

A Theological Aesthetic of Memory: Blondel, Newman, and Balthasar

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JORGE LOUIS BORGES'S MAN who can remember everything is "monstrous," rather than wondrous. The man himself in fact feels no wonder at all.¹ This is because memory is more than the mere notation of events, more than a mental etching of a period in time. It is far more active and alive, far more meaningful. Similarly, if sacred tradition is in some way the Church's memory of Christ, and if it is also in some way the Church's memory of its own past, then we are compelled to ask how this is so. We must ask how it is living and meaningful, how it is more than an etching.

This article is at once an excavation and an argument. In order to make the claims about tradition that I do, my argument appeals to resources that Hans Urs von Balthasar himself used in his "theological aesthetics" and elsewhere. Yet the purpose of such excavation is focused not on Balthasar, but on the problem of tradition. This is an article that makes an argument about the fundamental dynamics of sacred tradition. That is to say, this is an article on those founding principles that allow tradition to *be*, to exist. Tradition is, I argue, a kind of *remembering*. Further, I argue that the form that this remembering takes is coherently plural, at once many-faceted yet singular, a characteristic that I call *symphonic remembering*.

¹ See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 413. The story itself comes from Borges's *Funes el memorioso*, first published in 1942.

In order to make my argument, I move upward from tradition in human experience into increasingly “heightened” synthetic concepts. This concession of method follows Balthasar’s own in *Glory of the Lord*, which begins with “The Subjective Evidence” and only later seeks the objective.² I begin, then, with a detailed study of human action from Maurice Blondel, followed by his reflections on tradition. Blondel argues convincingly that human action is both historical and metaphysical, and based on this, he successfully shows us how tradition mediates history and truth to one another on the plane of human experience. From here, Blondel needs several clarifications, and John Henry Newman serves as the central explanatory figure. Blondel is, for his part, unclear about what role history plays in ideas, and Newman’s theory of the development of doctrine proves indispensable. Finally, I reflect on tradition as “memory” using several sources, chief among them Balthasar’s sense of tradition, memory, and their role in theology. “Remembering” and human consciousness are, on his view, strong analogies for tradition, but not without weaknesses. The final movement (of the symphony) strives to integrate the various themes of the article with a fully theological aesthetic consideration of time, a consideration of time as “music” that is open to the eternity that it itself is not. The total argument is Balthasarian in its essential polarity, like a compass set to follow the fundamental direction of Balthasar’s thought. It is at the same time a movement apart from him, an attempt to move theological aesthetics forward, asking questions and using sources that Balthasar himself did not.

Maurice Blondel

Human Action

Blondel’s first and most lasting major work was *L’Action* (1893), which he presents as a study of the “science” of human action.³ He chooses this science before all the others because we are, always and before we know it, deeply involved in action. “I am and I act, even in spite of myself,” he writes in his introduction; “I find myself bound, it seems,

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form* [hereafter, *GL I*], 2nd ed., trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).

³ Maurice Blondel, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

to answer for all that I am and do.”⁴ So, he proposes to examine every detail of human action from the ground upward, as it were, since we are always caught up in acting. Even if I am a pure determinist or nihilist, after all, I still act. Action, then, “is *the* question, the one without which there is none other.”⁵ Yet action, this elemental matter of willing and doing, is significantly more complex and elusive than it might first appear to us.

One of Blondel’s major emphases is that human action is actually a composite of forces, influences, and powers: “Life therefore is the organization of a little world that reflects the big one. . . . In the diffuse infinity of its determining conditions, what is living thus appears as a concentrated system of coordinated forces; and the infinite of its act is more interior to it than exterior.”⁶ Since the human being is a microcosm, rather than a monolithic subject, the entirety of human action, including consciousness, is equally as complex and microcosmic.⁷ We might imagine the human being of Blondel’s analysis as something of a fractal, repeating a complex pattern at every possible depth. Within this logic, there is another key point that we need to separate out and highlight: for Blondel, human action is as much, if not more so, a matter of human consciousness as it is human deed. This is the case in two respects: (1) consciousness itself is an act;⁸ (2) action is really a “body” or complex whole, a dynamism, rather than a simple reality without parts.⁹

What Blondel does here is profound, for it helps to establish how the human being is really a complex and organized gathering of more than one dynamic power at the same time. If, for example, the human body is an ordered network of cells, a circulatory system, a nervous system, and so forth, the human body is at once singular—it is one body—and yet composite. Each system is ordered toward the others, though not identically, which helps to create the whole that is the body, a whole that is made of, yet not reducible to, its parts.

⁴ Blondel, *Action*, 6.

⁵ Blondel, *Action*, 11.

⁶ Blondel, *Action*, 100.

⁷ Blondel, *Action*, 101.

⁸ Blondel, *Action*, 105.

⁹ We can see this, for example, in Blondel, *Action*, 153: “And what must be understood by *the body of action* is everything, in ourselves and outside, that still separates us from ourselves.” Or, as W.A. Scott puts the matter, “action, reflection, reaction, and further action go on in a constant process” (“The Notion of Tradition in Maurice Blondel,” *Theological Studies* 27, no. 3 [1966]: 392).

Human action is much like this for Blondel, and not only because he grasps how my body is already operating and acting *before* I intend and carry out a specific action. It is much more the case that action emerges from me in the midst of dynamisms already at work and that my consciousness itself, as dynamic, is also an act, and that my individual voluntary motions emerge both from my consciousness and from my existence as such.

I act, and I can conceive of my action in all its depths only partially. It is, after all, not as if I understand the full extent of my action even as I carry it out. So there is a kind of double mystery at work here, both in the origins of action and in its goals:

Having come from an impenetrable origin, the conceived act then crosses the illuminated field of consciousness, in order to tend toward a goal again still impenetrable. We live, it is said, only by hope; we labor only in view of the better.”¹⁰

In other words, while a single voluntary action is discrete and individual, the human reality from which it emerges is not even remotely simple. We may be accustomed to thinking of action as that which we can see, as the deed itself or simply the movement from decision to deed, but for Blondel, reducing action to this conceals how we are already in motion, how our actions continue to reverberate in us, and how our deeds arrive in the world from out of our own microcosmic worlds.

Blondel offers an account of human action that is keen to grasp its complex genius. That action is not simple will be key for us in this article. That action is instead comprised of an interlocking series of operations, some known to consciousness and others unknown, is also key. We might say that Blondel, in his own way, understands what Heidegger calls the “thrown-ness” of existence: we are already in the midst of movement as we move, whether we are making decisions or being pulled along by a tide. But Blondel is less concerned with an image of the human being as a single unit “thrown” into existence and more concerned with the human being as a composite of distinguishable yet inseparable systems.

Human willing, for Blondel, is continually transcending itself. In the first place, it emerges from a creature that comprises deter-

¹⁰ Blondel, *Action*, 114.

minate systems—even, say, my heartbeat—and yet is free.¹¹ In the second place, the will wants to see its own willing through to its completion, to its final satisfaction, which is never achieved via a single act.¹² The will arises and moves outward, as it were, and the human creature grows and changes. For the will to move to act upon something in the first place is already transcendence from its origin.¹³ Indeed, this very transcendence awakens in us a profound awareness of our limitation, since we can never seem to equal our own willing. “The will has not yet willed itself entirely,” writes Blondel.¹⁴ Or, more concretely, “before, during, after our acts, there is dependence, constraint, failure.”¹⁵ Since consciousness itself is act, there is also a yawning distance that opens up within ourselves. That is, I cannot will myself into completion, see myself to my own end, even as my willing allows for and effects my transcendence: “Yes, I have to will myself; but it is impossible to reach myself directly; from myself to myself, there is an abyss that nothing yet has been able to fill.”¹⁶

It is tempting to see the natural desire for God and the twentieth-century debates over it in what Blondel is building for us here. While it is true that he is an influence within those debates in theology, we would do well to let him stand on his own for a moment. His stance, at least here in *L'Action*, is much more minimal and apophatic.¹⁷ It is a prelude more than it is a position.¹⁸ Blondel is much more inter-

¹¹ Blondel, *Action*, 68–69.

¹² Blondel, *Action*, 191–92.

¹³ Blondel, *Action*, 123–25.

¹⁴ Blondel, *Action*, 308.

¹⁵ Blondel, *Action*, 307.

¹⁶ Blondel, *Action*, 313.

¹⁷ See Alexander Dru's and Iltyd Trethowan's "Introduction" to Blondel's "History and Dogma" (1904) in *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan, *Resourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 90–92.

¹⁸ On this point, I am in slight disagreement with Thomas Alféri, though I do not think the difference is ultimately a division. It is more a matter of different questions. Alfieri stresses the theological impetus of Blondel's work: "Effectivement, Blondel finit par considérer que, dans la vie croyante, la visée de la volonté humaine s'accomplit en faisant place à la volonté divine qui lui résiste" [Indeed, Blondel ultimately thinks that the life of faith, with respect to the human will, is achieved by making room for the divine will that resists it] ("Résistance et accomplissement de la volonté divine: une relecture de Maurice Blondel, *L'Action*," *Science et Esprit* 67, no. 2 [2015]: 256; my translation). My point is simply that it is too much of a burden on the text to read it

ested in showing us how a careful, unflinching analysis of the body of human action reveals that we are not sufficient unto ourselves. But he also wants to show us that our insufficiency presupposes and implies a sufficiency, a reality, that transcends us entirely. This reality is what Blondel calls “the one thing necessary,” “the supernatural,” “God.”¹⁹

So it is that Blondel shows us how the realm of human action is at once both historical and metaphysical. It is historical in the sense that it is highly contingent, occurs in time, and is shaped by multiple influences. It is metaphysical in the sense that its character and intelligibility are explained only by the existence of a transcendent supernatural. This means that human history, which is the history of *human action*, always necessarily refers beyond itself. Much like the distinction in German between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, there is for Blondel both the vast realm of all that human beings have done and the more constricted realm of what is written about human deeds. Such distinctions are key for us because, when we say that tradition is “historical,” we need to be clear about what we mean. We do not mean only that tradition can be interpreted by scientific history; we also mean that it is collective human action over time. So it is that a study of action is essential when we ask questions about sacred tradition. W. A. Scott summarizes such logic this way: “Tradition . . . forms itself by the use of a methodology of action. And the application of a philosophy of action to tradition can be fertile because it is always in act, always in the process of acting and reflecting on the action which has made up the history of the Church.”²⁰

Tradition

When Blondel was writing his essay “History and Dogma” in 1902, there was an intense debate in the Catholic Church over the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible. “History and Dogma” is a work on the nature of history written in the midst of a serious confrontation with it, and it is concerned with both the role of history and its boundaries in the study of Scripture. Blondel’s argument is framed according to the two “sides” of a specific biblical problem. How is the Bible true when it is also historical? One side of the conflict stresses truth apart from history (“extrinsicism”), while the

as a definitive statement on the natural and supernatural as defined by theology. He is speaking in a philosophical mode, albeit with a heart enlivened by faith.

¹⁹ See Blondel, *Action*, 314–24, for the major introduction to this framework.

²⁰ Scott, “The Notion of Tradition,” 395.

other stresses history apart from truth (“historicism”). Both poles of the debate are insufficient to the problem they address, and Blondel asks whether there may be any reconciliation or resolution to a crisis that seems to sunder the very possibility of faith.

For Blondel, the trouble with extrinsicism is not so much that it makes claims of truth as it is that it renders those claims of truth fundamentally unrelated to the human conditions in which truth is received. With extrinsicism, we emerge with a point of view in which the supernatural is a “password,”²¹ bearing a superficial relationship between sign and thing signified: neither the *words* of Scripture nor the *events* of history have supernatural meaning.²² Scripture and history are instead extrinsically laid over truth, like a thin cloth. As Blondel asks, “why bother to verify the details?” The worst result, he insists, is that extrinsicism “cannot set bounds to itself.”²³ This last claim is essential to remember because, while much more complex, historicism ends in much the same wasteland.

Historicism suffers because it wants history to do and to verify more than it is able. It is a kind of inversion of extrinsicism. In the case of historicism, human knowledge is considered a single unity, “an absolute monism,”²⁴ which means that it ends up demanding that history answer questions it is not armed to answer.²⁵ In other words, human thought and action have to answer entirely for themselves, and they cannot. Such an understanding of human activity leads to determinism: *that* something happened is taken to be its whole meaning, taken as *the* logical outcome of events.²⁶ Blondel calls this “an ontology . . . extracted from a method . . . a sort of dialectical determinism.”²⁷ In other words, in historicism, facticity *is* truth. The end result is as boundless as extrinsicism was: “Positive history is transformed into negative theology.”²⁸ History, then, usurps the role of divine truth. *That* something happened is all that could be and all that is, even with respect to God.

A couple of concerns are running underneath Blondel’s assessment of extrinsicism and historicism. If one pole is a kind of fundamental-

²¹ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 227.

²² Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 228.

²³ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 229.

²⁴ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 235.

²⁵ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 236.

²⁶ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 239–41.

²⁷ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 240.

²⁸ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 239.

ism about truth, then the other is a kind of fundamentalism about history. Blondel's problem with such thinking is first that neither can ultimately relate itself to other modes of thinking. If history or faith suffice for all knowing, then they need not make reference to any other form of understanding. Much more fundamentally for Blondel, the problem is that neither thought form (extrinsicism or historicism) is able to perceive its own limits. Each "science," as Blondel prefers to put it, depends on other sciences.²⁹

Though it seems that Blondel opposes extrinsicism and historicism in a pure dialectic, in fact they endure the same failure of absolute monism.³⁰ Both imagine reality to be single, entire, invariant, and self-sufficient. In one case, that monism is truth; in the other, that monism is history. Either perspective results in claims that can never receive restriction or differentiation, can never receive definition. The failure of both, according to Blondel, is ultimately a failure to grasp the supernatural, or more precisely, to grasp the relation between the natural and the supernatural. Here he does not mean revelation and grace, strictly speaking, but rather nature's fundamental relation to the existence of God. That is to say, the natural cannot entirely answer for itself.

Significant for our purposes is what Blondel does with his differentiated understanding of reality. Because human action is metaphysical as well as historical for Blondel, as we saw already in his analysis of human action, history plays a real but relative role in understanding it. The inverse is also true, though not in an identical way: metaphysics plays a real but relative role in understanding history.³¹ Within his variegated understanding of the real—and not otherwise—Blondel posits sacred tradition as the mediator of history and dogma. This allows him to preserve the relative independence of truth and history but also to relate them to one another. It also means that tradition is neither "nowhere" nor "somewhere" specific. Tradition is really known only through what it mediates: history and truth.

Blondel describes tradition as something other than "paper memory" (what could or will be written)³² and as something other

²⁹ Blondel, "History and Dogma," 234–35.

³⁰ This form of argument mimics Blondel's tactics in *L'Action*. For a breakdown of that logic, see César Izquierdo, "La tradición según Maurice Blondel," *Scripta Theologica* 21, no. 1 (1989): 63–96.

³¹ See also Scott, "The Notion of Tradition," 396.

³² Blondel, "History and Dogma," 266.

than “the transmission of a spoken word or of a custom.”³³ Here Blondel sidesteps arguments over *what* instruments hand on tradition and even *what* tradition hands on: there is an argument of an entirely different kind here. “Tradition’s powers of conservation,” writes Blondel, “are equaled by its powers of conquest: that it discovers and formulates truths on which the past lived.”³⁴ Indeed, tradition looks forward to the future God intends. So, tradition fundamentally spans not only time but also time as it is oriented to and animated by eternity. For Blondel, tradition is something much more like the body of the Church as it persists through history in “the unity of a consciousness which is divinely assisted.”³⁵ This makes sacred tradition at once historical, communal, and most importantly, the work of both the Spirit and human beings.³⁶ Says Blondel:

Something in the Church escapes scientific examination, and it is the Church which, without rejecting or neglecting the contributions of exegesis and of history, nevertheless controls them, because in the very tradition which constitutes her, she possesses another means of knowing her author, of participating in his life, of linking facts to dogma, and of justifying both the capital and the interest of her teaching.³⁷

With John Henry Newman in the background, Blondel presumes that doctrine can develop through the auspices of tradition. He associates tradition with the very existence of the Church, not as a thing separate. But the Church is nevertheless distinguishable from her tradition, for she can employ it as a means. Tradition has to do with human action that is metaphysical and historical, and yet it is not entirely either. It is a gift and a mediator. For Blondel, tradition is, like the Church, animated by divine life, and so is always bound to the flesh (to history, materiality) but not summarized by it. “Tradition,” César Izquierdo says of Blondel, “is not the handing on of a oral message that has not been collected in the Bible, but the living

³³ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 267.

³⁴ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 267.

³⁵ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 268.

³⁶ Again mimicking *L’Action*. See: Blondel, *Action*, 373–424; Alféri, “Résistance et accomplissement,” 268.

³⁷ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 268–69.

synthesis of facts (history), beliefs (dogma) and practices (life).”³⁸ Or rather, as Izquierdo acknowledges later,³⁹ tradition is more fundamentally a connection to the Incarnate Word in history and in truth.⁴⁰

The understanding of tradition that Blondel offers, while familiar to us through its hidden influence on others, indeed on the Second Vatican Council, is critical in its achievements.⁴¹ Here is a grasp of tradition that manages to be stubbornly historical without reducing itself to historical acts, that acknowledges communal awareness without hypostatizing the Church, that preserves the full dignity of revelation without divesting it of the Incarnation. Tradition is active mediation. This is what we need Blondel’s help to see, something he uniquely contributes, something we do not see at present.

John Henry Newman

Blondel’s account of tradition, which allows us to root it in history and in truth, is nevertheless incomplete. He does not, for example, discuss what it means to endure historical change, and this was a preoccupation of John Henry Newman’s.

Newman formulates the theory of development in response to historical research, and he does so in the face of theories about tradition that do not entirely explain what historical research in fact uncovers. A common ancient definition of tradition comes from Vincent of Lérins (fifth century): tradition is *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*—that which is believed always, everywhere, and by everyone.⁴² Of this rule, however, Newman admits that it is “more serviceable in determining what is not, than what is Christianity.”⁴³ This is so because what we actually find in the early Fathers is not nearly so clear, nor nearly so evenly held. A patristic thinker might well describe what is recognizable in the affirmation of a later council *and* what is recognizable as a later heresy in the same breath, and of still later Christian doctrines we may find no explicit mention.

³⁸ Izquierdo, “La tradición,” 68: “La Tradición no es la transmisión oral de un mensaje no recogido en la Biblia, sino la síntesis viva de hechos (historia), creencias (dogma) y prácticas (vida).”

³⁹ See especially Izquierdo, “La tradición,” 70–75.

⁴⁰ Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 274–76.

⁴¹ See, for example, Myles B. Hannan, “Maurice Blondel: The Philosopher of Vatican II,” *Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 6 (2015): 907–18.

⁴² Newman first quotes it in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 10.

⁴³ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 11.

Indeed, it is often much easier to recognize what is important in early sources according to what is said later. “To give a deeper meaning to their letter,” Newman says, “we must interpret them by the times which came after.”⁴⁴

Newman is aware, in other words, that tradition is subject to history. This is perhaps what marks off specifically modern theological perspectives on tradition. He is also aware that early formulations are not purely identical to later ones, and yet that they share a fabric that is more than purely chronological. He recognizes that past and present doctrinal understandings are not related to one another as simple cause and effect, as before and after. Instead, past and present doctrines are more unevenly related, as it were. They are historically related rather than purely logically. This means, in the first place, that the past and the present share a relationship that makes it possible to share ideas over time. Secondly, the passage of time allows for the development of ideas over time, and this is what allows ideas to *remain the same over time*. For Stephen Prickett, Newman helps us to see that “the true test of Catholicity is not just which Church is most like the supposed primitive form, but also which Church has demonstrated the greatest powers of organic development.”⁴⁵ The essential goal in Newman’s theory of development is to describe the complex relationship between ideas and their expression in time.

It is not merely that ideas—or rather, the same idea, the divine gift given in Christ—can develop over time. It is that these developments have particular characteristics that bind them together, characteristics that then allow for the idea’s development to be studied and understood. Avery Dulles writes, “Christian revelation as an idea, for Newman, has three leading attributes: it is comprehensive, living, and real.”⁴⁶ Revelation thus has particular characteristics that allow us to discern authentic developments from inauthentic ones. Newman offers these characteristics in his “Seven Notes on Authentic Development.” They are, briefly, as follows: preservation of type, continuity of principles, power of assimilation, logical sequence, anticipation of its future, conservative action upon its past, and chronic vigor.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 16.

⁴⁵ Stephen Prickett, “Newman: The Physiognomy of Development,” *Christianity and Literature* 40, no. 3 (1991): 269.

⁴⁶ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “From Images to Truth: Newman on Revelation and Faith,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 254.

⁴⁷ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 169–206.

What unites these seven characteristics or typologies is, as ever, the idea that Christianity as an idea has an “organic life,” has an elastic yet real *recognizability* like living things do.⁴⁸ The corruption of tradition is the opposite. In Newman’s words, corruption “is the breaking up of life, preparatory to its termination.”⁴⁹ Out of this general perspective, Newman’s more specific qualifications emerge. “Preservation of type,” for example, refers to a harmony between the external forms of an idea’s expression and its inner meaning, which allows for variety, yet not limitlessly so.⁵⁰ “Continuity of principles” describes how a doctrine comes out of a particular impetus that must be preserved along with it.⁵¹ Yves Congar mimics this sentiment decades later in *True and False Reform in the Church* when he talks of “being penetrated by the spirit of the Church” and describes how understanding the “spirit” that drove a past decision—rather than simple knowledge of the decision itself—is what animates true reform.⁵² Other notes like “anticipation of its future” highlight how, for Newman, doctrinal development does not simply point backward but, in its own history, points itself toward its own development.⁵³

Newman’s insight into tradition is an acknowledgment of tradition as a fundamentally historical reality. At the same time, it is an insight into the nature of (collective) human understanding; it is an insight into insights, as it were. His theory is based fundamentally on the idea that *ideas* are more than the words used to express them and ideas are more than the explicit understandings involved in their expressions. This is how ideas can develop while remaining the same: the idea itself does not change so much as our understanding of it deepens or develops. As Matthew Levering says in *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation*, “Newman’s defense of doctrinal development rests in significant part upon his awareness that revelation is actively received and understood by human minds, a seemingly obvious point but one whose implications can be overlooked.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Prickett, “Physiognomy of Development,” 270.

⁴⁹ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 170.

⁵⁰ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 173.

⁵¹ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 181.

⁵² Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 295 (see also 306).

⁵³ Newman, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, 195–99, esp. 196. It is unclear in this passage whether Newman thinks that we can know the anticipation as an anticipation of the idea, or only see it retrospectively.

⁵⁴ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the*

That ideas are known by human minds makes them not only historical—since human beings are in history—but also developmental. Ideas are learned over time and enriched over time, both individually and communally. This is in part because human beings are limited and cannot grasp all things at once. Prickett stresses how this human “weakness” becomes, for Newman, a strength.⁵⁵ The flexibility of human knowing—that we can learn and revise and share—is vital evidence of the human mind’s ability to know what is greater than itself. Prickett argues:

What in the *Essay on Development* he had perceived primarily as a historical mode of growth, and in the *Apologia* had been linked with personal integrity, by 1870 he had come to see as a fundamental law of the mind’s operation. For Newman the human psyche was neither logical nor alogical but possessed of powers that made it rather “super-logical”—capable of reaching beyond the powers of reason and proof to conclusions that we nevertheless act upon as certainties.⁵⁶

If the development of doctrine is anything like a divine condescension to human knowing, it is also a sign of our ability to understand under more than one mode of intelligibility. It is also a sign that our understandings, while historical, are nevertheless understandings of what is not historical. This is what Blondel, linked with Newman, shows us so convincingly.

Transition: Metaphysics, History, Theology

To forward our logic thus far: if tradition and human action are as Blondel says, tradition is at once historical and transcendent. Blondel argues, first, that human action is both metaphysical and historical, and he builds his case by revealing the ways that human action continually transcends itself yet can never fulfill itself. In his essay “History and Dogma,” Blondel indicates that two opposed positions, extrinsicism and historicism, in fact share the same problem: both are too monistic

Gospel through Church and Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 182.

⁵⁵ Prickett, “Physiognomy of Development,” 268: “In the best tradition of Christian theology, what began as an observed phenomenon of contingent weakness ends by becoming the cornerstone of the whole edifice of faith.”

⁵⁶ Prickett, “Physiognomy of Development,” 274.

in their thinking, imagining the world as if it were a flat plane in which everything had identical meaning dominated by only one element. Instead, he proposes that both truth and history are meaningful, but distinctively. Tradition is what mediates between the two.

Newman enriches this position in two fundamental ways: by stressing the historicity of ideas and by accounting for how ideas “change” in history. For Newman, ideas—even ideas of the Church—are subject to history in the manner that human beings are subject to history. This means that we learn things over time and not all at once, which need not be a sign of loss so much as it is a deeper insight into a reality or the development of an idea. We do this communally as well as individually, which means that doctrine can develop in the tradition of the Church. Because the object of the Church’s contemplation is God-made-man, tradition is the mode of an ever-increasing (and never complete) grasp of what is infinite.

Our relationship to time (and thus history) is both fixed and flexible. It suggests, like Blondel, that the “real” is not limited to what is in time, and that we are not either. It also suggests that we are always experiencing the mediation of time. We should note, with no small amount of deference, that more recent continental philosophers like Paul Ricoeur have had similar insights.⁵⁷ Blondel and Newman together provide a more substantial description of how problems of history are embedded in problems of time and how time itself opens out into an unutterable horizon. This is what Blondel calls the “supernatural” and what undergirds Newman’s basic trust that ideas can be consistent over time. Neither man ultimately thinks that truth is immanent to us, though they do think its mediations to us are several and complex.

A watershed moment in the Catholic theology of tradition, enabled by thinkers like Newman, occurs with Vatican II. Here, in a clarification of Trent, tradition is brought together with Scripture so that “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.”⁵⁸ Rather than splitting the two into what is unwritten and what is written or allowing tradition

⁵⁷ See especially Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Ricoeur’s final book is a summation of his philosophical career and, at the same, a press into the unknown—or as he puts it, into “incompletion” (506).

⁵⁸ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), §10 (translation from Vatican website).

to simply answer for what is not explicitly in Scripture, the council insists on a single deposit of faith, which both Scripture and tradition are and in which both participate.⁵⁹ This means, more practically, that considering tradition is also a way of considering Scripture without collapsing the two.

Sacred tradition, unlike other traditions, is not subject to disintegration, and this is so because the Spirit guides sacred tradition and Christ is its object. This is what makes sacred tradition a fully *theo*-logical problem. How to describe the complex interaction of human action (history), tradition, and truth—in time and before the eternal God—is still an immense puzzle, and it is at this point that I would like to suggest one possible integration: tradition as “remembering,” specifically as “symphonic remembering.”

Tradition and Remembering

Tradition as Memory

In his introduction to *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, Hans Urs von Balthasar associates tradition with the “consciousness” of the Church, specifically with memory. His reflection is important enough to quote at length:

Tradition, therefore, is the very consciousness of the Church and, in a more particular way, her memory, in which are accumulated the experiences of her sons and daughters, who succeeded in keeping the “sacred deposit” alive and intact in an incredibly diverse panoply of situations. The treasure-house of these memories is at the disposal of the theologian in the same way that the storehouse of his lived experiences is available to the individual. But it is evident that recalling the problems and solutions of the past does not admit, for either the theologian or the individual, of a literal presumption of previous solutions

⁵⁹ Aidan Nichols describes something of a disintegration in confidence after the Council, and he attributes this change to three factors: pluralism, hermeneutics, and reception. For Nichols, theology becomes fragmented in such a way that it seems locked in infinite indeterminate perspectives that are endlessly interpreted and received, leaving no room for something like a holistic theory of the development of Christian doctrine (*From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990], 266).

and their mechanical application to the difficulties of the present. For a new problem there must be a new solution.⁶⁰

We can hear Blondel in the background as Balthasar writes, particularly in the way he speaks of experience. Balthasar (with Blondel and Newman) stresses the transmission of faith in anthropological terms, through analogies of human consciousness. Just as our own memories help to orient our present actions, tradition orients a community in an analogous way. At the same time, simple repetition of a past solution cannot be the same as a present solution, either in individual life or in communal life. Remembering has to be peculiarly *active* for it to be “memory” in the authentic, phenomenological sense.

Yet we need to be careful when we compare tradition to a mode of consciousness. In his *A Theology of History*, Balthasar warns us to remember who governs the deposit of faith, and it is not the Church, who has nevertheless been given this deposit—it is the Spirit:

The genuine tradition of the Church can only be compared within very strict limits to the phenomenon of organic psychic development from the implicit to the explicit—a comparison greatly favored by the Modernists; and it would certainly be wrong to apply the category “subconscious” to what is supernatural process.⁶¹

Consciousness and remembering, for the Church, do not refer to surfacing what before now was known only subconsciously or somehow possessed by the Church without the Spirit. Still less would it mean that development of doctrine simply narrows the field of what theology needs to learn, as if the deposit could be divided into “learned” and “not-yet-learned.”⁶²

The question for sacred tradition, as memory, is in whether the remembering that occurs is authentic to itself, which would mean it has to be open to itself (the memory of Christ) *and* to the present, rather than, say, traumatically closed in both directions. Balthasar stresses that Christian sight is always intensely focused on Christ, as

⁶⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 11.

⁶¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 106–7.

⁶² Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 107.

in the saints, who act and pray with a keen apprehension of Christ in all things and all faces, and in whom we see Christ.⁶³ If we make idols of a past age or the present one, we are confusing earthly time (or earthly history) with the *kairos* of Jesus. Still, time and history are, on this view, not mere outer garments in which Jesus appears. In faith, the Church grasps what Balthasar would call the “form,” the *Gestalt*, of a thing, its animating principle in which we apprehend both its uniqueness and, through its uniqueness, its entirety;⁶⁴ that is, the Church perceives, and mediates, the form of Christ.⁶⁵

A couple of clarifications are necessary. In the first place, assertions such as these do not, for Balthasar, render faith reducible to doctrinal statements, but they do not exclude such statements either: “What is here involved is, therefore, nothing other than the turning of faith to its own interior authenticity, as faith in a proposition (‘belief that Christ’) becomes faith in a person (‘believing Christ’).”⁶⁶ Propositions of faith give way to the person of Christ because he is the supreme form of revelation, beyond every possible human word. Yet faith must also ask its questions and search for words (*fides quarens intellectum*), even as it is necessarily “complemented by an *inveniens*,” by the arrival of God himself.⁶⁷

Similarly, Balthasar invests faith with a fully transcendent character while also refusing to move away from the historical nature of revelation. In faith, we perceive none other than Christ, but not a purely heavenly or ahistorical Christ. Balthasar draws from Karl Barth as he says, “just as we can never attain to the living God in any way except through his Son become man, but in his Son we can really attain to God in himself, so, too, we ought never to speak of God’s beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation-history.”⁶⁸

⁶³ See, for example, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3, *Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1992), esp. 339–60.

⁶⁴ Balthasar, *GL I*, 19 and 115.

⁶⁵ A couple of example passages in Balthasar, *GL I*, are: “The image and expression of God, according to the Biblical assertion, is the indivisible God-man: man, in so far as God radiates from him; God, in so far as he appears in the man Jesus” (426); “Considered from the viewpoint of the Gospel, however, the Church has no other form than this relative form, whose function is to point to the supreme form of revelation” (541).

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *GL I*, 133.

⁶⁷ Balthasar, *GL I*, 132.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *GL I*, 121.

Like all other memories, this “memory” of Christ in history comes alive in the present: as a memory, it is “malleable” both with respect to how moments of ecclesial judgment stress certain elements of the memory over time and with respect to how the ecclesial sense of the tradition is able to discover more in the memory (as in Newman’s theory of development). Here it is very important to let go of our typical presumptions about both the past and the present as they live in our minds. What *was* is not simply “there” to be found again; what *is* is not simply “here” to be projected onto everything of the past. Remembering is the active apprehension of the past in the present. That is to say, memory in the fullest sense apprehends both the past and the present in a single, creative act.

The act of remembering Christ in tradition is “singular” not only in the sense that sacred tradition itself is unique, but also in the sense that every act of remembering is *also* unique. I mean that remembering is always remembering again and anew. It is not a rote action; it is achieved every time memory comes alive. Remembering is “creative” (note that I do not say “inventive,” or even “fabricated”) because its apprehension is the intelligible ordering of the past and the present simultaneously. Memory is made present in its own recognizable integrity, an integrity that persists in the shape of a past-made-present. Balthasar calls this kind of perspective a loving one, a love that, in remembering and hoping, is also necessarily creative.⁶⁹

The singular nature of memory, on this analogy, means that it is simultaneously diverse or heterogeneous. Balthasar will, for example, compare Scripture to a kaleidoscope,⁷⁰ describe ecclesial characteristics using different specific persons as harmonic ecclesial “principles” (Marian, Petrine, Johannine, etc.),⁷¹ and emphasize the fragmentariness of experience alongside the wholeness of form.⁷² In an interpretive approach like the one I am deploying here, Balthasar appears—to follow Cyril O’Regan’s description—“between Tübingen and post-

⁶⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

⁷⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Action*, vol. 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1976), 63.

⁷¹ Balthasar, *GL* I, 341–55.

⁷² This is the theme of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, trans. Rowman Littlefield (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1967). It also appears thematically at the end of his life in *Life Out of Death: Meditations on the Paschal Mystery*, trans. Martina Stöckl (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

modernity.”⁷³ The threat is that Balthasar becomes either postmodern or nostalgic, either falling sway to a flexibility of meaning so endless as to be meaningless or falling sway to a repetitive monotony that is equally as meaningless. Indeed, O’Regan points out that Balthasar has been contradictorily interpreted along both options.⁷⁴ Yet, for O’Regan, Balthasar transcends these poles in “an essential revision of the model of tradition as that which is one and the same everywhere and at all times.”⁷⁵ Balthasar simultaneously sets limits to this variety (in O’Regan’s parlance, variety of *difference* and of *plurality*).⁷⁶ In other words, “Balthasar moves beyond both univocal and equivocal interpretations of tradition.”⁷⁷

More recent work from O’Regan has focused more specifically on Balthasar and memory, ideas to which this article of mine draws quite near. He has published a volume on Balthasar and Hegel in which he claims that Balthasar works to re-remember Christian tradition in the face of Hegel, who deliberately mis-remembers it.⁷⁸ Based in the work we have done so far, remembering again is fundamental to tradition. It would be, for Balthasar, an instrument both of recollection and of subversion (as against Hegel).

Thus, memory is a way of appropriating the present through the past, and it is important that we never lose sight of either the past or the present. The past and the present are each patterned according to the other in remembering, though there is a certain primacy offered to the past. This dual patterning of past and present is the shape of memory’s particular form of mediation. What I want to do now is describe that mediation in some detail, particularly because we have already seen how the past does not come to us as whole cloth and partly because, in this section, we saw how the past is actively arranged and rearranged as we remember it.

⁷³ Cyril O’Regan, “Balthasar: Between Tübingen and Postmodernity” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3 (1998): 325–53.

⁷⁴ O’Regan, “Balthasar,” 325.

⁷⁵ O’Regan, “Balthasar,” 329–30. O’Regan continues here: “From a Balthasarian point of view, the position advocated by Vincent of Lérins, which throughout the history of Catholicism has had considerable support, is flawed. . . . Excluded is the variety of theological perspective that is constitutive of the depth of the Catholic tradition.”

⁷⁶ O’Regan, “Balthasar,” 330–32.

⁷⁷ O’Regan, “Balthasar,” 332.

⁷⁸ Cyril O’Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1, *Hegel* (New York: Crossroad, 2014).

Tradition as Symphonic Remembering

Because memory involves the active arrangement of more than one element of the past and present together, multiplying the senses of time that we participate in *as* we remember, a helpful way to grasp memory is through Balthasar's work on theological aesthetics. It is helpful to understand memory under the aspect of beauty, particularly—in the case of sacred tradition—as beauty relates to the glory of God. Essentially, remembering is especially suited to aesthetic concerns.

For Balthasar, the aesthetic is partially described in classical-medieval terms: beauty has integrity, proportion (or harmony), and *claritas* (brightness).⁷⁹ Especially important to this understanding is how beauty assembles parts into a whole: beauty relates proportions to one another in such a way that this whole has integrity, and beauty arrests our attention when it “shines forth” from an object. Balthasar's word for beauty's integral interrelating—for the “whole,” the unity, that we see—is *Gestalt* (“form”). “Form,” as before, does considerable work for Balthasar. He uses the word in both a Thomistic and modern sense. What we need to understand of his modern appropriation is that beauty elicits our response with a certain emotional-psychological intensity. Balthasar says our response to beauty is ecstatic, drawing forth everything in us. So, for Balthasar, *Gestalt* is both intelligibly grasped and—for lack of a better word—emotionally grasped. I mean something like Jonathan Heaps's work in what he calls “body-feeling.”⁸⁰

The apprehension of beauty is an experience and a judgment—that a thing is beautiful—and for Balthasar, this kind of interplay resembles (but is not yet) love.⁸¹ Our response to beauty highlights how human knowing is a unity: more than one operation, distinguishable yet whole.⁸² Beauty elicits the response of the very dynamism of knowing; it is a sort of assembling of self in response to the beautiful.

⁷⁹ Balthasar, *GL I*, 19–20.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Heaps, “Insight is a Body-Feeling: Experiencing Our Understanding,” *The Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 3 (2016): 461–72.

⁸¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: A Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 1, *The Truth of the World* [hereafter, *TL I*], trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 77–78. It is similar to when Bernard Lonergan describes the unity of proportionate being as potential, formal, and actual (*Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran [Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1992], 533).

⁸² Balthasar, *GL I*, 26–27.

It is important to note that, for Balthasar, “sight” is not meant literally, as if the truth were “out there now.” For him, seeing the form carries with it all of the senses I have described above, including the cognitive. If beauty is as he says, then remembering is aesthetic, since it too is the drawing together of many parts into an apprehended unity. Whether we are discussing the memory of the individual or the memory of tradition, we are also discussing an aesthetic “act.”

I call the act of remembering *symphonic* as a way to highlight the specific shape of its aesthetic, and because “symphonic” is Balthasar’s term for genuine pluralism.⁸³ I would be remiss if I did not mention a far more ancient reason to employ music as an analogy for reality. Peter Casarella reminds us of the ancient tradition of the *carmen Dei*, a song or poem about God, which recalls the harmony and order of creation.⁸⁴ Comparing memory—that is, comparing our relationship to temporality—to the “symphonic” recalls this tradition too, resurfacing it for a modern use.

The memory of tradition is also symphonic in many of the ways that Jeremy Begbie speaks of music and theology.⁸⁵ In music, he explains, “there is usually *a multiplicity of temporal continua, operating concurrently.*”⁸⁶ By this, he means that music is internally temporal, not only in meter but also in rhythm (which is not identical to meter) and other factors. Indeed, these temporalities interact with one another, and we interact with them.⁸⁷ For Begbie, this element of music has a number of theologically significant outcomes, the most important of which relate time and eternity, and which relate repetition and the Eucharist.

John Tavener is one of Begbie’s primary interlocutors for considering music—time—and its apparent negation, eternity. Tavener, who is Orthodox, stresses musical minimalism and the careful use of chant.⁸⁸ Above all, silence dominates the sound. Says Begbie,

⁸³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

⁸⁴ Peter J. Casarella, “*Carmen Dei*: Music and Creation in Three Theologians,” *Theology Today* 62 (2006): 484–500.

⁸⁵ His major work is Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). He has also published numerous essays: see Begbie, “Sound Theology: Meaning in Music,” *Christian Century* 124, no. 23 (2007): 20–25; Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁶ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 35 (emphasis original).

⁸⁷ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 37–51.

⁸⁸ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 133–36.

“Frequently the music emerges out of silence and drifts seamlessly back into silence. . . . The music of eternity sounds inaudibly ‘before’ the arrival of earthly sound and ‘after’ its cessation.”⁸⁹ Alongside Tavener, but also in contrast to him, Begbie’s theology concentrates on how the complexities of musical time hint at how the temporality of the Cross and resurrection can “penetrate” into the temporality of the rest of the world without being itself unchanged.⁹⁰ In other words, time can be changed by Christ’s time.⁹¹

It is unclear whether Begbie endorses a mutable God.⁹² Theologies and philosophies of music tend to attribute the mutability of music to divinity or eternity, and while Begbie himself is ambivalent, it is important to stress that, for Balthasar, there can be no question that God is immutable.⁹³ Balthasar’s version of immutability is admittedly idiosyncratic, and it is an open question whether he achieves his theological intentions against Jürgen Moltmann,⁹⁴ a question that has been studied at some length.⁹⁵ For our purposes, it is important to at least mark immutability as a necessary condition for a Balthasarian account of eternity and time, and so for tradition.⁹⁶ How this works out theologically would require an article of a different sort, though we have some sense of how this might look thanks to Blondel. Philippe Dockwiler, with Vincent Holzer, has done the most work in this direction in French scholarship.⁹⁷ For Balthasar, God’s immu-

⁸⁹ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 139.

⁹⁰ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 149.

⁹¹ Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 150.

⁹² He does mention Pannenberg (Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 151).

⁹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 5, *The Last Act* [hereafter, *TD V*], trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 66–68.

⁹⁴ Balthasar, *TDV*, 168–80.

⁹⁵ Gerard F. O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gilles Emery, “The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the ‘Suffering of God,’” trans. Thomas Joseph White, in *Divine Passibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁹⁶ There is neither the space nor the impetus to answer the controverted question here. Whether or not Balthasar maintains divine immutability as he wishes is one question; whether he considers it a condition for theological reflection is another.

⁹⁷ Philippe Dockwiler, *Le temps du Christ: cœur et fin de la théologie de l’histoire selon Hans Urs von Balthasar*, with introduction by Vincent Holzer (Paris: Cerf, 2011).

tability protects God's full transcendence and freedom, and this would be necessary to a theological aesthetic of memory.

If Christ is to be involved in history in a unique way as its redeemer, then he also must be "above" it, even while he is nevertheless "within" history. The Christological category that Balthasar concentrates on is Jesus's *uniqueness* as the Incarnate Word. This uniqueness allows Jesus to bear a universal mission and yet to transcend the world he saves. In *A Theology of History*, Balthasar argues that, in Christ, all the "abstract laws" of human nature are "integrated and subordinated within his Christological uniqueness, and formed and governed by it."⁹⁸ Jesus, as God, transcends the world, and thus is able to integrate its diversities without violating their relative integrity. At the same time:

In Jesus Christ, the Logos is no longer the realm of ideas, values and laws which governs and gives meaning to history, but is himself history. In the life of Christ the factual and the normative coincide not only *in fact* but *necessarily*, because the fact is both the manifestation of God and the divine-human pattern of true humanity in God's eyes.⁹⁹

Balthasar straddles the Incarnation's real appropriation of history and its transcendence thereof, binding history and theory together in Christ's life. The implication is, for Balthasar, primarily soteriological. It is not just that fact and theory can be reconciled in the Incarnate Word; it is also that faith comes to us *both* from above *and* through history. Balthasar refers to this as the "vertical" and the "horizontal." The proof of Jesus's divinity is "vertical" because: "He, his word and his existence must suffice to make the voice of his Father audible. . . . [But the leap of understanding] must equally be patient of a horizontal, progressive interpretation; it is the logical conclusion of a long history."¹⁰⁰

We can see further reflections on the coincidence of history and transcendence in the Incarnation in the ways that Balthasar links together his "aesthetics" and "dramatics" under the auspices of "form." Balthasar writes at the beginning of his theological dramatics

⁹⁸ Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 18.

⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 24. See also 22: "As *he who is unique*, he can be simultaneously the Lord of all creaturely norms in the sphere of essential being and in that of history."

¹⁰⁰ Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 133.

properly speaking: “The beautiful presents a challenge to all that is mean and common. It does not stand turned in on itself, but rather turned outward, facing all who can grasp it.”¹⁰¹ The challenge of beauty immediately implies the realm of ethics, of action; it demands a response to the Good. “Where a thing of beauty is really and radically beheld, freedom too is radically opened up, and decision can take place.”¹⁰² This means, in Balthasar’s parlance, that the revelation of the beautiful form of Christ draws us into the *dramatic*.¹⁰³ It draws us into the mysteries of freedom and decision, of “action,” both on the part of God and on the part of human beings. If history is human action in Blondel’s sense, then Balthasar’s sketch of the analogous relationship between beauty and drama is a careful construal of the relationship between *form* and *history*. In other words, the aesthetic—*Gestalt*, splendor, symphony—plays a vital role in Balthasar’s analysis of (historical) action. “Great music,” Balthasar writes elsewhere, “is always dramatic.”¹⁰⁴

This is but a sketch of theological themes in music, time, and their relationships to eternity. What we can see already, thanks to Begbie and Balthasar, is that music includes both difference and sameness. We can see that its chronological progression—in music and outside of music—does not close it off from what transcends it. These are themes that we have struggled to understand throughout this article, and music allows us to see how they are fundamentally different aspects of a single reality. In the “memory” of tradition, we have an analogous dynamic of plural-yet-singular time, of the particular opened out to eternity. Remembering is, in that way, symphonic. In music, and analogously in time, we have a present tense that both recollects the past and drives toward the future: the notes are only heard now, and yet heard in succession together, and both the meter and musical phrases draw us into anticipating what arrives next. Memory is always a remembering of the past in the present, and yet not with mere nostalgia. Or we might say that nostalgia is an incomplete version of remembering. A note without temporal rela-

¹⁰¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: A Theological Dramatics*, vol. 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God* [hereafter, *TD II*], trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 24.

¹⁰² Balthasar, *TD II*, 31.

¹⁰³ “This is what the ‘rapt’ man has tasted, this is the ‘book’ he has devoured—and its taste stays on his tongue. He must proclaim this Logos. In some shape or form, mission will be part of drama” (Balthasar, *TD II*, 31).

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 15.

tion to other notes. Instead, we recall the past in order to understand the present, even the re-minding of the present, and it is through the patterns of recollected experience that we make decisions in the present for the future. In Balthasarian language, Christ is not identical with (symphonic) tradition, but he is its form.

Conclusion

To recall Borges's man who can remember everything, mentioned at the very beginning of this article, we can understand better now why he is monstrous. Locked in every detail of his temporal existence, the world for him lacks every symbolic, mediatory possibility. He has every memory, and so he may as well have no memory at all. It is much more the case that human beings remember in patterned, mediatory capacities. We remember with more than one motive and more than one temporal concern, linking together the past and the present indissolubly with an eye for the future. In this context, to forget is not loss so much as it is a sign of memory's patterning, a sign of its orientation to truths that transcend it. In the case of sacred tradition, Joseph Mueller suggests that forgetting is a principle of continuity.¹⁰⁵ Rather than emphasizing forgetting, I have emphasized how the memory of tradition is symphonic, patterned, and ordered toward both history and truth. For tradition—and, ultimately, for human knowing—remembering's unity does not come from itself. To be more precise, human knowing and acting presupposes a perfect, transcendent God in order to be itself, as Blondel shows us. Newman reminds us that history makes ideas subject to development and that this does not have to mean change. Finally, Balthasar shows us how tradition's mediation of history and truth is radically without a symphonic unity unless it has God as its final object. Balthasar's aesthetics and dramatics speak to one another: the form of Christ is the form of tradition, and not otherwise. We are called to "see" Christ, and he is the fullest measure of tradition's authenticity.

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¹⁰⁵ Joseph G. Mueller, "Forgetting as a Principle of Continuity in Tradition," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 4 (2009): 751–81.