remote standpoint of a dispassionate observer, but by being drawn into the form itself; for it is only from within it that we can experience and evaluate its rightness.\(^{38}\)

Balthasar’s work regarding the Holy Spirit demonstrates that the Spirit’s power radiates from within the trinitarian life and transforms the human creature in an encounter with the divine. Sain, in her work on Balthasar states, “It is the Spirit who impresses the form of Christ into the being of the believer and helps the believer to be conformed even more closely to Christ. Assisted by the Spirit, the soul’s own expression becomes an image of the Image itself: the form of Christ.”\(^{39}\) What becomes critical at this point is noting that the transformative power of God that Balthasar believes transforms human consciousness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is intimately tied to the essence of God that radiates forth from within the form of Jesus Christ. Balthasar’s entire ontological project as an expression of the trinitarian life contains within it a hidden reality of epistemological transformation. This is not epistemological in the sense of the word from a modern, philosophical perspective. It is more in line with a way of knowing familiar to the early Church Fathers. Balthasar states:


\(^{39}\) Sain, “Expression in the \textit{Theo-Logic},” 313.
Let us begin with the action of grace, which is both an ontological elevation and transformation of man and the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in him. Supernatural participation in the divine nature creates (this is only another word for it) a new connaturality of the soul with divine things, and this connaturality, in turn, as a modification of the purely natural relationship between God and the creature, is immediately translated into a new inclination and readiness. Not that the creature’s ontological advancement to the sphere of God is, as such, adequately transmitted to the creature’s consciousness; rather the structure of human thought remains the same, but the standpoint of the whole person’s being—from which one thinks, wills, and perceives—has been changed. The effects on the sphere of consciousness are indirect and successive, corresponding to the readiness with which the free person assents to this new inclination which has been bestowed upon him and made available to him, the readiness with which he allows this inclination to take root in him and permits it to have its effects on the clearly perceived and psychologically graspable personal sphere.  

Balthasar believes the Holy Spirit has transformative effect on the ontological structure of the human being. This subtle shift ontologically (the standpoint of the whole person’s being) is the starting point for the “indirect and successive” shifts that take place in the human consciousness, if the human creature assents. As Balthasar continues, “When one turns away from one’s fallenness in and to the world, in order now to contemplate the divine values, love awakens, and this love in turn confers a new ability to see God and his infinite love.”

In some sense we have now arrived at the place where Balthasar wants us to reach all along: the power of love. The power of love becomes clearly evident once we have studied the ontological structures of the human and divine, once we have examined the form of Jesus Christ; and, once we have considered the transformative gift of presence in


41 Ibid., 248.
the Holy Spirit. In the end, the philosophical and theological leitmotiv for Balthasar’s entire work is love. Love is the truth of all being. The power of divine love ontologically and epistemologically transforms the human creature. Chapter five will investigate how this speculative work regarding the ontology, form and epistemology become evident in the particular life of a human creature: Elizabeth of the Trinity.

The heart of chapter five examines how Balthasar’s work on Elizabeth of the Trinity gives shape to his conviction that the Trinity transforms the consciousness of the human knower through the form of Jesus Christ. Balthasar’s biography of Elizabeth lets us see how the speculative elements in Balthasar’s theology up to this point come into vivid focus in the life of Elizabeth. In this biography one can see more clearly the encounter between the ontological structure of the divine and the human as presented in the form of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The reader can see how in Elizabeth the “flesh of revelation” is visible and how the trinitarian knowing in the life of God transforms Elizabeth’s human consciousness.

Balthasar provides in this biography a visible image of a life that in many ways is invisible. Balthasar states, “Although every strictly contemplative life in a general sense is a testimony to the invisible, there are still explicit commissions of word and formulation. It is to these that Elizabeth’s belongs.” For Balthasar it seems that reflection on the lives of saints gives us insight into how the trinitarian life is transformative of human consciousness. Elizabeth was no exception. Interestingly enough, it could be argued that contemplatives or mystics have a unique role or mission.

It seems as if their seclusion, their “leaving of the world,” so to speak has a more self-serving purpose. However, Balthasar sees the mission or calling of Religious as serving a larger purpose. He states:

There are some people in the Church who, through a special calling, are entrusted by God with a special mission, and this calling lifts them above the valleys into the vicinity of God and requires of them the sort of total cooperation expressed by Jesus Christ in the evangelical counsels: to leave the whole world in order to follow the call singlemindedly and to live out the heavenly will. But these people receive their commission for others, not for themselves alone.\(^43\)

Christians like Elizabeth are the visible form of the Holy Spirit’s continual work of the Trinity’s life in the lives of human creatures.

Elizabeth was shaped deeply by the scriptures, particularly the letters to the Ephesians and to the Romans. The phrase that struck her was \textit{in laudem gloriae gratiae ipsius} [to the praise of the glory of his grace]. This phrase along with additional scripture from Ephesians and Romans became the framework for her calling for the rest of her life.\(^44\) Elizabeth was enraptured by these verses and she spoke gloriously of God’s predestined call on her life, her adoption as a child of God.\(^45\) Balthasar demonstrates how Elizabeth’s complete devotion to a contemplative life is foundational for understanding how human beings can participate in God’s life. She is an example of what becomes a continual theme in Balthasar’s reflections. Elizabeth’s life demonstrates the encounter

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 416-417

\(^{44}\) See Ibid., 385-386.

\(^{45}\) See Ibid., 388-392.
between the divine and the human which leads to ever greater transformation of the human creature.

Mark McIntosh illuminates this relationality between the divine and the human by highlighting the point that Balthasar sees in the saints a “pattern of encounter.” McIntosh states:

What von Balthasar is uncovering here is a trinitarian structure, not within the mystic’s own being, but in the new relationship experienced as the mystic comes to live more and more in communion with Another. The theme of separation and distance which we noted before is crucial here: the creature lives in a kind of distance from God, within which, quite wondrously, the most intimate communion can happen - without the distance being overthrown and the creature annihilated into identity with God.46

By way of revelation: a pattern of encounter, the reality of contemplation comes to life in the believer. Thus, we find ourselves coming full circle and returning once again to that which was examined in chapter four: the ontological structure of the Trinity. What becomes evident in Elizabeth’s life is that the very structure of the Trinity allows for the human creature to participate in the life of God. This very participation becomes that power by which the human consciousness is transformed. For Elizabeth her act of adoration takes her to the depth of the Trinitarian life and this mission, this commitment to adoration becomes transformative. In other words, the very form of Jesus Christ from which radiates the life of the Father as an act of the Holy Spirit’s enrapturing love becomes that appearance by which the depth of God encounters the human form of Elizabeth’s own radiating being. As Balthasar highlights: “Nothing but contemplation and awe, beyond all satisfaction and bliss for herself, nothing but being for, being with,

being a response and being at love’s disposal.” Through her adoration of the Trinity, Elizabeth is satiated with the very participatory life that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In her adoration she is taken deeper into the Trinity’s act of adoration between the three persons. Through adoration Elizabeth is taken into the life of trinitarian adoration. Thus, her consciousness is swept up into the consciousness of God.

This dissertation focuses on how Balthasar conceives of the encounter between the Divine and the human. Arguing that epistemology is grounded within ontology Balthasar shapes a concept of knowing in the loving relationship between the Being of God and the being of the human creature. A fundamental question guides the conversation to the next chapter: if God as uncreated Being creates finite creatures, then how can uncreated Being be in relationship with created being? More specifically, through a Balthasarian lens how are we to understand this encounter in light of the Christian idea that uncreated Being has taken upon Itself the flesh of created being? I seek answers to these questions in chapter two: Unveiling the Ontological Structure of the Human Creature.

---


48 See McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 111
A key to understanding Balthasar is the way his historical study of Christian thought influenced his appreciation for the Thomistic notion of *analogia entis*. The building blocks for Balthasar’s epistemology of love is a Christian ontology handed down over the centuries. Therefore it is vital to this research that we examine the ontological foundation upon which Balthasar builds this epistemology.

The goal of this chapter is to examine Balthasar’s distinctive understanding of “difference” as the foundation for an ontological structure of the human creature and an ontological structure of the divine. In particular I will focus on the idea of “ontological difference” via Balthasar’s insistence that our knowing starts with concrete things through our senses.¹ Balthasar states:

> No metaphysics of Being as such and its transcendental qualities can be separated...
from concrete experience, which is always of the senses. ‘The True,’ the disclosure of Being in its totality, only becomes visible where a particular thing is adjudged true. The goodness of Being is only visible where one meets with some good thing which both brings ‘the Good’ near and – through its finitude, fragility and relative ‘badness’ – causes it to retreat again. And we know that there is beauty from the sensuous experience which presents and withdraws it, reveals and again conceals it, evanescent, in myriad layers.\(^2\)

Thus I will investigate how Balthasar’s use of *analogia entis* and the idea of real distinction is built upon his persistent premise that what moves the human heart is beauty, especially the beauty of what loves us and what we come to love. This beauty appears within the form of Christ qua *analogia entis*, and qua real distinction. Consequently, this chapter considers the critical role of *analogia entis* for understanding a Balthasarian epistemology via the relationship between ontology/metaphysics and wonder/love (aesthetics).

The steps toward achieving this goal are twofold: first, we will examine the notion of “otherness” via Balthasar’s historical analysis of Christian thought. This analysis provides insight into how his interpretation of this history shapes Balthasar’s unique claim for the ontological mystery of revelation and the epistemologically “love-centered” encounter of the human and divine within it. To reiterate, the question arching over all of Balthasar’s ontological considerations is that classic metaphysical question: “Why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?” Balthasar’s appreciation for this question comes from his insistence that the beauty of wonder is central to any admiration of a being’s existence. For Balthasar this question gives shape to how someone considers the distinction between the infinite and the finite. Reflecting on why there is anything instead of nothing is central to Balthasar because it is his metaphysical starting point for the

reclamation of the gift of wonder that was lost in the historical shift from the Patristic and High Scholastic periods as they evolved into the modern era including the speculative thought in his contemporary setting. In other words, Balthasar’s high regard for this metaphysical question is radically shaped by his insight into the evolution of thought (Patristic to High Scholastic to Modern) regarding the relationship between God and creation.

The second step requires us to examine the unique matrix through which Balthasar constructively uses ontology as the building block for a peculiarly contemporary idea regarding analogia entis. Following these steps prepares us to map out the intricate nature of the human/divine relationship (chapters three and four) in light of the metaphysical, ontological and analogical underpinnings of Balthasar’s theological genius. It allows us to see more clearly the foundation upon which Balthasar’s constructs his unique argument for the relationship between subjects and objects and, in the larger picture, the creaturely and divine and it gives ontological weight to how the form of Jesus Christ can transform human knowing. The influence of past theological development and the contemporary controversies of certain philosophical concepts will be our blueprint for understanding Balthasar’s unique development of analogia entis. Examining this Balthasarian blueprint gives us the necessary details to delve more fully into his argument for how the form of Jesus Christ is mystically transformative of human thinking.
Historical Influence

In a monumental yet somewhat obscure article titled, *Patristik, Scholastik und Wir*³ Balthasar gives an overarching analysis of three significant periods (Patristic, High Scholastic and Modern) in theological history. In this analysis Balthasar critically reflects on certain themes developed by theologians within these eras. His study of these three periods helps establish his influential and unique thought regarding *analogia entis.*⁴ By reclaiming the historical antecedents of the doctrine of the analogy of being Balthasar shapes his innovative approach to contemporary theology. According to Balthasar, his purpose in analyzing “the three great spiritual periods of the Church” is to reach deep into the soul of each one and measure its “law” via the “structural law” provided to us in the norm of the Gospel.⁵ Strictly speaking, Balthasar believes that an encounter with the Gospel leads a person to the essential reality of Christianity: Being in Christ.”⁶ Consequently, to comprehend Christianity within these three epochs Balthasar argues:

> Now the deepest longing of man is to ascend to God, to become like God, indeed to become equal to God. Whereas daily life chains and constricts him, confining him to the little world of his everyday life on this earth, a pressure ignites within him to tear away the chains of this slavery and to break through to the mysterious depths that lurk behind this world, to a place where he can be free, whole, wise and immortal—free of the limitations of his narrow ego, holding dominion over the total context of

---


⁴ It is important to note that Pryzwara was heavily influential on Balthasar’s novel use of the analogy of Being. Their work helped shape how Balthasar approached the relationship between the divine and human by way of a revelation that is centered upon analogy. For an excellent overview of Pryzwara’s influence on Balthasar see Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 15-44.

⁵ Balthasar, *FSO*, 352.

⁶ Ibid., 352-361.
events, superior to fate and to death.  

For Balthasar, this longing to ascend to God, to become like God, to become equal to God is also that place wherein resides our very dissimilarity to God. Thus, the essential law of Christianity, argues Balthasar is expressed most unambiguously in this way:

This not-being-God of the creature must be maintained as the most fundamental fact of all, ranking first and above all others. That God is God: This is the most immense and absolutely unsurpassable thought. It says to me (if it has really struck home to me in the deepest part of my being) with an absolute evidence which can never be gainsaid that I myself to the very marrow of my existence am not God.

For Balthasar the fundamental law of Christianity resides within the philosophical concept of analogia entis. However, what makes this explicitly Christian is that this concept is grounded in the Being of Christ. This point will be elucidated in later chapters. For now, the pivotal claim is an epistemological one. Expressed in more philosophical language, the essential Christian law is that the reality of knowing (epistemology) is grounded in the reality of being (ontology). Or more theologically, the reality of human knowing is begotten from within divine Being. As Balthasar continues:

And that is why, to the extent the creature comes nearer to God and becomes more “similar” to him, the dissimilarity must always appear as the more basic, as the “first truth.” The more we know of God (and that always will be: the more we are “in God,” since we can only know God through God), all the more do we also know that we are not God and that God is the One ever beyond all similarity, the ever more improbable, the ever ungraspable One. Or, as all the authentic mystics express it: The more we know God, the less we know him.

7 Ibid., 353.
8 Ibid., 354.
9 Ibid., 355. Bold emphasis mine.
In light of this claim, Balthasar evaluates the three epochs of Christian history in order to develop his own unique conceptualization of *anologia entis*. By way of his own phenomenological turn (the mother/child relationship) Balthasar gives shape to the concept of real distinction in a way that is uniquely modern and yet intimately connected to that which he argues is the “essential structural law of Christianity: Being in Christ.” In other words, Balthasar’s distinctive development of *analogia entis* is a phenomenological logic laid out in terms of a four-fold distinction in *Glory of the Lord*, Volume V. His claims in the formation of a uniquely modern establishment of *analogia entis* are examined below.

The concern driving Balthasar’s consideration of these three Christian eras is what he perceived as the “decay of Western culture among contemporary Europeans.”

What we uncover in Balthasar’s critical interpretation of the Patristic, High Scholastic and Modern periods is what we might term the key philosophical concept in any Balthasarian project: “. . .otherness, in fact, is the basic condition for love.” In fact, this

---


11 Ibid. 191. Balthasar is doing something profound here. Other scholars make bold statements about “otherness” and Balthasar’s unique approach makes a bold claim that seeks to reshape the debate about the distance between God and creation. For example, D.C. Schindler brings attention to Balthasar’s critique of Jean-Luc Marion’s term “beyond being” by way of Balthasar’s contrast of Marion with Gustav Siewerth in *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 413-414. As Schindler points out, Balthasar’s claim is “(Gustav Siewerth distinguished the difference between be-ing [*Sein*] and being [*Seiendes*] from the difference between act and substance, attempting to reserve the latter for the Trinity; this enabled him to ground the first difference in the second, which is the basis of ‘otherness’ in God: Gustav Siewerth, *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* [Düsseldorf, 1979], 19, 32. . .J-L. Marion seems in his two works *L’Idole et la distance* (Grasset, 1979) and *Dieu sans l’etre* (Fayard, 1982) to concede too much to the critique of Heidegger and others and to
ontological concept becomes the basis for all of Balthasar’s epistemological considerations. It cannot be overstated how critical the notion of “otherness” is for Balthasar. He states, “That God is God: This is the most immense and absolutely unsurpassable thought. It says to me (if it has really struck home to me in the deepest part of my being) with an absolute evidence which can never be gainsaid that I myself to the very marrow of my existence am not God.” To understand ontological difference is at the center of understanding love. What becomes evident in Balthasar’s historical evaluation is that in the movement from one period to the next we find that each era evolves more fully toward a clearer understanding of the encounter between the finite and the infinite. Or, as Balthasar says (appearing almost too simplistic):

In the course of its two-thousand year history of spiritual and cultural life, Christianity has created for itself a wide variety of expressive forms, particularly in the West; indeed Christianity has been crucial in bringing forth and developing these forms. In a labile and constantly changing relationship, it has turned these priceless works of art born of the human spirit into its dwelling places, its forms of expression, its vesture—indeed, it has almost made them a part of its very body. So it is almost obvious that today, where these dwellings seem to have become dilapidated, indeed where the worldly “body” of the Church seems to be wasting away, Christianity is being placed before the same question of what its living essence and core is that secular culture has also had to face. For to recognize a core as the creative ground of those [later] forms means that we cannot identify it with them. . . . Swimming against the stream of history, we seek to trace the course

disregard the passages where Siewerth and even Thomas characterize the bonum [the good] as the intrinsic ‘self-transcendence’ of esse. This does not mean, however, that we must (like the late Hengstenberg) leave esse (rightly understood) behind us as something penultimate—which, in any case, is an impossibility for thought. True, only the absolute goodness of God can make sense of something like a nonsubsistent act of being (for finite things). Nevertheless, however much this act of being is ‘the likeness of God’ in the world (Gustav Siewerth, Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes [Kerle, 1958], it does not flow forth (emanat) from somewhere above the Divine Being, which, as we have sufficiently shown, is itself the abyss of love.” Footnote 10 in Balthasar, TL II, 134. Schindler argues that Balthasar’s four-fold difference seeks to emphasize the radical significance of “wonder” as the key to the structure of being. For Balthasar wonder is at the heart of being and ultimately it is Balthasar’s objective to demonstrate that the at the heart of wonder is the abyss of divine love. See Schindler, 414.

12 Balthasar, FSO, 354.
of this development epoch by epoch, in order to find once more that living wellspring that lies behind all these cultural forms of expression.\textsuperscript{13}

One must realize that Balthasar’s simplistic reading of the eras focuses on that wellspring or content that lies behind the historical forms. To better understand this evolution of form and content, let us briefly probe Balthasar’s interpretation of each period. Doing so will give us a clearer picture of the foundation upon which Balthasar builds.

\textit{The Patristic Period}

In a variety of Balthasar’s works one can see he constantly returns to the Christian thinkers of the first eight centuries.\textsuperscript{14} In his consideration of specific works of the Church Fathers it becomes abundantly clear that certain Hellenistic themes become problematic for him. In fact, Brian Daley argues that for Balthasar, the High Scholastic and Modern periods become remedies for the over-Hellenized patristic view. He summarizes Balthasar’s conclusions this way:

\begin{quote}
The strength of the patristic view of things was its sense of the all-sufficiency of God, and its ‘deep ontological piety’, according to which existence itself is a prayer. Its weakness was its oversimplification of the relationship of God to the world, which had failed to see the enduring importance of the otherness, the particularity and concreteness, of creation. Scholastic and modern thought, in different ways, have remedied this, ‘because now the sovereignty and totality of God no longer comes into view at the cost of the world’s being but precisely as its fulfillment.’\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 348.

However, below the surface of Hellenistic theology is what Balthasar calls a “danger zone.”

There is no doubt, according to Balthasar, that certain neo-Platonic ideas influenced Patristic thinkers. Basically the central issue surrounds the theological understanding of the relationship between God and the world. For Balthasar it is quite evident that the Patristic era embodied a “participation” schema. He states, “The world is essentially what participates, while God is what is partaken of.” In theological language this participation is a pattern of egress/regress. Depending on which Church Father a person seeks to interpret effects how a person understands this participatory relationship.

The basic point is simple: the created world egresses or emanates from God. Balthasar makes the point that the Gnostics and later the neo-Platonists, for example, created a scheme wherein the created order egressed from God and then sought to return to the divine in a process of ascension or spiritual movement back to God. This apparent pantheism was problematic for Balthasar especially in light of the consideration of the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. As Balthasar claims, “The incarnation is consequently thought of as the most extreme point of the ‘egression’ of God from himself; the self-emptying (kenosis) appears as God’s self-alienation in the service of

---


16 Balthasar, FSO, 372-380. While von Balthasar provides criticism of certain themes from within the Patristic period we must also note that he highly praised the zeal with which the thinkers of this age bring the reality of Christ into a radiant encounter with the world. For example on page 371 of “The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves” he states, “Greatness, depth, boldness, flexibility, certainty and a flaming love-these virtues of youth are marks of patristic theology.” As much as von Balthasar receives criticism from such contemporary thinkers as Dom Polycarp Sherwood for what Sherwood calls Balthasar’s “leap” from his own context back into the historical context of early thinkers (See Daley quotation of Sherwood in “Balthasar’s reading of the Church Fathers, 187), I find that von Balthasar’s desire to reap a reward spiritually from the gifts of early thinkers is illuminating for contemporary Christian spiritual practice.

17 Ibid., 373.
fetching the world back home to the Godhead.” These neo-platonic traits, argued Balthasar, were clearly influential on the early development of Christian thought.

However, Balthasar’s concern most directly involves the “spiritualization” of Christianity that was such a part of the ethos of Hellenistic thought: “In consequence of the movement of the ascending, step-by-step return of the world potencies into God, this movement proceeds unambiguously away from the material to the spiritual. Spiritualization, presented in a thousand different colorations, is the basic tendency of the patristic period.” This tendency radically shapes, I would argue, how Balthasar develops his own theological agenda in regard to the divine purpose within the

---

18 Ibid., 375.

19 To be fair to Balthasar and Patristic studies a disclaimer is necessary. Balthasar’s article seeks to address the form and content of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as presented in three eras of Christianity. No doubt it may appear that Balthasar simplifies the Patristic period as a time when the Church Fathers took over an emanationist scheme from Plato. To do so might imply a denial of the doctrine of creation within the Fathers’ own theological development. I believe Balthasar would agree. One must remember that Balthasar’s “too-simplistic” reading of these eras serves his larger purpose of form and content. Balthasar says clearly in this article, “Of course, in the preceding we have first painted a strongly negative picture. We have described the effects and results of the encounter of the Christian content with the Greek Platonic form of thought in such a way that it would seem as if this encounter had led to a conquest of the former by the latter. But the proper way to judge this process also entails that we observe the second principle of interpretation as formulated above. Between form and content there exists not an overlapping relationship but a symbolic one that is liable and very hard to specify. Everywhere we find that words become transparent in a deeper way than their merely denotative meaning” (FSO, 376-377). For Balthasar the point serves to remind us of the relationship between form and content. Of course this point is at the heart of my dissertation. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. in Pattern of Redemption (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 1994) highlights the point nicely. He states, “For it is our very glance back through history that manifests to us the many, many forms of expression that the Church has adopted in her historical career. And the search for a norm, Protestant or Catholic, to judge those myriad forms completes the distinction. And especially when that glance backward is accompanied by a wistful feeling that things were better ‘back then,’ the distinction between content and form takes on a special pathos. . . .But one of the key methodological presuppositions of Balthasar’s theology is that content and form can in fact never be neatly separated out from each other. He resists the nostalgic view that would elevate any period of Church history—the first century included—as the one that was quintessentially faithful, with all subsequent eras representing a decline, precisely because form and content cannot be that so easily distinguished” (108-109). Thus, Balthasar’s too-simplistic reading of these eras really points the reader toward his central focus: form and content.

20 Balthasar FSO, 375.
incarnation and how he perceives what takes place in the human/divine encounter in
the person of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the patristic period fails to develop a clear
understanding of the momentous reality of “otherness” in the finite/infinite relationship.\(^\text{21}\) Because of what the Patristic period taught Balthasar he will spend an inordinate amount
of time and ink establishing “otherness” as a key to the relationship between the created
world and the divine. The reality of otherness will be fleshed out below.

**The Scholastic Period**

If the notion of otherness is, according to Balthasar, insufficiently developed in
the theological work of the Patristic era, then the recognition of otherness in the
Scholastic period becomes for him a remedy (or the beginnings of a remedy) to such
deficiency. Balthasar recognizes this in Scholasticism’s turn from Plato to Aristotle.\(^\text{22}\) In
considering such a theological shift, he argues, “. . .this avoids even the appearance of a
pantheistic emanationism: God’s emergence out of himself no longer appears under the
image of self-alienation (and thus the ‘depotentializing’ of the divine substance) but
under the image of a creation, a generating [Erzeugung] of an Other, a partner.”\(^\text{23}\) What
we have here, argues Balthasar, is a shift from an egress/regress or emanationist scheme
to that classically Aristotelean concept of causality. God is the cause and creation is the
effect. And, of course, Balthasar will reference Thomas Aquinas as the great theological
Father of this “new” theology.\(^\text{24}\) As Balthasar puts it:

---


\(^{22}\) Balthasar, *FSO*, 380ff

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 381.
Thomas is basically the philosopher of “secondary causality.” He is thus also the theologian of “nature,” that is presupposed before any gracious and unmerited participation in God can take place and in fact is the basis by which this participation can take place. This provides theology with a way for expressing a most fundamental fact of the Christian dispensation, that every relationship of the creature to God is to be constructed only on the basis of mutual otherness that is always more predominant. Furthermore, it says that only this basis of ever-greater difference suffices to support and make possible the highest unity. Thomas saw the paradox in all its starkness when he asserted the principle that: The nearer a creature stands to God, the more it is capable of moving by virtue of its own powers.\textsuperscript{25}

Simply put, this “new” theology is the conceptualization of a “real distinction” between God and creation. It is through this conceptualization that Thomas will develop the notion of analogy of being.

Balthasar understands these shifts between the great Christian eras as progressive transitions taking place over significant periods of time. He also recognizes that in each era we might find what he would call a shift in the right direction. However, one should not be blind to the weaknesses that remained even when a remedy is found. The important point for our purpose here is to recognize that these shifts become for Balthasar major theological moves that radically shape, what he calls the fundamental law of Christianity. During the Scholastic period he argues that some of the Patristic “dangers fall away.” His concern regarding the “spiritualization” of the relationship between God and creation begins to be addressed. He states:

For no longer do the levels of being (spirit-soul-body; or man-animal-plant-matter) have the exclusive character of a step-by-step depotentializing of being and of a progressive alienation from the central fire of life. In place of the Great Chain of Being there emerges the rounded, ordered cosmos closed in on itself in which every individual thing possesses its worth and

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 381.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 381. Bold emphasis mine.
dignity and no single thing—including inert and dead matter—is permitted to be dispensable to the whole.\textsuperscript{26}

The distinction between God and creation takes greater shape, which, in turn, effects how we consider the relationship between spirit and matter. This is crucial to how Balthasar understands, not only the relationship between the infinite and finite, but even more importantly in his own schema how this relationship is considered via the form of Jesus Christ. For Balthasar, how we comprehend this distinction effects how we understand the form of Jesus Christ as the revelation of a wholly Other God. According to Balthasar, “With the Scholastic concept of nature, the possibility is finally taken seriously that the incarnation can be seriously misinterpreted in a Docetic and Monophysite direction as a transitorium to a purely spiritual condition.”\textsuperscript{27} This idea, of course, lends itself to the purpose of this project, which is the idea that the form of Jesus Christ is able to transform human consciousness. If it is accurate that Balthasar believed that human knowing is able to be transformed in its encounter with the form of Jesus Christ, then it is no wonder that Balthasar believes it is critical to shift toward an Aristotelian argument for cause and effect and the recognition of distinction in the relationship between the infinite and finite and in the relationship between nature and grace. As Balthasar asserts, “For since grace is no longer a pneumatic \textit{substance} (as it is in the murky anthropological ‘Pneuma’ of the patristic period) but as modification (even if an unheard of one) of the natural substance

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 381.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 382.
(an accidens), all participation in a unification with God can be viewed from now on as a simultaneous perfection and crowning of the ‘naturality’ of nature.”

While Balthasar finds within this shift a much-needed remedy he also finds that it contains its own shortcomings. Even with his appreciation for the work of the Scholastic period, Balthasar argues that there are dangers hidden within the Aristotelian perspective. A primary example is the division between philosophy and theology, which Balthasar argues is a distortion caused by late Scholasticism. In his critical analysis of the Scholastic period he states, “The real danger of this position begins only where it forgets that this total world vision is a theological one, precisely in its most reliable conclusions. That is, this is a vision that God has given.” Thus, Balthasar becomes quite critical (as can be seen in many of his writings) of “modern Scholasticism’s” development of purely

28 Ibid., 382.

29 Ibid., 382-383. The reason Balthasar makes such a bold statement is because he believes that an authentic comprehension of reason requires a conceptualization of knowledge grounded in an “otherness” that is founded upon the otherness of God. Throughout volumes IV and V of Glory of the Lord Balthasar makes the case for the relationship between theology and philosophy (eventually divided into two separate disciplines in the modern period) by emphasizing over and over the need to understand finite reason as a vision given by God. He states, “The one, unique, fundamental question of all philosophy remains this: Has the act of transcendence already found the transcendent object? Is it, as act, therefore one with its object or not? Is the light in which we accomplish the act of transcendence identical with the illumination (Ein-Leuchten) of transcendence? Or, to put the question another way: Can the light of reason bring the radiance and the glory of myth within its purview?” GL IV, 155-156. Schindler notes this same quotation in his work stating that a major point of all of Balthasar’s work is the argument that reason must come from an other and not from within the subject itself. Schindler claims, “…if we interpret the light and illumination Balthasar speaks of here as the grounding a priori aspect of knowledge, the question is whether this light ‘breaks in’ in any sense form outside the subject (as an ‘Ein-Leuchten’) or whether it is wholly projected by the knowing subject, something that is already a function of the subject himself. In this latter case, Balthasar goes on to say, reason is essentially ‘monological’ and it is exclusive of relation to an other as a matter of its structure.” Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Structure of Truth, 3. Thus for Balthasar his entire argument for an epistemology of love is built on the notion of difference particularly the difference between the finite and the infinite. The point of this project is to systematically show how Balthasar’s epistemology is founded upon love and love requires, for him, that otherness is the link for both the structures of the finite and infinite reality of Being.
philosophical systems. Nevertheless, Balthasar finds that the Scholastic period provides the initial pieces for a necessary solution to the weak areas of Patristic thought.

To reiterate, Balthasar sees a move away from blurred lines between the created order and the divine. With the Scholastics the distinction between the two has been made and even more important the purpose of creation becomes clearer. He writes,

In this view, what is revealed is precisely that the highest nobility of the creature consists in being essentially and ontically a constantly available tool of the divine praise and service. But this also means that this absolute availability (potentia oboedientialis), and consequently the attitude of entrusting oneself and handling oneself over that is the subjective correlate of this availability, defines the ultimate essence and the most perfect attitude of the creature. If, therefore, by elevating man to participate in the divine nature, God claims this availability, this must imply that the dimension of the supernatural really is inscribed in the fundamental outline of nature. The unity simply could not be closer, no matter how much we separate and divide for purposes of analysis.  

What Balthasar appears to be saying is that God has created the world in the divine image. In this similarity we not only realize the unity between the divine and creation we also realize how paradoxically dissimilar both are. We will discover later that this move towards distinction becomes significantly crucial to how Balthasar develops his own theological argument for the unity between God and creation.

The Modern Period

Interestingly enough, Balthasar’s analysis of the Modern period is much more brief and surprisingly commendatory. Those readers familiar with Balthasar’s writings may be amazed that Balthasar makes such clearly positive comments about Modernity based on the simple fact that much of his work is constructively critical of the Modern

30 Ibid., 383.
31 Ibid., 383.
period, particularly German Idealism. Nevertheless, Balthasar provides some lucid insight regarding the effect of Modernity on Christian thought.

Three points are central to Balthasar’s analysis. First he argues that the Modern period makes a shift from the universal to the particular. Second, Modernity emphasizes the person (personal). These two points lead to a third: materiality becomes central. In outlining his analysis of Modernity he says, “Both lines of development: 1) the progressive development of the individual and the concrete and thus the increasing appreciation for the actual worldliness of the world, and 2) the progressive emphasis of the personal, were capped off in Christian thought by a shift of meaning that unified both.”

For Balthasar these two lines of thinking demonstrate an overcoming of the weak areas in theological thought stemming from the Patristic and Scholastic periods. It is as if the previous two eras find their fulfillment in Modernity. In light of this shift toward the particular and the personal Balthasar argues that the relationship between God and creation takes on a new element. The reality of “revelation” becomes central in the Modern period because of the distinctive nature of the creature. God who is wholly Other cannot be reached by humankind simply through some “shaking off” of the material or absorption of the finite into the infinite in some “spiritualized” sense. Balthasar argues, “Instead of individuatio ratione materiae, gradually what takes its place is the individuatio ratione formae.”

---

32 Ibid., 387. It is important to note that Balthasar is critical of certain areas within Modernity that become corrupted by certain thinkers who overemphasize the individual. Balthasar makes it clear in this article that in certain Modern contexts the particular “degenerated into empiricism, rationalism, Deism, materialism and historicism” (386).

33 Ibid., 386.
individual as more than material. The idea of form takes shape and brings to the forefront the reality that within the form is the act of embodiment or personhood. Balthasar continues, “Over against the natural and objective mode of thought of Thomas Aquinas, the personal and actualist approach of Scotus came to be emphasized. In its ultimate (later) culmination, this trend of thought sums up the whole realm of objective, logical, and ontological connections as those that express and objectify the ultimate, act-determined moment of the person’s freedom.”

Thus Balthasar argues that a new type of theological relationship develops when considering the finite and the infinite. The Modern period, he argues, gives shape to the reality of “personhood.” Thus, “The world now seems dependent from moment to moment on the unfathomable will, good pleasure, and love of a majestic and sovereign Person.” Through this dependent relationship, finite reality becomes clearly defined as that which is not infinite. For Balthasar, the Modern era becomes that point in history where the shortcomings of Hellenism are overcome. He states:

For the two characteristic theses of Platonism—the priority of the universal over the individual to the point that the world of Ideas was absorbed into the divine sphere, and the efforts that go along with this view of trying to get away from the material and particular in favor of the spiritual and general—finally experienced its reversal. The personal God, who in his actual personal intimacy cannot be reached from below or from the outside or taken to be an objective thing or expropriated by man’s spiritual sense, must now first reveal himself if he is to be known at all.

---

34 Ibid., 386-387.
35 Ibid., 387.
36 Ibid., 387.
Therefore, the notion of revelation takes on a new meaning. Revelation, argues Balthasar, is the way in which the divine enters into the world. This incarnation of the infinite with the finite becomes that place where the truth of finite existence comes to light. In the person of Jesus Christ, the relationship between both finite and infinite otherness is given meaning. Balthasar states:

The world into which the incarnation has taken place is a truly worldly world: not, for example, a shadowy and symbolic copy of a higher, spiritual, ideal and universal world but rather a world in which there are unique individual persons and situations, in which time and space are the bases of qualitative differences, differences which cannot be reduced to a general concept without robbing the particular of something essential to itself. This is a world, then, in which there is a true history. Moments, that is, have their own immediate relation to the eternal and cannot be replaced with something else. This is a world in which the bodily and physical is not something provisional but rather a definitive component.  

This being the case we hear, according to Balthasar, that in the Modern period potentia obedientialis comes to fulfillment. In the Modern period the reality of the supernatural entering into the natural or the reality that God enters the created order takes on primary significance. Balthasar argues,

God steps into this so very worldly world, so dissimilar to God, and claims it for himself, precisely in this worldliness and dissimilarity. The very feature that makes the world the world, its naturalness with all that this means--reasoning, logical thinking, free will, sympathetic feeling, the vitality and animality of man’s physicality, his emotions, pains and desires, in short the whole great bazaar of everyday life on earth—has been sought out by God as the place for his incarnation.

Here we arrive at what is most critical for Balthasar. In the modern period Christian thought has come to realize that this wholly Other God has entered into this created order.

---

37 Ibid., 388.
38 Ibid., 388.
through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This is the moment for Balthasar. This is the place wherein all becomes transformed for the created order. The reality of the relationship between the finite and infinite has come into clear view. In the person of Jesus Christ creation has come to know the divine in a way it has not known before. The reality strikes us that in our similarity to the divine our dissimilarity increases. Thus, the Modern period brings to fulfillment what was given within the Scholastic period, particularly by Thomas Aquinas. By way of the particularly concrete, personal materiality of createdness we come to know more clearly the wholly Other of the divine. However, we also come to realize that the wholly Other has chosen the created world as that place in which to reveal that which is wholly Other. In essence, the analogy of being comes into full maturity thanks to Modernity and it is thinkers like Balthasar that will demonstrate the critical role that *analogia entis* plays in Christian thought. Let us now turn to Balthasar’s unique development of this concept.

**The Analogy of Being**

Up to this point we have examined Balthasar’s own historical analysis of Christian thought. More specifically we looked at Balthasar’s consideration of certain eras in Christianity and the way in which these eras argued for the relationship between the divine and created orders. Having considered this let us now investigate the development of Balthasar’s own thought as it is built upon the past. Here I will examine Balthasar’s unique contribution to the concept *analogia entis*. Looking deeper into the distinct way that Balthasar develops the concept of *analogia entis* brings clarity to the way in which he advances his argument for the ontological structures of creation and the
triune God. In other words, knowing more fully Balthasar’s consideration of *analogia entis* guides our understanding of Jesus Christ as the form and the encounter between creation and God in this form of the incarnate Word. Furthermore, Balthasar’s novel development of *analogia entis* grounds his argument for epistemological transformation within the human creature.

Even the causal reader of Balthasarian studies will notice quickly that a myriad of writers make reference (or analyze in great detail) to the fact that the philosophical concept of *analogia entis* is of central concern to Balthasar. Clearly an understanding of this notion is vital for comprehending Balthasar’s entire theological work. However, the investigative reader will notice that in light of the history of this concept Balthasar makes a unique move. We have seen up to this point, in Balthasar’s analysis of Christian thought that “otherness/difference” is a central component to his understanding of metaphysics. Now I will examine how the concept of “difference” via *analogia entis* becomes central to a Balthasarian ontological construction of the human creature itself because of a concrete encounter. Specifically, I will present the case that “difference” qua *analogia entis* is necessary for understanding that mystery of an epistemology of love as radiated from with the concrete expression of being. Because of “difference” the transcendentals are powerful manifestations of being in the form of concrete experience.

---

Nichols states, “Contact, then, with concrete essences in their existence generates an experience of the transcendentals.” In other words I will demonstrate how the notion of analogia entis gives shape to how we understand the concept of embodiment in the ontological structure of the human creature. Understanding this ontological structure via Balthasar’s conceptualization of analogy of being helps set the stage for an analogical understanding of the divine/creaturely relationship. It guides our understanding for how the form of Jesus Christ becomes the place of holy encounter between the divine and created worlds. Balthasar contends:

The beautiful is above all a form (Gestalt) and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form’s interior. Species and lumen in beauty are one, if the species truly merits that name (which does not designate any form whatever, but pleasing, radiant form). Visible form not only “points” to an invisible, unfathomable mystery; form is the apparition of this mystery, and reveals it while, naturally, at the same time protecting and veiling it. Both natural and artistic form has an exterior which appears and an interior depth, both of which, however, are not separable in the form itself. The content (Gehalt) does not lie behind the form (Gestalt), but within it. Whoever is not capable of seeing and “reading” the form will, by the same token, fail to perceive the content. Whoever is not illuminated by the form will see no light in the content either.

Thus, understanding Balthasar’s use of analogia entis and its expressed polarity between a) the similarity/dissimilarity of the human creature’s freedom of interior and exterior expression in finite form; and, b) the similarity/dissimilarity of the infinite and finite encounter allows us to see more clearly how the form of Jesus Christ is both the self-disclosure of the divine interiority and the transformative power of human knowing.

40 Nichols, A Key to Balthasar, 6.

The first move in understanding a Balthasarian *analogia entis* is the reality of wonder. For Balthasar, a sense of wonder is the heartbeat of ontology. In his intricately developed argument for the “real distinction” between God and the created world he states,

Wonder at Being is not only the beginning of thought, but—as Heidegger sees—also the permanent element (αρχη) in which it moves. But this means—contrary to Heidegger—that it is not only astonishing that an existent Being can wonder at Being in its own distinction from Being, but also that Being as such by itself to the very end ‘causes wonder,’ behaving as something to be wondered at, something striking and worthy of wonder.  

Balthasar grounds this sense of wonder in his phenomenological argument for the reality of Being found in the tangible relationship between the child and the mother (the first of the four distinctions to which we will analyze below) This phenomenological relationship between the child and mother is the essence of a Balthasarian ontology. At the core of any relationship between “beings” is the reality that the very soul of Being is the gift of wonder. Schindler states, “...wonder is not a merely subjective experience, but it is rather the objectively adequate response to the reality of being. Likewise, since it is the nature of being to cause wonder, being cannot be perceived as it is except from within this experience.” This point is key. For Balthasar the abstractness of ontological speculation (being) comes to actualization in the concrete. He states, “The fact that I find myself within the realm of a world and in the boundless community of other existent

---


43 Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth, 50.

44 Ibid., 32.
beings is astonishing beyond measure and cannot be exhaustively explained by any cause which derives from within the world."\textsuperscript{45} Concrete experience (e.g. the relationship between the mother and child) is the starting place where the essence of difference radiates forth in the contemplative process of encounter that comes from within experience yet is not reduced simply to the subjective experience. Here we see the beginnings of the centrality of analogy. However, most critical at this point is the beginnings of analogy as understood via the transcendental of beauty. Balthasar is preparing us for the analogical move he will make later in step four of his fourfold difference.

A second consideration for a Balthasarian \textit{analogia entis} is his argument that the essence of being as an experience of wonder must be considered via the transcendental of beauty. Balthasar argues that beauty gives us a distinctive approach to \textit{analogia entis}. Stephen Wigley makes clear,

\begin{quote}
In \textit{The Glory of the Lord} von Balthasar consciously models his work on the beautiful, as the first of the transcendentals of being. In doing this he is picking up on that recovery of the divine glory which is part of what he had discovered in Karl Barth. However, he is doing this within a framework in which he will insist on the crucial importance of analogy, and especially the analogy of being, which had been part of the debate between Barth and Przywara and which he has taken on further.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

\textit{Analogia Entis} is the critical piece that lends credibility to how Balthasar argues that beauty is conveyed via form. In order to recover divine glory Balthasar raises the issue regarding the relationship between the beauty of creation and the beauty of the divine.

Basically, Balthasar’s use of \textit{analogia entis} reclaims a “theory of perception” grounded in

\textsuperscript{45} Balthasar, \textit{GL} V, 615.
\textsuperscript{46} Stephen Wigley, \textit{Balthasar’s Trilogy} (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 25.
the structural reality of otherness. Reclaiming this theory of perception is fundamental to Balthasar’s argument that the form of Jesus Christ is transformative of human consciousness. Wigley states, “This means that to offer a theory 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. . . 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.” Thus beauty and *analogia entis* work hand in hand. By way of Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar makes his case for why beauty and analogy of being work together. He states, “Thomas’s doctrine of real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is a philosophical thesis but it enables us once again to make a clear differentiation between the ‘glory’ of God and the beauty of the world. . .”

To better comprehend Balthasar’s argument that *analogia entis* is a differentiation between the glory of God and the beauty of the world, we must briefly analyze what wonder is not. Balthasar considers wonder from within the metaphysical reality of encounter. In other words, wonder requires a “more” or as Schindler highlights, “Metaphysical wonder, however, is possible only where the horizon of *being* itself is not closed but is constituted in such a way as to include a ‘more’: in other words, to include a difference.” It is key that we not overlook this point. “Difference” is that element

47 Ibid., 32.


49 Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 32. Schindler provides a clear description of what Balthasar means by contrasting freedom with “necessity of Being.” In analyzing Balthasar’s comparison of genuine wonder with admiration Schindler argues states, “Admiration is the
within relationality that takes us beyond simple “admiration.” Difference in an encounter is what gives way to that which is unexpected. Admiration lacks the element of surprise. This sense of surprise or something new that is added to an experience of wonder is the notion of freedom. Freedom is essential to Balthasar’s argument for the relationship between created world and the divine in the form of Jesus Christ. As Schindler argues:

Freedom. . .is related to positivity insofar as it designates a movement that is genuinely new, because it genuinely adds something to what was already given. But, to return to the logical analogy, this means that the source of the “conclusion” cannot simply re-reduce back to the premises from which it was de-duced, but rather it must owe itself to the premises and something besides. Thus, admiration may be the “adequate” response to an inner, necessary ordering of being, which is beautiful perhaps because of the harmony that results from its reducibility to a single principle. But only wonder is adequate to freedom. And without freedom, there can be no wonder.50

To go deeper into what Balthasar means by difference and how it is critical to relationship and a sense of wonder we must examine the influence of Thomas Aquinas’ thought on Balthasar’s own theological work.

For Balthasar the essence of Thomas’ development of real distinction is the idea that in God’s divine freedom God chose to create. He states, “Now Thomas sees esse as the non-subsistent fullness and perfection of all reality and as the supreme ‘likeness of divine goodness’, and so God can no longer in any way be regarded as the being of

50 Ibid., 33.
things, except in the sense that he is their efficient, exemplary and final cause.” In other words, by way of an analysis of the mystery of being, Thomas’ contribution to Christian thought is the monumental influence of philosophy in regard to biblical revelation. Thomas juxtaposes the doctrine of creation with metaphysics. By doing so, Balthasar sees within Thomas the essential need to approach the divine in both its transcendent and immanent reality. As Fergus Kerr argues in his distillation of Balthasar’s strategy:

The crucial move, in Balthasar’s interpretation, is Aquinas’s conception of the real distinction, the ontological difference, in every and all created being, between existence and essence; this is what allows us to see the radical difference between creatures and God, and thus to respect each, letting creatures have their own reality and letting God be God, collapsing neither into the other.

For Balthasar, Thomas is the turning point for all Christian thought, for his philosophical composition moves Christian thought regarding the relationship between creation and the Divine away from the emanationist, egress/regress schemes toward the recognition of the distinction between creation and God. In Thomas’ work God is recognized as “wholly Other.” Because of Thomas, Balthasar suggests, “. . .in a new and

51 Balthasar, GL IV, 393.
53 Ibid., 234.
54 See Edward T. Oakes, S.J., Pattern of Redemption, 31. Oakes provides a succinct argument for what Thomas’ work on real distinction means for Christian thought. In a lucid way, Oakes states what Thomas’ work means. He writes, “For to him [Thomas] we owe what has hereafter been known as ‘the real distinction between essence and being.’ What this means is that the act of existing that inheres in each individual is distinct from what that individual is. Each actually existing individual is, qua existing, a thing distinct from its own essence. Not only does it not have to be, it owes its existence to an act of being, an esse that is itself not derived. This distinction is absolutely crucial, for from it comes the development of the analogy of being which in turn gives us access to the whole structure of Balthasar’s thought” (31).
much more radical way God is placed over and above all cosmic being, above
everything that can be calculated or attained within the structures, real or ideal, of the
cosmos: he is indeed ‘the wholly Other.’ We can know that God is, but not what he is.

For Balthasar the consequences of such a move are paramount for any Christian
epistemology. In fact, by way of Thomas’ *analogia entis* Balthasar uses the notion of
real distinction as the foundation for his own unique consideration of the miracle of
being. Thomas’ writings are the starting point for how Balthasar, through a
“phenomenology of love,” creates a schema that grounds the creature’s knowledge of
God in God’s very unknowability. Balthasar uses the loving relationship between a child
and its mother as the premiere analogy for how we come to know God. He states:

> The metaphysics of Thomas is thus the philosophical reflection of the
free glory of the living God of the Bible and in this way the interior
completion of ancient (and thus human) philosophy. It is a celebration
of the reality of the real, of that all-embracing mystery of being which
surpasses the powers of human thought, a mystery pregnant with the very
mystery of God, a mystery in which creatures have access to participation
in the reality of God, a mystery which in its nothingness and non-subsistence
is shot through with the light of the freedom of the creative principle, of
unfathomable love.\(^{56}\)

Having considered briefly, Thomas influence on Balthasar’s thought, let us now turn to
Balthasar’s distinctive development of the analogy of being: the fourfold difference.

It is not the intent of this project to re-introduce the analysis of Balthasar’s
fourfold difference. Several other scholars articulate in excellent ways what they believe

\(^{55}\) Balthasar, *GL IV*, 393-394.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 407.
Balthasar is seeking to achieve.\textsuperscript{57} In this section I want to simply highlight the key elements in his fourfold difference upon which Balthasar builds his ontological structure of created beings. Doing so, gives us insight into the complex, phenomenological way in which Balthasar understands the relationship between a subject and an object. Once we are able to more clearly comprehend the relationship between subject and object we are then better prepared to examine “analogously” the relationship between God’s Being as Trinity and created being. More importantly we are able to see more vividly how Balthasar argues that God’s Being in the form of Jesus Christ is transformative for created being. At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that Balthasar’s starting point, the relationship between the mother and child, is the place where he establishes an ontological structure of finite things. More importantly it is where he emphasizes the positive reality of “difference” and by way of analogy creatively analyzes the relational structure between the finite and the infinite. Expressed in a different way, understanding Balthasar’s argument for the ontological structure of the human creature, sets the stage for an examination of how human knowing is transformed through the revelation of God’s transformative power in the form of Jesus Christ.

In considering Balthasar’s fourfold difference it is important to note that the individual stages of the fourfold structure are not static parts. When examining this structure it must be emphasized that the four stages must be taken as a whole. In doing so we are better able to consider the question that the Balthasarian scholar Schindler asks,

“What does the personal experience of the child’s awakening to self-consciousness in the love of its mother have to do with the structure of Being?” For Balthasar the fourfold character of this schema is a process of stages by which the reality of “difference” is the driving characteristic for the whole structure of finite being. As Schindler emphasizes, by taking all four stages together as one whole we are able to see more fully the “form” through which radiates the reality of “difference.” Not only difference between the child and the mother but analogously the difference between creation and God. As Schindler points out, “Nevertheless, if we keep in mind its limitations, this basic structure, which reveals a set of relative oppositions and intersections, will eventually help us to understand what Balthasar means by drama and Gestalt, or the involvement of Being in history.”

In a single event, Balthasar wants to take us to the heart of difference in the ontologically concrete expression of the relationship between a child and its mother. His words are worth quoting in length:

The fact that I find myself within the realm of a world and in the boundless community of other existent beings is astonishing beyond measure and cannot be exhaustively explained by any cause which derives from within the world. . .From the infinite prodigality of an act of generation. . .a ‘new’ being is created which, reflecting upon its personal ego, cannot interpret itself in any way as a product of chance. . .I could imagine (and there is nothing to conflict with this idea) that an infinite number of ‘others’ could have occupied this ‘same’ place in the universe instead of me. Why it should have been me, I do not know. Of course, the child does not awaken into consciousness with this question in its mind. And yet it lies, unacknowledged but alive, in the first opening of its mind’s eyes. Its ‘I’ awakens in the

---

58 Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth, 50.

59 Ibid., 51.

60 Ibid., 52.
experience of a ‘Thou’: in its mother’s smile through which it learns that it is contained, affirmed and loved in a relationship which is incomprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering and nourishing. The body which it snuggles into, a soft, warm and nourishing kiss, is a kiss of love in which it can take shelter because it has been sheltered there a priori. The awakening of its consciousness is a late occurrence, in comparison with this basic mystery of unfathomable depth. If finally sees only what always has been, and can therefore only confirm it. A light which has been perpetually asleep awakens at some point in to an alert and self-knowing light. But it awakens at the love of the Thou, as it has always slept in the womb and on the bosom of the Thou. The experience of being granted entrance into a sheltering and encompassing world is one which for incipient, developing and mature consciousness cannot be superseded. Therefore it is right that the child should glimpse the Absolute, ‘God’ (Parzifal, Simplicius), first in its mother, its parents, and that only in a second and third stage does it have to learn to distinguish the love of God from the love which it has experienced in this way.\footnote{Balthasar, \textit{GL V}, 615-616.}

While it would be tempting to quickly move from this imagery immediately to God, at least in an analogous sense, it is important that we stay with this imagery for a moment because it is the crux of the argument for Balthasar’s entire project. Rodney Howsare reminds us that Balthasar’s use of the inter-personal, provides us with third way in light of both cosmocentric and anthropocentric approaches. This third way is that of “love alone.”\footnote{See Howsare, \textit{Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed}, 57.} What becomes the critical piece at this juncture is that Balthasar will exemplify the reality of difference (distinction) through the unifying gift of love. Again we see here the amazing reality of wonder. In analyzing this reality of gift in Balthasar’s structure, Schindler emphasizes that “. . . we look to the child, in his first experience of his own existence as a gift. The wonder over this gift, indeed, embraces not only the child’s being, but necessarily also the existence of the mother and eventually all of being as such,
insofar as the experience is precisely that it is good to be at all.”\textsuperscript{63} Thus the act of love in the encounter of an other brings to light the wonderful gift of being.

Once the child comes to the realization that the reality of existence is a gift and that it is a gift given to all things that exist then the self-consciousness person (child) may come to the realization that all beings are dependent on Being. As Balthasar states, “But in so far as I am one existent among others, in so far as I am Spirit, I now understand that all other existents stand in the same relation to Being as I do myself. It evidently follows from this that, although all existents partake in Being, yet—to whatever extent we were to multiply them—they never exhaust it nor even, as it were ‘broach it.’”\textsuperscript{64} Thus created beings rely on Being for their existence. However, the same is true for Being in related to existent beings. As Howsare reminds us, within Thomas’ argument that “running does not run, only runners,” is the reality of the relationship between Being and beings. “If, then, we never encounter running, but only runners, we must conclude that Being only comes to subsist in the things which actually exist.”\textsuperscript{65} This third stage in the fourfold distinction is critical because Balthasar starts to make his move toward the necessity of God in creating the world. Due to the fact that Being is non-subsistent and cannot subsist except in those beings that exist then that non-subsistent Being which is common to all

\textsuperscript{63} Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth, 55.

\textsuperscript{64} Balthasar, \textit{GL V}, 618.

\textsuperscript{65} Howsare, \textit{Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed}, 58. This pushing forward is for Balthasar the move toward the wholly Other. Howsare states it this way, “Only a free and self-subsistent being--for whom Being and existence are absolutely one, in whom there is no potentiality--can account for the existence of finite essences in their actual forms. In short, if the third distinction--which highlights the dependence of Being upon beings--does not open up to the fourth, Being is just as much left ‘hanging in the air’ as the actual existent finds itself hanging in the air. ‘The consequence is that the grounding in God of this Being which does not depend upon any necessity, points to an ultimate freedom which neither Being (as non-subsistent) could have, nor the existent entity,’” 59-60.
existent beings cannot create existent beings. Therefore the first three stages of the fourfold distinction push us into the fourth.\textsuperscript{66} In Balthasar’s words, “One’s gaze must seek to penetrate beyond the Ontological Difference (which is not far removed) from the Thomist \textit{distinctio realis} in its systematic significance) to the distinction between God and world, in which God is the sole sufficient ground of both Being and the existent in its possession of form.”\textsuperscript{67}

In essence the structure of the fourfold difference comes full circle back to the first stage in analogous fashion. In the mother’s free act of love, her turning toward the child and the difference therein points us toward the difference between Being and beings which in turn points us toward the difference between God and the created world. This movement brings to light the reality of God’s freedom. In other words the very turning of the mother toward the child in love analogously demonstrates God’s free turning toward the world in an emerging expression of wholly Otherness.\textsuperscript{68} Thus the metaphysical reality of positive otherness gives rise to the nature of being: difference as a gift bound in an essential act of love. Examining the essence of this difference in the created being is the purpose of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{67} Balthasar, \textit{GL V}, 624.

\textsuperscript{68} See Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth, 44-45.
CHAPTER THREE

UNVEILING THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BEING

Joseph Ratzinger argues that the experience of, “being overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction. . . We must rediscover this form of knowledge—it is an urgent demand of the present hour.”¹ Ratzinger argues that this profound form of knowledge (beauty of Christ) is the central tenet of Balthasar’s entire theological aesthetics. To understand Balthasar’s unique epistemological structure wherein the beauty of Christ is the foundation of knowledge that transforms human consciousness, I will unpack Balthasar’s remarkable argument for the ontological structure of the finite creature. Why is this analysis important? Balthasar argues that an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture is an encounter embodied with transformative power. Thus, Balthasar emphasizes that Jesus Christ is powerful for humans because in the human creature’s encounter with Christ, God is the initiator. This divine acting is critical to what happens when a person meets Jesus. For Balthasar, when humans encounter Jesus Christ they uncover the reality that God is for us and therefore humans become entranced by the reality that God is actually

“for us.” Such a discovery, argues Balthasar, gives the human being the truth that when a person encounters Jesus Christ they have already been met:

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 overpowering and overwhelming inconceivability of the fact that the God of plentitude has poured himself out, not only into creation, but emptied himself into the modalities of an existence determined by sin, corrupted by death and alienated from God. This is the concealment that appears in his self-revelation; this is the ungraspability of God, which becomes graspable because it is grasped.²

For Balthasar the human creature meets in Christ a love so powerful that our knowing is reshaped and something mystical takes hold of the human self. In Jesus, argues Balthasar, the human encounters the reality of God’s giving God’s Self to us by actually becoming like us.

Because God has grasped hold of human life through Jesus, the human creature is now able to grasp hold of the reality of God’s life in a definitive way; humans are able to comprehend the reality of their lives as grounded in the other-centered, outpouring of God’s life. In giving God’s Self to humanity through the Son (the Word made flesh), the human being encounters God in a unique way. In this unique encounter, the human creature is taken up into the life of God which, for Balthasar, is a peculiar form of knowing. Thus, Balthasar contends that within the ontological structure of the human creature resides a knowledge of faith. This knowledge encompasses the realization that the incomprehensible life of God is essential to the structure of human thought. Yet Balthasar is emphatic that incomprehensibility is not the same as unknowability. Instead,

---

incomprehensibility is a form of divine knowing that actually works on the human consciousness in a mystical yet humanly shaped activity.\(^3\) For Balthasar this activity is the real participation in the Trinitarian divine knowing that has already participated in humanity.\(^4\) In fact, Balthasar argues that by way of this participatory activity within the divine knowing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit the created world comes into existence in myriad forms. Within this creative act God takes upon God’s Self the existence of finite creature hood in the incarnation. As Balthasar asserts, “Now, what makes its appearance in Christ in no way presents itself as a \textit{phainomenon} of the One as opposed to the Many, but as the becoming visible and experienceable of the God who in himself is triune.”\(^5\) According to Balthasar, when we encounter Jesus Christ we come to know the incorporeal reality of God as it has become corporeal; it is a point of union between the finite knowing and infinite knowing. When we meet Jesus Christ our knowing is taken up into the very divine knowing of the Trinity.

To understand more fully the depth of this encounter between the divine and human in the revelation of Jesus Christ it is key for us to examine both the divine and human sides of the equation. In chapter two I briefly examined the metaphysical platform upon which Balthasar builds his unique ontology. This chapter investigates Balthasar’s innovative speculative analysis of the human being. Here I will analyze

\(^3\) Mark McIntosh provides a compelling argument regarding the conceptualization of knowledge in relation to mysticism in his work \textit{Mystical Theology} (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998). He argues for Balthasar’s claim that in our encounter with Jesus Christ the human consciousness is transformed by a participation in the life of the divine that Jesus Christ presents to the human creature. See pages 101-105.

\(^4\) What I mean by Trinitarian divine knowing is the eternal act of relationality that takes place between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Balthasar’s argument for the ontological structure of the human creature.

Fundamental to any understanding of an epistemological conceptualization of an encounter between the infinite and finite is the need to excavate the “act of knowing” that takes place between a subject and an object. By way of his famous “fourfold difference” Balthasar builds an ontological structure within finite reality and then analogically paints a picture regarding the ontological relationality between the human creature and the Trinity. Simply put, Balthasar’s speculative work that I briefly presented in chapter two comes into better focus when we examine how the “act of existence” is expressed in the structures of human relationships. The ontological structure of the human creature invites one deeper into Balthasar’s reasoning for how “knowing” is radically woven within the “revealing” reality of relationality. Not only does this structure give evidence for the connection between knowing and revealing, it also gives shape to Balthasar’s claim that the distance between God and creation is founded upon the distinctive persons of the Trinity. Thus we see that for Balthasar the Trinitarian relations are the ontological ground for any finite reality. Consequently, we gain insight into the evidence Balthasar uses in arguing for how a person’s encounter with Jesus Christ can be transformative of the very ontological structure of the finite creature.

---

6 I use the phrase “act of existence” to give clarity to the vague and abstract word “being.”

Meta-Anthropology

A core component for how Balthasar conceptualizes a finite ontological structure is the idea of Meta-anthropology. Balthasar states:

We start with a reflection on the situation of man. He exists as a limited being in a limited world, but his reason is open to the unlimited, to all of Being. The proof consists in the recognition of his finitude, of his contingency: I am, but I could also, however, not be. Many things that do not exist could exist. Essences are limited, but Being is not. That division, the “real distinction” of St. Thomas, is the source of all the religious and philosophical thought of humanity. It not necessary to recall that all human philosophy (if we abstract the biblical domain and its influence) is essentially at once religious and theological, because it poses the problem of the Absolute Being, whether one attributes to it a personal character or not.

Starting his reflections with the situation of human persons in light of Thomas’ real distinction, Balthasar makes a distinctive claim for metaphysics. It is a claim made essential to the modern perspective via an ancient frame of reference. Balthasar is not letting go of the metaphysical; he is reshaping it in light of the modern era’s focus. As

---

8 The term meta-anthropology is not unique to Balthasar. In fact, he states in an interview with Angelo Scola, Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 24-25 that he discovered this term in the work of his cousin, Peter Henrici, S.J. Balthasar claims, “He [Henrici] has pointed out in an important paper that we can no longer regard metaphysics the way the Greek did. For them, physis was simply the cosmically all-embracing, whereas we are apt to regard man as the apex and epitome of the cosmos. Hence we ought to be transposing ‘meta-physics’ into ‘meta-anthropology,’ without, however, neglecting the meaning of ‘meta’ in any way.” D.C. Schindler also points out that Balthasar study of the Church Fathers shaped his use of the term meta-anthropology. Schindler argues, “Meta-anthropology, thus conceived, carries a certain ontological presupposition, namely, that human being is so to speak the place wherein the cosmos is both ‘summed up’ and ‘surpassed.’ This theme is, of course, not new to Balthasar but has its root in the tradition, even if Balthasar interprets it in a particularly dramatic way.” Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 260-261. Schindler highlights in footnote 13 on page 261 that Balthasar’s argument for a human being as a microcosm is found in his work on Maximus the Confessor in Hans Urs von Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

Rodney Howsare puts it, “If Balthasar is going to retrieve the Thomistic metaphysical heritage, he knows that he has to do so with an eye towards the conception of truth and knowledge that accompanies the modern, scientific worldview.” Reflecting on the radical difference that exists between the finite and the infinite Balthasar asks key questions: Why are we not God? Whence comes the division? Why does the world exist? especially if God has no need for a world. All these cosmological and anthropological questions are grounded in that ancient metaphysical question: Why is there anything rather than nothing? In considering how human reason is open to the infinite Balthasar continues:

It is here that the substance of my thought inserts itself. Let us say above all that the traditional term “metaphysical” signified the act of transcending physics, which for the Greeks signified the totality of the cosmos, of which man was a part. For us, physics is something else: the science of the material world. For us, the cosmos perfects itself in man, who at the same time sums up the world and surpasses it. Thus our philosophy will be essentially a meta-anthropology, presupposing not only the cosmological sciences but also the anthropological sciences, and surpassing them toward the question of the being and essence of man.

Balthasar unquestionably begins with a necessary finite analysis of things, for as Angelo Scola notes, “This consideration [of limited human existence open through reason to the unlimited] is of fundamental importance because, when rigorously thought through, it reveals the enigmatic nature of man. How else than with the word “enigma” can we define the fact that man is, but does not have in himself the foundation of his own

---


11 See Balthasar, My Work, 112-114.

12 Ibid., 114.
Thus our reflection on the finite nature of the human creature against the backdrop of the infinite is our religious sensibility. In other words, our religious perceptiveness asks the questions of ultimate meaning. Questions of ultimate meaning are the religious dimension in every human being that help establish the unique character of each person. No matter how each person responds to these religious questions or how they perceive the infinite, the human creature cannot quell that religious sensibility that is embodied within the very core of the human person. Implicit in Balthasar’s argument is the belief that out of real distinction comes the religious sense of the human creature. In light of the enigmatic nature of man, that is, the sense that he does not have his foundation in his own act of existence, Balthasar makes the distinguishing claim for a meta-anthropology wherein the cosmological and anthropological find there fulfillment. Meta-anthropology is Balthasar’s way of examining Being in its most finite concrete expression: the human person. Balthasar’s substantive argument for why a meta-anthropology is essential is at the heart of his theological method. He argues:

Now man exists only in dialogue with his neighbor. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter, the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that that love is good, therefore all Being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all Being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all Being is beautiful. . . We add here that the epiphany of Being has sense only if in the appearance [Erscheinung] we grasp the essence that manifests itself [Ding an sich]. The infant comes to the knowledge, not of a pure

---


14 Ibid., 20.
appearance, but of his mother in herself.\textsuperscript{15}

Balthasar makes explicit the notion that the human creature’s encounter with an “other” is, in fact, a real manifestation of the transcendentals. Balthasar is seeking to “go beyond” the human creature’s “enigmatic nature.” He starts with an existential analysis of man so that he can focus on the experience of transcendence played out in the dialogical reality of finite-infinite relationships. In essence this is the point of the fourth step of the fourfold difference. Scola puts it this way, “Man is thus the point of departure of meta-anthropology; but if I pose the question of the ontological difference in terms of man I must first recognize that man exists only in dialogue with his fellow man. The horizon of infinite Being in its totality opens to him in dialogue. And in dialogue, correlatively, man gains self-awareness.”\textsuperscript{16} Thus in the encounter between mother and child the one, the good, the true and the beautiful are made manifest. In their manifestation the reality of Being is encountered. Put another way, in the encounter between the mother and child (the encounter with an other) Being itself is revealed.

To recapitulate, meta-anthropology is the idea that in the human creature we discover an act of encounter and transcendence. In the life of the human creature an act of encounter takes us deeper into the reality of transcendence. Or, more specifically for Balthasar, the reality of the one, the good, the true and the beautiful radiate forth from within their speculative trappings and become real sensorial expressions of existence. The encounter between the mother and child is metaphysical for, as Scola writes, “the transcendentals are discovered in this encounter because in reality every encounter is an

\textsuperscript{15} Balthasar, \textit{My Work}, 114.

encounter with Being, and the transcendents are properties of Being as such; they are coextensive with it and surpass the limits of the every essence. In the encounter with the other, it is not simply the other who reveals himself, but Being itself.”

Thus Balthasar’s approach to metaphysics, his meta-anthropology, opens the door to understanding the depth of Being as something intimately manifested within the finite life yet transcendent in its appearance. At play here is the reality of an encounter. Distinctively, Balthasar seeks answers to abstract metaphysical questions via concrete finite relationships. However, these concrete expressions are not simply appearances of a real essence hidden behind an image. Rather, the very depth of the appearance of the other is an actual encounter with the essence of the other. Scola notes, “For Balthasar . . . the more deeply I delve into the transcendental in the individual essences in which Being reveals itself, the more deeply do they reveal Being to me. The essence is a fragment in which Being subsists; it will never be able to deplete Being, but in this essence Being reveals itself and its transcendents.”

Balthasar assumes that the human person epitomizes the fundamental reality of knowledge. Meta-anthropology is Balthasar’s uniquely cosmological and anthropological modern way of reclaiming the metaphysical question, “why is there anything rather than nothing?” Why he finds it necessary to reclaim this question will hopefully become clearer in the progression of this project. One must note that, for Balthasar, meta-anthropology serves as the charted path toward a model for how humans can understand the essence of knowing as concretely expressed in an act of revealing.

17 Ibid., 26.
18 Ibid., 27.
Such revelation becomes central, not only to the encounter between finite things but more importantly in understanding the encounter between the infinite and the finite. As Howsare summarizes it:

Because created being finds its highpoint in the human person, reason also should be understood at its highpoint in inter-personal knowledge. The give and take, that is, that is witnessed when one person comes to know another person is present, in an analogous sense, all the way down to the level of inanimate beings. This enables Balthasar to overcome a fateful decision which marks the beginning of modern philosophy, the decision to understand knowledge as “power” over the object of knowledge.19

Balthasar is seeking a model that recognizes the freedom of knowing as central to the intrinsic nature of the human person. His epistemological structure is built upon receptivity, faith, mystery, love, dialogue, those elements that are key to human experience and freedom. He argues for the centrality of human knowing within the metaphysical encounter thus demonstrating the interrelation between epistemology and theology.20 Consequently, Balthasar’s meta-anthropological claim points us in the direction of unconcealment and receptivity, two concepts we will analyze below. His argument shifts away from an epistemology founded upon “knowledge as power over an object” towards an epistemology built upon the ontological reality that knowledge in the encounter between “others” is truly about unconcealment and receptivity. Or, more emphatically, an epistemology grounded in the unveiledness of the other that is then received by the other as the embodiment of the properties of being: unity, goodness, truth and beauty. As Howsare points out,


20 See Ibid., 54-55.
Knowledge has as much to do with worldly Being offering itself to be known (cf. Heidegger’s recovery of the primary meaning of truth as “unconcealment”) as it has to do with the a priori structures of the human mind. Notice that there is a revelatory dimension to knowledge all the way up from inanimate objects, which offer themselves to be known and must be given a space by the subject to do so, through human knowledge—and here Balthasar makes the more obvious point that one cannot get to know another person unless the other person freely opens up—to our knowledge of God, who also cannot be know apart from self-revelation.  

Having examined the stage of meta-anthropology upon which Balthasar seeks to play out his drama, let us now examine Balthasar’s discourse on the ontological substance of the subject and object that perform in this epistemological encounter.

How Balthasar understands the reality of Being encountered in the knowing that takes place between finite creatures impels investigation of the ontological structures of both the subject and the object. I will demonstrate that Balthasar’s ontological argument for the finite shines light upon the epistemological relationship that radiates from within the encounter of individual subjects and objects. Such an examination will guide our understanding of revelation as expressed in the finite subject/object encounter thus giving shape to the analogical move that is necessary in comprehending the revelatory encounter between finite human creatures and the infinite life of the Trinity.

**Subjects, Objects and the Transcendental Truth**

Truth is, for Balthasar, at the core of any finite structure. In giving an initial definition of this Transcendental, Balthasar describes it as “the unveiledness, uncoveredness, disclosedness, and unconcealment (αληθεια) of being. This unconcealment implies two things: First, that being appears; second, that being appears.

21 Ibid., 55.
Now, unveiling consists in the fact that this duality is nonetheless a singularity—and truth consists in unveiling.”

In other words, all being contains within its structure the power to unveil itself to an other. In light of this initial description we might ask, “to whom is beingness unveiled?” Balthasar’s answer:

If being had the property of unveiledness only in itself, and not also immediately for a conscious mind, it would not really be unveiled at all, but locked and concealed to itself. The fact that being is unveiled analytically that it is also unveiled to someone who recognizes it in its unveiling. This ‘someone’ is the subject, and here it makes no difference whether or not the subject is identical to the unveiled being, that is, whether it is unveiled to itself or another. It is not essential to the concept of truth that all being should be self-conscious, but it is essential that all being should have a relation to some self-consciousness.

Implied in the disclosure of any being is an “other” who is able to recognize the object’s property as it is unveiled. Thus, according to Balthasar, a self-conscious subject is an essential element, to any relationship between beings, a foundational component to “Being’s” ability to be unveiled. Alongside the notion of “unveiledness” is a second attribute, emeth: fidelity, constancy and reliability. Hence, these attributes are two constitutive features of truth: unconcealment and trustworthiness. When being is unconcealed it is opening up to self-conscious knowledge. Individual being is juxtaposed with being in general. Balthasar states, “It follows that every opening of a particular being includes the promise that all being can be made manifest.” Consequently, in the

---


23 Ibid., 38.


manifestation of truth in the encounter between two beings a form of knowledge arises that recognizes the two-sided nature of the encounter. Balthasar sees in this two-sidedness the measure of Being embodied in the finite appearance. He states,

True knowledge thus manages to conjoin two seemingly contrary experiences: the experience of possessing, and surveying from above, the object of knowledge in the clarity of the intellect [Geist] and the experience of being flooded by something that overflows knowledge in the heart of knowledge itself, or, to put it another way, the awareness of participating in something that is infinitely greater in itself than what comes to light in its disclosure. In the first experience, the subject wraps itself around the object, in the sense that when something is grasped, it finds itself inside the person who grasps it (comprehensively). In the second experience, however, the subject is introduced, initiated even, into the mysteries of the object; it explicitly lays hold only of a fraction of the object’s depth and richness, albeit with the promise of further initiation to come.²⁶

The subject stands high on the mountaintop of subjective rational experience and gazes out upon the vast expanse of the mystery of that other which radiates forth from an object. It is a rational encounter in that a self-conscious subject is placed before a canvass of potential experience even though it has not yet been actualized. In the encounter an object reveals a certain concrete expression of its own being to the rational subject. However, in the subject’s ability to possess what is revealed by the object in concrete, there is always a level of transcendence in that the totality of being that is the object is not fully possessed by the subject. The vast expanse of the object’s being that radiates forth from the object and is possessed by the subject always transcends that particular concrete moment of encounter. This is the epistemological mystery for Balthasar.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 40-41.
Because of the two-sided nature of an encounter, Balthasar claims from the start that the ontological structure of a finite subject is only understood as a structure built upon the relationality with an object. Subjectiveness and objectiveness arise from within the two-sided relationality in their encounter. Simply put, knowing is, as a result, begotten from within the ontological reality of unconcealment and receptivity. This point should not be overlooked. Knowing takes place as an encounter between a self-conscious subject and a unveiling object. However, this knowing is not of the type where the subject has intellectual domination over the object. The object unveils itself in the space of the subject’s self-conscious presence. And, even though the object risks the vulnerability of giving itself it never gives, in total, all itself. Balthasar continues:

Now, this two-sided relation in which, on the one hand, the object is captured and enclosed within the subject, while, on the other hand, the subject is initiated into the all-embracing world of the objective disclosure of being, suggests a fundamental point that will be decisive. . . Insofar as the disclosure of being is a property objectively inherent in being itself, the knowing subject is obliged to conform itself to this disclosedness. That is, knowing the truth happens when knowledge, by virtue of an “adequation” to the thing as it really is (adaequatio intellectus Et rei), lets itself be determined and measured by the thing. A proportion has to be achieved between subject and object, and the decisive measure of the proportion lies with the object. On the other hand, the purpose and mission of the subject is not simply to be a kind of machine for recording objective states of affairs. Subjectivity in the full sense includes freedom, self-determination, and creativity ad extra.28

The absolute reality in the encounter is the disclosure of being; this disclosure is an inherent property of being; this is how a being actively expresses its existence. Thus a “knowing subject” must conform to the inherent reality of “disclosedness.” The relative

27 See Ibid., 41.
28 Ibid., 41.
reality in the encounter is that an object can only be fully known relative to a knowing subject. Subject and object cannot be a full embodiment of their being without one another. As Balthasar notes:

> It is the subjects that not only possess knowledge and bring it to its conclusion but that also pass judgment on truth as such. Truth in the full sense is actualized only in the act of judging the truth—as the manifestness of being now possessed as such in a consciousness. The emphasis in truth thus shifts. Although the object remains the measure by which truth is measured, the agent of the measuring is now the subject, and this activity of measuring is a spontaneous, creative achievement. But we can go even farther. The disclosure of being is meaningful only if it is directed to a knowing subject.²⁹

At this juncture I reiterate that Balthasar understands truth as the interplay (or measuredness) between being and its appearing.³⁰ To summarize, the three stages of a preliminary conceptualization of truth are 1) Truth as unconcealment; 2) a particular appearance of being conveys an awareness of being as a whole; and, 3) in a subject/object encounter there exists in an everlasting polarity between a subject and an object.³¹

> “Subject and object comprehend each other reciprocally, in the sense that the subject is introduced into the ever vaster world of the object, while the object’s appearance opens it to be surveyed and judged from the subject’s more comprehensive vantage point.”³²

**Distinctive Qualities of being: subjectivity and objectivity**

Having briefly looked at the essential qualities of Truth in light of the interrelationship between the subject and object, I will now investigate both the subject

---

²⁹ Ibid., 41.


³¹ See Balthasar, *TL* I, 43.

³² Ibid., 43.
and object and their distinctive qualities of being. I do this in order to analyze the specific elements within the ontological structure of subjective and objective beings: receptivity, consciousness, spontaneity and measuredness.

In analyzing these characteristics, Balthasar makes the following statement about the subject:

Now, a being that can measure itself because it is unveiled to itself is called a “subject.” Insofar as it is unveiled to, and no longer concealed from, itself, it is a being that is inwardly full of light, has emerged into clarity for itself, and is transparent. Its being has the specific form of self-consciousness. In the radiance of this light, the subject is able to measure itself, to take its own measure. But in recognizing itself as be-ing, it simultaneously grasps what being as such and as a whole is, so that in reflection it is given the measure not only of its own being but, in principle, of all being.  

Directly understood, the subject is a subject by way of its self-awareness. Because a subject is able to measure itself, it is by virtue of this constitution able to measure other things. From an epistemological perspective, Balthasar argues that self-consciousness is grounded in a receptive configuration of ontology. He notes, “Receptivity means accessibility to another’s being, openness to something other than the inner dimension of one’s own subjectivity, the possession of windows looking out on all being and truth. Receptivity signifies the power to welcome and, so to say, host another’s being in one’s own home.” Thus self-consciousness contains within its composition the power of receptivity. Within its very structure, self-consciousness opens itself to the possibility of receiving the gift that radiates forth from the other. This receptivity “not only implies this unlocking of the self to other beings but also expressly denotes the capacity to let

33 Ibid., 43-44
34 Ibid., 44-45.
itself be enriched with the gift of their distinctive truth.” For Balthasar, receptivity is the key to any subjective being’s epistemological structure. The highest expression of joy is what comes from receiving of the being of an other. However, this receptivity requires a sort of poverty in the sense that truth is an expression of the intimate giving and receiving in a subject/object relationship. As Balthasar sees it, “One knows oneself simultaneously with actually being addressed by another’s truth. The subject receives the measure of being in the form of self-consciousness only insofar as another summons it to apply this measure to a truth not its own. There is no moment when subjectivity monadically and self-sufficiently rests in itself. Rather, subjectivity is a matter of finding oneself always already engaged with the world.”

At this point I must reflect momentarily on the notion of consciousness in order to clarify how it is that Balthasar’s definition of consciousness is uniquely modern. Influenced by Heidegger’s own reflection on being and the encounter between beings, Balthasar stresses the point that consciousness cannot be understood outside the realm of an encounter with Being:

All Being, since it is grounded in the Word of God, is revelation, manifestatio, similitude exprimens. Bonaventure never ceases to wonder at the mystery that the things of the world possess the power to emit an expressive image of themselves into the entire medium which surrounds them, and that thereby of themselves they shine and reveal themselves to a potential knowing subject.

35 Ibid., 45.
36 See Ibid., 44-47.
37 Ibid., 46-47.
Schindler brings clarity to Balthasar’s understanding of consciousness by reminding us that in this schema consciousness is not a closed system. Schindler remarks, “the reality of consciousness itself demands that we understand it as the ‘common’ meeting place of subject and object, in the sense of belonging in some original way to both.”39 In essence, receptivity requires a certain degree of spontaneity in order to be fully functional in any encounter. By spontaneity Balthasar means a certain vulnerability of “going forth” in the unpredictability of an encounter with an other. However, in the susceptibility of going forth the reality of receptivity grows. Balthasar affirms, “Increased spontaneity thus brings increasingly perfect receptivity. To put it in other terms: Increased self-determination implies a correlative increase in the opportunity and the capacity to let oneself be determined by another.”40

Thus a pivotal point in the developing epistemological argument arises, for the reality of what is transcendentally true encompasses the subject’s receptivity to freedom, encountered by another in love. He argues:

The reality of love, precisely when love is perfect, runs counter to any high-handed anticipation of the truth of one’s Thou. Rather, it is part of love’s very constitution to wish, genuinely and unfeignedly, to receive every gift of this Thou as a new, truly enriching wonder. Love would gladly give up a great deal of what it knows if it could thereby receive it anew from the beloved; indeed, it would happily perform the miracle of unknowing things that it knows in order to be able to receive them anew as a gift of the beloved. Thus, we can express the knowing subject’s readiness to welcome possible objects of knowledge in itself only by simultaneously employing the categories of act and potency.41


41 Ibid., 48.
What distinguishes Balthasar from a Kantian understanding of the Transcendentals and consciousness is the fact that love is the act through which he moves away from the abstract and begins with the concrete. It is disposibility; an active readiness that recognizes the immediate actuality of the current encounter while “open” to the future potential of another encounter. In other words, truth is about a creative receptivity through which new beginnings present themselves in an infinite progress. Balthasar contends:

This openness to any truth that might show itself is an inalienable perfection of every knowing subject, and, as knowledge increases, it cannot contract but only expand. . .being is disclosed neither as an individual object nor as the sum of all objects but is infinite and unbounded because it transcends all limitation. This feature of being is reflected in truth’s characteristic way of opening, of making new beginnings, of promising more truth to come.  

Thus, this active readiness first and foremost is an experience of an actual encounter that is constantly open to the future potentiality of another encounter. The appearance of an object to a subject is an embrace of the existential reality of both in their encounter. It is a moment of actual presence that points beyond the immediate moment to a potential future. Consciousness is epistemologically true, for Balthasar, as a finite expression that points to the infinite. Schindler summarizes Balthasar’s thinking this way:

The mother’s smile is the outward expression of her love for the child and thus her “self-gift” to the child. . .it is a mediated immediacy, a presence that bears within itself an “open space.” This open space within the positivity can be put more concretely: the spontaneous gift of self on the part of the mother is not mere spontaneity, which would in fact smother the child, and force his consciousness into the ill-fitting mold of a pure passive receptacle for the mother’s own self. But this is not consciousness at all. Rather, the content of the mother’s self-gift is her receiving her child. Her spontaneity has the form of receptivity.

---

42 Ibid., 49-50.
In the constitutive reality of the subject, we see Balthasar’s epistemological move. Receptivity and spontaneity are not abstract concepts already mysteriously present in the consciousness of the subject. Spontaneity is the creative act receptively available in the gifted encounter between two beings. The subject’s structure embodies within itself the ability to give itself away to another and thus create a space in which the other is called into realization of its own being. “This is why Balthasar says that the love of the mother is a creative call; it is a spontaneous receptivity that gives rise to a receptive spontaneity.” However, this encounter not only opens the door for the developing self-consciousness of the child; it opens the door for the mother into the larger framework of Being. In this finite, concrete encounter the subject comes to realize its constitutive nature against the backdrop of infinite Being. In other words, the subject comes to the realization that it both measures and is measured. It is here that Balthasar makes the unique movement towards God as the fundamental measure of all beings.

In the encounter with an individual “other” the subject’s own self-differentiation leads to a deeper understanding of actual being in its totality. Balthasar maintains:

In the act of cognition, wherein the subject’s indifferent readiness is activated by an individual object that comes into appearance, the subject experiences a double limitation. It encounters the object as a particular

---


44 Ibid., 115. It is important to note that receptivity and spontaneity are complex terms with a loaded history. The use of these words depends on which philosophical school shaped their definition. In light of Balthasar’s use of such terms one must note that he is making philosophical claims in critical response to Kant’s use of the them. However, many thinkers would argue that how Kant defined these words is not explicitly clear. For our purposes I refer to Aidan Nichols work in defining how Balthasar uses these terms. He states, “Since the revelation of an object has its meaning only when it is offered to a knowing subject, we can even say that the object finds its own full sense only in that subject. Created knowledge for Balthasar is, therefore, at one receptive and spontaneous, or, in his preferred vocabulary, ‘measured’ and ‘measuring.’” Aidan Nichols, *Say It is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Logic* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 15.
thing. It knows and recognizes that it is just one possibility and actuality of being, because it is familiar with being as a whole, but cannot survey it in its totality. Thus the object, in its limitation, stands out against the unlimited background of a being that is ever-greater than itself.  

Balthasar makes a distinctive claim: In the subject’s encounter with an object the reality of the object’s act of existence radiates forth into the space of the subject. In the subject’s own measuring of that object in which it encounters the subject comes to the realization that it too is being measured. In the subject’s own measuring of the object it comes to the realization that its experience of the object is not an unlimited experience of Being in its totality. The subject comes to realize that its own measuring is grounded in an infinite measuring.

And so the subject realizes that in the act of measuring it is being measured by the encompassing truth of being tout court, which comprehends the subject itself. The subject’s light is a limited participation in an infinite light. Its thinking is embedded in an infinite thinking of being and so can serve as a measuring stick only because it itself is measured by an unmeasured, yet all-measuring, infinite measure.  

This is Balthasar’s turn towards God in response to modernity’s turn to the finite subject. “This infinite, unmeasurable measure is the identity of thinking and being in God. All finite subjectivity and cognition necessarily presupposes the presence of this identity.”  

This turn embraces the heart of the matter for Balthasar. In the finite meeting of subject and object the reality of being opens up the subject’s own experience to the reality of infinite being. Having said this one must understand that for Balthasar the experience of being measured by the infinite is not a direct experience of the Divine Being itself.

45 Balthasar, TL 1, 50-51.

46 Ibid., 51.

47 Ibid., 51.
Any immediate knowledge of God or immediate intuition of divine truth is out of the question. Only the finite subject’s insight into its own contingency is immediate. Yet because this contingency brings home to the subject with all desirable clarity that it is not God, its insight into contingency can disclose, by means of an (implicit) causal inference, the existence of a sphere of absolute identity on which all reality and truth in the world are necessarily based. All knowledge of God is mediated through the contingency of the world, yet there is no knowledge of God that leads more immediately to him than this. If we did not have this implicit recognition of God’s transcendence, we would never be able to draw any inference form this world to God.48

Here, Balthasar’s argument for analogy of being comes full circle. In the subject’s service to the object the reality of finitude highlights the self-conscious subject’s creatureliness. The more the finite subject recognizes the finite reality of its encounter with the subject the more fully it understands that it is not God. The more the subject lives into the reality of receptivity and spontaneity in the exchange between it and the object the more it realizes the distance between its own finite measuring and God’s infinite measuring of all things. In this distance the subject is able to draw closer to Divine Being by way of its recognition of the self-standing reality of other beings.49

Balthasar states, “Because it must decide to confess its finitude before the infinite God, the finite subject must also decide to acknowledge that its fellow creatures, too are self- standing existents. Before God, it recognizes that, while being as a whole is not simply unknown, it is not yet disclosed in its totality.”50 Nonetheless, in the intersubjectivity of actual finite beings does the distance between God and creatures make sense. More importantly only in the analogy of being wherein the distance between God and creature

48 Ibid., 52.
49 See Ibid., 53-57.
50 Ibid., 54.
is recognized does the positive space between finite beings embody the truth of God’s gift of measuring and being measured.

Truth now appears in the world as distributed among countless subjects, which in their original posture of readiness are open to one another and which await from one another the communication of the part of the truth that God has granted them as a share in his own infinite truth. In their mutual openness, in their reciprocal disponibility, finite subjects thus mirror forth the highest measure of what the finite world can capture of the infinite openness of God’s truth.  

As a result of all that has been said to this point, the subject, in its receptive spontaneity encounters a world. In that encounter a mutual openness of reciprocal disponibility becomes the place wherein the light of the infinite shines forth. Put another way, the infinite makes itself known in the very finite measuring between subject and object. In the finite measuring of subject and object God’s infinite measuring is made manifest.

Having briefly examined the ontological structure of the subject we now turn to the ontological structure of the finite object. An inquiry into the constitutive elements of the object solidifies how we comprehend Balthasar’s argument for the ontological structure of the finite creature. Such an analysis is essential to how we examine the relationship between the ontological structures of the finite and infinite as it takes shape in the revealing form of Jesus Christ in chapter five. Let us now turn to the object.

Epistemologically speaking, Balthasar’s focus reminds us that an object’s knowability is not the same as the act of knowability itself. The implications of the argument are central to Balthasar’s argument for the reciprocal relationship between the act of existence of a finite creature and the way it knows and is known. Balthasar

51 Ibid., 55.
52 See Ibid., 55.
contends, “It has often happened in the history of epistemology that the conditions of knowability are either deduced from those of knowing or are simply equated with them, as if ontology were nothing more than a projection of the structure of knowing upon being.” If truth is the unveiling and receptive encounter between a subject and an object then fundamental to this interrelationality is the claim that the subject is not only receiving from the other, but is actually receiving the other. It is not receiving only an abstract conceptualization of the other.

What is at stake, from the perspective of the object in relation to the subject, is that the two properties of truth are intimately intertwined. Balthasar contends, “It is only when the unveiling is not just a possibility, but has in fact occurred, that being is inwardly illumined and thus measured. Now, measure and light are the two properties of truth, and they are inseparable. The supposition that an existent has measure and thus knowability makes no sense unless it also stands in a light in which it is actually being measured.”

Thus measuring is paramount to any encounter between a subject and an object. When an object is self-conscious it makes sense that it can measure and be illumined to itself. Thus when an object is actually an subject, measure and light makes sense. However, when an object is not a self-conscious subject how are we to understand the essentially reality of measure and light? “Indeed, one self-consciousness can be the object of another, but what becomes objective for the second is not necessarily what is objective

53 Ibid., 55.

54 Ibid., 56. Nichols provides lucid insight into Balthasar’s novel use of words such as measure and light. He states, “Balthasar has already established that the two inseparable properties of truth are measure and light: measure is being’s aptitude for being known, light is the effective knowledge brought by a subject.” Say It Is Pentecost, 18.
for the first. All of which suggests that the question of the object’s being measured is independent of the question of the measuring subject.”55 What are we to make of this independent measuring?

Here is where Balthasar makes a critical move regarding the ontological structure of an object. Insofar as a subject is able to finitely measure an object is all well and good. Nevertheless, Nichols contends:

For an object to be knowable it does not suffice for it to measurable. It must also (so Balthasar now goes on) be measured already. Since it cannot be self-measured when considered as an object (and even a subject may, and must, be considered as an object when objectified by another subject), and since, furthermore, the finite subject pre-supposes that any object it know is already measured in and of itself, it follows that the measure of the object must be located in the infinite Subject—in God. A being which was not known by God would possess no measure and thus no truth.56

Consequently, the actuality of revelation begins to unfold by way of comprehending the meaning of “being measured” and “measuring.” Balthasar asserts, “A being that was not known by God could not be known by a finite subject, for the simple reason that it would not exist in the first place. But it would not exist because, being unknown by God, it would have no measure for its being and thus no truth.”57 Here we see the crux of Balthasar’s epistemological argument. The very essence of being in a finite creature is founded upon the creature’s existential measuredness. Put another way, to be measured at all in the finite world it must be measured by way of a divine knowing. He continues:

All things, therefore, stand completely unveiled before the divine knowledge, and by that same knowledge they are measured. Their

55 Ibid., 56.

56 Nichols, Say It is Pentecost, 18.

57 Balthasar, TL I, 56.
truth lies with God, and whoever wants to know them must know in their adequation to the mind of God. This does not mean that the finite subject has no immediate relation to the object, as if, in order to know the object, it had to make a detour via God. It does mean, however, that the knowability of the object stems from its being actually known by God and that he alone knows its full truth.\(^58\)

From the perspective of revelation, I surmise Balthasar believes that implanted within every finite being is the very measuredness (or divine knowability) of the creature as it is known in God’s idea of it. The finite creature’s existence is founded upon divine knowledge. In some sense, created being comes into existence through God’s idea of it. Balthasar says it this way, “God does not take the measure from an already existing object; rather, the object gets its measure from the idea that God has of it. Insofar as the object accords with this idea, its being participates in truth. The divine idea is in part given to the object and implanted in it along with its very existence.”\(^59\) This gives shape to how Balthasar sees the reality of a revelatory moment. The finite creature is able to reveal itself to an “other” because God has already revealed this creature within God’s mind. Therefore, any created being is able to be received into the space of a receiving subject because it contains within its created structure God’s own measure of it. Again, we find Balthasar staking his own modern claim. He is turning back toward God as that Absolute Being from which all created beings receive their existence. Consequently, any

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 57. Nichols’ summary of Balthasar’s argument is vividly clear. He argues, “The divine knowledge, then, founds the truth of the existent, and give it all the relations it enjoys. The divine idea is immanent in a being as its ‘internal plan, its nature, its meaning.’ If the existence of things cannot be identified with their being without also taking account of their essence, the kinds of things they are, then that essence is never ‘something complete in itself.’ It cannot be detached from God’s idea of it, and therefore from his power to modify it in the course of the story of a life. And this is never more true than when the ‘essence’ we are speaking of is that of the human being” *Say It Is Pentecost*, 19.
act of existence or revealing of the creature’s essence comes from God and not solely from within the creature’s own creative power.

Larry Chapp presents another way of looking at the notion of revelation in light of the measure between finite objects that is founded upon God’s measuredness of all finite creatures. He argues, “The significance of all of this for our purposes is that the Trinitarian relations act as the ontological ground of possibility for the ‘non-divinity’ of the world. The infinite distance between God and creation finds its theological grounding in the intrtrinitarian distinctions. The world finds its ‘place’ within the ‘spaciousness’ opened up in the Trinitarian relations.”60 As a result the very reality of revealedness with the circumincession of the Trinity is gifted in the creative process of finite existence. For that reason the epistemological encounter between a subject and object arises from within the individual ontological structure of each being. In essence finite existence is created with the power of revealedness. Its composition entails the actual power of revealing. Such a notion is critical to how we examine the form of Jesus Christ and its ability to transform human consciousness through the interrelations of the finite and the infinite.

Before leaving this chapter on the ontological structure of the human creature and turning to the ontological structure of the divine, I will make one concluding consideration of the subject and object in relation to each other. Doing so, prepares us for the next chapter on the form of Jesus Christ.

---

60 Larry Chapp, “Revelation,” 18.
Subject/Object Interrelationality

In the interrelationality of the subject and object, the object reaches its fuller potential outside of itself. It achieves its calling in the arena of the subjective receptivity. This is not a letting go of the objective nature or a transformation of the objective into the subjective. Balthasar claims, “Both subject and object will be fulfilled by coming together, but the fulfillment will be a wonder and a gift for both. Their encounter will reveal them to each other, even as the revelation of the other will contain, for each the revelation of itself, which can come about only in the other.” Vital to this coming together is Balthasar’s use of the classic Thomistic notion of conversio ad phantasmata. This “turning to the images” is where Balthasar’s argument for how knowledge’s active process emerges. Gaining a more thorough grasp of the interrelationality prepares us for how we will consider analogically the encounter between the finite and infinite as an act of transformation of human consciousness through the form of Jesus Christ.

In thinking about the relationship of the object to the subject one must note, “In reality, the objects of this world need the subject’s space in order to be themselves. . . It needs the sensorium as a space in which to unfurl itself. It unveils its color within an eye that sees color; it whispers only in an ear that hears sound; it presents its unique flavor only in the mouth of another capable of tasting.” The key here is that the object needs the space of the subject (sensory space) in order to fulfill its calling outside of itself and

---

61 See Nichols, Say It Is Pentecost, 19.
62 Balthasar, TL I, 62.
63 See Ibid., 61-78. See also Nichols, Say It is Pentecost, 20-22.
64 Ibid., 63.
inside world of subjects that assist in bringing the object to its actual expression.\textsuperscript{65}

Paramount to the relational reality of the subject/object encounter is the sensory space of the subject. Put succinctly, the consciousness of sensory subjectivity opens up a space for the reality of an object to unveil its being. In a paramount image for what Balthasar means I quote at length his imagery of a tree:

> Who would venture to assert that the tree, stripped of all its sense qualities and reduced to an unknown “vital principle” (which is supposedly what remains outside of knowledge), is still the beautiful, meaningful, useful thing that the Creator obviously intended it to be? All that it can be apart from the subject’s space is only a material, a substrate, which, while surely indispensable to the complete idea of the tree, is nonetheless incapable of conveying any concept of the thing itself. The concept that expresses the full essence of the tree needs something more than that substrate; it needs someone to conceive it, someone whose heterogeneous, though analogous, space hold ready the complementary factors required alongside its already existing vital principle for the full, organic, unitary concept of the plant’s essence. This concept alone utters what the tree truly is, in other words, the truth of the tree. This truth is the unveiledness of its being, but the unveiling in which the truth is constituted calls for the joint operation of subject and object. It is not a property inhering in the object alone that merely needs to be discovered; rather, this discovery, which is something that the subject does, is an essential component of the unveiling of the object. The latter’s objective truth lies partly in itself and partly in the space of the subject whose activity helps it become what it is meant to be.\textsuperscript{66}

This is not an argument for the truth of things being simply grounded in a subjective reading of the objective such as Kant and German Idealists argued, for the object contains within itself its ontological truth.\textsuperscript{67} The subject must conform to this fact. The space

\textsuperscript{65} See Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 64.

\textsuperscript{67} For an excellent overview of this issue see Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth, 101-108. Here Schindler briefly lays out “The Transcendental Unity of Apperception and the Problem of Self-Consciousness.” He highlights the problematic issues that arise regarding self-
created by the subject is the arena wherein the object is able to manifest, radiate forth, the glory of its ontological self. It is a movement of knowledge that gives expression to the created glory that is structurally within an object and subject via God’s creative process. Again Balthasar paints a critical image for understanding this relationship. He argues:

The better course, then, is to stop regarding the subjectivity of the sensorium as a reason for calling into question its contribution to the truth of the object. Here, as before, the object’s center is in itself. From this self-existent center, the object irradiates into the knower’s space in order to exhibit itself there in its completion. This opens up a new possibility to the object—that of unfolding itself in a higher space without therefore forfeiting its objectivity—but not only to the object. The subject, too, is equipped with a new task—that of being the space in which the truth of things comes to itself. A part of the object can unfold only in the subject, and the subject is structured in such a way that it has to serve as the locus of this unfolding. Its role, then, is not limited to possessing the object in itself, but consists most properly in making itself available, in an attitude of service, for the completion of the object.68

Therefore the epistemological reality of finite knowing is that in the act of cognition the object requires the space of the subject in order to radiate forth the truth of its own being. However, the subject in essence needs the object too.

The subject’s ability to recognize itself, the actuality of its self-consciousness, is alive in its act of knowing. Balthasar says, “Without the world it remains an unformed ego. It has no form, no contours, no definite lineaments, no character. It becomes formed in the measure that it takes the world in and helps it take shape.”69 Of course this

68 Balthasar, TL I, 66.

69 Ibid., 67.
encounter with the world is not necessarily an orderly process of sorting and judging those objects that are marched before the subject’s stage. Balthasar contends that the world, in a sense, throws itself before the subject in a constantly occurring encounter of knowing. Balthasar puts it rather poetically: “Reflexive knowledge begins, then, with the opposite of what would seem to be the chief characteristic of intellectual cognition, namely ordering judgment, because it starts instead with the unannounced invasion of a motley jumble of objects that get thrown into the subject’s unoccupied space.” Thus the subject’s work is to discern, analyze and self-consciously bring order and sense to the “always there” encounter with the objects of the world. Out of such an experience the fullness of the world gives expression to the true “self” of the object. The encounter is not just a projection of the object into the space of the subject. This encounter is an unfolding (however limited) of the very essence of the object itself. There the subject shares in the fullness of the truth of the object itself which in turn becomes a truth for the subject itself. In such a measuring and being measured the subject and the object both are formed in their own unique callings as beings. There in the encounter, Balthasar contends, is the double form of truth.

**Begetting the Form: The Object’s Image as the Revelation of Truth**

Having examined the individual structures of the subject and object and having examined the interrelationship between both the final step in this chapter is to examine the double form of truth that arises in the relationship between the subject and object. It is this double form of truth that prepares us for our transition from studying the

---

70 Ibid., 68.
71 See Ibid., 68-69.
ontological structure of the finite being into the investigation of the ontological structure of the divine.

In this final piece we are invited to probe the speculative elements of the encounter between the subject and the object. Here we should hold to the fact that Balthasar is making a novel claim for what actually happens in the self-conscious act of encounter. This is the place where Balthasar argues for the core of meaning in the subject/object encounter. Understanding what he means as the double form of truth gives us the necessary tools for comprehending how Balthasar argues that within the actuality of conceptualization is where the truth of revelation exists. Once we understand this we are better prepared to decipher how Balthasar perceives the form of Jesus Christ as transformative of human consciousness. In the double form of truth we find the nuts and bolts of the ontological structure.

Seeking clarity for “what happens” in the encounter between a subject and an object Balthasar states: “The subject lays hold of the object on the basis of the images generated by the object in its sensory sphere. The subject perceives these images by means of an immediate sensory intuition [Anschauung]. At this initial stage, the sensory image and the immediate perception of this image are one.”72 Undoubtedly, Balthasar makes the case that a balance is achieved, however momentary, between the subject’s receptivity and the objects’ unveiling. Significant for this thesis is how Balthasar conceives of this balance in light of epistemology. He continues:

Sensory intuition can do no more than introduce the image into the space of the subject. This is why it is not yet knowledge. It is, in fact, utterly immediate; no one can adequately express in words how he sees red or tastes sweetness.

72 Ibid., 71-72.
In this respect, the sense image mediates a peculiarly intimate contact between subject and object—so intimate, in fact, that it cannot be conveyed in language. The object has announced its presence within the subject. It has, however, made this announcement through a word that is, at first, a pure expression, which does not yet disclose the essence either of the object or of the subject as it is in itself. And yet this expression of the object in the language of sense images is as much of the object as the subject can immediately grasp. Even if the subject will penetrate to the object’s being and essence thanks to the sensory images, it will find these realities—which, after all, cannot be immediately perceived by the senses—only in the images, which are in fact the expression of being and essence. The subject will never find the sense of the words except in the words themselves.  

At this point one might be confused. It appears as if Balthasar ends up limiting to “images only” the experience of the object within the space of the subject, an idea that seems similar to Kant. However, Balthasar, implicitly provides a key in the phrase “not yet knowledge.” It is a loaded phrase, for the idea of “not yet knowledge” actually embodies a larger Gestaltian framework, to coin my own term. Nonetheless, if we survey the subject/object landscape through the lens of Gestalt (the focus of chapter four) we find that Balthasar indeed makes an important distinction that separates him from a Kantian philosophical conceptualization about image. To complete our brief investigation of the ontological structure of the human creature let us consider one final

---

73 Ibid., 72. It is critical to note that what Balthasar does here briefly in his section of “Truth as Nature” in the Theo-Logic I is unpacked more thoroughly in his sections on “Truth as Freedom,” “Truth as Mystery,” and “Truth as Participation.” Specifically in his section on “Truth as Mystery,” 131-225 is where we find a monumental discussion regarding the notion of image as that place where the truth of an object “appears” within the space of the subject. One of the most influential secondary sources for understanding “image” within a Balthasarian philosophy is the aforementioned book by D.C. Schindler, Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth. Schindler’s work assists my analysis of Balthasar’s argument for image.

74 I would be remiss if I failed to mention here that Balthasar’s makes clear in his section on “Truth as Mystery” what appears contradictory in the last section of “Truth as Nature.” My discovery is that Balthasar gives more thorough insight in the world of images later on in Theo-Logic I. In this chapter we evaluate the structure of the subject/object relationship. In chapter four I will unpack how Balthasar understands the relationship between subject and object as something the defines what he means by image.
element of this structure. The very heart of a subject/object relationship, in Balthasarian terms, must be understood via the reality of form.

In light of the subject’s encounter with the object via sensory image, Balthasar makes the following claim:

Thanks to the unity of self-consciousness, the subject understands three things. First of all, it has the power to unify synthetically the in itself disjoined image. This is the unity of perception [Einheit der Anschuung]. Furthermore, because the subject has immediate access within its own inner space to the relationship between inward significance [Bedeutung] and outward sensible expression, it is able not only to unify the image on the level of perception but also to confer upon it the unity of an inward, intellectual meaning, of a coherent, intelligible essence. The result is the unity of the concept [Einheit des Begriffs]. Finally, the subject experiences the unity of existing being in its own self-consciousness. Now, because this experience originates in the analogy, and inherent distance, between its own being and absolute being, the subject can adjudge to the essence it beholds in the image an objective, extramental existence. It thus establishes the unity of objective existence [Einheit des Da-Seins].

Balthasar makes the case for the subject’s initial act of knowledge in its preliminary experience of the sensory images generated by the object. One must realize Balthasar argues that inherent within the subject’s self-consciousness is a power to “synthesize and unite.” This is not a “sovereign” subjective power. “. . .the unity of self-consciousness comes about only under an impulsion of sensory imagination that itself proceeds from the object.” Key to this “synthesizing and uniting power” is the ability to discern meaning in what is presented via the object’s image. He notes:

By drawing essential points into the foreground while pushing inessential aspects into the background, the subject can see vivid contour in the disjointed multiplicity presented to immediate perception, understand the figure it apprehends as the active expression of a power necessarily underlying the activity, but not appearing as such, and bring out the meaning of what it has

---


76 Ibid., 73.
beheld by arranging it within already familiar contexts or categories. This manifold activity is characterized by a simultaneous elevation of sensory perception into the concept (abstractio speciei a phantasmate), on the one hand, and immersion of the intellectual meaning into sensory perception (conversio intellectus ad phantasma), on the other.\textsuperscript{77}

One must apprehend that Balthasar is arguing for a process through which the meaning of the encounter with an object takes shape. Nichols says, “What is happening is that the subject decodes in the image a significance and a spiritual system of relations which do not exist in the sensuous order as such.”\textsuperscript{78} The sensory image of the object contains within itself the very mystery of something more because the image itself does not contain in its fullness the essence of the object itself. The appearance signifies a something more and the subject’s own ontological capacity for discernment, its spontaneity via receptivity gives luminosity to the image and also adds spiritual meaning.\textsuperscript{79} In light of this encounter Balthasar continues, “Because of the inextricable interweaving of receptivity and spontaneity in knowledge, the relationship between the subject and object, and thus truth itself, has a curious two-sideness.”\textsuperscript{80} This two-sideness comes to full expression in Balthasar’s argument for Gestalt, which I will examine in chapter four.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 73-74.

\textsuperscript{78} Nichols, Say It Is Pentecost, 21.

\textsuperscript{79} See Ibid., 20-22.

\textsuperscript{80} Balthasar, TL I, 75.
CHAPTER FOUR
UNVEILING THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE TRINITY
THROUGH THE FORM OF JESUS CHRIST

To understand how Balthasar considers the epistemological relationship between created being and Divine Being, we must examine how Balthasar considers “what God must be like.” In this chapter, I investigate Balthasar’s treatment of God’s Being to account for his belief that in the form of Jesus Christ human consciousness is re-created. Simply put, what we can faithfully speculate about God’s essence is significant to understanding the reality of all created existence by way of this form. In particular, I will focus on Balthasar’s consideration of how the relationship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit is an expression of God qua Being.¹ Once we formulate this divine ontological

¹ It is important to briefly note here that the concept of analogia entis as investigated in chapter two is key to Balthasar’s theological work regarding the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While many scholars make abbreviated mention of Balthasar’s use of the concept of analogy of being some give thorough attention to it. Balthasar’s argument for God as Being is built upon his use of Gregory of Nyssa’s work. The use of Gregory, along with the concept of analogia entis as learned from Erich Przywara, are significant to key sections of this chapter. Here I want to note Anthony Cirelli’s essay, “Re-Assessing the Meaning of Thought: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Retrieval of Gregory of Nyssa,” The Heythrop Journal 50, no. 3 (2009): 416-424 as central to Balthasar’s treatment of God qua Being. Cirelli contends that Balthasar retrieves Gregory’s argument on thought in order to challenge the primary role of the subject in modern thought. While I am intrigued by this thesis, the intent for my dissertation is to consider Balthasar’s retrieval of Gregory in light of his own development of the nature of God. I investigate how Balthasar’s own Trinitarian doctrine develops by way of his retrieval of Gregory. My intention is to demonstrate in detail the significance of this doctrine for how Balthasar develops an epistemological structure with his doctrine of revelation. By considering Balthasar’s thinking on the nature of God we are able to better assess the relationship of human creatures to God especially in light of the transformation of the human consciousness by the divine in the form of Jesus Christ.
structure we can then examine how the nature of God via the form of Jesus Christ is critical to the human creature’s re-schematized conscious.²

Balthasar continually makes clear that in the relationship between human and divine logic, we must keep before us, through faith, the mystery of the Logos and the logic of God that is this Logos. As was stated earlier, access to the trinitarian mystery is revealed in the form of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. By way of this form, we discover that the ontological structure of the Trinity is the determining factor of all other ontological structures. To help set the stage for our understanding of the form of Jesus Christ, Aidan Nichols highlights three salient “presuppositions of form” that are central to how we analyze this intersection of the infinite and finite.

These presuppositions are Creation, Incarnation, and Trinity. From a general revelatory expression the created order demonstrates the glory of God in general revelatory experience. Even so, this creation is not to be considered “self-identical” with God. Simply put, a world freely created by a gracious act of the infinite cannot be identical because of the transcendent reality between an infinite Creator and a finite creation. However, any revelation of the infinite to the finite requires some sort of

² A significant element within this chapter is my naming the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as a trinitarian divine knowing. I believe that Balthasar’s conceptualization regarding the relationship of one being to another is an “act” or process of knowing. My central point is that Balthasar provides some crucial insight into the very concept of “knowing.” From a classical point of view much of Balthasar’s work is grounded in the ancient philosophical notion of “why is there anything rather than nothing.” This question is central to how Balthasar looks at anything through his philosophical and theological lens. Moreover, I find much of Balthasar’s work carries an implicit notion that takes the question deeper. Not only does he consider why there is anything but also how do we know there is anything rather than nothing. This implicit desire to examine the reality of knowing applies to the finite concept of knowing and, I believe, it also applies to the Trinity. Balthasar examines human knowing by way of a conceptualization around divine knowing, that is the knowing that happens in the inter-permeating reality of three persons and one substance. My intention is that this “chapter on the divine” will analyze Balthasar’s consideration of divine knowing and the power of this knowing which radiates into human life and transforms the human knower.
mediated expression. Thus analogical expressions of the divine glory shine through creation as an act of similarity grounded in an ever-increasing recognition of dissimilarity. Of course the definitive expression of this infinite revelation, from a Christian perspective is the Incarnation. God’s glory is revealed via an embodiment of humankind’s flesh. This is not, however, a magnified expression of creation’s general revelation. In the form of the incarnate God bursts forth into the reality of humanity in a form that is transformative of the very substance of humankind. In the incarnation God is perfecting the world. Thus the real power of this transformative act is the circuminessio of the Trinitarian life. Nichols affirms, “The Trinity, as the ultimate source of Being, is infinite, yes, but not infinite in the negative Hellenic sense of To apeiron, that which has no boundaries and is therefore formless. God’s infinitude takes the form of the circling intercommunication of Father, Son and Spirit, the expression of which in the creation leads to the indefinite profusion of finite forms we find in the world.”

However, the challenge is being able to conceptualize how this incomprehensible God becomes known in the personhood of Jesus Christ. God is uncreated Being, that which is beyond all being yet the one who creates all being. As Balthasar claims:

But the Father’s always already giving himself away, which thought can neither go behind nor exhaust, is the ultimate ground for God’s being incomprehensibly more than any finite concept can comprehend: love, posited in its absoluteness, is absolutely groundless, and it communicates this groundlessness to everything that, qualifying its plenitude more closely, can be called a “property” of God. Everything inside and outside God proceeds “a secreto Patris arcanoque” [from

---


4 Ibid., 35.
the secret and mystery of the Father]. . .”

Balthasar uses volume two of the Theo-Logic to express “what God must be like” in order for any “being” to exist at all. Therefore by unveiling the ontological structure of the Trinity we see how it is that Balthasar conceives of the Being of God in order for us to understand the being of any thing. To get there, Balthasar begins with the notion that the only way to conceive anything about the essence of God is to begin with the Son. He states, “Only Jesus’ way of relating to his Father and to the Holy Spirit can teach us anything about the intratrinitarian relations of life and love in the one and only God.”

It will become evident that such concepts as participation, love, life, truth, beauty and goodness are inter-permeated throughout Balthasar’s work because of how he argues for a trinitarian ontology by way of the Word made flesh. The window into God’s soul, figuratively speaking, is Jesus Christ. Balthasar says:

Hence, we must start once more with Jesus Christ, who,. . .is able to reveal the Divinity through his majesty (despite his brotherhood with us), while revealing to us his genuine humanity through his brotherhood with us (despite his majesty). But this tension, which at once exhibits and overcomes, is merely the starting point for his disclosure of the mystery of God’s essential properties. These properties remain mysterious, because God as a whole is and remains mystery, for “only now when the mystery of God discloses itself does it appear as mystery; what, in fact would we know of the mystery of God without revelation?”

As we might expect from Balthasar, the encounter with Jesus Christ opens our minds to the reality of God’s life in triune form shrouded in mystery. Consequently, when we

---


6 Balthasar, TL II, 125.

7 Balthasar, TL II, 139.
stand before the window of Christ what do we see? Balthasar answers this question one way through the transcendental property of truth as set forth in the Gospel of John. Balthasar’s reference to this gospel, says O’Donnell stems from its first chapter where “Jesus is the exegesis of the Father (John 1:18).”8 However, comprehending how Balthasar argues for Jesus as the exegesis of the Father is the challenge in this chapter. As O’Donnell continues, “He [Jesus] interprets the truth of the Father to the world. Thus the central problematic for a theological understanding of truth, that is, one rooted in the Incarnation, will be how the divine logic can be expressed in human words and language.”9 Thus chapter four examines the divine essence as manifested by the form of Jesus Christ. Here I focus most directly on Jesus as the expression of the divine. In epistemological terms, Balthasar’s argument for “the form of revelation” (GL I, 432) is a knowing rooted in a Trinitarian logic. The critical point of this chapter, then, is the examination of the very structure of the Trinity. As a result, we can apprehend how it is that the circumincessio of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is able, by its very structure, to transform the human knower through the form of Jesus Christ.

Balthasar asserts that the way in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit “know” each other in an eternal process of participation is given to the world by way of the incarnation and thus human knowing is transformed by the enrapturing power of the divine life. As Balthasar argues, “the hypostases determine in their circumincessio what

---


9 Ibid., 194. O’Donnell summarizes, as does Aidan Nichols in A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 99 the heart of Theology II wherein Balthasar states plainly that the central question is how Infinite Being (God) come to expression within finite reality.
God is and wills and does.”\textsuperscript{10} My purpose here is to gain insight into how Balthasar envisions the substance (analogically) of God and to evaluate Balthasar’s argument wherein he considers the visible expression of this divine ontological structure by way of the form (\textit{Gestalt}) of Jesus Christ.

\textbf{The Depth of Form: God’s Being as Act}

To understand the complexity of Balthasar’s argument for the form of Jesus Christ we must first examine his case for “God’s Being as Act” via the work of Gregory of Nyssa. In his introductory comments on Gregory’s argument regarding “being” and “God,” Balthasar states,

\begin{quote}
God is \textit{υπερ πασαν φυσιν καλον παωτος επεκειωα}. He is \textit{υπερ το αγαθον}. Since, for Gregory “God” denotes the attribute of universal Providence (\textit{θεος}, from the verb \textit{θεασθαι}), God is even “above God.” But to say that God is above Being would make no sense, since Being is that Great Beyond. It is he we touch by all that we posit and all our negations. He is the “underlying agent” (\textit{υποκειµενον}) who cannot be designated in any other way than by \textit{ειναι}. We shall see farther on how this \textit{ειναι} has been forgotten, not only as it concerns the knowledge of God, but almost as much insofar as it concerns the knowledge of creatures.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Balthasar associates the knowledge of creaturely and divine things with Gregory’s connection between God and Being. Knowledge is begotten from the power of existence, the “to be” of things which is God. In Anthony Cirelli’s estimate:

\begin{quote}
Being \textit{is} God precisely as that mysterious power [\textit{dunamis}] that is unable to be grasped conceptually yet causes all things to be by imparting existence of life participatedly. Gregory’s understanding of Being, therefore, is connected not simply to a realm of essences or ideas but to the nature or power of existence. Balthasar’s whole study of Gregory on thought flows
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Balthasar, \textit{TL II}, 148.

from this principle of Being as the power of existence and how this principle determines the meaning, direction, and limit of thought.  

Thus, a Balthasarian consideration for human knowledge is produced by way of God’s power. Balthasar’s argument for human knowledge is built upon Gregory’s identification of God with Being. And, Balthasar’s argument for “form” takes its shape from Gregory’s ideas about *logoi*. Cirelli continues:

Balthasar echoes the platonic maxim that God creates according to certain dynamic spiritual principles or powers [*noetas*] that are the very universals, or forms, that make thought possible. These powers are both intelligible reality [*nous*] and the creative powers of God, as they are constitutive of all that is and without which nothing can be: ‘Apart from these concepts (*logoi*) nothing more remains. Yet, according to Balthasar’s reading of Gregory, these ‘*logoi*,’ which are the forms of Plato and the neoplatonists, do not create independently but rather are dependent on God *qua* the one who creates by means of these perfections or forms. Balthasar asserts: ‘For God alone is able to give a particular life to his ideas. And so the forms/powers/universals, etc., are the *logoi* of God, that is, those principles by which God imparts existence to all beings. However, they are not God himself. Again, they are everywhere present in creation making things *to be* precisely as the creative powers of God’s thought. Yet, God as to *einai* is beyond these.’

If God is beyond these *logoi*, the forms/universals through which God creates, then how is human knowing understood in relation to an unknowable God? These *logoi* serve as God’s “intellectual agents.” Balthasar, appealing to Gregory, argues that *logoi* are the “principles of intellection” and thus a human knower “knows” by way of the “cognizable” effect of these *logoi*. Thus, any human knowing is always grounded in God. By way of these *logoi* any human knowing implies God. Cirelli maintains, “For it is God who both causes the *logoi* to be and who remains present in creation through his

---


13 Ibid., 417.

14 See Ibid., 417-418.
logoi. However, an understanding of this metaphysic does not mean that God can be ‘seized’ by the mind as it cogitates according to the forms. Rather, God can be said to awaken the mind to thought.”\(^{15}\) Thus, God enables human knowing via these logoi. Therefore, human knowing is ultimately dependent upon God for its actualized function in the world.\(^{16}\) This being the case, there are three key elements to briefly analyze in order to make sense of Balthasar’s own argument for the “meaning of thought.” The heart of Cirelli’s argument focuses on these “three angles” as he calls them. Cirelli states in his footnotes the interesting connection between Balthasar’s interpretation of Gregory and how that interpretation shapes Balthasar’s development of Gestalt. Cirelli’s argument does not focus on how Gregory influences Balthasar’s own argument for “form.” It is the intent of this chapter to make the connection.

First, Balthasar argues that the dynamic, desirous search for meaning and truth is significant within human thought. Even though “knowing” is a passive receiving of what is given by the logoi it nevertheless involves a “moving” out from within itself towards that which it seeks. This “movement towards the infinite” is characteristic of all creatures, both material and spiritual even though the nature of the movement is different between finite beings and spiritual beings.\(^{17}\) The key is in the difference between these

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 417.

\(^{16}\) See Ibid., 417-418. Significant to Cirelli’s argument is the way he highlights Gregory’s influence on Balthasar’s own conceptualization of “form.” Cirelli makes clear that Balthasar reading of Gregory’s “God qua Being” strengthens Balthasar’s own critical reflection (Apokalypse der deutschen Seele) toward modern German thinkers. Cirelli states, “More precisely, since thought’s ultimate horizon in the quest for meaning must be oriented to the very source and possibility of thought, namely God, any turn to the human subject as the measure of the real is a grave falling away from one of the fundamental truths of human existence, that if thought can only be true to itself by turning to God for knowledge of the truth of Being, thinking is thus moribund when it turns away from God” (418).
two types of being: “Yet, Balthasar asserts that while time/finitude is the proper
dimension of material existence, spiritual existence, which finds its source in God, is
open to an infinite horizon. Man is thus a paradox. Bound by the finite borders of
material existence, he is nevertheless aware of the infinite, which haunts his steps and
beckons him constantly to transcend himself.” Consequently, Balthasar sees within
mutability the innate movement towards God, which is the reality of our becoming.
Thus, God is not the one who “necessarily” moves towards in order to come to
realization. “In Balthasar’s reading of Gregory, the infinite God does not seek out man
necessarily but rather beckons finite man to himself.” Of course this movement toward
God requires human thought to become aware that it cannot “possess” God. To know
God relies on a never-ending desire to seek God. Becoming requires a desire to seek God
more and more because God simply cannot ever be fully possessed. Therefore, genuine
knowledge is never stopping at what is known but always moving toward that which is
beyond knowing.” Balthasar says:

Thus true knowledge is produced outside of all light, in the night, but in a
“divine night” (θεια νυξ), in a “dazzling darkness” (λαμπρος γνωφος).
This night is faith, in which all knowledge is reached and which alone
“links and joins together the searching spirit and the ungraspable
nature. . . , and there is no other way to approach God. Seized itself by
the presence of being, faith, and faith alone, in its turn, seizes being.”

---

17 See Ibid., 418.
18 Ibid., 418.
19 Ibid., 419.
20 See Ibid., 419.
21 Balthasar, Presence and Thought, 103.
An unending desire to keep searching in a movement toward God is a vital factor to human knowing.\footnote{In this respect one could argue that Balthasar’s argument for a “desirous movement toward God as key to human knowing” is not that different from the transcendental Thomism of Rahner and Lonergan.}

Second, Balthasar analyzes Gregory’s epistemological argument via the inner consciousness of the human being. Balthasar argues that contained within every person is spirit/reason and love. This is the image of God within finite persons.\footnote{See Cirelli, “Re-Assessing the Meaning of Thought,” 419.} Balthasar argues:

What then is this image? It is, Gregory tells us, participation in all the goods of divinity, in that infinity which is the lot of the spirit. In the first place, it is Spirit and Reason (Νους καὶ Λόγος), which are divine, “and from which human nature is not estranged”, and then it is Love (Αγάπη), of which Saint John says that it is God and which “our Creator has given us as the expression of our human countenance” and “whose absence alters the character of the whole image”. Love includes all the virtues and brings about through their harmonious interaction the brightness of the image. Spirit includes that ability to see through everything, an ability that is properly divine. The two of these together bestow on the creature that “light” which caused the Prophet to say: “The light of your face, Lord, has shone upon us.” It is “the face of God expressed in human features [Θεου προσωπον εν χαρακτηρι θεωρομενον].” It can be seen how little this image is added exteriorly to a nature that is already constituted. It is rather the very constitution of it, inasmuch as the spirit possesses this grace (χαρις), which is the brightness of its divine kinship. Nor is this a dead image and separated, as it were, from the archetype. On the contrary, we have seen that for the spirit the term “creation” came to be analogical and that it was necessary rather to speak of “participation”. This is therefore a living image, which for this reason bespeaks a very close union as well. It is that connaturality (συγγενεσια) that is so dear to Gregory and that is merely the concrete form of the analogy.\footnote{Balthasar, Presence and Thought, 113.}
This is the heart of the matter for a Balthasarian epistemology and to all that follows regarding how the form of Jesus Christ is transformative of human consciousness. For Balthasar, via Gregory, human spirit/reason is the capacity to see an object as it is constituted by the creative power of God. “Thus spirit is the capacity each person has to perceive what is constitutive of all beings, namely the logos and, ultimately, that everything has its origin in God. Spirit is, in some way, thought.”\(^{25}\) However, in partnership with spirit/reason is love. Love is that gift from God that enables the human being to communicate the presence of God to one another. Love is that power, given by God, through which spirit/reason communicates God’s divine glory to another. As Cirelli contends:

> The expression of this love entails ‘all virtues,’ which one takes to mean the presentation and extension of care towards beings. Expressing love also effects how one thinks about Being, insofar as thinking that is tempered by love entails a concern for the object of perception such that the subject allows for the object to give itself rather than manipulating the object to the subject’s own interpretation. Without expressing this love, that is, without surrounding the object of perception with a loving openness, the truth of objects cannot be known. This failure to temper reason with love is precisely the tendency Balthasar sees in modern German thought. Hence, true knowledge of Being, of God, is not possible.

Thus love is the decisive element to any finite epistemological structure. It is the meaning of this love within the divine life and as expressed in the form of Jesus Christ that we must unpack in order to consider how this form transforms human consciousness. True knowledge can only become a full expression of the truth through love. Love perfects our ability to perceive what the object discloses. The relationship between the infinite and the finite is bonded by an epistemology of love. “In other words,

\(^{25}\) Cirelli, “Re-Assessing the Meaning of Thought,” 419.
spirit/reason can only, at best, perceive the truth of Being. Only by loving what thought has perceived, granted the object is lovable, e.g. a human being, does one enter into the knowledge of Being, which Balthasar understands as unfolding in a relationship between beings, hence God.\textsuperscript{26}

The third and final key to Balthasar’s retrieval of Gregory’s “theocentric epistemology” is “the purpose of the incarnation.” Here Balthasar argues for how God has chosen to approach us. First, in Jesus Christ the eternal is begotten in time. Because humanity has lost its image and sin has affected its nature, humanity is in need of a savior. Balthasar says, “If, therefore, humanity, through sin, has lost the image, and if sin has entered into humanity as a condition of its nature, only the presence of a ‘true’ and pure man effects in humanity as a whole a ‘change in our very nature \[\alphaυτης \tauης \phiυσεως \eta\muων \muεταστοιχεωσις\]’, and that “by a simple and incomprehensible coming of life, by the presence of light.”\textsuperscript{27} He argues that because the image has been lost, the Word becomes flesh to bring humanity back to the “full integrity of its nature.”\textsuperscript{28} Second, because God loves the world God chooses to move towards the world via the incarnation. Cirelli highlights, “God/Being is to be indentified with a super-becoming and that becoming, understood as the ever-extending dimension of love towards God, is the final identification of man’s thought which reflects his being made in the image of God. . .”\textsuperscript{29}

Through God’s love for us in the Incarnation we are empowered to love ourselves, to

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 420.

\textsuperscript{27} Balthasar, \textit{Presence and Thought}, 137.

\textsuperscript{28} Cirelli, “Re-Assessing the Meaning of Thought,” 421.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 421.
reclaim an epistemology of love by the power of Jesus Christ, that original image of God. God’s love transforms us to continually move towards God in an unending desire to be in relationship with God. The incarnation is the fundamental core of this movement. Balthasar summarizes:

This is the immense revelation that has been granted to us by the Incarnation: God is Life. Most certainly he had appeared to us, from the time our desire had its first awakening, as that Ocean of Being that our thought would never be in a position to capture. His own life, his pure infinity, his repose, his light, would never be our life, which would eternally remain a life of movement, of struggle, and of desire. We believed that becoming and Being were opposites, two forms, as it were, analogous without a doubt, but irreducible. Through the Incarnation we learn that all the unsatisfied movement of becoming is itself only repose and fixity when compared to that immense movement of love inside of God: Being is a Super-Becoming. In constantly surpassing ourselves, therefore, by means of our love, we assimilate ourselves to God much more intimately than we could have suspected.30

Thus the love of God in its divine form comes to finite expression as an epistemology of love. That is, the incomprehensible love of God becomes comprehensible through the Word made flesh: the form of revelation in Jesus Christ.

**Incarnation: Jesus Christ is the Form of the Divine**

Having considered briefly Gregory of Nyssa’s God *qua* Being and its shaping of Balthasar’s thought, I now turn to Balthasar’s consideration of Jesus Christ as the form of the divine. For this section I offer the following questions: “How Can God’s Logos express himself in the finitude of the creature?”31 What enrapturing power exists within the incarnation to actually transform the human consciousness? To say it another way,

---


what form does the love of God in Jesus Christ take in order to (re)form this
epistemology of love within the actual finite life?

To begin our consideration of what happens in the revealing act of the Incarnation
we must first think briefly about what Balthasar means by form. Balthasar states:

Those words which attempt to convey the beautiful gravitate, first of all, toward the mystery of form (Gestalt) or of figure (Gebilde). Formosus (‘beautiful’) comes from forma (‘shape’) and speciosus (‘comely’) from species (‘likeness’). But this is to raise the question of the ‘great radiance from within’ which transforms species into speciosa: the question of splendour. We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a lovely-worthy thing.32

Simply put, form is the unity of the physical and spiritual. For Balthasar, the form of any object is both the physical shape of something and that which shines forth from within this shape. Fundamentally, we are dealing with Balthasar’s insistence (rightly so) of the communication of being. He continues,

Similarly we are confronted with both the gathering and uniting of that which had been indifferently scattered—its gathering into the service of the one thing which now manifests and expresses itself—and the outpouring, self-utterance of the one who was able to fashion by himself such a body of expression: by himself, I say, meaning ‘on his own initiative’, and therefore with pre-eminence, freedom, sovereignty, out of his own interior space, particularity, and essence. Again, we are brought face to face with both interiority and its communication, the soul and its body, free discourse governed by laws and clarity of language.33

Balthasar’s consideration of form as the “intersection of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions, an essential tension between the finite and the infinite”34 is central to my

---


33 Ibid., 20.
argument. In considering the relationship between the infinite and the finite

Balthasar asserts:

The appearance of the form (Gestalt), 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. In different periods of intellectual history, to be sure, one or the other of these aspects may be emphasized: on the one hand, classical perfection (Vollendung: the form which contains the depths), on the other, Romantic boundlessness, infinite (Unendlichkeit: the form that transcends itself by pointing beyond to the depths). Be this as it may, however, both aspects are inseparable from one another, and together they constitute the fundamental configuration of being.35

There is thus a tension that exists in the relationship between the infinite and the finite. Schindler terms it the “structurality of event,” or the tension of being’s expression in the historicity of finite existence.36 Of course such a structure is key to my purpose here. Since form is an encounter by way of an appearance, a revealing of the depths of something, it presupposes a subject/object relationship, “since every appearing implies an appearing –to or –for.”37 Clearly then, a consideration of Balthasar’s argument for the “form” of Jesus Christ and the power of God that radiates from within the infinite/finite tension in this historical reality is of consequence, for it reveals that this power is what transforms human consciousness.


35 Balthasar, GL I, 118-119.


37 Ibid., 16.
Having briefly stated Balthasar’s general definition of form, one must note a particularly definitive uniqueness to the form of Jesus Christ in relation to all other created forms. Balthasar states,

The form of revelation, therefore, is not appearance as the limitation (περας) of an infinite non-form (απειρον), but the appearance of an infinitely determined super-form. And, what is more important: the form of revelation does not present itself as an independent image of God, standing over against what is imaged, but as a unique, hypostatic union between archetype and image. In the form of revelation, what is image is of no interest in isolation and for itself (the man Jesus), but only in so far as in this image (Christ!) God portrays himself—indeed, in so far as this man himself is God. Qualitatively intensified, here again the statement applies to the effect that ‘God’s invisibleness has become visible for the rational spirit (Rom 1.20), and, what is more, the intensification is so unprecedented that those who see and yet do not see are ‘inexcusable’ (Rom 1.20 = Jn 15.22).

To be sure, reading this form is something as unique as the form itself. Nonetheless, if this form really is the crowning recapitulation of everything in heaven and on earth, then it also is the form of all forms and the measure of all measures, just as for this reason it is the glory of all glories of creation as well.\(^{38}\)

The form of Jesus Christ is that revelation of the divine life, which maintains a categorically transformative power within finite being because it transcends the created order. As Aidan Nichols notes, “Owing to the Incarnation, the object here presented through beautiful form is not merely human being but in a direct and plenary way divine Being itself.”\(^{39}\) By way of this divine Being’s expression within finite experience, the dynamic desirous search for meaning and truth within human thought is shaped by the very fact that this Super-form transcends our form. Consequently our contemplative

\(^{38}\) Balthasar, GL I, 432. As Nichols in The Word has been Abroad states, “Of course what distinguishes the form of Jesus Christ from all other forms is that here, thanks to the hypostatic union, we are not dealing simply with an image produced by the Trinitarian super-form in impressing itself on created being. For here in the God-man both image and the archetype of the image are available in one single being” (35).

movement towards God is shaped by the mystical beautiful expression of God that seeks us by way of God’s revealed Self in Jesus Christ. In light of the notion that Gestalt is “the figure” and “that which shines forth from the figure,” Balthasar sets the framework for how we consider exactly what takes place within the Christological reality of form and what is revealed from within the Christological act that is the historical expression of the Word become flesh. An analysis of this form emphasizes the actual figure of Jesus Christ.

An apprehension of the core of this particular form is established with Balthasar’s ana-logic approach to appearances in the world. Balthasar emphasizes in the “The Triadic Structure of Worldly Logic” the way in which the structure of the Trinity is imaged in the finite world. In a complex way he lays out this structure:

Neither “identity” nor mere “difference” can, as Blondel has shown, express the structure of real worldly being. A logic built upon such propositions (A=A; A≠B) is an abstract residue of the actual constitution of this being and, in that respect, performs at best the secondary function of helping us not to miss the absolute demand for decision within the relative. In the real, difference, the “other than myself”, is always already overtaken by a third

---

[40] See Ibid., 19.
[41] See Balthasar, TL II, 35-62. Here Balthasar starts this pilgrimage into the heart of the form (appearances) via the creation’s expressive reflections of the divine. Nichols asserts in Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar’s logic (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), “Since what the Logos discloses is the Trinity, such an ana-logic will consider possible traces of the Trinitarian mystery in the creation and our reflection upon it – a well-known feature of patristic and medieval theology here revived by Balthasar on a renewed basis which turns out to be essentially twofold” (69). See Angelo Scola, Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991). He writes, “Once the existence of the Trinity is known through Jesus Christ, can analogic shed light on it? Balthasar here lays down a second important limit. The various expressions of the analogical approach—the triadic structure of worldly logic; the images of the Trinity in finite being (Augustine, Richard of Saint Victor); the possibilities of dialectic (Hegel) and of the dialogicians, the students of the I-Thou relationship (Rosenzweig, Buber, Ebners); and the thesis of fecundity which completes the work of the dialogicians (Scheeben)—remain images that look upward from below” (56).
[42] Ibid., 35.
within which I am able to apprehend its otherness in the first place.\textsuperscript{43}

Nichol’s highlights that Balthasar sees this triadic structure in personhood thus pointing to the fact that “traces of the Trinity [are found] in the structure of both thought and being in the world.”\textsuperscript{44} This point is key to the developing epistemological argument here.

Balthasar continues:

Now, the upshot of all this is that logically there can be no A (I) without the finite set of non-A’s that determine it and (2) without a relation of this entire finite set of determinate and delimited things to an unlimited reality that determines them all. B, C, and so on, are simultaneously the negation of A (abstractly) and (concretely) its co-constituents, insofar as their otherness is a positive co-determinant of A. This fact rests upon the double presupposition that all things exist together in a finitude (common to all) and that this finitude, in turn, is distinct from, and related to, the origin from which the universal all springs.\textsuperscript{45}

By way of this image of the Trinity within the worldly shape of finite being, Balthasar sets the stage for the constitutive reality of the divine in re-shaping finite reality. With this triadic structure as foundational, Balthasar argues that in the relationship of the “I” and the “thou,” we are pointed to an infinite ground beyond this encounter. Thus, when we encounter Jesus Christ we are taken up into the infinite ground beyond this encounter, which is the Trinity. More importantly we are taken up into the triadic reality of the

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 35. Balthasar’s logic here is complex. Nichols, in \textit{A Key to Balthasar} gives some clarity. He states, “Balthasar maintains that all logic has a triadic structure. No ‘A’ can be determined except by reference to an indefinite series of delimiting co-determinants, as also to an unlimited determinant without which there would be infinite regress” (101). Nichol’s highlights that Balthasar sees this triadic structure in personhood thus pointing to the fact that “traces of the Trinity [are found] in the structure of both thought and being in the world.

\textsuperscript{44} Aidan Nichols, \textit{A Key to Balthasar}, 101.

\textsuperscript{45} Balthasar, \textit{TL} II, 37.
circumincessio of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{46} The appearance of Jesus Christ invites us into the depths of the divine life that is radiating out from the heart of the appearance. Balthasar emphatically states, “Jesus gives us the key to the mystery of the living God, a mystery that truly appears in all mysteriousness precisely when we are given access to it.”\textsuperscript{47} This triadic structure imaged in the reality of finite personhood points to the personhood of Trinity. As a result we find intersected in the form of Jesus Christ the truth of this Trinity as it radiates forth into finite existence. This radiance is the triadic structure of relational movement of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that penetrates into the created world. It is God’s self-utterance that gives triadic shape to the created world by raising it up into the divine life via the personhood of Jesus Christ. And this self-utterance bears the indelible mark of love that is the eternal life of divine knowing. Therefore an ana-logic way of existence discovers a cata-logic divine ontology of love that transforms all existence.

Balthasar’s use of the word “ana-logic” is his expression for the finite movement towards God. Cata-logic is his expression for the divine’s movement toward creation. In a way, the term cata-logic is Balthasar’s way of uniting in logic all that he has expressed through the \textit{Theo-Aesthetics} and the \textit{Theo-Dramatics}. It is the uniting of the beautiful, the good and the true in the One Flesh wherein the power of God’s love radiates into the world through flesh as the very mission of reconciling the world to God’s original purpose as a divine expression of God’s glory.\textsuperscript{48} From the perspective of an

\textsuperscript{46} See Aidan Nichols, \textit{A Key to Balthasar}, 100-106 and \textit{Say It Is Pentecost} 69-72.

\textsuperscript{47} Balthasar, \textit{TL} II 127.
epistemology of love, the divine *agapaic* power that exists eternally with the divine life becomes a power (through the Word made flesh) within the existential reality of finite being. This is necessary in order for finite beings to be reconciled (or re-shaped) into God’s originally intended purpose, which is a loving relationship with God. Balthasar goes to great lengths demonstrating via certain thinkers (Maximus the Confessor, Bonaventure, Rupert of Deutz and Nicholas of Cusa) the necessity of a catalytic expression of God’s reconciliatory power in the world via the form of Jesus Christ. For our purposes I will briefly examine Balthasar’s use of Maximus in defining this power.

Having considered the outer appearance of the form of Jesus Christ we must now reflect on Balthasar’s treatment of that which radiates from within the incarnation. Because Christ is the appearance (super-form) of the trinitarian structure we come face to face with the enrapturing power within the incarnation and the way in which it re-schematizes human knowing. Simply put, our examination of that which radiates from within the incarnation provides, by way of Balthasar’s lens, some answers to why the form of Jesus Christ enraptures a human knower.

To shed light on form’s power in an encounter between the human creature and Jesus Christ, Balthasar’s utilizes Maximus the Confessor’s argument regarding the human subject and its encounter of the divine. Balthasar inquires into the dialogic between subject and object so as to clarify the power of revelation within this dialogue.

---

48 See Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 106. There he notes, “For theological aesthetics, the flesh – the sensuous realm – had been the pivot. For theological dramatics, though the flesh was in itself no sinful principle, in history it had turned away from the life of God that is the light of men. To restore its integrity was why the Word assumed it. Now in the theological logic, the stress will lie on the potential for redemptive expression found in the union of finite flesh and infinite Word.”
Balthasar argues that Maximus considered knowledge between subject and object as 
“the realization of a reciprocal directedness an affinity for one another, an ontological 
relatedness that Maximus calls σχεσις and which is a fundamental expression of created 
existence.” Succinctly put, knowing is a relationship between a subject and object that 
are equal in their creaturely presentation. As for God, this same understanding of the 
relationship between subject and object is not applicable. Because God is not an object 
of the world God is not an object of knowledge. Therefore Maximus, as Balthasar points 
out, argues for a different approach to a human knowing of the unknowable. Balthasar’s 
analysis of Maximus’ thought continues:

The relationship of knowing that unites the creature to God is not ‘objective’ 
knowledge in an inner-worldly sense, since it cannot base itself on any relatedness 
[to itself] in its object; it brings with itself an essentially new 
aspect, which Maximus calls ‘supposition’ or ‘belief,’ but which is a kind 
of grasp that is sure and strong beyond all object knowledge.

As Balthasar demonstrates Maximus argues for the notion that when the human knower 
meets Jesus they come to realize a shape of knowing beyond everyday objective 
knowledge. In their encounter with Christ the human knower is given the realization of a 
“belief” necessary for knowing the unknowable. This “belief” is formulated by way of 
“what remains” in a subject/object encounter. Balthasar proceeds:

Sense knowledge, in Maximus’ system, has already been described as 
the synthetic identity of the sensing faculty with the sensible object; 
but the result, which the imaginative process (Φαντασμα) produces—the

---

49 Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor (San Francisco: Ignatius 
Press, 2003), p. 166. Hereafter referred to as CL. The epistemological formulation that is present in 
Maximus is clearly evident in a vast way within Balthasar’s work. While I am briefly presenting this 
structure by way of Balthasar’s examination of Maximus’ thought it is the intention of the latter part of this 
chapter to provide a constructive argument regarding Balthasar’s consideration of knowing as it is 
understood relationally between subject and object.

50 Ibid., 167.
sensible image (Φαντασμα) — points, as we saw, beyond itself toward a higher form of knowing. In all finite knowledge there is always a “remainder”, which comes from the nonidentity of the subjective and objective poles and which remains, despite the identity of those two within the process of forming the sensible image (Φαντασμα) or thought (νοηηνα).\footnote{Ibid., 167.} It is this remainder that becomes for Balthasar the point of departure into transcendental knowledge. There comes a point, says Balthasar wherein theoretical knowledge transcends into a form of knowledge (belief, faith) through which the absolute truth of the object is expressed by way of the Absolute power that is its foundation. In other words, this transcendental knowledge is the place where God’s power takes effect and confirms in a mysterious revelation of the truth of any thing. Balthasar argues, “For this confirmation is no longer derived from the ‘evidence’ of the idea and from the concept of the ‘object’, as is the case with the knowledge of created things. But the ‘remainder’, which already makes itself felt here, becomes a mighty force that drives the motion of thought along, until ‘proof from reasons’ is no longer possible.”\footnote{Ibid., 168.} This is what Balthasar terms, “the ascent of the soul” because this “belief” is a process through which the knowing subject ascends toward the Absolute in a formative synthesis of the finite subject with the full expression of God’s divine Idea of the object that reveals itself. It is this process of ascension that takes place in the human subject’s encounter with the divine knowing via the form of Jesus Christ.

In meeting Jesus human knowing begins its transformation by an increased awareness that in all relations there is a knowing that transcends all creaturely life and is
the foundation of all existence. Jesus Christ triggers in the human knower a sense that something more is available for answering the purpose of human existence. In the encounter with Jesus Christ a new vision is activated within the human creature; a new way of seeing is stirred up and the conscious grasp of God’s desire for relationship with us is begun.

Through the notion that Jesus Christ sets in motion a new way of seeing things, Balthasar, by way of Maximus’ guidance, argues for the purpose of Jesus Christ as the one who “simply fulfills God’s decree, which providently foresees all and, by the liberal giving of its love, is exalted above the aspects of ‘redemption’ and of ‘fulfillment of the world.’” Balthasar’s reflections guide him to the fact that what human knowing encounters in Jesus Christ is the synthesis that God intended for creation from its inception. Balthasar continues, “Maximus makes a point of stressing that the God-man’s act concomitantly fulfills the anthropological synthesis God had intended man to perform: ‘As man he [Christ] thus fulfills in deed and in truth through inviolable obedience all that he himself had decided beforehand as God and for our sake carries out the entire will of the Father.’” Accordingly we come to know in Jesus Christ the desire God has had from the beginning of creation: a synthesis of creature and Creator in an existence of deified knowing. Since humankind failed in this synthesis the God-man comes into the world to make such a union possible. Thus the human knower, by way of an encounter with Jesus Christ becomes enraptured by the fact that in the incarnation

54 Ibid., 192.
55 See Ibid., 193.
of God’s Son God seeks the fulfillment of God’s will that is union with creation. As Balthasar asserts,

Hence, the trinitarian logic is not a dogma contrived after the fact. No, he reveals himself immediately in the fact of the *Verbum-Caro*. Consequently, this fact already transcends itself as a purely worldly and historical event in all of its aspects. Thanks to a logic not limited to creation, its very facticity can be conceived and exposited adequately only in faith on the basis of a trinitarian logic.\(^{56}\)

Balthasar argues that God uses human ways of speaking, in essence, to get our attention. That is to say, the very truth of the incarnation is the way in which God has chosen to radiate God’s Self through human experience as it is formed in Jesus Christ. The reason it is possible for human knowing to be re-schematized by the divine knowing in Jesus Christ is because God (trinitarian logic) takes upon himself the human experience. Balthasar states, “In him alone [Jesus Christ] but through him for all men the word of God is hypostatically one with man. In him human existence in time comes, as we saw in the first part, to a parity with the truth.”\(^{57}\) For Balthasar, human knowing becomes a participation in divine knowing because the divine has become human. Hence the human consciousness has become re-schematized because, in an analogous way, God’s own life has become re-schematized by way of the incarnation. Balthasar continues:

Nevertheless in Jesus, a man unique and aware of his uniqueness, the Word of God reached men. God’s word is no longer an abstract law, it is this man. Everything God had to say or give to the world has found a place in him. The whole objective spirit of religion, of law, of ritual is identical with the subjective spirit of this particular of this particular man, a man like us. It is

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 299.

the religion of freedom. When this man gives God his all, obeys him to
death, he obeys but himself, his love as Son for the Father. With him it is no longer
any question of heteronomy or of autonomy; the heteros, the Father, is also
tò autòn, the same concrete nature. He who believes in the Son is free, for he
has attained to the true, absolute humanism. 58

To put it succinctly, as Balthasar attests to in his chapter title, “God speaks as Man.”
This speaking is the splendour, it is that which radiates forth from the form of Jesus
Christ. This speaking is, for Balthasar, God’s enrapting power that re-creates the
human consciousness in preparation for an ongoing, eternal act of participation the divine
life. Because of this act, Balthasar is then able to take us deeper into the reality of what
God must be like in the very Self of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) for human
creatures to united with the divine.

**The Form of Jesus Christ: His Mission is Our Mission**

Up to this point I have attempted to show how Balthasar considers the
relationship of the human knower and the divine by way of the form (appearance) of
Jesus Christ and that which radiates from within that appearance. To summarize, when a
human being encounters Jesus Christ this creature discovers that God, through love, is
always for them. They come to realize that they have been grasped by the One who is
ungraspable and thus are now able to know who God is in the *circuminessio* of Father,
Son and Holy Spirit. In Christ, finite being meets a God who has approached humanity
in love in order to save humans from the destructive modes of sin, death and alienation.
In the inconceivable fact that God loves women and men so much that he sends his Son
for them, human beings discover that their history has been altered. Because of God’s act

58 Ibid., 93.
the very nature of humanity has been re-worked in a new direction. Because of God’s enrapturing claim of us by way of Jesus Christ, the human creature, says Balthasar, takes upon itself a desirous contemplation of the God who seeks out humans. In meeting Jesus, finite contemplation is begotten and a new reflection or gazing takes hold of human minds and humanity seeks the One who seeks them. In substance humanity becomes divinized, they move deeper into the divine life. Balthasar sees this very expression of an epistemology of love in the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity, the final chapter of this essay.

This being the case, the objective in this final part is briefly to examine Balthasar’s consideration of what it means to “move deeper into the divine life” by way of Jesus’ divine mission as it appears in finite historical actuality. Moreover, I will examine Balthasar’s treatment of the purpose of Jesus’ divine mission as it gives form to the act of human contemplation in God’s never ending love. The final question in this chapter is: what is the significance of Jesus’ mission for human contemplation in light of the way the form of Jesus Christ investigated above shapes it? Specifically, I will consider Balthasar’s argument for this mission as it radiates the divine knowing and thus, through its loving power gives shape to human contemplation. We see here again the overarching reality for Balthasar that in Jesus Christ, the human creature encounters the divine life. Consequently this encounter changes the finite creature and forms this finite being so it too radiates this divine life as the body of Christ. Thus, the last part of the chapter considers the notion of Jesus Christ’s mission as the Son of God and how that mission becomes our mission.
Balthasar argues that the first part of Jesus’ mission is to present to the world, in his human form, the very life of the Trinity. Balthasar states:

As man, Jesus, the ‘holy one of God’ (Mk 1:24; cf. Acts 3:14; Rev 3:7), so perfectly lives out his mission to complete in the Spirit the task given him by the Father—‘to reveal God’s essence and attitude toward man’—that he manifests in his sense-woven human existence not only God’s solidarity with the sinner and the needy but all the other properties of God as well.59

For Balthasar, the fundamental quality that Jesus Christ reveals to humanity is love. In Jesus Christ, argues Balthasar, we see not just any love, but “something that reveals the eternal gratuity of the Father’s love.”60 In light of Balthasar’s consideration of Jesus Christ as the revealer of love we find an even more important sense of the divine life by his analysis of this love between Father and Son. Balthasar continues:

The “Word” that the Father speaks in bringing forth the Son is certainly not “spoken” in order that he might learn something that he did not already know. Whatever the nature of the “generatio per modum intellectus” [generation by way of intellect] may be, it is the result of an unfathomable gratuity behind which no thought can probe, a gratuity that, as such, is the primal ground of the mystery of God. This primordial gratuity has a distant echo in the gratuity of creation—no creature can say why it is, why there is any worldly being at all—and in the further gratuity of the redemption, to which no sinner has the slightest right. But creation and redemption are, as was said, only an echo of the love within God. In the generated Son, who is “turned toward the bosom of the Father” (Jn 1:18), who says “Abba” with infinite affection, we see the same love in the form of infinite gratitude, infinite readiness to be, to become to do--and to suffer--all that the loving Father wills. All that the divine love can conceive in the drama of saving history has been planned and harbored for all eternity in the abysses of this love.61

---

59 Balthasar, *TL* II, 139. As Scola remarks “Jesus Christ, in fact, is the concrete analogia entis, because in the unity of his divine and human nature he represents the most exact measure possible of the relation between God and man. Thus, the verbum-caro is the royal way to contemplate, to the small extent that is allowed to the eyes of our faith, the unfathomable mystery of the Triune God.” *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style*, 57.

60 Ibid., 140.

61 Ibid., 140.
Balthasar argues for something significantly hidden from the world. God does not love the world as if God *needs* to love the world to truly be God. God loves the world because the very existence of God in the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the expression of gratuity between the persons of the Trinity.\(^6^2\) This gratuity erupts into the world because of the very reality of the Son’s “infinite affection” in being the very will of God the Father. This is paramount! Here Balthasar presents the core of an epistemological structure. It is the expression of gratuity between the persons. Rodney Howsare highlights how significant the reality of personhood is to this epistemology. He states:

> So, how does this question of personhood fit into all of this? And what does Balthasar’s unique reflection on this question add to the post-Calcedonian debates? Balthasar begins by reminding us of the fundamental problem of the human person: I am at once a member of a species of countless other human beings who possess the same nature that I possess; and yet I possess this nature in an absolutely unique and incommunicable way.\(^6^3\)

The problem that Balthasar works through is how we consider personhood. To understand how it is that Jesus Christ can become fully human while also being fully divine rides on how we conceive of personhood, or more aptly, how, Balthasar argues God’s power conceives personhood within finite reality. To get us beyond mere individuality (or subjective-centered reality) into the true reality of personhood Balthasar states.\(^6^4\)

\(^6^2\) Scola states in *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, “The central fact in Balthasar’s entire construction is the concept of ‘mission.’ The principle that Balthasar often repeats is taken from Thomas when he states that, for the divine Persons, processio (intradivine) and missio (extradivine) are the same thing” (58).

It [personhood] can only be given by the absolute Subject, God. It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence—that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorized mission—that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a “person.”65

Thus God, whose very personhood is the eternal logic of the divine in the gratuitous expression of the persons in the Trinity, is the defining power of finite personhood. It is this power that shapes the fully human and fully divine reality of Jesus Christ in his divinely authorized mission. He continues:

This is what happened, archetypically, in the case of Jesus Christ, when he was given his eternal “definition”—“You are my beloved Son.” Thus, as we have seen, he was given his unique, universal mission (which we cannot conceive as having a beginning in time), together with the most precise knowledge of who he is, not only for God but “in the beginning with God” (Jn1:1). Here, indeed, in the mission of Jesus, where an exact definition of personal uniqueness coincides with its universal significance, we have the irrefutable expression of his divinity. He receives this divinity, for we are speaking of a mission that is imparted to him. Nor is there any internal contradiction here, for this is not the case merely of a creature participating in God: it is a handing-over of divinity to One who is God (Deum de Deo. . .).66

Again, we find here beautifully articulated what was been spelled out earlier in our consideration of what the human creature meets in the encounter with Jesus Christ. We see once more, according to Balthasar, the inconceivable way in which God “determines the knowledge of faith.” He articulates further:

All these speculative endeavors to distinguish philosophically the concept of the person from that of the conscious subject are nugatory if the task

64 Howsare provides a lucid overview of Balthasar’s argument for personhood especially in light of the immense discussion about personhood in Jesus Christ. See Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed, 129-136 for an excellent analysis.


66 Ibid., 207.
before us is to define theologically the personal being of Christ (and hence the personal being of others in Christ). So we must return to our point of departure. All the empirical approximations we use to try to describe the characteristics of the conscious subject within a species (man) are inadequate. Only God can define and designate such a subject in his qualitative uniqueness. And in the one, sole archetypal instance, it is God who defines who this Subject is and why he is there; it is he who sets forth the meaning, the task, the vocation. In Jesus, the two are identical: this is what distinguishes him from other subjects who have thus been personalized by being given a mission (for example, the prophet). Jesus acts accordingly; he does not communicate a divine plan but speaks as the personal Word of God. In Christo, however, every man can cherish the hope of not remaining a merely individual conscious subject but of receiving personhood from God, becoming a person, with a mission that is likewise defined in Christo.67

Accordingly, we find here the essential clue to our mission. All personhood is grounded in God because of the personhood of the Word-made-flesh. It is a participatory relatedness in which the participatory substance of divine life is the mission of Jesus Christ. His mission is to make holy the mission of finite being. Jesus Christ is, in effect, the *analogia entis* because in him the abyss between the infinite and finite has been crossed. From an epistemological perspective, if our knowing is ontologically grounded in analogy then Jesus Christ is the form that unites us to the divine because he crosses that abyss. Balthasar maintains:

> Between the divine and the created natures there is an essential abyss. It cannot be circumvented. The fact that the person of Jesus Christ bridges this abyss without harm to his unity should render us speechless in the presence of the mystery of his person. . .Since the person of the Logos is the ultimate union of divine and created being, it must constitute the final proportion \([Mass]\) between the two and hence must be the “concrete *analogia entis*” itself.68

This becomes for Balthasar an in-depth expression of eternal participation among the persons of the Trinity. God participates within the very Self of God in the eternal

67 Ibid., 220.

68 Ibid., 220-222.
expression of relationality between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within Balthasar’s treatment of the Trinity we see an epistemology of loving relations between the divine persons that ignites within the human person. As Balthasar argues, “the hypostases determine in their circumincessio what God is and wills and does.”69 For Balthasar, the way in which Father, Son and Holy Spirit “know” each other in an eternal process of participation is given to the world by way of the incarnation and thus human knowing is transformed by the enrapturing power of the divine life. He continues:

Only Jesus’ way of relating to his Father and to the Holy Spirit can teach us anything about the intratrinitarian relations of life and love in the one and only God. . .Jesus’ relation to the Father (leaving aside for a moment the Holy Spirit) is the expression of self-utterance, not by any means of his humanity alone, but, through his humanity, of his person, which is inseparable from and is represented through, his humanity.70

“God’s ultimate secret is given away—as an abiding mystery.”71 This mystery is a lived encounter in the eternal participation of love that is given away within the personhood of the godhead; it is also, by way of Jesus Christ, bestowed upon the finite personhood of human beings. Our beings take on the essence of this divine participation and we become forms of this divine life through the active power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit shapes the form of Jesus Christ within the soul of human beings. We become visible signs of God’s love for the world because we have been transformed in our encounter with the form of Jesus Christ. In our encounter with the relationality of the Trinity, our knowing and our loving becoming synonymous realities in the ontological

69 Balthasar, TL II, 148.

70 Ibid., 125.

71 Ibid., 148.
shaping of our lives via the concrete *analogia entis*, Jesus Christ himself. Through the shaping of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ as the concrete *analogia entis* is inscribed on the hearts of humanity and we become finite epistemological expressions of this divine love. It is to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a particular saint that we now turn.
CHAPTER FIVE
ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY: A LIVING EMBODIMENT OF AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

In chapters two, three and four I examined Balthasar’s speculative consideration of what happens, epistemologically, to the human creature in its encounter with Jesus Christ. In this chapter I will investigate the cornerstone of Balthasar’s philosophical argument by considering his spiritual analysis of the nineteenth century mystic, Elizabeth of the Trinity, via the personhood the Holy Spirit. The purpose is twofold: first, to analyze how, for Balthasar the person of the Holy Spirit is the divine power that shapes human beings as the continuation of Jesus Christ’s transformative “form” in finite life; and second, to demonstrate this “holy shaping” in the life of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity. In this way Elizabeth’s life becomes paradigmatic in understanding how the form of Jesus Christ transfigures human consciousness by virtue of the interpretive power of the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ From the start one must recognize the central role of the saints in all of Balthasar’s work. Much of his abstract reflection comes to visible expression in the lives of the saints. They are the datum through which his philosophical ruminations make a lively appearance in the world. Balthasar speaks throughout a variety of his works regarding the revelatory character of the saints. They are icons, windows to the way in which Christ transforms lives as living examples for all the members of the universal church. Elizabeth serves as one of a myriad of saintly role models. In her, like all other saints, Balthasar’s proves his claim that God transforms human beings through the form of Christ. Of course I must mention that Adrienne von Speyr’s mystical encounters with the saints shaped Balthasar’s understanding. Her work Book of All Saints trans. D.C. Schindler, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008) was a collection of Adrienne’s mystical encounters with individual saints. Balthasar transcribed and edited all of these experiences.
In his biographical work on a Carmelite nun, Balthasar argues that the manifestation of Jesus in her life actually affects her knowing. Balthasar’s sketch of Elizabeth offers us a glimpse into the concrete expression of revelation. She exemplifies what Balthasar thinks happens to human persons when they meet Jesus by way of the Holy Spirit. In describing a contemplative Elizabeth, Balthasar alleges:

Her power lies in reflecting (speculari), in gazing (theōrein), in glimpsing the depths of the simple word. . . . Her exegetical efforts remain shy and scarcely developed. She desires, not theology, but adoration; yet adoration of the word in its revealed character. This requires contemplation of the word, contemplation born of “the mind of God” as it is implanted in the believer.²

In Elizabeth we find the revelatory word becoming flesh. Balthasar highlights that Elizabeth’s desire is founded upon an adoration of the Word in its revealed state. In such a revelation the reality of contemplation comes to life in the believer. By contemplation I mean a form of action within the person wherein the human creature “pays attention” to Christ and what is presented to the world in the incarnation. Mark McIntosh defines Balthasar’s understanding of contemplation by stating, “contemplation and action in the world are forms of attentiveness to Christ; they are not the search for an inner truth but the means of interiorizing and apprehending by personal interpretation the public truth of God’s work in the cosmos.”³ McIntosh accentuates the point made throughout this dissertation that for Balthasar a key theme in the human encounter of Christ is a placing of the self in relation to the objective form’s shaping of the subject. The encounter between the subject and object is a communication grounded in relationality. This


communication contains truth as an ontological grasp of knowledge. As Aidan Nichols states, “Balthasar asserts that being (nothing less) is what appears. Over against a Kantian noumenalism, he affirms that being does indeed appear. And the unity of these two statements yields up to us the nature of truth. Truth is being’s ability to appear as it is.” As I see it, both McIntosh and Nichols underscore the fact that Balthasar stresses the critical relationship between subject and object. This becomes most visible in Balthasar’s examination of the saints. By building on my analysis of Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation through the previous chapters, I intend to demonstrate in this chapter the critical interplay between the attentiveness of the human creature and the Truth that appears as it is. Examining this interplay demonstrates how a human being (Elizabeth of the Trinity) was ontologically (re)shaped in an encounter with God through the appearance of Jesus Christ. This (re)shaping is an epistemological act because “true” knowledge for Balthasar is an ontological communication between two realities. Elizabeth was a living embodiment of this knowledge.

Why does a person take center stage in this last chapter on the epistemological transformation of finite beings in their encounter with the infinite? Because Balthasar’s entire theological project argued that knowledge is not a concept existing abstractly in the human mind. Rather, knowledge is communication between two realities. Human knowledge can be transformed (or shaped) by the divine life that reveals itself in the form of Jesus Christ. Elizabeth confirms for Balthasar that “in revelation” contemplation

---

4 From the point of philosophical speculation, Aidan Nichols calls attention to the idea that Balthasar was sympathetic to certain thinkers of the phenomenological school, particularly Brentano, Husserl and Heidegger. Aidan Nichols, *Say It is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Logic* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, , 2001), p. 12.
comes to life within the believer through a power that comes from God. This point is significant, for when a human being contemplates the appearance of Jesus Christ, the divine is impressed upon the person and the objective reality of the divine can change the subjective reality of that person. Thus the paschal mystery itself, as revealed in the very act of contemplation, is the transformative power, not the subject’s mystical state. As Mark McIntosh notes,

What especially concerns von Balthasar is that journeys towards an Absolute One, because there is not much one can say about the One except how one is doing on the way, tend to become pre-occupied with analyses of the mystic’s inner states. This is only avoidable if the apophatic journey is grounded more deeply within the paschal mystery itself.5

Elizabeth’s experience demonstrates the centrality of the paschal mystery. Balthasar argued that Elizabeth’s encounter with Christ gave birth to a critical process of contemplation within her being. Her process of contemplation was begotten by way of the paschal mystery. Elizabeth was born on July 18, 1880 and she died in November 1906. She was one of two daughters. Her father died when she was young, and her mother raised them alone. Aside from her father’s death, her childhood appeared conventional. However, she had a deep and abiding devotion to Jesus at an early age. She explained on many occasions the heartfelt love of God and a desire to completely devote her life to Him. Receiving her first communion at the age of ten significantly affected her life. Anne Hunt notes, “She was moved to tears and, despite the then long fast in preparation for reception of the sacrament, after receiving Communion she

explained to her friend: ‘I am no longer hungry; Our Lord has fed me.’ 6 I will return to her life as a contemplative later in this chapter.

In looking at Elizabeth’s life, the question is, what divine power was actively working to give life to her contemplative process? Balthasar’s treatment of Elizabeth suggests that in the encounter between the incarnate Word, something was “born” within her. To flesh this out, Balthasar argues that in this meeting between the human and Jesus, there occurs the actualization of certain behaviors. However, the actualization of these behaviors only makes sense when seen in light of a “christologically-grounded mysticism.” As McIntosh argues, “christologically-grounded mysticism is likely, in von Balthasar’s view, to be more expressive of the objective realities of God’s own self-disclosure rather than focused on states of inner experience.” 7 This actualization is the interpretative work of the Holy Spirit. Examining these behaviors from a Balthasarian perspective that privileges divine self-disclosure, we come to an epistemology of love; a knowledge as loving communication between finite and infinite realities. Elizabeth is a living embodiment of what actually happens to a human creature in its encounter with the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

Put at its simplest but most provocative way, Balthasar proposes that Jesus Christ, by way of the Holy Spirit’s guiding light, enraptures a person to such an extent that a shift takes place in the very reality of one’s mind. As Balthasar states, “This means that the Spirit will not simply interpret a teaching (let alone the mere letters of ‘Scripture’),


7 McIntosh, Mystical Theology, 101.
but will guide us to the vital depths of what takes place between Father and Son, introduce us into the hypostatic realm. . .we can only be introduced to the Christological reality if we are prepared to be assimilated to it." ⁸ In considering Elizabeth’s explanation of reflection (speculari) and gazing (theòrein) Balthasar draws attention to a mysterious power at work. He states, “These glimpses fully satisfy her, for she could never fully chart the depths of the word by taking soundings. She permits the word to stand, and, as she adores, its unforeseen dimensions reveal themselves.” ⁹ In considering the mystical life of Elizabeth, Balthasar demonstrates that when humans meet Christ an actual change takes place in their thinking and acting. That is to say, when a person meets Jesus, the very structure of his or her life is re-shaped by the form of Jesus Christ. This shape, according to Balthasar, is a re-creating of the self by the very self of Jesus Christ through the logic of the Holy Spirit.

**The Holy Spirit as Person**

To reiterate a key Balthasarian idea from chapter four, the very personhood of the Trinity is an eternal logic of divine gratuitousness expressed in the infinite relationality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In an essay discussing the concept of person, Balthasar says, “Herein lies implicit a first decision: if one distinguishes between individual and person (and we should for the sake of clarity), then a special dignity is ascribed to the person, which the individual as such does not possess.” ¹⁰ From the start, personhood contains a uniqueness that comes to incomparable expression by way of an illumined individual

---


⁹ *Two Sister in the Spirit*, p. 376.

form. Significant to a finite understanding of the person is the theological meaning that is inscribed in it through a trinitarian and christological meaning. This means that a concept of person begins and ends with the trinity and the christological revelation from within the trinitarian life. Balthasar continues:

What de Rougemont calls “vocation” I have named “mission” in my definition of the person in the truly christological context. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” Christ says. Here we can presuppose, with St. Thomas, that in a trinitarian sense missio is the economic form of the eternal processio that constitutes the persons of the Son and of the Spirit in God. Participation in the mission of Christ (or that which in the building up of the church Paul calls “charisma” and which is given to each as his eternal idea with God and his social task)—that would be the actual core of the reality of the person.

It is the mission of Jesus Christ to reveal this divine gratuitousness in order to fulfill the will of his Father. The will that is revealed is God’s longing to reshape the human creature as a finite expression of God’s creative Idea for each specifically created being. Jesus as the Word made flesh is the very mission of this will. Balthasar states clearly:

Jesus experiences his human consciousness entirely in terms of mission. The Father has commissioned him, in the Holy Spirit, to reveal God’s nature and his disposition toward man. There is nothing one-sided about this revelation (as people like to think today); it is not simply that God takes the part of sinners and the needy: in his sense-mediated human nature, Jesus is to reveal all God’s other attributes as well, that is, God’s anger (for instance, over the sinful desecration of his place of worship); God’s weariness at having to endure for so long these people who are so lacking in understanding; God’s grief and tears at Jerusalem’s refusal to respond to his invitation. We can even say that, in the cry of dereliction on the Cross, Jesus reveals how God is forsaken by sinners.

---

11 See Ibid., 19-20.

12 Ibid., 25.

Jesus reveals God’s will, not only by giving God to the world, but also giving the world to God. The high point of Jesus’ mission is to be person wherein God and humanity meet and a certain form of communication takes place, existentially between the infinite and finite realities. The meaning of “Word made flesh” embodies a definitive, ontologically transformative encounter between the divine and the human. For Balthasar, this communication accentuates the true form of knowledge: personhood. The personhood of the trinity and the personhood of humanity are ontologically molded together in Jesus Christ. From within this form radiates the epistemological truth for human beings. The form of Jesus Christ exists as the true epistemology of love. The love revealed in the mission of Jesus Christ focuses attention on the will of the Father to participate lovingly in the transformation of human beings from sin into redeemed creatures. Balthasar stresses:

Jesus’ whole existence, including the aspect that the Greeks found so difficult, his pathe, is in the service of his proclamation of God. But he does this 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. He is the revelation of man as he ought to be, as he is and as he is once more to become (through Christ’s action on man’s behalf). However, this latter aspect takes place concomitantly: Jesus does not live in order to exhibit himself as the highest example of the human species but solely to fulfill the Father’s will.14

As the eternal Word made flesh, Jesus Christ participates in humanity and in that “act of participation” humans are invited to become that mission too. The divine epistemology of love that exists in the eternal participatory nature of the personhood of the Trinity reconstitutes it within the finite creature by way of Jesus Christ. Balthasar states, “If one

14 Ibid., 225.
takes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity seriously, then the divine persons Father, Son and Spirit appear, if one wants to hold on to the unity of God, to be constituted in nothing other than pure love or selflessness.”

The divine ontological structure is the ontological framework for an epistemological transformation of the human being. Balthasar claims that the person of the Father from the perspective of eternity is the great mystery of this transformation: “the first person does not generate in the sense that to the complete person the act of generating a son is added, but the person is the act of generating, of offering oneself and flowing out...the pure actuality.” Consequently, the actualization of this ontological transformation of the human creature is founded upon and is perpetually continued by way of the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

To understand the role of the Holy Spirit as the actualization of Jesus’ mission within finite being one must first examine the person of the Spirit in light of the theo-logic reality of the Truth of the Spirit. As Nichols emphasizes, the Holy Spirit gives expression to Jesus Christ as the infinite truth. Whereas the disciples knew Jesus the Incarnate One; it is only after the Pentecost that they are able to “know” Jesus as the finite expression of the infinite. The Spirit’s power makes this truth known to the disciples and all Christians.

Nichols states:

A theological logic is concerned with salvation’s intelligible structure—not its attractive radiance, which belongs to theological aesthetics, nor its power to resolve life’s conflicts in favor of the good, the subject matter of theological dramatics. In this perspective, Balthasar speaks of the Spirit as ‘expounding’ a twofold movement—from Father to Son in the Incarnation and from Son

---


16 Ibid., 26.

to Father in the Resurrection of the Crucified. What the Spirit lays out in so doing is the definitive revelation of the Father in the former, the endless glory of the Son in the latter, and in both the perfection of their mutual love. The share of the disciples in this movement and disclosure is what the Greeks call ‘divinization’ and the Latins ‘incorporation in Christ’.  

This is an essential point in a Balthasarian epistemology of love. The Holy Spirit bestows the “sharing in” of Christians in the life of the divine upon the human creature. The mutual love of personhood that is the participation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit circuminessio is actuality conferred within the structure of humanity by way of the Spirit. Nichols continues, “The Holy Spirit, Balthasar argues, is not only the personal love of Father and Son, the expression of their intersubjectivity. He is also supremely objective, the fruit of their love.” The very heart of the Spirit’s personhood, then, in the triunity of the three persons is the active (classically understood as economy) “pouring out” of the divine knowing (the immanent love that is the essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) into the life of finite beings. In considering how Balthasar answers the question, “Who is the Spirit” it becomes clear that any sort of human “knowing” is always bound up in the eternal love of the Trinity. And it is this pattern of eternal loving that is the source of any finite creature’s pattern of existence. Balthasar, in reflecting on the eternal act of love that is the relationship of the Father and the Son, gives clarity to the notion that the Holy Spirit proceeds (as the Nicene Creed proclaims) from the Father and the Son as the “infinite reciprocal gratitude” and “reciprocal entreaty of their eternal relationship.” He contends:

It is an interplay of absolute love that would seem to be eternally

---

18 Ibid., 169.
19 Ibid., 170.
self-sufficient, yet internally it is characterized by such an excess that, “incidentally” (as it were), and precisely as excess it produces another One: namely, the proof that this loving indwelling has succeeded, just as the human child is both the proof and the fruit of the reciprocal love of the parents. “The third”, says Tertullian, “is the fruit that comes from the root of the tree. He [the Spirit] arises from the reciprocity [of Father and Son] while surpassing it and being inaccessible to it; yet his freedom springs from it. The Spirit (“breath”, “wind”, “ferment”) “blows where it wills,. . .you do not know whence it comes or whither it blows” (Kn 3:8). . .God, from his very origin in the Father, is the miracle of that love whereby he can be himself in giving himself. This miracle is performed in the Holy Spirit because he, the excess of love that is “always more”, is the incomprehensible and unsurpassable peak of absolute love. . .As we have said, it is impossible to approach the Holy Spirit except from two sides, as the (subjective) epitome of the reciprocal love of Father and Son—whereby he appears as the bond (nexus) between them—and as the (objective) fruit that is produced by this love and attests it.20

This divine expression as the reciprocal love of Father and Son and the fruit that is produced in this reciprocity interprets the form of Jesus Christ to a human being. I would call the Holy Spirit the ontological fountain that pours forth from within the epistemological immanence of Father and Son into the world of the finite being. The very personhood of the Holy Spirit is this reciprocal love and fruit that is produced. And the power that this personhood embodies is given to the world as gift, freedom and testimony. As such, the Holy Spirit manifests to the world the infinite “knowing” of the Father and Son and in turn transforms human knowing into a transfiguration of the person of Christ.

**Gift, Freedom and Testimony: The Unselfing Power of the Holy Spirit**

Understanding how the Holy Spirit (as fruit of the Father and Son) ontologically shapes human knowing returns our focus to a theological aesthetics. Again, we see how

a theo-logic cannot be fully understood apart from a theological aesthetics. Or, in light of my claim for an epistemology of love, a theo-logic (knowing) can only be fully understood by way of a theological aesthetics (ontology of beauty). Therefore the Spirit’s power of gift, freedom and testimony is grounded in the very form of Jesus Christ and that which radiates from within it. These words give depth of meaning to how the Holy Spirit serves as interpreter of God’s manifestation to humanity through the Son, which will become evident in our examination of the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Balthasar understands the persons of the Trinity by way of the one God’s mission as it is distinctively expressed in the relational distance between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In considering the Holy Spirit, Vogel reminds us:

> We have seen that the mission of the Holy Spirit in von Balthasar’s theology is to establish in those whom he dwells Christ’s attitude of selflessness, and that it is in this way that he is called ‘interpreter.’ He does not set the event of Christ before others so much as inserts them into it; his activity consists in multiplying the instances of Christ’s selflessness in the world.  

To achieve this end, the Holy Spirit must overcome the reality of sin that pervades humanity. There is a process by which the Holy Spirit must offset the self-centered privatization of the human being that prevents the finite creature from openness towards an other. Vogel states:

> The Spirit’s activity consists in counteracting the constricting motion of sin and dismantling the falsely circumscribed existence of the flesh. This he does by “establishing himself with the sinful enclosure and dull finitude of our spirit, in order to open the doors from within. An essentially outgoing force, the Spirit’s indwelling breaks us out of ourselves or, to use a less violent imagery, renders us receptive to the world. Indeed, it is better to speak of our being possessed by the Spirit than of our possessing him. Individuals may have a personal experience of

---

the Spirit—they can share in the salvation accomplished by Christ in no other way—but they cannot have a private one.\textsuperscript{22}

A person must apprehend the essential giftedness, freedom and testimony that is the Spirit’s power in order to understand how it is that the Spirit “possesses” the human being.\textsuperscript{23} These words speak analogically to the ontological nature of the Spirit’s “act” in moving outward from the divine and inward into human existence.

\textit{Gift.} In explicating this word as a word about the Spirit, Balthasar makes clear that in the mutual love of Father and Son we discover the \textit{surplus} of that love:

First of all, it is clear from the words of Jesus about his relationship with the Father that they interpenetrate in their reciprocal loving self-surrender. Both renounce being a mere “I” without a “thou”: this allows us to glimpse the indemnity of poverty and wealth in the divine love; for wealth and fullness are found in the self-surrendering Other (this also applies to the Father, since without the Son he could not be Father). Since this wealth—with its implicit renunciation—is experienced by both as a single gift, and neither keeps account of the renunciation it demanded, the wealth of both (which in each case is a received wealth) coincides in a oneness. For both, the event of this oneness is a gift: the \textit{bonum} of a mutual love is a \textit{donum} for the lovers. Thus both, the loving Father and the loving Son, receive this mutuality as a gift. This gift, however, is not the calculable total of their love, nor is it the resultant identity of their love: it is an unfathomable \textit{more}, a fruit (as the child is the fruit of the “one-flesh” relationship of man and wife); for even divine love, and every love that reflects it, is (as we have already said) an “overflowing”, because in it, the pure, unmotivated nature of goodness comes to light, as the ultimate face, \textit{prosopon}, of the Divinity.\textsuperscript{24}

What “radiates” from within the form of Jesus Christ via the Holy Spirit is the depth of God’s life as it is made manifest within finite reality as gift. This means that ontology

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} See Nichols, \textit{Say It Is Pentecost}, 157-160. Nichols provide succinct explanation for Balthasar’s argument for these words of the Spirit.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Balthasar, \textit{TL} III, 226-227.
\end{itemize}
and epistemology are inseparable because in the divine life knowing and ontology are a
gift. God’s Being (ontology) is an epistemological actualization of love (eternally known
circuminessio). It is this reality of God as Gift, the love act that gives meaning to any
human act of knowing. And, because God’s ontological reality is a triune epistemology
of love we come to realize that human knowing is shaped by this love. This is an eternal
process of knowing between Father and Son. This eternal process bears forth the fruit,
which is the Spirit and it is this Spirit that bestows this “agapaic knowing” within the
human mind by way of the free gift that is testified to in Jesus Christ. As Vogel asserts,
“This mutual openness between the Father and the Son, which results spontaneously in
the Third, the Holy Spirit, whom von Balthasar calls the “Divine We,” is the very
definition of divine personhood—and, therefore, of all personhood.”

*Freedom.* In the unfathomable more that is the fruit of the reciprocal loving self-
surrender of Father and Son we find a freedom or unpredictable way of the Spirit. At a
certain depth this freedom is the fundamental quality of *kenosis.* The very gift that is the
Father and Son’s mutual love contains within the core of its expression a freedom to
unfold the divine life into the created world. The Holy Spirit as the fruit of divine love in
the Father and Son is *free* to fulfill the expression of this love within the finite being of
humanity. Balthasar makes clear:

> Here we must speak of love’s freedom; certainly, it is a freedom that
> owes its being to Father and Son and is ready to carry out their plans (which
> count on its collaboration), but it does so as a love that is free. It is free
to choose, within the vast horizon of the divine imagination, the ways in
which God’s purposes are to be implemented; this is a new and as it were,
original synthesis. The Spirit blows where he will, even though he can
and will blow only within God’s infinite expanses. So this “freedom of

---

the Spirit” is already rooted in its position between Father and Son;’ it is something within the Godhead, not something that arises in the wake of the creation.26

It is this divine freedom as a kenotic act of love that frees the human being to choose this love that has already chosen humanity. It is this freedom that “gives light” to the human spirit and stirs up within the heart of human beings that love which is the “to-be” of all created being.27

_Inward and Outward Testimony._ In considering how the Holy Spirit is the witnessing power to the love between Father and Son we must remember that the personhood of the Spirit “is both the act of reciprocal love between Father and Son and the fruit of that act—an act that presupposes the distinction of Persons in the unity of the Godhead and guarantees that this distinction makes possible, through their loving union—and to their “surprise”—the unity of the loving Persons.”28 Because of the two-fold nature, Balthasar, in drawing on Hegel’s concept of the subjective/objective, argues that what the Holy Spirit reveals (gives testimony to) is the incarnational reality of the divine life. The Spirit as subjective testimony is the divine power that gives witness to how the love between Father and Son is revealed in the life-act of the person Jesus Christ. However, it is this same Spirit that gives objective testimony to this divine power by being the incarnational presence of the Godhead in the life of the Church and individual Christian believers. This “Spirit as objective testimony” is what concerns us most here.

The very giftedness and freedom that is revealed by the Spirit as the act of reciprocal love


between the Father and the Son and as the fruit of that love takes shape in the life of all post-resurrection Christians by way of the Holy Spirit’s eternal incarnational testimony to this love. As Balthasar emphasizes,

It is the ‘power’ of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) that will make the disciples into witnesses and inspire them with the necessary words on whatever occasion they have to give testimony (this is the meaning of John 16:13: ‘he will declare to you the things that are to come’); for the task of being a witness will replace that knowledge of ‘times and seasons’ that the disciples begged of the departing Lord.  

Having considered these key words let us now turn to how these words are made manifest by the “power” of the Spirit in the finite life of humanity.

**The Holy Spirit: Unselfing Power within Finite Being**

Vogel says this process of manifestation by the Holy Spirit is defined as *Entselbstung.* According to Vogel, “Von Balthasar refers to the expropriating activity of the Holy Spirit as our unselfing (*Enstelbstung*).  

Those who receive the Holy Spirit in faith are unselled by him, carried out of their enclosure in the direction of others.”

Thus a fundamental element to the Spirit’s power at work within human beings is the contemplative reality of being carried out from within the Self towards the life of others. It is a radiating from within that very structured goodness that is the created reality given to any created being by God. This structure is transformative to those who are on the receiving end of it. It is a giving away of oneself; an openness to others as a participatory act of love. The key for Balthasar is that the divine life has bestowed on human beings,

---

29 Ibid., 249.


31 Ibid., 25.
through the Holy Spirit, the life-pattern we know as revealed in the form of Jesus Christ.

As McIntosh demonstrates:

In von Balthasar’s view (following Maximus), the whole creation is given its existence through the work of the divine Word, the eternal expression of the Father’s self-giving love. This means that every creature bears within itself, as part of the very structures of its existence, a profound correlation with the pattern of the Word’s own act of existence. And the Word’s act of existence consists ultimately in the historical mission to bestow love by being human as the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ is, in other words, the real meaning and enactment of the very patterns of existence by which every creature is given life and unfolds life. The intrinsic patterns of meaning in our life are not part of an abstract metaphysical scheme but the contours of a historical human being’s struggle to love, to be available for God and neighbour.32

Unfortunately the reality of human sin deters humans from living into this contemplative way of being in the finite world. God created us for openness to one another. The mutual openness of the trinity is the creative power by which humanity is created for openness to one another. This unselfing draws (woos) a person out, by the Holy Spirit, from within the sinful privatization of our autonomy.33 It happens by way of an invitation to participate, contemplatively, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I mention at the beginning of this chapter, contemplation is that “paying attention” to the Divine Being that radiates from within the objective form of Jesus Christ. For Balthasar this Being is an act of love; when it encounters humans it radically (re)shapes the finite “being” that is lovingly confronted by God’s Being. Human beings are invited to participate in the “life-pattern of Jesus,” for the incarnation of Jesus embodies what McIntosh calls a life pattern of self-giving love, a pattern that radiates the

32 McIntosh, Mystical Theology, 102.

creative Word through which all things come into being as an act of love. The same pattern existentially, incarnationally emanates Jesus’ openness to everyone. In Jesus’ continually “giving himself away,” human beings are invited to share in his life. Balthasar’s see this self-giving love most prominently in mystical theology. Jesus’ radical openness to others touches human consciousness. In so doing Jesus’ life-pattern gives shape to, or (re)shapes human beings by including them in Jesus incarnate experience. Thus Jesus’ life is open, mystically, to all finite creatures and they are invited to participate in his life. When a person participates in the life-pattern of Jesus her own consciousness is re-created. Participation in the form of Jesus Christ is a continual process of losing yourself to know yourself in Christ.

The person of the Holy Spirit includes other persons in the transformative power of God’s always being for the other. By contemplating on this “being for the other” humans are mystically drawn into the divine life as they are drawn out of themselves. For Balthasar it is an unselfing. He states, “Faith’s effect of ‘unselfing’ us creates a ‘vacant space’ that is occupied by Christ and his ‘Spirit,’ who ‘confirms’ to us that we, like the Son, are children of the Father, sharing a relation to the Son through the Spirit, so that the *imago trinitatis* is fulfilled in us.” For Balthasar there resides within human beings, implicitly evident, a deep desire or ability to reflect, to gaze, to contemplate by way of adoration the Wholly Other revealed in the particular form of the person of Jesus Christ. Balthasar’s reflection on Elizabeth’s life gives us a glimpse into how revelation

---

34 See McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 102.

provides vision for humanity. It is to this work that I now turn as a concrete example for how the ontological reality of God’s life is an epistemological fulfillment through love within the ontological structure of humanity.

**The Communion of Saints: Unity, Obedience and Fruitfulness**

In turning to a specific saint within the repertoire of Balthasar’s works, one must take note of Balthasar’s theological commitment to the saints in general. The purpose of the saints as living expressions of the power of divine love within finite being is radically significant to Balthasar’s theological agenda. In reflecting on the mission of the saints, Balthasar suggests:

For the faithful, they are, above all, a new type of conformity to Christ inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore a new illustration of how the gospel is to be lived. For theologians, on the other hand, they are rather a new interpretation of revelation; they bring out the scarcely suspected treasures in the deposit of faith. Even when the saints have not been theologians, nor themselves very learned, their sheer existence proves to be a theological manifestation that contains most fruitful and opportune doctrine, the directions of the Holy Spirit addressed to the whole Church and not to be neglected by any of her members.  

The saints are the windows through which Christians are able to see the light of the divine as it radiates into the reality of finite existence. It is the mission of the saints to demonstrate the mission of humanity as it is created through the Word of God and made visibly manifest in the mission of Jesus Christ.

---


In light of the earlier argument for the mission of the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, I now draw attention to Balthasar’s definition of a saint by way of a “mission” created via the form of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. In considering the “task of theology” as a vital element in the work of the saints, Balthasar argues, “This task, demands corresponding alterations in method: rather than consider the psychological unfolding from below, it should work out of a sort of supernatural phenomenology of their mission from above. The most important fact about any great saint is his mission, the new charisma bestowed upon the Church by the Holy Spirit.”

What is the purpose of Elizabeth of the Trinity’s mission? How does her mission bring light to Balthasar’s argument that in the form of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit human knowing is transformed? In actuality what does this transformation look like and how does this transformation serve God’s purpose for finite being?

McIntosh notes, “The prerequisite for mystical union with God is not just any kind of ecstatic flight into the One, but a drawing of the creature into such a sharing of the divine love that the soul begins to enact this same love in the forms of creaturely life.” Thus the mission of any saint is to be drawn into this mystical union and to be transformed into a certain form that radiates this life to others. Balthasar argues for such a transformation by way of certain dimensions that reveal a certain path by which the saints (for our case, Blessed Elizabeth) walk as the Holy Spirit draws them into deeper

---

38 See Moss, “The saints,” 80-81.

39 Balthasar, Two Sisters in the Spirit, 26. Moss’ commentary on Balthasar and the saints emphasizes that theologians are responsible for exegeting the saints’ mission in order to understand the fruit bestowed upon the church through these saints’ work. See Moss, “The saints,” 84-85.

40 Mark McIntosh, Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 116.
union with divine love. They are the process of sanctification Balthasar believes is the fundamental way of saints. These are “a series of reductions,” in the life of Elizabeth, “that we may call the theological, christological, and mariological dimensions of saintly experience – and that these in turn reveal to the eyes of faith those dimensions of unity, obedience, and fruitfulness that God’s commandment to love always brings with it (John 15:12).”

In Elizabeth’s life, unity, obedience and fruitfulness give shape to her mission as an epistemology of love. They exemplify her sharing in the knowledge of God’s enrapturing love in Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth’s Life: Setting the Stage

Elizabeth of the Trinity offers a unique view into the knowledge of love that radiates from within the trinity towards the world. She exemplifies how an encounter with Jesus Christ changes human consciousness. Her life demonstrates that knowledge is communication between two realities. As I mentioned above, Elizabeth led a typical childhood. Even so, from an early age Elizabeth sensed a call to devote her entire life to the Trinity. By the time she was fourteen she felt the allure of the Order of Carmel. Her mother refused to let her pursue this calling but ultimately agreed to let her enter the convent in 1901. However, before becoming a nun, she had a significant spiritual encounter with Père Gonzalve Vallée OP who was the Prior of the Dominicans at Dijon. As Hunt puts it, “Fr Vallée explained the mystery of the trinitarian indwelling to her, in fact confirming Elizabeth’s already profound experience of the Three guests in her soul.”

As a Carmelite, Elizabeth grew to understand more clearly her vocation. She

---

41 Moss, “The Saints,” 86.
believed her calling was to be in every ounce of her being, “a Praise of Glory, *Laudem Gloriae.*”

While much of Elizabeth’s childhood was normal she does highlight in a questionnaire a personal characteristic that Balthasar argues shaped her mission. This characteristic was *la sensibilité.* Balthasar highlights:

For her, *sensibilité* meant for her primarily a prickly sensitiveness, the soul’s vulnerability in regard to all things of this world. This carried a dual danger: on the one hand, a certain high-strung sensitiveness with a sublimating tendency to become lost in thoughts and feelings; on the other hand, a vulnerability toward everything worldly, or, as her religious commitment became dominant in her life, an almost passionate abandonment of everything worldly.

This *sensibilité* affected how Elizabeth separated herself from those who helped shape her path and it also empowered her to appropriate the thought of others who influenced her thinking and her writings. Whatever way one might interpret Elizabeth’s “prickly sensitiveness,” many theologians and spiritual writers influenced her mission (especially Marie of Jesus, the prioress at Dijon and Fr. Vallée) and, at the same time, she transcended these influences through her own mystical encounter of the holy Trinity.

Her calling to be a “Praise of Glory” was most vividly shaped in an encounter she had with an older nun who commented on the letter to the Ephesians. As I stated in the

---


43 Ibid., 63.

44 See Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit,* 377-379. See also Hunt, Apostle of the Indwelling Trinity, 64.

45 Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit,* 378. Dr. Dennis Martin, one of my readers, points out the flawed translation of the word *sensibilité* as “prickly sensitiveness.” The German “mimosenhafte Empfindsamkeit” literally means “a mimosa-like sensitiveness.” Most likely this meaning comes from the mimosa bush, probably mimosa pudica, which folds its leaves when exposed to heat or when touched (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimosa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mimosa)). It seems that Balthasar uses this German word to exemplify with potency this characteristic of Elizabeth.

46 Ibid., 379-383.
first chapter, Balthasar says this encounter brought to Elizabeth’s attention the text where Paul says “in laudem gloriae gratiae ipsius [to the praise of the glory of his grace] (Eph 1:6).” Supposedly Elizabeth was struck by this passage and from it she gave herself the name “the praise of glory.” Nonetheless these words were part of a longer scripture verse that opened Elizabeth’s eyes to what she believed was her predestined calling. The following texts from Ephesians and Romans became the foundation to all her work:

Ephesians 1:4-6, He [God the Father] has chosen us in him [that is, in Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before his face; in love he has predestined us to adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Romans 8:29-30, Those whom he foreknew, these he also predestined, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren; moreover, those whom he predestined, these he has also called, and those whom he called, these he has also justified, and those whom he justified, these he has also glorified.

These scripture verses remained a significant influence on Elizabeth’s spiritual development until her death. They shaped how she understood her call as predestined by God. They shaped her unending desire to completely turn herself over to the limitless Trinity by way of constant adoration, praise and service. Within this call we find a living embodiment of an epistemology of love. She exemplifies Balthasar’s claim that knowledge is communication between two realities and that knowledge between God and humans is an act of unconditional love.

48 See Ibid.,385-386.
49 Ibid., 386.
Elizabeth’s Life: Predestined by Love for Unity with God

The dimension of unity is bound to the idea that in the endless unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we find a unity-in-difference. Such a concept refers us back to chapter two of this dissertation wherein I discussed Balthasar’s “essential law of Christianity.” To reiterate, Balthasar emphasizes the real distinction that is essential to understanding the analogous approach to the relationship between the infinite and the finite. This fundamental law insists that the nearer a human creature comes to God and the more similar that creature is to God the more dissimilar this finite being is from God. The more we “know” God the more we realize that we are “not” God and thus we come to the realization how much “less” we know God. In this greater dissimilarity we recognize that in the radical difference between the infinite and the finite lies the truth about God. The analogous difference between God and creation points to the difference in the persons of the trinity. In that difference between Father, Son and Holy Spirit we find a “unity-in-diversity.” The relationship between unity and difference is central to Balthasar’s understanding of the saints. As Moss argues, “It is this passionate and rhythmic contrasting of union and difference that is the key to any doctrinal reading of saints and indeed the communion of saints.”

They reveal this “unity-in-difference” and give expression to how the unity of God is actually a “being for one another.”

Balthasar states it this way:

The extent to which the “saints”—those who attempt to take seriously their sanctification by the holy triune God and to respond to it—are able in their community to be, to live, to work, and to suffer for one

---


51 See Ibid., 87.
another can only begin to be realized when one has grasped the principle which welds them together into the unity of the community of the Church: the unity of the triune God manifested in the self-giving of Christ and poured out in the Holy Spirit. For this unity is nothing other than pure being-for-one-another. If there were a definition of God, then one would have to put it in the form: unity as being-for-one-another. That which we refer to, for want of a better word, as divine “persons” is the necessary condition of their being such a pure being-for-another in God.

In the saints, God’s unity becomes the saints’ unity. The personhood of the trinity mystically empowers the saints’ to bear to the world this personhood. In their own unique personhood the being-for-another that is God’s life gives shape to their personhood so that God’s loving other-centeredness continues to work in the finite world. The self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father gets personified in the finite lives of the saints through the active working of the Holy Spirit. Balthasar continues:

These “persons” do not have a primary being for themselves which is then only secondarily open to others; that which we might speak of as their “being-for-themselves”, their self-consciousness, they have in common as the one, indivisible God; but this is integrated always from the beginning (and not subsequently) by the being-for-one-another. One cannot understand the Father except in his giving of himself in the begetting of his begotten Son, nor can one understand the Son except in his being for the Father. The self-giving of both to each other is further a “being-for-one-another” which in the writings of the New Covenant is clearly distinguished as “Holy Spirit” both from the Father and from the Son; it is personified “being-for-one-another” itself and the total self-giving of God to men.52

Through the unselfing power of the Holy Spirit, the saints imitate the divine pattern of being for an other that is the circumincessio of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, the eternal unity-in-diversity, fundamental to the nature of the Trinity, gets dramatized in the

---

lives of the saints. Accordingly, the common life of the saints is, analogously, a finite expression of unity-in-diversity, which is embodied as a being for one another.

The theological reduction communicated in the dimension of unity is exemplified in the life of Elizabeth of the Trinity as predestination in the limitlessness (infinity) of the Trinity. These words give visible form to the unity-in-difference of the divine mission that was Elizabeth’s life as a Carmelite. Balthasar states, “Elizabeth belongs to those missions that lie precisely on the line between visible and invisible. Her calling is found in an invisibility of contemplation that points to a visible activity.”53 She was a visible form to that invisible grace bestowed upon her life in a way that exemplifies transformation. According to Balthasar, the Ephesians and Romans passages quoted above shaped most, if not all of Elizabeth’s writings even if their application as texts did not fit with what Elizabeth wrote about. Out of these texts, Elizabeth develops a certain knowledge regarding predestination. This knowledge gave remarkable shape to her own participation as a subject united-in-difference to the presence of the divine radiating forth from Jesus Christ into her being.54 “The mystery of predestination,” Balthasar claims, “becomes from this time onward the horizon from which and toward which she lives, the standard for all her individual and concrete steps, the ordering framework for all ecclesiastical teaching and doing, the decisive goad for all decisions and sacrifices.”55 Predestination was the first critical tool in sculpting Elizabeth’s knowledge of her participatory relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Elizabeth desires to have her


54 See Ibid., 387-388.

55 Ibid., 388.
knowledge shaped by the knowledge of God that is given to her in the love of Jesus Christ. By way of the Ephesians text and the Romans text Elizabeth emphatically asserts that it is God’s predestined desire to conform created beings into the image that is given them through the Son.\textsuperscript{56}

Reflecting on this end goal that God has for women and men in their eternal election, Elizabeth makes the case that in God’s eternal Idea of creation is the truth that all created being is predestined to eternal life with God. Balthasar’s affirmative eschatology allows him to say that “the links in the chain described by Paul are so interlocked in God that the chain cannot be torn apart: the one foreknown is predestined, the one predestined is called, the one call is justified, the one justified is glorified.”\textsuperscript{57} It is from within God’s foreknowing, predestining, calling, justifying, and glorifying that the human being is able to see God’s eternal plan for creation. This is critical for Elizabeth because in this chain she finds the power of contemplation that was highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. As I noted earlier, contemplation is the form of action within the person wherein the human creature “pays attention” to Christ and what is presented to the world in the incarnation. This contemplation is what Elizabeth calls faith. And it was this faith that united her to God. In her own words:

“To approach God, one must believe” (Heb 11:6). It is Paul who talks like this. Furthermore, he says, “faith is the presence of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). This means that faith makes future blessings so certain and present that they take up existence in our soul and are available to her before we can enjoy them. John of the Cross says that faith serves as feet to make our way to God, that faith is an obscured possession for us. . .In his conversation with the Samaritan

\textsuperscript{56} See Ibid., 391-392.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 393.
Thus, Elizabeth’s emphasis on predestination leads her to account for that power (faith) that is the actualized “unity-in-difference” between her and the divine. Faith becomes her unique active response to God predestined in her life from within God’s foreknowledge of her. Balthasar emphasizes, “This faith, it goes without saying, is precisely the living, loving and therefore ‘saving faith’ that itself believes in love and is itself an act of love. Yet it is more, it is a response to and a stake in the eternal love that has revealed itself to faith from the beginning.”[59] Of course the key here is the connection between faith and love. In the previous chapters I made the case for God’s eternal act love in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as an epistemology of love; here I argue that Elizabeth’s faith (her otherness/difference) is an epistemological act begotten from within (united to) God’s eternal “knowing in love.” Through her faith, God has foreordained her and predestined her as a “knowing” creature. Balthasar says it this way:

Faith, hope and love, all three are experienced as living gifts of God from eternity, as something that we could not do from ourselves but which he has granted us out of the stores of his grace so that we might respond to the eternal calling and predestination. . .Thus loving and hoping faith becomes a genuine participation in eternal life by the power of God indwelling the chosen soul through grace. She is the pistis (faith) because the pistos, the Faithful One, is present in her.[60]

Out of her faith comes God’s call for her to abide in God. Or, more directly out of God’s abiding in her she is empowered “to abide” in God. Thus Elizabeth’s contemplation, her

---

58 Quoted in Ibid., 393-394.
59 Ibid., 394.
60 Ibid., 395.
attentiveness to Christ and God’s work through Christ in the cosmos begins as a “stirring up within the human heart” a faith that becomes an abiding in God because God has abided in her. Balthasar analyzes the actuality of this process in Elizabeth. He states:

Faith, love, hope contain within themselves the truth of life, as something really carried out: the divine and eternal carried out for us and at the same time the Son’s sacrifice carried out in us—our conformity to his image. Sacrifice is not an addition to faith, rather it is simply the fulfillment of eternal predestination in us through faith, through which the eternal becomes present in us. It is an abiding in the orbit that begins with God’s foreknowledge and, in glorification, flows back to the beginning. This abiding not only expresses for John the basic attitude of a Christian but also substantiates predestination within time. “Whoever abides in him remains without sin. Whoever sins has not seen or known him” (I Jn 3:6). For Elizabeth, it is an abiding in the God of heaven, in the Trinity: “The Trinity is our dwelling place, our Father’s house, from which we shall never depart.”

Thus the faith that comes from God empowers Elizabeth to “pay attention” and become more and more an abiding participant in the love of God for her and the world.

Elizabeth, in her abiding seeks to remain steady on the path that leads to eternal glory with God. She seeks to become more and more captivated in the divine life and continuously asks God to enhance her mind so that she may continuously “walk in the presence of God.” Balthasar suggests, “What she has in mind is a walking with firm step into a space that is always open, a walking that stays on the road of those ‘works that God has prepared, so that we might walk in them’ (Eph 2:10). It is a walking that takes place under his gaze, in the radiance of his presence.” Elizabeth knows that “to walk in the presence of God” is a daily battle and that she must die daily to herself in order that

---

61 Ibid., 396.
62 Ibid., 399.
63 Ibid., 399.
her life may be filled with God’s life. She must daily seek to say “Yes” to God in order to open herself more fully to the transformative shape of God’s divine life for her.

Balthasar reiterates, “Elizabeth grasps the revelation of this mystery precisely in the manner and meaning with which the Scriptures give it to believers: as the loftiest unveiling of divine love—and as nothing else. It has been promulgated for one purpose alone: to gather together [unity-in-difference] the human response of love, incorporating it perfectly into God’s plan of love.”64 How this “pattern of common life” is translated to the world is through the “image” that gives christological shape via the path of the cross.65 Nichols highlights how her understanding of predestination shaped how she understood the unity-in-difference she experienced. He states:

Her attraction to the Infinite, the unsoundable abyss, was to an Infinite who embraced the finite, detached it from earth and (in her word) ‘infinitized’ it so it could become itself a heaven for his dwelling. Balthasar notes her passionate language as she desires to be engulfed, Invaded, inundated, buried by God. . .Living in communion with Christ is to occupy a transitional state between the finite and Infinite. . .In her last weeks on earth, she altered the inflexion of this Christological approach to the Infinite. Previously, that approach signified for her the ‘excess of love’ poured out from the human nature of God the Son. Now she came to see it as meaning above all the Passion of the Lord as ‘gate of the infinite’. Through the passion, ‘the world was enabled to see [I would argue “know”] the abyss of God’s love’.66

It is the path of the cross that gives shape to the second dimension: obedience.

64 Ibid., 401.


Elizabeth’s Life: Obedience as an Epistemological Act of Adoration and Praise

Once Elizabeth’s “knows” that she is predestined to life with God she is empowered to a life of obedience. The christological reduction emphasizes the idea that the saints must obediently be reshaped by the mission of the Son in the economic mission of the person of Jesus Christ. This reality of obedience shapes most critically the idea that human knowing is transformed by the presence of the divine in Jesus. Moss notes,

*Obedience* is the key term that Balthasar will use here to describe this translation of the love which the Persons of the Trinity enjoy together into the conditions of fallen and finite creation; and this of course, first and foremost, through the mission of the Son which leads to the hypostatic union itself – God with man. Obedience is the creaturely analogue of the divine being-for-one-another; and *just so* does it become, paradoxically enough, the occasion for a discovery of our true personhood in Christ.  

Moss’ argument pushes forth the idea that the saints embody the concrete reality of sanctity in their obedience, finding their own personhood reshaped by their obedience to the pattern of existence incarnated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Christ’s obedience to the Father’s will—an obedience that inevitably leads to the cross because of humanity’s fallen existence—the world is “taken up” into the Son’s personhood as it eternally exists in the indwelling of the Father’s love for the Son. The saints stand at the crossroads “from above” and “from below.” And because they stand at this crossroads, which is a place of “death,” they are shaped by this very death, as they are “taken up” into the indwelling of the Father. The saints participate, through their willful obedience, in the Son’s obedience that is exulted in his willingness to succumb to

---

67 Moss, “the Saints,” 88.
the cross. Jesus’ death on the cross becomes their death. Moss continues, “However, in the saints Balthasar suggests that we see this ‘abstract’ law [dying of a grain and thus the bearing forth of fruit, John 12:24] exhibited, even personalized, through a life’s dramatic co-ordination to the externalizing drama of the Passion of Christ.” It is a dying to their old self and a “being personalized” at a new level of being that then radiates a certain fruitful expression of the divine life to the world around them. As obedient persons, “The missions of the saints imitate this paradoxical rhythm of personalization through death.”

Elizabeth embodied obedience in acts of adoration and praise. Especially at the end of her life, she was shaped by the christological reduction. Her commitment to Jesus Christ’s will is enraptured in the Son’s being “taken up” on the cross. Thus, Elizabeth is taken up into the indwelling of the Father’s love of the Son and her “being personalized” is shaped into the form of adoration and praise. Obedience takes Elizabeth deeper into the unity-in-difference that is the divine life. Her very nature in knowing God becomes united with the knowing that is the participation of the Father in the Son. Consequently, the fruit of their love, the Holy Spirit, becomes the fruit of her obedient adoration. Her adoration was enveloped in love. The “all encompassing” of God’s presence in her life made here a worshipful being. Balthasar notes:

Worship is not a voluntary act that the creature decides to undertake after thinking it over. It forces itself upon the creature wherever eternal love, in its inexpressible impact on a person, in its incomprehensible presentness, permits itself to be seen. “Crushed by happiness”, the soul falls to the ground, buried under what Paul calls the “excess of love” (Eph 2:4)

---

68 See Ibid., 88-89.
69 Ibid., 89.
70 Ibid., 89.
and what Elizabeth took as a maxim for her life: “There is a word of Paul
that is like a summary of my existence, that could be written over each
moment of my life: ‘Propter nimiam caritatem!’ [from excessive love].
Yes, all these rivers of graces—they arise from his having loved me
all too much.”71

With fervently charged language Elizabeth shared the immense experience of God’s love
for her. Her obedient adoration came from God’s Spirit filling every part of her being.
Balthasar recognizes the tremendous transformation within her life. He continues,
“Adoration filled her to the limit with the mystery she contemplated: the indisputable
present-ness of God, before her and in her, in the nakedness, surrender and self-sacrifice
of eternal love.”72 Her adoration was an act of obedient silence wherein she awaited
God’s blessings. Elizabeth states:

On Mount Carmel, in silence, in solitude, in a prayer that never ends
and survives all interruptions, the Carmelite lives as if already in
heaven: for God alone. The same God who some day will be her
blessedness and will satiate her in glory, bestows himself on her here
and now, never leaves her, lives in her soul, more than that, forms a
single entity with her. Therefore, she thirsts for silence so that she
can listen relentlessly, so she can steadily penetrate deeper into his
limitless being. She is one with the one she loves, she finds him
everywhere. She sees how he shines forth through everything.73

Elizabeth discovered the dual nature of the solitary life. In the solitude of monastic life
she realized that God was present with her. She senses the all-encompassing mystery of
the Son’s love for her. She said, “I feel as if I am wrapped up in the mystery of the love

72 Ibid., 440.
73 Quoted in Ibid., 440-441.
of Christ, and when I look back, I see how divine love has pursued my soul. O how much love there is! It is as if I am crushed under its weight. So I fall silent and adore.”

Elizabeth’s obediential adoration grew up from within the faith that was Elizabeth’s predestined goal given to her by God. In fact, Balthasar will maintain that Elizabeth’s faith was an act of obedience through which her whole being was transformed. Balthasar affirms:

Faith is primarily a transcending of all criteria of the world and the soul—and not merely a transcending of reason but of all of life, of the entire human experience, including most particularly the richest and innermost experience: intuition. But this transcending does not take place in a vacuum, rather it follows and submits to a law—the law of the word and revelation of God, who thereby proves beyond all this world’s words his divinelly present being and who demands adoring submission to that proof of his presence. In this sacrifice of all worldly criteria, faith is a powerful act of obedience. Elizabeth often returns to this truth, for it is an essential part of her faith’s insight. The central thought here is that there is no real distinction between God’s will and God’s being, and therefore, whoever has elevated God’s Will to the innermost law of her being possesses God’s being at the center of her being.

We see here again the relationship between epistemology and ontology. With the elevation of her being into the life of divine being her very thought processes were changed. Her own being became a glorification of the divine being-for-an-other that is the eternal life of the circumincessio of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Nichols says: “The love of God present to the soul so penetrates it as to place it at the apostolic service of others—in that mode alone possible to the enclosed nun which is prayer.” I now turn to this last dimension of her life, service.

74 Quoted in Ibid., 442.
75 Ibid., 454.
Elizabeth’s Life: An Epistemological Act of Fruitful Service

Obedience is that fruitful act whereby the Word of God dies on the Cross and thereby gives new life to the flesh of humanity. Obedience unto death is, paradoxically, an act through which the fruit of the trinitarian life becomes the feast of epistemological love upon which the created world is filled. Moss declares, “For in Christ on the Cross, we see this God as no miserly giver, but in fact as ‘personified handing-over’; the handing over of himself into the flesh of a human being and then into the dark, grave soil of the world – precisely into those very places where his life will once again seed and fecundate.”  

In other words, the Holy Spirit is the fruit of the love between Father and Son. So too the human being who encounters the form of Jesus Christ is the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s fecundating action in the being of the human creature. Moss argues that Balthasar sees fruitfulness as the sign of sainthood and these signs, or forms of the saints radiate within every age the form of Jesus Christ as the image of being-for-one-another. The Holy Spirit’s fruitfulness is our fruitfulness. For the world, the saints are an embodiment, or a shining forth of God’s handing-over of God’s Self in flesh. They are epistemological expressions of God’s (re)imaging of that original Idea of God’s created beings as beings-for-one-another. 

By way of the saints, God’s knowing is fecundated in human knowing.

---

76 Nichols, Divine Fruitfulness, 257.

77 Moss, “The saints,” 90.

78 See Ibid., 90-91.
Elizabeth sees God’s desire to fecundate as the transformation of finite creatures into radiating expressions of the divine life. This is, for her, the reality of service.

Reflecting again on Paul’s words, she says,

Those who are glorified...see God in the simplicity of his essence. Paul says that ‘they know as they are known’ (I Cor 13:12)—they are known by him, that is, by direct, simple vision, and therefore, the great saint continues, ‘they are changed from glory to glory by the power of his spirit into his own image’ (2 Cor 3:18). Thus they become a neverending ‘praise of glory’ for the Divine Being, who sees in them his own glory.

God “knows” us because we are the Idea of God’s in the epistemology of love that is the participation between Father and Son. Participation is the activity of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit’s action gives form to all created being through the Word of God.

Thus, Elizabeth was changed by the power of the Spirit into the image that was God’s design for her. This is why she can call her transformation a “never-ending praise of glory” because God’s glory is what shines through her soul and radiates from within her as this glory. However, her transformation was not a simple “copy” (finite being) of the original (divine being). Balthasar emphasizes:

This transformation spoken of in this last passage from Paul is no “moral” transformation accomplished by making the copy similar to its exemplar rather it is virtually a “physical” change in which the sovereign power of the exemplar is expressed in the copy in a steadily more glorious manner, causing the exemplar to shine forth from the copy. Elizabeth understood this very well. She knows that “we love God with his own love,” and that the faithfulness with which we keep God’s commands is no new, independent human word in response to God’s word in us, rather it is itself part of and powered by God’s command within us.80

79 Quoted in Balthasar, Two Sisters in the Spirit, 464.

80 Ibid., 464.
God’s grace was working from within the soul of Elizabeth and this grace fertilized the seed of her soul and bore forth the fruit of her life as an act of service. By grace, Elizabeth was transformed to participate in God’s outpouring of the divine mind into the world. Balthasar contends, “Her Order’s rule is for her ‘the form in which God wants me to be holy’, a form that radiates holiness by imparting it moment by moment to those who observe it.” Inevitably this meant that her form radiated from within her appearance the holiness of God. Her being was re(shaping) in order to impart the holiness of God to those who encountered her person. Again, an epistemology of love radiated forth into the very being of finite creatures. The form of Jesus Christ of course, shapes the human being by way of holy scripture and the tradition of the Church. Balthasar says, “More than anything else, the word of Scripture is an ecclesial place for Elizabeth. As it was for the Church Fathers, so too for Elizabeth: to think and speak as a Christian is to think and speak within the thought and speech of the divine Logos as he became flesh in the letter of Scripture.” Elizabeth’s service was to be for God what God, in his endless love, longs for her to be. She desired always the will of God for creation. She asked God to transform her mind to be like God’s so that she could partake of the divine will as it is in God’s mind. Balthasar notes, “Elizabeth wants to see Scripture read and contemplated with the ‘mind of God’ (sens de Dieu), with a subjectively supernatural power of comprehension that alone would be capable of

---

81 See Ibid., 482-485.
82 Ibid., 486.
83 Ibid., 486.
grasping God’s objectively supernatural, infinite mind.” That is the heart of the matter. By way of her adoring contemplation Elizabeth paid attention to the form of Jesus Christ that appeared to her in scripture and radiated into her being the being of God. Thus, her service became an unbending commitment to be shaped by the way God knows her in the love of the divine as it always a being-for-her. As a result God’s epistemology of love was the very epistemological transformation of Elizabeth’s ability to know God and the world around her. God’s knowing became her knowing because God communicated the triune life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to her through the person of Jesus. God’s love became her love because true knowledge is the loving communication between God and human beings. Her service to God and to the world around her was to KNOW all things in LOVE.

84 Ibid., 486.
Two problems were the driving force behind this dissertation. First, many scholars have wrestled with the notion that Balthasar is unwilling to consider modern theology’s starting point of the consciousness of the knower. Otherwise stated, some scholars argue that Balthasar’s point of departure is the will (love) to the neglect of human consciousness (intellect).\footnote{It is important to note that the heart of my dissertation is a constructive analysis of a Balthasarian epistemology. While much evidence exists for the debate about whether or not Balthasar considered central to his own work modern theology’s “turn to the subject,” an analysis of Balthasarian debates on this topic is not my intent. This being said, here are some examples of essays that make reference to or consider as their main topic Balthasar and modern theology’s central conviction regarding human consciousness: David Schindler, “Towards a Non-possessive Concept of Knowledge: On the Relation between Reason and Love in Aquinas and Balthasar,” Modern Theology 22:4 (October 2006): 577-607; Kevin Mongrain, “Poetics and Doxology: von Balthasar on Poetic Resistance to Modernity’s Turn to the Subject,” Pro Ecclesia 16:4 (Fall 2007): 381-415; and, Victoria S. Harrison, The Apologetic Value of Human Holiness: von Balthasar’s Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), pp. 126-133.} I disagree. As it happened, I sought to demonstrate that an analysis of Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation brings to light an intricate epistemology that is critical to postmodern epistemological scholarship. The epistemological structure within Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation is a much needed voice in Christian theology’s consideration of human knowing. Coming from within this first problem is a second one. Alongside the debate on whether or not Balthasar neglects human consciousness is a concern regarding the relationship between reason and faith within a Balthasarian system. In other words, by way of Neo-Scholasticism much conversation has taken place pertaining to relationship between faith and reason within the human knower. Whereas the Neo-Scholastic tradition considers faith and reason as
separate realities within the human knower, Balthasar provides a unique argument for their interrelationality. Balthasar sees within the relationship between human knowing and divine knowing something “revealed” that is the very essence of all knowing. In light of these two problems I developed my argument for the centrality of an epistemological structure within Balthasar’s doctrine of revelation.

In this dissertation I attempted to draw attention to Balthasar’s consideration of what happens to human knowing in an encounter with Jesus Christ. Balthasar seeks to make a strong critique of the modern notion that the subject is the determinative factor in knowing. Instead Balthasar argues that all knowing is dependent on the infinite. My intention was a theological analysis of an epistemological structure, implicit, in the work of Balthasar. I believe such an exploration provides important insight into the larger discussion of human knowing and the ability (if at all) for God to transform human consciousness. Specifically I have attempted to demonstrate that Balthasar believed human consciousness is transformed by the power of God that radiates from within the form of Jesus Christ. I also ventured to show this transformation in the particular life of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity.

I hope this project will shape future conversation and research in three ways. First, I aspire to further the dialogue amongst theologians regarding what is revealed in the form of Jesus Christ. I believe drawing attention to Balthasar’s consideration of what happens to the human knower in an encounter with Christ adds to the various conversations on epistemology. Victoria Harrison contends that within Balthasar’s

---

critique of a Kantian epistemology he offers an innovative approach to rationality and objectivity.³ One of her main points focuses on Balthasar’s insistence that all knowledge requires some sort of “belief, or faith, which determines what can be known.”⁴ In other words, faith is necessary for an epistemological truth. By way of this claim, Harrison analyzes the way in which Balthasar’s unique treatment of rationality and objectivity flies in the face of modern scientific methodology. This project is a first step in examining those structures wherein the relationship between faith and knowing is key to how we examine the relationship between God and creation.

Second, much conversation surrounds the concept of revelation with the Christian tradition. Balthasar is very intentional about examining what takes place for the human knower in its encounter with Jesus Christ. By examining Balthasar’s treatment of the form of Jesus Christ my goal was to offer constructive theologians another source from which to consider the intricacies of subject/object relations and the way in which subject/object encounters contain within them something transformative. By analyzing Balthasar’s epistemological structure of revelation my intention was to see how central the divine life is in actually transforming the human knower. Balthasar’s examination of the divine life and how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit know each other in their eternal relationality adds fruitful insight into how humans might consider what actually happens when the forms of objects come in contact with each other. His thoughts on form and how within every form there is that which radiates from within provides insightful


⁴ Ibid., 68.
thought on the power of relations. Analzying Balthasar’s treatment of God’s action within these relationships will hopefully provide a valuable resource in the conversation especially in the specific disciplines of anthropology, christology and trinitarian studies. I believe theology in the twenty-first century tends toward studies that begin with anthropology. In other words, much contemporary study of the doctrines of christology and the trinity start from within anthropology. The human subject tends to be the starting point for theology. I argue that a more lucid understanding of humanity must begin with the doctrines of the trinity and christology. I hope this study helps influence the conversation especially in light of such modern thinkers as Kant and Schleiermacher who emphasized a “turn to the subject” to the demise, I believe, of our understanding of the relationship between God and creation. Balthasar offers current theologians and philosophers a way to respond constructively to the far-reaching influence of anthropology.

Third, many scholars have argued that Balthasar was unwilling to consider modern theology’s starting point of the consciousness of the knower. I simply do not find this to be the case. In fact, this dissertation sought to demonstrate that Balthasar makes intricate reflection on and serious analysis of the human knower. In fact he provides detailed insight into the relationship of the human knower to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Balthasar wants us to reclaim the idea that anything we can say or understand about humanity, consciousness and all our anthropological insight must be considered by way of the divine and the very essence of all being which is the God of Being as we see it in the triune life of the godhead. I hope my analysis of Balthasar’s
epistemological structure within his doctrine of revelation will help shape further scholarship in the area of human knowing and divine knowing.

Finally, Balthasar has a tremendous way of taking an abstract philosophical concept and bringing it to life in concrete ways. Balthasar gifts readers with an aesthetically deep expression of the speculative within the concrete embodiment of being. This project attempted to highlight Balthasar’s unique way of bringing to life the conceptual within the everyday realities of humans. I believe Balthasar continually makes the case that in the end an epistemology of love is indispensable. The power of love was Balthasar’s goal in all his work. This dissertation attempted to make clear Balthasar’s argument for love as the truth of all being. Such love resides within the relationship between the infinite and the finite as an epistemic act of being. I hope this project will encourage further conversation regarding the epistemological form of being as it becomes expressed in the phenomenological relationship between the divine and the human. I hope this study helps further the conversation regarding the heart of true knowledge as the loving communication between God and human beings.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


____. “Creation and Trinity.” Communio 15, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 285-293.


____. “Death is swallowed up by life.” Communio 14, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 49-54.


____. “Toward a theology of Christian prayer.” *Communio* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 245-257.
Secondary Sources


O'Donnell, John J. "Truth as Love: the Understanding of Truth according to Hans Urs von Balthasar." Pacifica 1, no. 2 (June 1988): 189-211.


VITA

Tim Squier was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and raised in Norwalk, Iowa. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Religion Studies from Texas Christian University in 1993. He received a Master of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary in 1996. While serving a church in Sioux City, Iowa Tim received a second Bachelor or Arts in Vocal Performance at Briar Cliff University. In 2003 he attended Seabury Western Theological Seminary where he studied to become an Episcopal priest. He received a Master of Theological Studies and a Certificate of Anglican Studies from Seabury.

Tim entered the Ph.D. program at Loyola University Chicago in 2005 and was awarded the Ph.D. in Constructive Theology, August 2013. At Loyola, Tim served as a research assistant and as an office assistant in the department of theology.

Currently, Tim is the rector at Saint Ignatius of Antioch Episcopal Church in Antioch, Illinois. Along with his vocation as a priest, his research interests are epistemology and spirituality, Trinitarian studies, liturgical theology and the relationship between the academy and the church.