

Response to Readers of *Anatomy of Misremembering*, Volume 1 (Hegel)

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MY MAIN RESPONSIBILITY is to reply to three skilled readers of my *Anatomy of Misremembering: von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, volume 1 (Hegel; hereafter in this article, simply *Anatomy 1*), two of them aficionados of Balthasar, one a philosopher and theologian broadly in the Thomist tradition, and I definitely plan to execute my charge and spend almost all the space allotted to me responding to commentators who have rendered my text with tact, who have asked questions of its rendering of Balthasar, and in one case of Balthasar's rendering of the tradition, and in general of his theological adequacy. But before I do, I would like to thank the editors of *Nova et Vetera*, Matthew Levering and Thomas Joseph White, O.P., for staging this symposium on my work. It is an act of consummate generosity and grace. But I suppose even grace has its reasons, and one of these reasons, I suspect, is to start a conversation between those of more nearly Balthasarian and Thomist persuasions. I am not assuming that the aim is that of reconciliation, for one cannot assume that, as Catholicism goes forward, it will do so under the mantle of one kind of theology. What might be useful is a suspension of uninformed hostilities and an appreciation for the gifts of a form of theology other than one's own, even if one is convinced of the superior value of the form that one prefers to inhabit and explicate.

In addition to the above, I suppose it would help the reader of the symposium if I gave some indication of where *Anatomy* and its quickly following sibling, *Anatomy 2* (which focuses on Balthasar's critique of Heidegger) came from. I should begin by confessing that

neither volume was intended. I had written about a half-dozen articles on Balthasar's treatment of major figures or movements in the theological tradition and had planned to use them in a much more comprehensive volume on Balthasar's theory of the tradition as illustrated in his practice of retrieval. Having read a considerable portion of his work and the triptych in its entirety, I began clearly to see two things: first, that the extent of the retrieval was in proportion to his anxiety about modern amnesia regarding Christianity; and second, that whoever is going to do theology in the modern period also has to take account of forms of thought that were concerned to overcome the amnesia of modernity and that, while looking much more friendly to Christianity, distorted it and ultimately constituted themselves as rival systems. Hegel and Heidegger loomed extraordinarily large, although it was difficult to separate Heidegger and Nietzsche. I resolved to write a chapter on this phenomenon of what I called "misremembering" in a book largely devoted to Balthasar's memorial of the Christian tradition of thought, practice, and form of life. This prospective chapter, however, underwent a kind of mitosis: first two chapters, then four, then a small book, then from small to medium to large, to finally two gargantuan books, only the first of which is published, although the second is in the final stages of rewriting. My judgment regarding the book is that it is both entirely accidental and entirely necessary. It is entirely accidental because it was a creation that was not planned. I had an intuition that proved insistent and that demanded explication. But it is also, I believe, entirely necessary in much the way that a poem seems to develop in the only way it could. It is hard to know what is chicken and what is egg, whether all the labor extended over the two volumes, which together will be about thirteen hundred pages, made me convinced that a genealogy of misremembering is a major (perhaps *the* major) component of Balthasar's genealogy of modernity, as well as the complement to his great orchestration of retrieval of the Christian tradition, or whether the labor was made light because of this conviction. As might be expected, I find myself much more inclined to the second option.

Response to Anthony Sciglitano

In a beautifully constructed interpretation, in addition to attempting to broadly explain *Anatomy 1*, Anthony Sciglitano selects and highlights from the work, and in the process of doing so evinces all the generosity and judiciousness of his own reading of Balthasar. Joining beginning and end, he suggests that a good synoptic way of reading the work is

to think of it as a reflection on the impossibility and possibility of the memory of the dead in Hegel and Balthasar. In which case, as it turns out, Hegel provides the capstone to the view of the impossibility of memory characteristic of the modern, and Balthasar, his interlocutor-antagonist, provides a plenary example and defense of its possibility. If this should prove instructive to the reader of *Anatomy 1*, it also proves illuminating for the writer. Sciglitano captures brilliantly what I would call the pathos of the text. Along this line of interpretation, we can key not only on forgetting and remembering, but also on the mechanisms in and through which Hegel forgets Christ and the individual person as the irreplaceable particular, his interpretation of the Eucharist as being defined by our memory of Christ, not God's memory of us in the Cross, death and Resurrection of Christ, his identification of the Holy Spirit with our memory, and the eclipse of the Father to whom Christ and we ourselves pray.

Sciglitano, however, does more than capture the pathos of *Anatomy 1*, he also grasps both its *raison d'être* and basic dynamics. In terms of *raison d'être*, he understands that the fundamental claim of the text, given in its very title, which underscores "misremembering," is that the twentieth century's most copious Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, is also a genealogist. This is not such a self-evident thesis that its acceptance can be taken for granted. Moreover, it is especially gratifying to see that this Balthasar scholar of the first rank assents to the thesis that the particular genius of Balthasar resides in his diagnosing and resisting not merely the Enlightenment's displacement of Christianity in and through its promotion and practice of forgetting, but also the discourses that follow upon the Enlightenment and attempt to overcome both historical forms of Christianity and the modern forgetting of Christianity by offering a new optics regarding Christianity, thereby enacting a form of misremembering and thus replacing it. Sciglitano, who is familiar with the thought of Charles Taylor, is convinced that it is this second layer of the complex ideology of modernity that is the more dangerous, since its hostility to Christianity is essentially hidden. He shows no reserve in thinking that throughout Balthasar's work as a whole, and especially throughout the great trilogy, at both overt and covert levels, far from repeating Hegel, Balthasar has Hegel in his crosshairs: Hegel, who appears to be the post-Enlightenment rememberer of Christian discourses, practices, and forms of life, is the greatest distorter of Christianity in the modern age. Sciglitano is a wonderfully careful reader. He understands well the confessed limits of the "genealogical"

ascription to Balthasar: to think of Balthasar as a genealogist is deny neither that he is a great retrievalist of the length and breadth of the Catholic tradition nor that the putting into play of the riches of the pre-modern Christian tradition in terms of (1) its reading of Scripture, (2) its unification of theology, spirituality, and contemplation and action, (3) the practice of prayer and Eucharist, and (4) forms of life both religious and lay given over to finding a unique vocation is not ultimately far more important than uncovering the equivocalness of Hegel.

When it comes to what I have referred to as the dynamic of the text, it would be difficult to come across a better reader. Scigliano rightly judges that the heart of the confrontation between Balthasar and Hegel is conducted in part 2 of *Anatomy 1* and that, textually speaking, Balthasar's five-volume *Theo-Drama* is decisive. He recognizes that Christology and Trinity provide two of the essential battle-grounds between these two figures, and ultimately between faithful and unfaithful forms of Christian thinking. On Balthasar's account, Hegel's theology is both monophysite and relentlessly functional and his Trinitarian theology is undergirded by a developmental ontology that collapses the immanent Trinity into the economic. Scigliano speaks eloquently to Balthasar's diagnosis of the "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of both fundamental distortions in twentieth-century theology. He is just as eloquent and precise about *Anatomy 1*'s detailing of the formal elements of Hegel's misremembering of Christianity according to Balthasar: the monistic nature of Hegel's logic that unsettles the creator-created distinction, Hegel's necessitarianism that removes the gratuitousness of creation, redemption and sanctification, the peculiar nature of his interpretation of divine love not as an absolute plenitude but as lack seeking fulfillment, and an anomalous view of kenosis that thinks of divine self-emptying as a form of self-filling. Scigliano then fully grasps the central substantive features of the confrontation between Balthasar and Hegel, fully grasps the motivation of the text, and catches the pathos of the text. It is a pleasure to be so well understood.

Response to Rodney Howsare

Rodney Howsare's reflection on *Anatomy 1* overlaps with that of Scigliano, although having a number of different emphases. It is, for example, a relief to find that Howsare, the author of a first-rate book on Balthasar's relation to Protestantism, is more or less convinced that Balthasar's engagement with Hegel is more extensive in the

former's work and more deep than might first appear and also that this engagement is largely critical in that Balthasar fundamentally contests Hegel's view of the God-world relation and the Christological and Trinitarian frames that supports it. Howsare spends considerably more time than Sciglitano in bringing out how and why Hegel is not simply suffered by Balthasar, but approved for having taken steps beyond the Enlightenment and Kantian understandings of Christianity. He rightly numbers (1) Hegel's analysis of the Enlightenment and amnesia and (2) the tendency in the modern world for rationalism to generate its fideistic double as two aspects of Hegel found attractive by Balthasar. In addition, Hegel's commitment to truth and, in turn, truth's connection to wholeness (as well as Hegel's refurbishing of the doctrine of the Trinity) also recommend him to the Swiss theologian. Howsare both underscores and develops a point I made in part 1 of *Anatomy 1* that Balthasar's attraction to Hegelianism—restricted though it may turn out to be—is the converse of serious reservations concerning Neo-Scholastic theology, whose elevation of philosophy over theology is indicative of a disrespect for the order of revelation. In terms of uncovering Balthasar's basic motivations, this seems to be right. Of course, this is not necessarily to say that Balthasar's judgment here is considered, balanced, charitable, or justified. Perhaps it is the peremptory nature of Balthasar's judgment here that has encouraged the suspicion that he might be judged to be closer than he avows to the Idealists whom he critiques from the *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (1937–1939) on.

No less than Sciglitano, Howsare thinks that Balthasar is a concerted anti-Hegelian thinker. Howsare understands well that Hegel and his epigones fundamentally distort the God-world relation by abolishing its gratuity, meld God and world in the Incarnation, historicize the eschaton, and overall, deconstruct meaningful distinction between the triune God and his economy of grace. Howsare is a lucid and pleasing writer, and here he communicates with a facility that one can only envy. When it comes to precursors of Balthasar in the refutation of Hegel, similarly to Sciglitano, he focuses on Bulgakov. This hardly betrays the text. Bulgakov is an item of reflection in two of the four parts of the book (parts 3 and 4), clearly suggesting my interest in opening up the conversation of dependence, a conversation that has recently been carried forward in Jennifer Martin's wonderful new book on Balthasar and Russian religious philosophy. Both Howsare and Sciglitano are patient with me when it comes to my discussion of the relation, and neither challenge my interpretation

of Bulgakov as an anti-Idealist thinker. It makes sense that, when it came to precursors, the attention would go the colorful Bulgakov's way rather than to the more wooden Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800–1856), the Tübingen theologian whose sprawling oeuvre constitutes the most concerted theological refutation of Hegel in the nineteenth century. I confess, however, that I have affection for the unfortunate Staudenmaier. My teacher at Yale, Hans Frei, often said that it is the responsibility of a theologian—even when not doing historical work—to discover or rediscover one or two major past theological figures who seemed to have entered a kind of undeserved oblivion. I consider my rediscovery of Franz Anton Staudenmaier as proof that I was listening and understood that such rediscovery is an essential—even if ancillary—part of the theological vocation. Perhaps even more, however, one does not have to argue—in the way one does for Bulgakov—that Staudenmaier is constitutively anti-Hegelian. After a relatively brief romance with German Idealism in general and Hegel in particular, which lasted roughly between 1828 and 1835, Staudenmaier reoriented his career in a direction that was vituperatively anti-Hegelian and which concluded in the articulation of a dogmatics based significantly—although not entirely—on the theology of Aquinas.

Throughout his reflection, Howsare is far more laudatory than one has a right to expect. Nonetheless, there are two interesting—if highly understated—criticisms that have to do with Balthasar's precursors when it comes to Hegel. Howsare wonders whether Maximus might not have just as easily been appealed to as Irenaeus as a template of a Christian response to a discourse that bears a resemblance to that of Hegel. I find this a telling query, especially in light of some of the French commentary that suggests that Balthasar's work on Maximus in the 1940s has as one of its main intentions the defeating of the German Idealism that was targeted even earlier in *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. In addition, I should confess that, for quite some time I debated including Maximus, even if I never entertained the idea of substituting him for Irenaeus. When I made my decision to exclude him, the principle of parsimony was obviously at work: why have two ancient exemplars if one will do. Even more, however, while Maximus could serve as template for the kind of Cross-oriented Christology that Balthasar could bring to bear as a redress of Hegel's, it was not evident how much more critical work Maximus could do when the distortion of Christianity under consideration is truly comprehensive and extends to the entire Christian narrative,

and thus to every theological topic. Thus, the advantage goes to Irenaeus, since this is precisely the kind of comprehensive distortion that is being diagnosed and rebutted in *Against Heresies*.

The second of the two criticisms that Howsare makes is equally intriguing. When it comes to proximate Balthasar precursors for constitutive anti-Hegelianism, why not adduce Balthasar's mentor, Erich Przywara? Howsare does not force the point, but he could have, given that, in *Analogia Entis* (1932), the case for analogy as an irreducible Catholic *Denkform* is accompanied by concerted criticism of Hegel's erasure of real transcendence. Again, in writing the book, I thought of Przywara as a candidate for inclusion, only to finally reject him. The basic reason was that, although Przywara's rejection of Hegel is pointed in *Analogia Entis*, the critique is elliptical and, in the end, quite general and formal. While Balthasar was, undoubtedly, convinced that Przywara was right in his criticism of Hegel, he also realized that Przywara did not pursue Hegel theologically across his reading of the Christian narrative and the various doctrines associated with its nodes—Trinity, creation, fall, redemption, Christian Church, and eschaton. This is what Balthasar begins to pursue in *Apokalypse* five years after the publication of *Analogia Entis*. Still, I have a palliative up my sleeve. In volume 2 of *Anatomy*, which concerns the relation of Balthasar to Heidegger, Przywara functions as the proximate precursor of Balthasar's critical engagement with Heidegger. Why the distinction, given that Przywara's negative remarks against Heidegger in *Analogia Entis* are no less formal and synoptic than the negative remarks against Hegel? The reasons are many, and since volume 2 is not yet at the publisher, it seems best to provide a partial rather than full explanation. I think it can be said that Balthasar believes that the ratio of positive-negatives when it comes to Christianity is somewhat better in the case of Heidegger than in that of Hegel. The Heideggerian advantage, however, is in significant part due to the fact that Heidegger's discourse is less densely Christian than Hegel's and less engaged in replacing or rewriting Christian doctrines. In that case, the kinds of general foreclosures of Christian speech and action to which Przywara draws attention in *Analogia Entis* stand out all the more.

Response to Guy Mansini, O. S. B.

Although Guy Mansini would not style himself as a scholar of Balthasar, he has commented on him in the past. Although he has been critical of some major aspects of Balthasar's Trinitarian thought, he has been as

intelligent as he has been fair. Similarly here. Mansini seems to support an analysis of modernity as a complex affair in which Christianity is dismissed, allowed back in but only under the auspices of something like a *salto mortale*, and then refigured in Idealism. Although he grants Balthasar his genealogical interests and gives a good account of the features that Balthasar finds attractive and repelling in Hegel and his epigones, Mansini sees his task mainly as testing Balthasar's thought for theological adequacy. He is perfectly in his rights to judge that Balthasar fails, and while it takes a little time to bring in the verdict, it is eventually brought in largely on the grounds that (a) Balthasar cedes to Hegel in requiring that immutability and impassibility require any modification of the way they have been handled in the classical metaphysical tradition, (b) Balthasar's thinking of ur-kenosis as the ground of kenosis in Christ is both philosophically and theologically irresponsible; and (c) Balthasar's discussion of activity and reception among the persons at the level of the immanent Trinity is problematic.

I will attend to these three features of Mansini's argument momentarily, but before I do I would like to mention the interesting flattening afoot in Mansini's account of the debits and credits in Balthasar's complex negotiation with Hegel laid out in *Anatomy* 1. Mansini acknowledges that Balthasar argues that Hegel is Christianly unacceptable because of the conflation of God and world, the erasure of the particularity of Christ, the excision of Resurrection, the Joachimite displacement of Christ by the Spirit in the economy, and finally modalism at the Trinitarian level. But Balthasar's relation to these faults seems to be on the same level as the affirmations of Christ in Hegelian thought, particularly the Cross being at the center of Christianity. Mansini is right to underscore that the conversation between Balthasar and Hegel cannot get off the ground unless there are some theologically attractive features in Hegelian thought. Still, recall that both Scigliano and Howsare underscored, in different ways, the huge asymmetry between the credits and debits. Compared with the credits accorded Hegel's discourse and the related practices, the debits are enormous—indeed, they are sufficient to make Hegel the greatest distorter or “misrememberer” of Christianity.

In his first objection, Mansini's argument is not that Balthasar expressly advocates the passable God of Hegel or Moltmann. Rather, he argues that Balthasar fails to make a plausible defense of a *tertium quid* between strict impassability and passability positions. In fact, for Mansini, any reservations regarding divine immutability and impassibility as classically conceived suggest that Balthasar is moving inex-

orably towards the passability position and that he is fatally caught in the gravitational pull of Hegel. Personally, I am not sure this follows. One would have thought that Balthasar's insistence on the absolute priority of act over potency in the triune God would have counted decisively against this charge, since it is the priority of potential over act and that of result over origin in Hegel's thought that is the basic engine for the introduction of mutability and possibility into God. Mansini shows no sympathy for Balthasar's view that revelation provides motive and warrant for thinking of divine impassibility more richly and beyond the binary construction of the ascription of passability to the worldly domain and impassibility to the divine. Mansini simply cuts off at the pass, for example, Maximus' two-will Christology serving as a traditional warrant for Balthasar's view and extends no sympathy to the former's interest in preserving the humanity of Christ while strongly insisting on the communication of idioms. By implication at least, Mansini suggests that a figure whom Howsare thinks functions entirely in an anti-Hegelian fashion in fact functions to facilitate the entry of Hegelianism into would-be Catholic theology.

Mansini's second objection concerns Balthasar's account of intra-Trinitarian kenosis. This feature of Balthasar's thought does not come in for criticism by either Scigliano or Howsare, although to be fair, neither exactly ratify it either. Mansini's objection cuts in a number of different directions at once. On the one hand, the positing of an *ur*-kenosis is speculative and transgresses the limits of knowledge. I suppose this might be called the epistemic irresponsibility charge. There can be no doubt that Balthasar is vulnerable to this objection or that his reliance on Bulgakov with respect to this notion might be more a hindrance than a help, even if Bulgakov could be reliably constructed as anti-Hegelian. Although Mansini would likely not enjoy the suggested company, his objection resembles Rahner's dismissal of Balthasar's articulations in the immanent Trinity of the conditions of possibility of divine expression in creation and redemption as "gnostic."

Mansini's objection to its deployment in Balthasar's work, however, is not epistemological without remainder. He also has reservations of a more substantive theological kind. He thinks that positing intra-Trinitarian kenosis devalues the kenosis of Philippians 2.7, which locates kenosis definitively in the Christological sphere. While I see the point of the objection, I can definitely say that this is far from Balthasar's intent, which is rather to put an exclamation

point to kenosis in the Christological sphere by drawing attention to its intra-Trinitarian ground. I am also inclined to think that Mansini goes a bit too far when he associates Balthasar's use of kenosis with the German kenoticist, Thomasius. On the Christological plane, Balthasar commits himself without reservation to Chalcedon and inveighs against a Hegelian kenosis that is one of substance rather than form. In *Theo-Drama*, Thomasius and other nineteenth-century kenoticists are understood to be examples of this very unhappy rendition of Philippians that Balthasar rejects.

Mansini also has serious reservations about Balthasar's reflection on the activity and receptivity of the persons at the intra-Trinitarian level. Apart from the highly speculative nature of such reflection, Mansini worries that this leads to a prioritization of persons over divine essence and, thus, encourages tri-theism. I suppose the worry is the worry of an Augustinian or Thomist regarding a Trinitarian conspectus that draws on the Greek East. I think the worry can be honored without necessarily dismissing the personal emphasis. It is not as if no problems arise when we insist on the community of essence and will in and with the persons; there exists the obverse danger of modalism. In volume 3 of *Theo-Logic*, Balthasar makes the suggestion that Catholic theology might necessarily have to deal with the tensions between what are, historically speaking, different emphases between East and West, since it was not clear to him that any Trinitarian theology hither-to-fore had done equal justice to both. I suspect that no more than Balthasar's loitering with Bulgakov, Maximus, and the Greek fathers would this irresolution be found acceptable by Mansini.

The Catholicity of the Church and the Great Conversation

I can lodge no personal objection to Mansini. He is fair to my rendering of Balthasar in *Anatomy 1* and presumes it to be accurate—which is granting a great deal. It is to the Balthasar whom I render that he objects and whom he finds wanting. Albeit against a backdrop of considerable appreciation, in the elaboration of this theology (and especially the Trinity), the Swiss theologian demonstrates a penchant for being epistemologically reckless and substantively risky. I see the force of all of Mansini's well-lodged objections, and especially of the epistemological one. Moreover, one has to concede that Balthasar's own rejection of Neo-scholasticism was not exactly fair, so he and, perhaps, *nouvelle théologie* as a whole were less than generous to Manual

Theology and perhaps too dismissive also of the value of reason and argument in theology. While such a concession is unlikely to satisfy someone who is persuaded of the absolute validity of propositional forms of theology, could one not claim that neither propositional nor retrievalist/genealogical forms of theology fully suffice as Catholicism negotiates the truth of the tradition and the contemporary world? Granting a greater appreciation of the logical rigor of Scholastic theology, could it not be admitted that Balthasar performs a necessary theological task? The symposium performed here, even with (or especially with) its moments of criticism, seems to me to be a real symbol of the necessary catholicity of the Church, especially at a time when the Church is remanded to become a kind of ethics or politics whose traditions are being continually attenuated and massaged into something more agreeable to the modern person. What has been performed here is just the opposite of a “night battle” in which thinkers faithful to the Church reify and exaggerate differences. The banner under which the Church proceeds is Christ. I suppose this renders an apocalyptic diagnosis of history, which I owe in significant part to the Balthasar of *Theo-Drama*. Still, I can promote this in good conscience. We can and should read ourselves as Church into the book of Revelation, which Balthasar once again has made a gift to the Church. N-V

