

Balthasar's Method of Divine Naming

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ONE OF THE MOST original elements of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology is his method of predicating attributes of the triune God, combining divine immutability and divine suffering love. Although Balthasar explicitly rejects the God of process theology, he understands the mystery of the Trinity to include death, surprise, potentiality, becoming, faith, and time. Yet at the same time, Balthasar enthusiastically adopts the Dionysian and Thomistic threefold way of affirmation, negation, and eminence, a method that Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Thomas Aquinas used to exclude all change, suffering, and potentiality from God. How can these apparently contradictory views of God stand together in the thought of one of the greatest speculative theologians of the twentieth century?

Not surprisingly, this element of Balthasar's theology has sparked a lively debate in the past few years. David Schindler¹ and Gerard O'Hanlon, SJ² have argued for the internal coherence of Balthasar's thought, holding that his theology is an organic development of the Fathers and the great Scholastics. Guy Mansini, OSB³ and Richard Schenk, OP⁴ have

¹ David L. Schindler, book review of Gerard O'Hanlon's *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, *The Thomist* 58 (1994): 340–41; "The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity," *Communio* 21 (1994): 172–90.

² Gerard F. O'Hanlon, SJ, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³ Guy Mansini, OSB, "Balthasar and Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 499–519.

⁴ Richard Schenk, OP, "Ist die Rede vom leidenden Gott theologisch zu vermeiden? Reflexion über den Streit von K. Rahner und H. U. von Balthasar," in *Der Leidende Gott: Eine philosophische und theologische Kritik*, ed. Peter Koslowski and Freidrich Hermanni (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001), 225–39.

questioned some of Balthasar's divine attributes like becoming and suffering. Perhaps this debate can be advanced by asking the question: What is Balthasar's method of divine naming? More specifically, how does Balthasar recognize perfections in creation and the history of salvation, and how are these perfections then attributed to God? This approach, a particularly Scholastic one, can shed much light on the Trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Such a study necessarily involves the investigation of a number of essential themes in Balthasar's thought. We will begin with a brief look at Balthasar's approach to the relationship between philosophy and theology. Second, we will consider his adoption and critique of negative theology. Third, we will examine his doctrine of Christ as the concrete analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Fourth, we will consider his principle that the economic Trinity, the Trinity as it operates in the history of salvation, is the only way to the immanent Trinity, the Trinity as it is in itself. These four studies will prepare the way for a closer look at individual divine attributes: although Balthasar did not think of himself a systematic theologian, we can still look for a certain order, not only in his statements about divine naming, but also in his use of divine names. At the same time, our discussion of divine attributes will provide an overview of Balthasar's adoption of the Dionysian and Thomistic threefold way of affirmation, negation, and eminence. We will conclude with a critique of some elements of Balthasar's method of naming God.

The Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology

Balthasar's view of the relationship between philosophy and theology can be found above all in his book on Karl Barth and in the first volume of *Theologik*. Balthasar was very sympathetic to Barth's theological outlook, adopting a Christo-centric theology that places great emphasis on the analogy of faith, which identifies Christ as the ultimate manifestation of the true similitude between creatures and God, a manifestation that includes but also corrects a philosophical analogy of being. Yet there is a marked distinction between the two great Swiss theologians of the twentieth century in their understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy.

Balthasar points out the tension in Barth's thought between his desire to give philosophy its due and his insistence on the absolute primacy of graced knowledge. For Barth, theology must employ the concepts and categories of philosophy.⁵ Yet, as Balthasar recognizes, while grace presup-

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1971), 85.

poses and is distinct from the order of creation, all too often Barth's theology reduces everything to the order of grace.⁶

In an effort to distance himself from Barth, Balthasar explains that "the real source of controversy here was Barth's refusal to grant any trace of theological relevance to man's philosophical knowledge of God."⁷ Balthasar asks: "Doesn't the analogy of faith (or grace) presuppose an analogous (by no means identical) analogy in the order of creation and even in the order of sin? Without the latter analogy as its external ground, can the analogy of faith become truly and effectively operative?"⁸ Balthasar warns us that "if there is no philosophy, then the whole hierarchy of values and scholarly disciplines collapses. If there is no philosophy, then there are no absolute truths and values any more."⁹ Instead, "a real priority of nature and reason is presupposed if there is to be a real Incarnation."¹⁰

In *Theologik I*, especially its revised prologue, Balthasar again insists on an autonomous place for philosophy. Theology presumes an ontological structure;¹¹ revealed truth does not destroy but perfects the world's truth.¹² Yet Balthasar also questions to what extent the world's ontological structure is already known by reason.¹³ In fact, he holds that because reason is weak, it must be illumined in order to be able to penetrate thoroughly the being of natural realities.¹⁴ His attitude of caution toward reason's ability to entirely discern the world's ontological structure moves Balthasar toward a Bonaventurian outlook on faith and reason.

Balthasar's critique of philosophy goes one step further in *Theologik II*, in which he argues that in some ways, philosophical or worldly logic can no longer assist Christian life and thought. As proof for his position, he points out that for Sts. John and Paul, Jesus' resurrection contradicted all earthly logic and experience. The Christian, therefore, can no longer orient himself by using earthly logic.¹⁵ This argument implies a sharp critique of the power of ungraced reason, leaving the role of philosophy in theology very uncertain.

⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 297.

¹⁰ Ibid., 270.

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik I* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1985), vii.

¹² Ibid., xi.

¹³ Ibid., vii.

¹⁴ Ibid., xii.

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik II* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 98.

Does this exegesis of Sts. Paul and John on the resurrection conflict with Balthasar's praise of philosophy in *Theologik I*? Is the world's logic not a reflection of the divine logos as it shines forth in creation? Does Balthasar tend toward Karl Barth's view of the relationship between faith and reason? We cannot give a definitive answer to these questions now. Our study of Balthasar's method of divine naming will place us within closer reach of a solution. As Peter Casarella has pointed out, Balthasar's notion of faith generating new experience does not necessarily entail fideism.¹⁶ On the other hand, Richard Schenk has argued that Balthasar's theological method, which Schenk identifies with the Augustinian–Franciscan tradition, involves a receptivity to graced knowledge that is theoretically open-ended to the point that philosophy is no longer a measuring stick for revelation, but is transformed by received public and private revelation.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Balthasar did recognize the indispensable role of philosophy in theology. The question for us is not whether Balthasar was a fideist, but what role philosophy plays in his theology.

According to Balthasar, philosophy unaided by grace can discover perfections in creation that may be truly predicated of God analogously. However, since the illumination of grace may be needed to recognize what is in nature, theology may discover additional perfections in nature that were not accessible to ungraced reason.

Balthasar's Appropriation and Critique of Negative Theology

One of Balthasar's main concerns in *Theologik II* is a defense of positive language about God against Neo-platonic apophatic theology and Eastern mysticism. The latter's approaches to God lead to such a radical negative theology that they form the greatest fortress against Christianity, leaving God wholly unknown and wholly distant from us.¹⁸

Yet a biblical foundation for negative theology exists already in the Old Testament.¹⁹ The Church Fathers even adopted elements of pagan Neo-platonic negative theology, although their outlook was balanced by a recognition of the primacy that is due to the way of eminence,

¹⁶ Peter Casarella, "Experience as a theological category: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Christian encounter with God's image," *Communio* 20 (1993): 118.

¹⁷ Schenk, "Ist die Rede vom leiden Gott theologisch zu vermeiden?" Reflexion über den Streit von K. Rahner und H. U. von Balthasar," in *Der Leidende Gott: Eine philosophische und theologische Kritik*, ed. Peter Koslowski and Freidrich Hermann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001), 235–36.

¹⁸ *Theologik II*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82–83, 94.

which is a way of affirmation.²⁰ Following Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar affirms that the more knowable *in se* is less knowable *quoad nos*.²¹ Furthermore, since God the Father remains invisible, he is beyond our concepts.²² Despite the wondrous revelation that God has made in Christ, the infinite God-creature distance remains, even with Christological analogy.²³ Balthasar assents to the classic position in Christian theology that God is incomprehensible, a position that goes back to Philo and scriptural revelation.²⁴

Balthasar's creative contribution to the critique of negative theology is his approach to the negation of materiality and finitude. This way of purification, in which one abstracts from materiality, corporeality, the sensible, the imaginable, and the conceivable, has led to great problems, even as practiced by the medievals and St. John of the Cross.²⁵ In a bold move, Balthasar never clearly supports a full negation of material limitations when speaking of God.²⁶ Why does he do this?

We can provide only a brief answer to this question, yet one that seems to reflect the entire spirit of Balthasar's theology. As already seen, he hesitates to use worldly logic to evaluate revelation. This hesitation is rooted in a deep desire to have our finite, fallen reason corrected by a marvelous graced illumination from above. Balthasar wants to let the incarnate Word speak, to be attentive to the divine attributes which our philosophical logic and analogies may have overlooked or rejected, but which are manifested in the glorious revelation of Christ. Balthasar's motivation is praiseworthy. His reverence and awe before the Word revealing itself is a model for theologians. Indeed, theology on one's knees is the only way to a fruitful theology. But does Balthasar's method present an approach to divine naming which possesses both internal coherence and coherence with the Fathers and the Scholastics? Some possible solutions to this question will emerge as we consider how Balthasar attributes perfections to God.

For the moment, we can say that Balthasar recognizes both a need for negative theology and a limit to affirmation. God remains incomprehensible. Even attributes that seem to imply an intrinsic finitude will only be predicated of God within a negative theology that excludes

²⁰ Ibid., 91.

²¹ Ibid., 110–11, 246.

²² *Theologik* I, 15; *Theologik* II, 87.

²³ *Theologik* II, 288.

²⁴ Ibid., 87.

²⁵ Ibid., 101–2.

²⁶ Ibid., 89, 91.

from him all inner-worldly experience.²⁷ But Balthasar has also left the door open for the possibility of attributing characteristics like sacrifice and becoming to God, attributes that philosophical negative theologies have usually identified as intrinsically material or finite, suggesting that, for Balthasar, salvation history and the intellect's graced illumination will open up a radically new perspective on nature.

Jesus Christ as the Concrete *analogia entis*

Balthasar's theology is centered on Christ as the perfection of creation manifesting his divinely ordained relationship to God,²⁸ the concrete analogy of being revealing all of God's attributes.²⁹ He is the standard with which every philosophical analogy of being must be measured: "Theological analogy sheds definitive light on what the philosophical analogy is as such."³⁰ In his perfect humanity Christ manifests our proper relationship of similarity and dissimilarity to God. The analogy of faith that comes through Christ is so important because creation's proper analogy to God is obscured by sin; in the words of Angela Franz Franks, "only Christ, as both divine Son and man, can express absolute Being within a worldly form."³¹

It is the hypostatic union that really makes this analogy possible. The perfect qualities and attributes of the one nature can be applied to the other only because they are united in one person.³² This concrete *analogia entis* still presupposes a philosophical analogy of being, a natural similarity of God and creatures: "The theological analogy does not abolish the philosophical analogy."³³ However, "there is no upper limit to the concrete content that can be injected into this concept of nature . . . no creature can set arbitrary limits to what God does or could say to us . . . grace elevates and completes man in a radical way."³⁴

²⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama* IV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 324 (*Theodramatik* III [Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1980], 301–2); O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, 38.

²⁸ Angela Franz Franks, "Trinitarian *Analogia Entis* in Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 542.

²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama* II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 267 (*Theodramatik* II.1 [Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1976], 243); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama* III (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 221 (*Theodramatik* II.2 [Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1978], 203).

³⁰ *Theology of Karl Barth*, 231.

³¹ Franks, "Trinitarian *Analogia Entis*," 541, cf. 553.

³² *Theodrama* III, 222 (*Theodramatik* II.2, 203–4).

³³ *Theology of Karl Barth*, 230; see Franks, "Trinitarian *Analogia Entis*," 542.

³⁴ *Theology of Karl Barth*, 236.

It should be pointed out that for Balthasar, the analogy between God's being and created being is somewhat fluid. In Christ, however, the proper analogy between finite and infinite freedom is revealed.³⁵ We are called to live out our freedom as a participation in Christ's freedom, which will bring us into greater harmony with our essence, just as God's freedom is in harmony with his.³⁶ Freedom is a power by which one determines one's position in being.³⁷ There is a disjunction between the analogy of being in fallen nature and the analogy of being to which we are called in grace. We can recognize here a Plotinian, Augustinian, and Bonaventurian understanding of the hierarchy of being (ontological, epistemological, and moral) in which the human being's place is somewhat fluid and temporary, in contrast to a Proclian, Dionysian, and Thomistic approach in which each being has a fairly permanent place within the hierarchy, with an absolute ontological determination and a relatively fixed epistemological and moral determination. By allying himself with the former tradition, Balthasar intensifies the radicality of the revelation of Christ as it opens up a new perspective, one that includes insights into the kind of perfections which will be attributed to God.³⁸

The Economic Trinity as the Only Way to the Immanent Trinity

In Balthasar's view, statements about the immanent Trinity can only be made from the economic Trinity.³⁹ This principle implies the critique of classic Trinitarian analogies (like those of St. Augustine and Richard of St. Victor) that Balthasar articulates in *Theologik* II.⁴⁰ Instead of focusing on analogies in creation to describe the Trinity, one should look to the center of salvation history, especially the central event of that history, the paschal mystery.⁴¹ While non-biblical analogies can be used in theology, they

³⁵ Franks, "Trinitarian Analogia Entis," 536; Thomas G. Dalzell, SM, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York, Peter Lang, 1997), 48, 70–80.

³⁶ Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom*, 80, 98.

³⁷ Ibid., 72–73, 97.

³⁸ For this interpretation of the history of theology, see Richard Schenk, OP, *Die Gnade Völlendeter Endlichkeit: Zur Transzendentaltheologischen Auslegung der Thomanischen Anthropologie* (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1986), 246–48, 279–80, 517–18.

³⁹ *Theodrama* IV, 324 (*Theodramatik* III, 301–2); Thomas Rudolf Krenski, *Passio Caritatis: Trinitarische Passiologie im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Johannes Verlag, 1990), 117–18, 129.

⁴⁰ *Theologik* II, 61.

⁴¹ Krenski, *Passio Caritatis*, 118; Matthew Levering, "Balthasar on Christ's Consciousness on the Cross," *The Thomist* 65 (2001), 570–71.

should be treated with great caution. *Contra* Karl Rahner, however, the economic Trinity cannot be identified with the immanent Trinity.⁴² Still, the two are closely connected, so that everything in creation, including finitude, suffering, and sin, must somehow have its foundation in the Trinity.⁴³

However, because the immanent Trinity is distinct from the economic Trinity, we cannot simply read off the former from the latter. Because Jesus has two distinct natures, he cannot simply represent his own divinity, as this would involve a mono-physisite heresy. Not everything about Jesus' humanity can be taken as a direct revelation of God. To argue so would be to miss the crucial distinction between the form and the content of form, the distinction between form and the truth communicated by the form. Rather, Jesus manifests his relationship with the Father and transposes it into the creaturely-temporal.⁴⁴ With the purifying method of the Dionysian threefold way (affirmation, negation, eminence), the revelation of that relationship will take us to the heart of the Trinitarian mystery.

Divine Time and Space

We are now ready to study the first set of Balthasar's controversial divine attributes, which are divine time and space. The previous sections will shed much light on the method that Balthasar uses in predicating individual names of God.

The divine processions, the procession of the Son from the Father, the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, are timeless.⁴⁵ The Father is not "before" the Son, and the Son is not "after" the Father. The divine Persons are co-eternal, a thesis that Catholic dogma demands. God's time cannot include any creaturely becoming.⁴⁶ Here we have the negation of creaturely time from the life of the Trinity.

Turning to the way of eminence, however, Balthasar posits a "super-time." The first reason for this is that it maximizes divine love:

The Father's act of surrender calls for its own area of freedom: the Son's act, whereby he receives himself from and acknowledges his indebtedness to the Father, requires its own area. . . . However intimate the relationship, it implies that the distinction between the persons is maintained. Some-

⁴² *Theodrama* III, 508 (*Theodramatik* II.2, 466); O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, 37.

⁴³ *Theodrama* V, 516 (*Theodramatik* IV, 472); Franks, "Trinitarian *Analogia Entis*," 534, 542; O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, 72.

⁴⁴ *Theodrama* V, 120 (*Theodramatik* IV, 104); Peter Casarella, "The Expression and Form of the Word: Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Sacramentality of Language in Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology," *Renascence* 48 (1996): 115, 119.

⁴⁵ *Theologik* II, 126.

⁴⁶ *Theodrama* V, 77 (*Theodramatik* IV, 67).

thing like infinite “duration” and infinite “space” must be attributed to the acts of reciprocal love so that the life of the *communio*, of fellowship, can develop. While the Father from all eternity utters his eternal Word, the latter does not, as it were, keep interrupting him. . . . True, all temporal notions of “before” and “after” must be kept at a distance; but absolute freedom must provide the acting area in which it is to develop. . . .⁴⁷

A kind of “super-time” and “super-space” allows for an interchange of love and thanksgiving between the divine Persons that is analogous to an intense experience of mutual love and thanksgiving among human beings, while the traditional understanding of eternity allows only one perfect divine act of love. The latter would mean that the Son cuts off the word of the Father, does not leave him room to communicate his love for the Son. Balthasar is taking his experience of human interpersonal love as a foundation for this description of divine *communio*. The beloved must leave the lover room for self-expression, the time to speak, before responding with thanksgiving. This understanding of interpersonal love is also rooted in dialogical philosophy and the mystical experience of Adrienne von Speyr. We will elaborate on Balthasar’s appropriation of this Trinitarian analogy later.

Balthasar backs up this language about God by appealing to a very novel way of interpreting Johannine theological time:

. . . God’s “abiding forever” must not be seen as a “non-time” but as a super-time that is unique to him; and this is illustrated in the fact that Christ’s time mediates between God’s “time” and world-time. Christ’s time recapitulates and comprehends world-time, while it also reveals God’s super-time. Jesus’ time, particularly in John, has a kind of inner periodicity that, while of course colored by the human time in which Jesus shares, has its own intrinsic validity as a result of his relationship with the Father; in other words, it has Trinitarian significance.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Theodrama* II, 257 (*Theodramatik* II.1, 233: “Der Akt des väterlichen Sichgebens fordert seinen eigenen Freiheitsraum, der Akt des Sichempfangens und—verdankens des Sohnes den seinen . . . Der Austausch kann noch so innig sein, er fordert das Sich-Durchhalten der Differenz. Den Akten der sich austauschenden Liebe muss so etwas wie unendliche ‘Dauer’ und unendlicher ‘Raum’ gewährt werden, damit das Leben der *communio*, der Gegenseitigkeit sich entfalten kann. Während der Vater von Ewigkeit her sein ewiges Wort spricht, fällt ihm dieses nicht gleichsam immer schon ins Wort. . . . Wenn aus diesem Austausch auch jedes zeitliche Früher und Später fernzuhalten ist, muss sich die absolute Freiheit doch den Spiel-Raum gewähren, sich zu entfalten.”)

⁴⁸ *Theodrama* V, 30 (*Theodramatik* IV, 24: “. . . dass Gottes ‘Dauer’ nicht Unzeit, sondern eine ihm eigene Über-Zeit ist, wird vor allem daran ersichtlich, dass zwischen der ‘Zeit’ Gottes und der Weltzeit die Zeit Christi vermittelt: die Weltzeit in sich zusammenfassend, aber auch die Über-Zeit Gottes offenbarend.

Relegating Jesus' sacred time to his human nature and excluding it from a revelation of the triune life would be an unjustifiable division of the Person of Jesus into his two natures.⁴⁹ Rather, this salvific-historical time in the Gospel of John points to Jesus' relationship with the Father. Balthasar sees an even stronger basis for this kind of exegesis in the sending of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.⁵⁰

Thus, the role of philosophical negative theology is acknowledged in the negation of purely worldly time. However, Christ moved in a special time distinct from this purely creaturely time. We cannot negate this from the immanent Trinity based on a previous notion of the nature of eternity, since this would bypass the economic Trinity that provides the only access to the immanent Trinity. A Boethian notion of eternity would involve the importation of a non-biblical analogy and ignore analogies that the Bible itself presents, a method which does not adequately recognize Christ as the exemplar for all of creation. Only the revelation of Christ can ultimately enlighten the mind sufficiently as it strives to recognize the true nature of eternity.

Suffering Divine Love

The main exposition of Balthasar's controversial divine attributes is found in the fifth volume of *Theodrama* (volume four in the German). Early on in the work, he summarizes the difficult paradox that he maintains:

We must resolve to see these two apparently contradictory concepts as a unity: eternal or absolute Being—and “happening.” This “happening” is not a becoming in the earthly sense: it is the coming-to-be, not of something that once was not (that would be Arianism), but, evidently, of something that grounds the idea, the inner possibility and reality of a becoming. All earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal “happening” in God, which, we repeat, is per se identical with the eternal Being or essence.⁵¹

Die Zeit Jesu hat, gerade by Johannes, eine Art innere Periodik, die gewiss zunächst von der Menschenzeit, an der Jesus teilnimmt, tingiert wird, aber in sich selbst durch seine Beziehung zum Vater, also trinitarisch, relevant wird”).

⁴⁹ *Theologik* II, 117.

⁵⁰ *Theodrama* V, 31–32 (*Theodramatik* IV, 25–26).

⁵¹ *Theodrama* V, 67 (*Theodramatik* IV, 59: “. . . wir müssen uns entschliessen, diese beiden scheinbar unvereinbaren Begriffe zusammenzusehen: ewiges oder absolutes Sein—und Geschehen. Ein Geschehen, das also kein Werden im innerweltlichen Sinn ist, kein Entstehen dessen, was irgendwann nicht war (das wäre Arianismus), aber offenbar doch etwas, was die Idee, die innere Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit eines Werdens fundiert. Innerweltliches Werden ist ein Abbild des ewigen Geschehens in Gott, das als solches—man muss das wiederholen—identisch ist mit dem ewigen Sein oder Wesen”).

While Balthasar affirms the immutability of God, he also sees becoming as analogous to the divine nature. And yet, God is the eternal, fully actual Absolute. "And since God is immutable, the vitality of his 'becoming' can never be anything other than his Being. . . ." ⁵² Balthasar assents to the language of God's pure and infinite actuality in this and many other passages: "The eternal life that is God . . . cannot be described as a becoming. . . ." ⁵³ Here we see the negation of attributes like *created* and becoming, suffering, and finitude, since immutability refers to the claim that God is *not* changing, and infinity points out that God is *not* finite.

Turning to the way of affirmation, Balthasar posits a kind of death on the part of the Father in generating the Son:

In giving of himself, the Father does not give something (or even everything) that he *has* but all that he *is*—for in God there is only being, not having. So the Father's being passes over, without remainder, to the begotten Son. . . . This total self-giving, to which the Son and the Spirit respond by an equal self-giving, is a kind of "death," a first, radical "kenosis," as one might say. It is a kind of "super-death" that is a component of all love and that forms the basis in creation for all instances of "the good death," from self-forgetfulness in favor of the beloved right up to that highest love by which a man "gives his life for his friends." ⁵⁴

This explains how suffering can be possible in creation. Balthasar is operating on the premise that creaturely limitation must have its foundation in God. ⁵⁵ He posits an "infinite distance" between the Father and the Son as the ground for the possibility of creation, a distance that also allows for the possibility for sin. Searching for the source of suffering, he finds it in God's own self. The suffering of the Father is the foundation for every "good death" in creation, that is, every death for the sake of love, every self-denial for the sake of the other.

⁵² *Theodrama* V, 512 (*Theodramatik* IV, 468: "Auch weil Gott unveränderlich ist, kann die Lebendigkeit seines 'Werdens' nie etwas anderes sein als sein Sein . . .").

⁵³ *Theodrama* V, 77 (*Theodramatik* IV, p/ 67: "Das ewige Leben, das Gott ist . . . kann keinesfalls als ein Werden bezeichnet werden . . .").

⁵⁴ *Theodrama* V, 84 (*Theodramatik* IV, 73–74: "Die Selbstpreisgabe des Vaters, der nicht nur etwas oder alles von dem gibt, was er hat, sondern alles, was er ist (in Gott ist nur Sein und kein Haben), geht restlos auf den erzeugten Sohn hin . . . diese totale Selbstpreisgabe, die der Sohn und der Geist antwortend mitvollziehen werden, bedeutet so etwas wie einen 'Tod,' eine erste radikale 'Kenose,' wenn man will: ein Über-Tod, der als Moment in jeder Liebe liegt und innerhalb der Schöpfung alles grundlegen wird, was in ihr guter Tod sein wird: vom Sichvergessen für den Geliebten bis zu jener höchsten Liebe, die ihr 'Leben hingibt für ihre Freunde'").

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; see *Theologik* II, 78.

This text also gives us a glimpse of Balthasar's a priori understanding of love: "a kind of 'super-death' that is a component of all love. . . ." Suffering is that which every lover is willing to undergo for the beloved, the ultimate sign of love. We pointed out how Balthasar's interpretation of human love relationships influenced his view of eternity. Another side of this interpretation of the nature of human love leads him to posit suffering in God. The Father's suffering is a kind of total self-emptying of his own self into the Son, a giving of his whole divine essence to another. This suffering is appropriately predicated of the Father because of the nature of love, which must be in the divine Persons most of all.

Balthasar backs up this radical notion of divine suffering with a number of authorities. First, God is described as crying, complaining, in pain, and in sorrow over eighty times in the Old Testament, far outnumbering the statements about God's immutability in the old covenant.⁵⁶ Second, passages about God's compassion and mercy like John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 ought to be taken seriously, and ought to be seen as standing behind that of the earthly Jesus, meaning they should not be restricted to Jesus' humanity. The economic revelation of the Trinity seems to demand some kind of suffering in God.⁵⁷ Third, a number of Church Fathers, including Tertullian, Cyril of Alexandria, and Origen posited affects or suffering in God.⁵⁸ Thomas G. Weinandy has also recently pointed out the place of divine suffering in patristic thought, especially in Origen.⁵⁹ This suffering cannot be externally imposed on God, as it cannot occur without the assent of the divine will. God chooses to be affected by suffering in creation out of his love for all beings. Fourth, Balthasar approaches suffering as a kind of perfection based on the mystical visions of Speyr, who reported mystical experiences of divine suffering. Her writings become a support for Balthasar's unique approach to the economic Trinity as revelatory of the immanent Trinity: "In the Christian context, sacrifice, suffering, the Cross and death are only the reflection of tremendous realities in the Father, in heaven, in eternal life."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Theodrama* V, 214–15 (*Theodramatik* IV, 193).

⁵⁷ Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom*, 169; O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God*, 38.

⁵⁸ *Theodrama* V, 217–221 (*Theodramatik* IV, 195–99); see Krenski, *Passio Caritatis*, 62–70.

⁵⁹ Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, Cap., *Does God Suffer?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 97–102.

⁶⁰ *Theodrama* V, 511 (*Theodramatik* IV, 467: "'Opfer, Leiden, Kreuz und Tod sind christlich betrachtet nur die Widerspiegelung von gewaltigen Wirklichkeiten im Vater, im Himmel, im ewigen Leben . . .'").

But is the attribution of suffering to God simply metaphorical language used to bring out the intensity of divine love? Such is the interpretation of Gerard O'Hanlon and Thomas Dalzell.⁶¹ But Balthasar himself does not describe God's suffering as metaphorical. "So we can say that, if human love is enlivened by the element of surprise, something analogous to it cannot be excluded from divine love. It is as if the Son born of the Father 'from the outset surpasses the Father's wildest expectations.'" ⁶² The language of divine surprise is much more than an attempt to describe the utter fullness of God's love without predicating some kind of actual surprise in God. It seems that something analogous to surprise as experienced in this world is also found in God.

Still, could Balthasar not be using the term "analogous" in a very loose way here? Balthasar's poetic and dialectical rhetoric often make it difficult to grasp what he is trying to say. However, his *Theologik* II includes a fascinating passage on the nature of the revelation of Christ and its relationship to metaphor.

It was already mentioned that all three spheres are claimed for the Word revealing itself as flesh: it is the "expression" of God (Heb 1:3), the "image" of the invisible God (Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4) and the "Word" of God (Jn 1, 1:14, Rev 19:13). Here there is no hierarchy anymore, rather the three descriptions are equal, stand next to one another and are even in one another. Everything in the Word made flesh is an expression of the Father in the Holy Spirit. . . .⁶³

Balthasar then turns to the work of E. Jüngel on metaphor, which is here taken in the Aristotelian sense of "translation into another form of speech."⁶⁴ Balthasar refuses to attribute such metaphor to the revelation of Christ, countering that grace gives the believer the light "to go beyond the boundaries of the metaphorical image to an understanding of the

⁶¹ O'Hanlon, *Immutability of God*, 141–43; Dalzell, *Dramatic Encounter*, 169–71.

⁶² *Theodrama* V, 79, quoting Speyr (*Theodramatik* IV, 69: "Darum ist ein Analogon zu dem, was in menschlicher Liebe das belebende Moment der Überraschung ist, aus der göttlichen nicht auszuschliessen. Der aus dem Vater geborene Sohn übertrifft gleichsam 'die kühnsten Erwartungen des Vaters von vornherein'").

⁶³ *Theologik* II, 246: "Doch wurde schon angemerkt, dass für das als Fleisch sich offenbarende Wort alle drei Sphären in Anspruch genommen werden: es ist 'Ausdruck' Gottes (Heb 1:3), 'Bild' des unsichtbaren Gottes (Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4) und 'Wort' Gottes (Jn 1, 1:14, Rev 19:13). Hier herrscht keine Stufung mehr, vielmehr stehen die drei Bezeichnungen ebenbürtig neben—ja ineinander. Alles am fleischgewordenen Wort ist Ausdruck des Vaters im Heiligen Geist. . . ."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 249: "Übersetzung in eine andere Sprachform."

primordial meaning.”⁶⁵ He concludes that “to describe language in this context as metaphor at all means to drop out of the realm opened up by God’s revelation. The creaturely images . . . become transparent and included in the sacrificial love of God.”⁶⁶ The grace of Christ elevates the earthly language of the God-man, language that includes “expression,” “image,” and “word,” to the divine. Thus, to interpret Christ’s revelations of divine time, suffering, faith, and surprise as metaphorical would be to veil what Christ himself never veiled, to close the curtain of “likenesses” that the disciples finally overcame in the Last Supper discourse of John.⁶⁷ Instead, the divine modalities of expectation and fulfillment, of letting the other be, of faith and hope, of surprise, time and space, are “positive features of the eternal, free, animated life of the Trinity.”⁶⁸

That Balthasar posits suffering as a properly analogous divine attribute is an interpretation held by Rudolf Krenski, Margaret Turek, and Anne Hunt. Krenski understands Balthasar to predicate suffering of God, pointing to a *similitudo* within a greater *dissimilitudo*, so that there is an identity of the suffering revealed in Christ and the suffering of God, although the latter’s is dissimilar because it is a freely accepted *passio*.⁶⁹ Turek sees the predication of self-yielding surrender, weakness, dependency, and expectancy as perfections included in the Father’s infinite freedom.⁷⁰ Hunt refers to Balthasar’s analogies from the paschal mystery to the immanent Trinity as “not just metaphor but analogy properly speaking.”⁷¹

Balthasar certainly realized the immense tension that his thought introduces into theology’s image of God. Applying this new notion of eternity as time-fullness, he states, “There is a primal beginning in which the Father is ‘alone,’ even if he was never without the Son, for

⁶⁵ Ibid.: “um das Gleichnisbild über seine Grenzen hinaus zu seinem urbildlichen Sinn hin zu verstehen.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 250: “in diesem Rahmen Sprache überhaupt als Metapher zu bezeichnen, fällt aus dem in Gottes Offenbarung eröffneten Kreis. Die geschöpflichen Bilder . . . werden in die Sprache der sich entäussernden Liebe Gottes durchsichtig und darin einbezogen.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Theodrama* V, 98 (*Theodramatik* IV, 86: “. . . lauter Positivitäten der ewigen freien Lebendigkeit in der Trinität.”).

⁶⁹ Krenski, *Passio Caritatis*, 362–70. See Schenk, “Ist die Rede vom leidenden Gott theologisch zu vermeiden?” 235–36.

⁷⁰ Margaret M. Turek, “‘As the Father has Loved Me’ (Jn 15:9): Balthasar’s Theodramatic Approach to a Theology of God the Father,” *Communio* 26 (1999): 300–304.

⁷¹ Anne Hunt, “Psychological Analogy and Paschal Mystery in Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 215.

ultimately it is he, unique and alone, who begets the Son.”⁷² The Father somehow sacrifices his solitude to generate the Son, even though the divine Persons must be co-eternal, since their divinity requires their eternity. Balthasar himself describes “emotions” as actually existing in the divinity:

Furthermore, such forms of the eternal life as mercy, patience, and so on, can be understood on the analogy of human emotions, but this must not involve attributing “mutability” to God . . . the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, look *through* this attitude and discern beyond a quality of the Divinity as such.⁷³

Balthasar also presents a kind of divine generation, in which, although the Son proceeds from the Father, the Father has no assurances of the Son's response to him:

There are no in-built securities or guarantees in the absolute self-giving of the Father to Son, of Son to Father, and of both to the Spirit. Humanly speaking, it is a total surrender of all possessions, including Godhead. From the giver's point of view, therefore, it could appear to be an absolute “risk. . . .”⁷⁴

The Father makes a certain wager in generating the Son, “hoping” that the Son will assent to the will of the Father. The Father somehow does not know what the Son will do; he is filled with expectation; he waits for a response of obedience. This anxious “waiting” of the Father will become one of the bases for divine love. It is one instance of the Father's suffering, the willingness to be rejected by his own Son, the “decision” to give up his solitude in favor of *communio*. And yet Balthasar admits that the divine processions are not a matter of the Father's decision, but consequent upon

⁷² *Theodrama* V, 94, quoting Speyr (*Theodramatik* IV, 82: “‘Es gibt einen Uranfang, in welchem der Vater ‘allein’ ist, auch wenn er nie ohne den Sohn war, denn schliesslich ist er es, der den Sohn zeugt, in seiner Einzigkeit und Alleinheit’”).

⁷³ *Theodrama* V, 222 (*Theodramatik* IV, 200: “Ferner können, ja müssen Formen der ewigen göttlichen Lebendigkeit (wie Erbarmen, Gedult, usf.) in Analogie zu menschlichen Affekten verstanden werden, ohne dass dadurch ‘Veränderlichkeit’ in Gott einzuzeichnen wäre . . . die Bibel Alten und Neuen Bundes blickt zweifellos durch seine ökonomische Haltung *hindurch* auf eine Eigenschaft der Gottheit an sich selbst.”).

⁷⁴ *Theodrama* V, 245 (*Theodramatik* IV, 221: “In der absoluten Selbsthingabe des Vaters an den Sohn, des Sohnes an den Vater, beider an den Geist sind keinerlei ‘Sicherungen’ eingebaut; es geht, menschlich gesprochen, um den restlosen Verlust des ‘ganzen Habens und Besitzens,’ die Gottheit einschliesslich, um etwas also, das vom Schenkenden her wie ein absolutes ‘Wagnis’ erscheinen könnte . . .”).

the very nature of the Godhead.⁷⁵ He thereby negates any creaturely wager of God, since the Father did not choose to take a chance and generate the Son rather than to remain alone. Nevertheless, an eminent wager remains, one that is beyond our comprehension.

Still, the divine Persons are co-eternal. How then can the Father be said to be “waiting” for the Son’s response? Furthermore, how could it even be possible that one divine Person reject another? This paradox may seem to pose a contradiction. But for Balthasar, such an approach is needed in order to acknowledge the divine freedom of each person of the Trinity:

In begetting the Son, the Father does not determine him; rather “he endows him with freedom to explore the infinite realm of his own free Sonship, of his own divine sovereignty.” Accordingly, it is the Father’s will to be “outstripped, for all eternity, by the Son’s love. Faith is, as it were, the space that must be opened up so that there is room for infinite fulfillment, beyond the limits of all expectation.” “Faith is constant readiness, the basis of all love.”⁷⁶

What is the economic basis for the predication of this kind of freedom in the Godhead? First, the incarnated Son of God displayed an assent to the Father’s will, one that did not come automatically and seems, following the Johannine narrative, to not have been fully desired at first. Jesus Christ’s decision to be obedient to the Father mirrors a divine reality.⁷⁷ Balthasar is applying the principle that Christ reveals not his own divinity but his relationship to the Father, which he can do because Christ “is the *revelation of the Trinity* . . . ‘he lives in a fully Trinitarian way yet is a man among men.’”⁷⁸ The last two citations from *Theodrama V* also include Speyr’s exegesis of the New Testament several times: Balthasar consistently gives Speyr’s mystical understanding of the New Testament a great deal of authority. Finally, we can recognize Balthasar’s adoption of themes from dialogical philosophy, where the perfection of love and *communio* involves letting the other be other.

⁷⁵ *Theodrama V*, 88 (*Theodramatik IV*, 77).

⁷⁶ *Theodrama V*, 98 (*Theodramatik IV*, 86: “Der Vater legt den Sohn in der Zeugung nicht fest, ‘er lässt ihn vielmehr frei in den unendlichen Raum seiner eigenen sohnhaften Freiheit, seiner eigenen göttlichen Souveränität,’ deshalb will sich der Vater ‘in alle Ewigkeit von der Liebe des Sohnes übertreffen lassen. Der Glaube ist wie der Raum, der geöffnet werden muss, damit Platz für unendliche Erfüllungen über alle begrenzte Erwartung hinaus geschaffen wird.’ ‘Glaube ist die stete Bereitschaft, und so die Basis aller Liebe’”).

⁷⁷ *Theodrama V*, 123 (*Theodramatik IV*, 106).

⁷⁸ *Theodrama V*, 121 (*Theodramatik IV*, 104: “Der Sohn ist *trinitarische Offenbarung* . . . ‘er lebt vollkommen trinitarisch, obwohl er Mensch unter Menschen wird’”).

Thus the Father who gives the Son divine freedom, a freedom that integrates every perfection found in human freedom, must respect the autonomy of the Son, letting the Son be God in his way, giving him "room" to maneuver, the "space" to respond to the Father's outpouring of himself. Thus the Father has faith that the Son will respond with obedience, which he does. The Father is overwhelmed by the immensity of the Son's response, the Son's thankfulness for being generated and adoration of the Father's greatness: "Again and again, the Father and the Son are more in their mutual relationship than they themselves would have supposed."⁷⁹ The absolute negation of such freedom, faith, and surprise from God in philosophical negative theology is thus overcome by a reverent obedience to the revelation of Christ interpreted through mystical experience and dialogical philosophy. The content of nature expounded by philosophy not yet purified by the obedience of faith is radically transformed.

Let us now step back and consider the overall Trinitarian analogy at work in Balthasar's thought. This can only be approached through his critique of the Augustinian Trinitarian analogy and his adoption of the analogy of the family for the triune life. Balthasar maintains that St. Augustine's analogies of *mens*, *notitia*, *amor*, and *memoria*, *intellectus*, *voluntas* are inadequate. The former remains accidental in relation to the substance, since each particular act of knowing and loving is non-substantial for the human person. The latter never moves beyond one person, as they represent the faculties of one soul.⁸⁰ Here Balthasar points to Augustine's emphasis on the unity of essence achieved through his analogies, one that seems to leave an inadequate representation of the three persons. Balthasar's objection reminds us of the inherent weakness of every Trinitarian analogy. Either the unity of the divine essence is emphasized at the expense of the plurality of persons or vice versa.

Balthasar puts a much greater emphasis on the distinction of persons, due to (1) his understanding of Jesus Christ as the concrete *analogia entis* who reveals not so much his own divinity but his relationship to the Father, which manifests a Trinity that dialogues as the incarnate Jesus dialogues with the Father; (2) the Trinitarian visions of Speyr; and (3) his adoption of the theme of personhood as intrinsically dialogical from philosophers like Martin Buber. Following an exposition of the dialogical philosophers Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Ferdinand Ebner, Balthasar compares the Augustinian analogy to the analogy of the family, which is "the simple but necessary supplement of the previously described dialogic,

⁷⁹ *Theodrama* V, 515, quoting Speyr (*Theodramatik* IV, 471: "... 'immer wieder sind sich Vater und Sohn gegenseitig mehr als sie selber vermutet hatten'").

⁸⁰ *Theologik* II, 35–37.

and remains despite its clear differences the best imago Trinitatis given to creation. It overcomes the enclosure of self that is found in the Augustinian concepts. . . .”⁸¹ Not only does the analogy of the family avoid the isolated individualism of Augustine’s approach, but the latter’s analogy is not found in Scripture, and so should only be adopted with extreme care, since theology should always remain close to Scripture.⁸² Balthasar’s enthusiasm for this interpersonal analogy does not stop him from offering a critique of Richard of St. Victor’s intrasubjective Trinitarian analogy. Still, Balthasar’s own understanding of God seems to be much closer to Richard’s than to Augustine’s. As Matthew Levering has pointed out, Balthasar’s difficulty with Richard’s approach is caused not so much by the latter’s use of an analogy from three human persons but rather by Richard’s failure to ground this analogy in salvation history.⁸³

So Balthasar’s preferred model for triune love is that of interpersonal human love. Whereas Augustine spoke of mind loving its knowledge, Balthasar insists on an analogy of love between one human person and another, the love of parents for their child. Using this model, Balthasar presents joy and wonder as part of the mutual love of the divine Persons:

Above all we must fend off the “all-knowing” attitude . . . this eviscerates the joys of expectation, of hope and fulfillment, the joys of giving and receiving, and the even deeper joys of finding oneself in the other and of being constantly over-fulfilled by him; and finally—since we are speaking of God—it destroys the possibility of mutual acknowledgment and adoration in the Godhead. . . . [W]e cannot say that a particular hypostasis is rich in possessing and poor in giving away, for the fullness of blessedness lies in both giving and receiving both the gift and the giver. Since these acts are eternal, there is no end to their newness, no end to being surprised and overwhelmed by what is essentially immeasurable. The fundamental philosophical act, wonder, need not be banished from the realm of the Absolute.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid., 56: “die einfache aber notwendige Ergänzung der vorher geschilderten Dialogik, bleibt trotz allen klaren Verschiedenheiten die sprechendste dem Geschöpf eingestiftete imago Trinitatis. Sie übersteigt nicht nur die Ichgeschlossenheit des augustinischen Konzepts. . . .”

⁸² *Theodrama* III, 508 (*Theodramatik* II.2, 466).

⁸³ Levering, “Balthasar on Christ’s Consciousness on the Cross,” 569–70.

⁸⁴ *Theodrama* II, 257–58 (*Theodramatik* II.1, 233–34: “Vor allem ist daraus jedes für Menschen tödliche ‘Je-schon-Wissen’ . . . fernzuhalten, womit die Freuden des Erwartens, des Erhoffens und Erfüllens, die Freuden des Von-einander-Empfangens, tiefer noch die Freuden des sich im Andern immer neu Findens, des steten übertrreffenden Erfülltwerdens durch ihn, schliesslich—da wir von Gott sprechen—der gegenseitigen Anerkenntnis und Anbetung des Gottseins verunmöglicht

This kind of divine love is made possible by Balthasar's understanding of eternity and his refusal to fully negate attributes found in creation that seem to be intrinsically tied to limitations or temporality. A contradiction is avoided as long as these new divine characteristics of surprise and joy are posited as perfections within a dialectical theology, as part of God's infinite actuality. The human experience of intense interpersonal love, one that overwhelms the lover with the goodness and mutual love of the other, becomes a divine perfection.

But how can the Father be surprised by the Son, rejoicing in the unexpected love of the Son for the Father, and vice versa? Balthasar answers that Divine surprise occurs through one person seeing a new side of the other. Citing Speyr, he states: "It is characteristic of 'genuine love' that it 'cannot tire of looking at the beloved. . . . Thus the Son, in the Father's presence, is for ever beholding him in a new way. . . .'"⁸⁵ But how can one person see a "new side" of the other if each is eternally and infinitely in act? Because each person keeps a mystery about himself from the other: "[T]he partners are perfectly transparent to one another, and they possess a kind of impenetrable 'personal' mystery."⁸⁶ One can see Balthasar's dialectic at work in this last passage. In order to retain continuity with the theological tradition of the Fathers and the Scholastics, as well as the doctrine demanded by the ecumenical councils, he has to posit the absolute omniscience of each divine Person to protect the divinity of each. Thus, creaturely surprise must be negated. Yet his interpretation of Scripture through the lens of the concrete *analogia entis*, the mystical experience of Speyr, and dialogical philosophy lead him to posit an apparent contradiction: Divine Persons who always fully know one another and yet keep a secret to themselves in order to reveal it to the other, resulting in the surprise and joy of the other. This surprise includes the Son's "decision" to answer the Father's incredible gift of self with thanksgiving.⁸⁷ The

würden . . . man kann nicht sagen, eine Hypostase sei reich als Besitzende und arm als Verschenkende, denn erst im Geben wie auch im Entgegennehmen des Geschenkten und Schenkenden liegt die Fülle der Seligkeit. Da diese Akte ewig sind, ist das Neuseins, des Überrascht- und Über-wältigtwerdens durch das Masslose kein Ende. Der philosophische Grundakt des Staunens braucht aus dem Absoluten nicht verbannt zu werden").

⁸⁵ *Theodrama* V, 79 (*Theodramatik* IV, 68: "Es gehört zur 'echten Liebe,' 'sich am Geliebten nicht sattsehen zu können . . . Wenn der Sohn, vor dem Vater stehend, ihn doch immer wieder neu sieht . . .')."

⁸⁶ *Theodrama* II, 258 (*Theodramatik* II.1, 234: "... liegt in diesem göttlichen Austausch oder Gespräch immer beides: voll-kommene Durchsichtigkeit füreinander und dennoch so etwas wie ein unlüftbares 'personales' Geheimnis").

⁸⁷ *Theodrama* V, 508–9 (*Theodramatik* IV, 465).

Son is so filled with this gratefulness that he wants to be able to give the Father something “of his own.” Returning the love that springs from the divine essence would be to return what was given. So the Son becomes incarnate, in fact: “‘He must do this so that he can possess something, so that he can have something to give away,’”⁸⁸ that he might “prove” his love for the Father. So he “gives up” his divinity and becomes man, in order to present a new gift to the Father, one not already in the divine essence.⁸⁹ And yet, despite the expectation and surprise present in the relationship of the divine Persons, the now of fulfilled expectation already *is*, eternally: “What is ‘now’ always was, and it is so full that it is unsurpassable . . . in such a way that expectation and fulfillment exactly coincide.”⁹⁰ This is the paradox of an eternally fulfilled expectation, joined to a kind of faith that the Son will respond to the Father’s self-emptying with love.

The themes of suffering love, faith, and surprise all reveal Balthasar’s understanding of receptivity as a perfection, and here we mean a receptivity that includes far more than just the fact that the Son’s being is from another. By attributing suffering to the Father, an event mirrored in the Jesus’ abandonment on the Cross, Balthasar appears to posit the ability to be negatively affected by another as a divine perfection. The Father takes a risk in generating the Son, giving up his solitude. He gives the Son true divine sovereignty, which apparently does not involve the Son’s necessary assent to the Father’s will. Thus, the Father must be open to receive rejection. But the Father has faith that the Son will say yes to him, and the reception of this assent is also a perfection. Finally, the surprise involved in divine love means that each person must be open to receive a new insight into the other person, open to receive an unexpected love that overwhelms every expectation.

Balthasar emphasizes the perfection of this receptivity for a new love:

[C]onceiving and letting be are just as essential as giving. In fact, without this receptive letting be . . . the giving itself is impossible. . . . Hence there is “no less love in receiving than in giving. Perhaps there is even more, since what is received and conceived is divine.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Theodrama* V, 516, quoting Speyr (*Theodramatik* IV, 472: “. . . ‘er muss es tun, um etwas zu besitzen, was er verschenken kann . . .’”).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Theodrama* V, 126, quoting Speyr (*Theodramatik* IV, 109: “Das Jetzt war immer schon da, und es ist so voll, dass es uneinholbar ist . . . so, dass Erwartung und Erfüllung übereinfallen’ wobei die zukommende Erfüllung die Erwartung je übererfüllt”).

⁹¹ *Theodrama* V, 86–87, quoting Speyr (*Theodrama* IV, 75–77: “Das Empfangen und Geschehenlassen ist für den Begriff der absoluten Liebe ebenso wesentlich

Balthasar finds this complementary activity and receptivity in the Trinity, one that includes the reception of a love from the other which is somehow greater than expected. This receptivity includes a kind of new knowledge that one divine person shares with another, one that propels God's love to new heights. The Son's self-revelation of a mysterious side of himself to the Father is received with joy and surprise, spurring the Father on to a greater love for the Son, who is filled with wonder and awe. Balthasar sees this kind of dialogical receptivity as analogous to the reception of new knowledge and love which is a necessary element of any fruitful interpersonal love relationship on the human level. But all of these divine attributes are predicated in an eminent way, following the way of negation that excludes all strictly creaturely receptivity, surprise, and potentiality.

Review

Balthasar's method of divine naming can be summarized thus. First, philosophy is indispensable, yet it must be elevated and perhaps radically transformed by grace. Second, negative theology is also necessary, but a philosophical negative theology cannot be allowed to exclude certain characteristics from the process of divine naming, if supernatural revelation points in another direction. This naturally leads to the third point, that only the revelation of Christ can determine the true nature of potentiality and finitude. Fourth, the economic Trinity must be the basis for any description of the immanent Trinity, and so one must look to Christ as the revealer of his relationship to the Father. Fifth, an understanding of true love as *communio*, as letting the other be, giving the other freedom, a doctrine of love inspired by dialogical philosophy and the visions of Speyr, is a hermeneutical key in the approach to supernatural revelation. The Trinitarian analogy of the family is closely connected to this. The first two steps take away the restriction on the predication of suffering and the related attributes we have discussed. Christ is the one standard for all analogies and doctrines of analogy. He reveals his relationship to the Father. However, this revelation must be interpreted, which is where the influence of dialogical philosophy and the mysticism of Speyr come in. Thus suffering, time, surprise, and other attributes are recognized as analogous perfections. Their creaturely modalities are negated of God, followed by the attribution of "super-death," "super-time," and so on. The eminent way in which suffering, sacrifice, and other attributes are present in God is beyond our comprehension, yet we must,

wie das Geben, das ohne das empfangende Geschehenlassen . . . gar nicht zu geben vermöchte. . . . Also liegt 'nicht weniger Liebe im Nehmen als im Geben. Vielleicht sogar mehr, weil das Empfangene göttlich ist'").

in obedience to divine revelation, maintain that these are perfections that are really and analogously present in the being and life of the Trinity.

Critique

We will conclude with a threefold critique of Balthasar's approach to divine naming, regarding his notions of (1) Christ as the concrete *analogia entis* which is the standard for every other analogy, (2) Christ as revealing his relationship to the Father, and (3) modes of potentiality such as surprise and suffering as perfections.

The teaching that Christ is the concrete *analogia entis* could be interpreted in a way to which every Christian would be forced to assent; for example, in the sense that reason must be obedient to faith, so that every philosophical analogy owes a certain obedience to supernaturally revealed analogies. The understanding of the content of supernatural revelation, however, itself requires reason and philosophical analogies. We must bring a philosophical understanding of humanity to the revelation of Christ, and while this understanding must be perfected by grace, it must include true philosophical insights into human nature. We cannot say what is creaturely and what is divine if we refuse to distinguish the content of the revelation of Christ and the humanity of Christ. Without a philosophical *analogia entis* that plays a determining role in the interpretation of revelation, the image and the original would fuse into one, and we would have no way of distinguishing the two. The very notion of Christ's humanity presumes a pretheological understanding of what humanity is, which would have to include certain attributes, some of which would be recognized as perfections, others as limitations. Jesus himself did not teach us in his earthly life how to distinguish between the manifestation of his humanity as humanity and the manifestation of his humanity as a revelation of God and the divine perfections. Rather, he presumed knowledge gained from the created order, an order that was instituted through the eternal Logos himself.

Balthasar seems to have sensed the problem we have mentioned, admitting that Jesus cannot simply represent his own divinity, as this would involve a mono-physite heresy. The solution for Balthasar is to approach Jesus as manifesting his relationship with the Father, one that Christ transposes into the creaturely-temporal. The problem is that Jesus has a twofold relationship with the Father: as man and as the eternal Son of God. Hence, Jesus' relationship with the Father as the Son of God can only be understood if Jesus is manifesting his divinity. Balthasar gives priority to the manifestation of the relationship to the Father over the manifestation of Christ's own divinity. But the two are inseparable. Balthasar, in fact, recog-

nized the need to distinguish the two natures of Christ. Can this be done, however, without an *analogia entis* that is brought to the reception of revelation, an analogy that enables the believer to distinguish the creaturely from the divine, the limited as limited and the limited as imperfect perfection? It seems that instead of turning to an *analogia entis* which is not already radically transformed by the *analogia fidei* though not disobedient to it, an *analogia entis* that both shapes the *analogia fidei* and is shaped by it, Balthasar turns to Christ as manifesting his filial relationship. Unfortunately, the problem of distinguishing perfections from limitations remains, and we are still without a sufficient hermeneutical principle to recognize these. Jesus' relationship to the Father in his divinity is distinct from his relationship to the Father in his humanity (Jn 10,30: "The Father and I are one"; Jn 14,28: "The Father is greater than I"). Can this distinction be recognized without letting the *analogia entis* play a greater role in the understanding of revelation?

The third critique concerns Balthasar's transformation of attributes (like suffering) into analogous divine perfections, attributes that are experienced in this life as potentialities. He states that potentiality in creation can be something highly positive, and that there is a vibrant becoming in God that is nothing but being.⁹² Here, potency and becoming are treated as positives and partial perfections either because they already include actuality in some way or because potency as such and becoming as such are now seen as perfections. In the former case, we are simply extracting actuality from mixed potency and becoming, so that calling potency and becoming perfections is a kind of equivocation, since we are not really predicating perfection of potency as such but of the actual element of partially actualized potencies. But in the first of the *Theodrama* passages just cited, Balthasar suggests that he is also thinking of the latter case, of passive potency as perfection. This would mean that potency as such is act as such, and becoming as such is being as such. If this is so, then has the order of creation not been reduced to the order of grace?⁹³ Is theology still using philosophical concepts and categories, or is it creating its own?⁹⁴

These questions are of the utmost importance. The intelligibility of Christian revelation is at stake.

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⁹² *Theodrama* V, 90, 512 (*Theodramatik* IV, 79, 468).

⁹³ *Theology of Karl Barth*, 126.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

