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# The Aesthetic Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar

Jason Paul Bourgeois

*University of Dayton*, jbourgeois1@udayton.edu

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# CHAPTER ONE

## GADAMER'S AESTHETICS

Few contemporary philosophers have paid as much attention to the phenomenon of art as has Gadamer, who employs aesthetic experience as an analogy of how hermeneutics is not simply a method of interpretation but is rather a mode of human understanding involving a dialogue between interpreter and text. Thus, aesthetics is relevant to discussions of the human search for truth. Gadamer wishes to criticize a methodological approach to interpretation that presupposes the need for distance or neutrality in regard to what is being interpreted. Instead, using the model of aesthetics, one needs to allow oneself to be affected and potentially transformed by one's encounter with the truth of an artwork or text. Only in this way can true interpretation take place.

This section of Chapter One will discuss Gadamer's critique of the subjectivization of aesthetics in the Kantian tradition, and will be followed in the next section by an analysis of the Heideggerian (disclosure-concealment) corrective in terms of Gadamer's concepts of play, presentation, and aesthetic non-differentiation. The chapter will close with sections detailing Gadamer's views on drama and on the (Neo-)Platonic ontology underlying his radiance theory of beauty.<sup>1</sup>

### **Kant, Heidegger, and the Subjectivization of Aesthetic Consciousness**

Gadamer expounds his own aesthetics in contrast to a development that he sees starting from Kant and influencing generations of later German thinkers. He characterizes this development as the "subjectivization of aesthetics" and sees as its main characteristic the emergence of the "aesthetic consciousness" with its task of "aesthetic differentiation." In other words, Gadamer rejects a view of the search for the beautiful that reduces it to a wholly subjective experience, in which beauty is unrelated to the disclosure of truth. Furthermore, he rejects the idea that a work of beauty is a-historical and can only be appreciated for its formal qualities, as opposed to its content (and thus, its ability to convey truth). It is necessary to begin with Gadamer's treatment of Kant and to sketch what Gadamer sees as Kant's influence on later German thinkers. This section will attempt only to discuss *Gadamer's* evaluation of such thinkers, which may or may not be agreeable to every interpreter of German philosophy.

**Gadamer on Kant**

One of the key focuses of Gadamer's treatment of Kant is the distinction between an aesthetics of taste and one of genius. For Kant, aesthetic taste "facilitates the play of one's mental powers, increases the vitality that comes from the harmony between imagination and understanding, and invites one to linger before the beautiful."<sup>2</sup> It is universal (in that it is not based on the particular empirical judgments of any particular community or individual), but it is also subjective (because it is only known by the feeling of pleasure that is produced by a tasteful, or beautiful, object). Hence, it is an *a priori* of sorts, but it does not produce theoretical knowledge since it is based partly on imagination and not purely on understanding.<sup>3</sup>

To put it in Gadamer's own words, he understands the Kantian view of taste to be a perception of the beautiful that does not have

the sort of truth or universality to which we apply the conceptual universality of the understanding. Despite this, the truth that we encounter in the experience of the beautiful does unambiguously make a claim to more than merely subjective validity. Otherwise it would have no binding truth for us.<sup>4</sup>

Gadamer's understanding of Kantian taste is that it generates a universal agreement, not through conceptual argument (in which one person shows another why something is, in fact, beautiful), but through the development of a discriminatory faculty. Furthermore, taste is most often applied to *natural* beauty for Kant (or to purely decorative patterns), and results in a state of "disinterested delight," which "means that we are not interested in what appears or what is 'represented' from a practical point of view." Instead, one simply takes a non-conceptual enjoyment in this type of beauty.<sup>5</sup>

Gadamer claims that Kant opposed the natural beauty of taste to the beauty of artistic creation. For the latter, the concept of genius applies instead, which stresses the free creativeness of the artist as an explanation for the power of an artistic work. Since genius emphasizes the free creation of the artist that does not follow conventional rules, it highlights the fact that "there is no other way of grasping the content of a work of art than through the *unique form* of the work and in the *mystery* of its impression, which can never be fully expressed in any language."<sup>6</sup> Like taste, it is recognized subjectively in "the intensification of the *Lebensgefühl* (life feeling) through the harmonious correspondence of imagination and understanding" produced by the work of art.<sup>7</sup>

According to Robert Bernasconi, Gadamer vacillated on his analysis of the Kantian notion of genius in relation to taste. He claims that “Gadamer’s discussion of the relation of taste to genius in 1960 [TM] was by no means unambiguous, although this was perhaps only a reflection of the ambiguity of Kant’s text itself.” Nevertheless, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer does not claim that Kant progressed from taste to genius as the basis for aesthetics; rather, he claims that Kant’s followers (e.g. Schiller) made this progression. In later essays, however, Gadamer does link the notion of genius as foundation for aesthetics more with Kant himself.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Bernasconi holds that in *Truth and Method*, “Gadamer’s presentation of Kant had the negative purpose of showing how the use of Kant as a basis for the philosophy of art proves inadequate, whether it be by way of an aesthetics of taste, of genius, or of ornament.”<sup>9</sup> We shall leave these questions about the relationship of genius and taste in Kant to Kantian scholars, and proceed with Gadamer’s analysis in *Truth and Method* of the concept of genius as it was employed by the German romantics after Kant.

### **Post-Kantian Subjectivization of Aesthetics**

It will be recalled that the Kantian notion of taste, even though not based on the universality of conceptual truth, nevertheless had a universal quality. In fact, Gadamer claims that later German thinkers rejected Kant’s theory of “invariable” perfect taste, precisely because they believed that taste was “a testimony to the mutability of all human things and the relativity of all human values.” (That is, they believed that taste did not have a universal quality). However, they were very impressed by his concept of genius, which “fulfills much better than does the concept of taste the requirement of being immutable in the stream of time.”<sup>10</sup> Genius took the place of taste in grounding universal aesthetics for them. In fact, the later German romantics formed something of a cult around the idea of the genius creating timeless works of art. Their main difference with Kant here (according to Gadamer in *Truth and Method*) is that they removed beauty from its teleological framework (i.e., the beauty of nature, recognized by taste), and instead emphasized purely subjective free human creation (genius).

The later German romantic thinkers, then, in their reading of Kant, separated beauty from natural teleology (taste) and explained it purely in terms of free human creation (genius). According to Gadamer, this development continued the subjectivization of aesthetics that had begun with Kant’s theory of taste as faculty of aesthetic judgment.<sup>11</sup> This problematic of the “subjectivization of aesthetics” led to the development of the so-called “aesthetic consciousness” by

the German romantics (e.g. Schiller), which bases itself solely on formal criteria (as opposed to content) for appreciating the beautiful.

The development of aesthetic consciousness, according to Gadamer, was a moral imperative for the German romantics towards the development of a broader “cultural consciousness,” which involved a “rising to the universal, distancing from the particularity of immediate acceptance or rejection, respecting what does not correspond to one’s own expectation or preference.”<sup>12</sup> This meant that the work of art must be separated (indeed, alienated) from the world in which it arose, an abstraction that Gadamer calls “aesthetic differentiation.” Aesthetic differentiation is an abstract judgment that emphasizes only aesthetic qualities of a work of art, and not its “purpose, function, [or the] significance of its content.”<sup>13</sup> Thus it separates the work from its historical context, from its content or significance, and also from its performance or presentation (its “mediation” to an audience). The “genius” produces such works of art, which appeal solely to aesthetic criteria.

Aesthetic differentiation also depends upon a problematic theory of history that is termed “simultaneity,” which can be described as a sort of conflation of all historical periods into one. Simultaneity is *not* the integration of the past into the present, but tends to collect all the great works of art from different historical periods into one collection (e.g. a museum). The result is that “the work loses its place and the world to which it belongs insofar as it belongs instead to aesthetic consciousness.”<sup>14</sup>

The concept of *Erlebnis* provides a bridge between this aesthetics of genius and an aesthetics of reception. *Erlebniskunst*, or the emphasis of aesthetic consciousness upon the “aesthetic experience,” seems to suggest a transformative effect on the interpreter, and this at first appears to be in line with Gadamer’s emphasis on the “dialogical” model of the experience of the work of art. *Erlebniskunst* yields meaning that “belongs to the unity of this self [who experiences the work of art] and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life.”<sup>15</sup> Dialogical transformation is further suggested in the following description by Gadamer of *Erlebniskunst*:

the power of the work of art suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, yet relates him back to the whole of his existence. In the experience of art is present a fullness of meaning that belongs not only to this particular content or object but rather stands for the meaningful whole of life. An aesthetic *Erlebnis* always contains the experience of an infinite whole.<sup>16</sup>

However, the problem for Gadamer with this theory of *Erlebniskunst* is that it is too isolated from other types of interpretive experiences. In other words, the aesthetic becomes its own “genre” of experience that cannot overflow into other modes of understanding and knowledge. As Gadamer says, “[a]s the work of art as such is a world for itself, so also what is experienced is, as an *Erlebnis*, removed from all connections with actuality.”<sup>17</sup> *Erlebniskunst* represents a symbol of infinity, and not an integration of aesthetic experiences with the other experiences of the interpreter, for example the function of a work of art in the religious life of the community.<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, this theory of *Erlebniskunst* led to a theory of reception in which the interpretation of a work of art yields endless, unique, discontinuous experiences. The receiver, as it were, creates the work anew in each interpretive experience; thus the concept of genius shifted from that of the creator of a work of art to its interpreter. In contrast to this, Gadamer wishes to emphasize the *integration* of the work of art within the continuity of the interpretive experience of the observer, and so he sharply dismisses this idea as “an untenable hermeneutic nihilism.”<sup>19</sup>

Gadamer wishes to correct the view of history related in the “aesthetic consciousness” above, employing to this end Heidegger’s notion of the historicity of the interpreter as *Dasein*. Within the interpreter’s finite self-understanding (which has no privileged a-historical viewpoint from which to understand herself), she must try to appropriate the knowledge gained by the work of art into her own temporal process of self-understanding. In Gadamer’s words, “the phenomenon of art imposes an ineluctable task on existence, namely to achieve that continuity of self-understanding which alone can support human existence, despite the demands of the absorbing presence of the momentary aesthetic impression.”<sup>20</sup> Neither abstract a-historicity nor complete relativism is the result of this understanding of aesthetic experience, which emphasizes the attempt of the interpreter to integrate the aesthetic experience into her own continuing process of self-understanding.<sup>21</sup> This dialogical encounter is the mediation between the work of art in its historicity and the interpreter in hers. Already we see foreshadowed Gadamer’s concept of fusion of horizons, which will be dealt with below in Part Two.

It should be noted that throughout the book, the term “dialogical encounter” will be used: it suggests a structure in which the human interpreter interacts with a particular expression of “truth” in a work of art, a text, an event, or the personal communication of an Other. It is analogous to an I-Thou relationship. In this structure of dialogical encounter, the *interpreter* (the “I”) is open to a new

understanding of the subject matter through personally appropriating *the particular expression of truth* by the Other (the “Thou”: texts, works of art, events, personal communications).<sup>22</sup> Correlatively, in her personal appropriation of this truth the interpreter brings a unique perspective to it, on the basis of her situatedness. Thus, the “dialogical encounter” (as I am employing the term) is *not* between two interpreters trying to adjudicate between differing interpretations of the same text or phenomenon. It occurs rather between an interpreter and an expression of truth contained in a particular form (text, work of art, the expression of an Other person). Thus the dialogue ultimately concerns the truth about a “subject matter,” which transcends both of the partners (i.e., interpreter and text).<sup>23</sup>

Returning now to Gadamer’s aesthetics, I have discussed Gadamer’s account of the “subjectivization” of aesthetics that began with Kant in his concepts of taste and genius, and was continued by later German thinkers through “aesthetic consciousness” and “aesthetic differentiation.” It should be pointed out that aesthetic consciousness suggests a reliance upon the subject-object distinction to understand aesthetic experience. The subject is emphasized through the concept of genius in creation and later in reception of the work of art, which leads to a form of relativism for the aesthetic experience. On the other hand, the work of art becomes an “object” which exists in a timeless (a-historical) fashion, and thus cannot be integrated into the finite self-understanding of the interpreter in such a way that it results in a transformation. Instead, it can only be appreciated for its formal qualities and not its truth-bearing content.

In corrective to this, Gadamer articulates a theory of aesthetic experience in which the historicity of the work of art and of the interpreter are taken into account, in a dialogical encounter which results in transformation and self-understanding for the interpreter. One might say that Gadamer corrected an over-emphasis on the subject (stemming from Kant and his followers), and moved towards an understanding of experience that emphasizes the dialogue between interpreter and artwork that discloses truth (reflecting Heidegger’s position). Before discussing below this dialogical encounter in terms of Gadamer’s concepts of play, presentation, and aesthetic *non*-differentiation, it is necessary first to include a brief account of some key notions in Heidegger’s aesthetics that influenced Gadamer, relying on Gadamer’s own evaluation of these notions.

### The Heideggerian Corrective

Heidegger's influence upon Gadamer's aesthetics is not reflected only in the latter's awareness of the temporal horizon of human beings and its effect upon the historical self-understanding of the interpreter through an encounter with the work of art, which was discussed above. It is also reflected, in part, in Heidegger's thoughts on the origin of the work of art.<sup>24</sup> There are two key notions in this essay of Heidegger's that will affect Gadamer's aesthetics. The first, and less prominent notion is that of the conflict between earth and world.

For Heidegger, earth is the unyielding, basic matter that gives art its concrete form, while world is the "referential totality of Dasein's projection" which constitutes "the horizon that was preliminary to all projections of Dasein's concern."<sup>25</sup> The work of art arises out of the conflict between earth and world, when material reality is so shaped as to "open up a world" in which the human being can more deeply understand his situation through the encounter with this work of art. The importance for Gadamer of this conflict between earth and world is that it emphasizes the givenness of Being (earth), which can never be fully utilized by human beings (in technical mastery). Rather, Being is revealed through the event-character of the work of art, an event in which the work of art opens up a new and unique world, through virtue of its revealing "form" [*Gestalt*].<sup>26</sup>

The second (and related) notion in Heidegger's aesthetics, that influences Gadamer more substantially, is that of his disclosure and concealment theory of truth. One can see above that in the uniqueness of a work of art (its "form"), something is revealed (disclosed or "unconcealed") but also something remains concealed. That is, Being is not fully disclosed in any work of art, because this would suggest that one is capable of total comprehension (in the sense of scientific certitude and technical mastery) of its meaning. Heidegger, like Gadamer, rejects this modern, scientific attitude and prefers to view Being as always fuller (and hence more mysterious) than humans can grasp.<sup>27</sup>

One can see, then, that the aesthetics of Heidegger (and also of Gadamer) depends upon the notion that Being, in a disclosure event such as a work of art, reveals the truth about itself (but never completely). In the words of Gadamer's analysis of Heidegger,

[a] unique manifestation of truth occurs in the work of art. The reference to the work of art in which truth comes forth should indicate clearly that for Heidegger it is meaningful to speak of an event of truth. Hence Heidegger's essay does not restrict itself to giving a more suitable description of the Being of the work of art. Rather, his analysis supports his central philosophical concern to conceive Being itself as an event of truth.<sup>28</sup>

Aesthetics and the unique revelatory character of the work of art opens up into an analysis of the revelatory character of all Being. This shifts the emphasis from a subject-centered manner of thinking (in which the world is something to be fully comprehended and controlled) to an understanding of the human being in which she is taken out of herself into dialogue with the mystery of Being. It now remains to articulate this “dialogue” further in terms of Gadamer’s own aesthetics, focusing on his concepts of play, presentation, and aesthetic *non-differentiation*.

### **Play, Presentation and Aesthetic Non-Differentiation**

The concept of play is employed by Gadamer as a model of aesthetic experience, in which the subject-object distinction is viewed as inappropriate, and is replaced by a dialogical understanding in which the “subject” loses himself in the experience. This “loss” of self is termed “aesthetic non-differentiation” by Gadamer, in contrast to the aesthetic differentiation of aesthetic consciousness, which as we saw above was heavily criticized by him. It remains now to explain these concepts in greater detail, and to explain the ontological mode of being of art, termed “presentation” by Gadamer.

In beginning his reflections on play, Gadamer emphasizes that, even though its purpose is recreation, it has an inbuilt “seriousness” which must be respected by the player. One who doesn’t take seriously the rules of the game, is not truly “playing.” However, to play “seriously,” one must immerse oneself in the game to the point where one ceases to think about the rules consciously. To do otherwise would be to make the game into an object. Instead, “play fulfills its purpose only if the player *loses* himself in play.”<sup>29</sup>

Play is offered here as a contrast to the styles of aesthetic consciousness and differentiation that were outlined above. Instead of focusing on *Erlebniskunst* as an isolated type of experience within human consciousness, Gadamer instead chooses “the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art and thus the question of the mode of being of the work of art” as his topic of discussion. In contrast to the emphasis on subjectivity that he finds in aesthetic consciousness, he stresses that “the work of art... becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The ‘subject’ of the experience of art... is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself.”<sup>30</sup>

Gadamer articulates an understanding of aesthetic experience which is structural in nature and which de-emphasizes the subject in favor of the “to-and-fro” movement characteristic of play. By “to-and-fro,” he refers to the idea that one

cannot play a game by oneself. In any game, there has to be “something else with which the player plays and which automatically responds to his move with a countermove.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the structure of play is analogous to the structure of dialogical encounter, and thus it cannot occur within the subjective consciousness of the individual alone. Rather, it occurs through allowing oneself to be captivated by interaction with the Other. This analogy holds true for aesthetic experience as well: just as the player forgets himself and allows himself to be caught up in the game, so does the interpreter of a work of art allow himself to be caught up in the truth that it discloses.<sup>32</sup>

The ontology behind this understanding of aesthetic experience is characterized by the concept of presentation (*Darstellung*), with its underlying dependence upon Heidegger's disclosure-concealment theory (which was discussed above). Play becomes presentation through the players, who are not however the subjects of play. The player, in setting out for himself a task or game to which he devotes his attention and in performing it, “presents” that task or game, and also at the same time himself as player. In Gadamer's words, “the self-presentation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing—i.e. presenting—something.”<sup>33</sup>

An essential element of Gadamer's notion of presentation is that of representation (also signified by *Darstellung*), which brings his reflections closer within the ambit of aesthetics and especially drama. For Gadamer, “all presentation is potentially a representation for someone (*Darstellen für jemanden*).”<sup>34</sup> Representation involves the notion of a *spectator* of the game, or spectator as part of the game. As special instances of these types of “games” which intend the participation of spectators, Gadamer cites religious rites and dramatic plays. In these instances, the “players represent a meaningful whole for an audience” and, in turn, since the play (or religious rite, for Gadamer) is part of a closed world in which the audience participates, “[t]he audience only completes what the play as such is.”<sup>35</sup> The spectator, in a sense, is the one for whom the play is presented as meaningful, and thus the spectator represents the possibility of meaningful reception in any play or work of art. As Gadamer says, “[a]rtistic presentation, by its nature, exists for someone, even if there is no one there who merely listens or watches.”<sup>36</sup> Thus presentation functions to convey artistic meaning to another (in which case presentation becomes representation).

In his later essay “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” Gadamer expands these reflections by claiming that the spectator plays an active role in the presentation of the work of art. Play is a “communicative activity” that “does not really acknowledge the distance separating the one who plays and the one who watches

the play.”<sup>37</sup> Rather, the spectator completes the work of art by his own constructive perception of it. According to Gadamer, this entails a “constant cooperative activity” on the part of the spectator, which entails the active construction of “the form” of the work. It is “the identity of the work that invites us to this activity,” and so this perception is not “arbitrary” but is based on the reality of the work itself.<sup>38</sup> One might say that the spectator, as it were, perceives the form of the work of art, and in this way participates in its truth.

Gadamer discusses these theories further through his notion of play as “transformation into structure” (i.e., *Gebilde*). What this means is that in the interaction between players, what is played, and who watches the players, the “structure” of play is completed. Emphasizing one element over the other, especially emphasizing the isolated subjectivity of the player or the spectator, misses this holistic “structure” in which truth alone emerges.<sup>39</sup>

Gadamer’s theory of presentation and representation thus reflects the theory that truth emerges through the excess of being (that is, that being is never fully knowable), or in Heideggerian terms, through the disclosure and concealment of being in a work of art. Presentation is, in a sense, the disclosure of truth in the event of the “play,” and in representation this truth is understood by the human being (the spectator or interpreter).

The truth that emerges in a work of art, then, for Gadamer, reflects the reality of the world that becomes transformed and *recognized* through its “presentation.” In the following words, Gadamer echoes Heidegger: “in being presented in play, what is emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn.”<sup>40</sup> Art brings to light (discloses) what is already there, and in this sense Gadamer reflects the Platonic theory of art as imitation, and appreciation of art as recognition of the truth about the world and oneself. However, Gadamer does not believe that art is a mere “copy” of reality, and thus inferior to it (which is one of Plato’s criticisms of art). Nor does he believe, with Hegel, that art is an inferior expression of pure concept, so that art does not reveal truth as well as philosophy. On the contrary, art brings out the “essence” of its subject and thus “is necessarily revelatory (*zeigend*).”<sup>41</sup> Thus the “recognition” of truth in the work of art involves the recognition of the true being that it discloses through presentation.

Gadamer contrasts this theory of truth with the overly subjective aesthetics that he associates with Kant and his followers. As he states, “[i]f art is not the variety of changing experiences [*Erlebnisse*] whose object is filled subjectively with meaning like an empty mold, we must recognize that ‘presentation’ [*Darstellung*] is the mode of being of the work of art.”<sup>42</sup> We can see here in more

detail the contrast Gadamer draws between “Kantian” and “Heideggerian” aesthetics. In the former, aesthetic consciousness, aesthetic differentiation, and aesthetic *Erlebnis* are the dominant concepts, implying that the subject is isolated from the “meaning” of the work of art and instead escapes into a rarefied and discontinuous “experience” of purely aesthetic formal qualities. In the latter, player and spectator become parts of (in fact, are almost lost within) a larger structure in which the essence of reality is, as it were, highlighted (disclosed), and thus is more easily recognized. This structure (of play or of aesthetics) has an ontological status, and so Gadamer claims that “the aesthetic attitude...is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*.”<sup>43</sup>

This difference can be further illustrated through a consideration of Gadamer's theory of “aesthetic non-differentiation,” which he sets up explicitly in contrast to the “aesthetic differentiation” that he associates with the followers of Kant. Aesthetic differentiation consists of a sharp distinction between a work of art and its subject matter, and also of a sharp distinction between a work of art and its “performance.” In other words, it focuses on the purely formal aesthetic qualities of the work of art or upon the mechanics of its performance, while neglecting the subject matter and its potentially transformative, truth-revealing effect on the spectator. In Gadamer's words:

[t]o investigate the origin of the plot on which it is based is to move out of the real experience of a piece of literature, and likewise it is to move out of the real experience of the play if the spectator reflects about the conception behind a performance or about the proficiency of the actors. Already implicit in this kind of reflection is the aesthetic differentiation of the work itself from its representation.<sup>44</sup>

In the place of aesthetic differentiation, Gadamer proposes that the proper aesthetic attitude is a *non*-distinction between the work of art and its subject matter, and the work of art and its performance. The work of art reveals the truth of its subject matter, and its performance makes it present to the spectator in such a way that she loses herself in this disclosure, and in doing so enables the work of art to make a “claim” on her.<sup>45</sup> Even though, in a sense, the performance mediates the work of art, for Gadamer the goal of the mediation of a work of art is to bring the full presence of truth to the spectator.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Gadamer claims that “[t]he artistic experience is constituted precisely by the fact that we do not distinguish between the particular way the work is realized and the identity of the work itself.”<sup>47</sup> In this way, he emphasizes the inseparability of the truth of the work of art from its particular presentation.

If one engages in aesthetic differentiation, this ontology of disclosure is shattered and one ends up in the rarefied and discontinuous realm of aesthetic consciousness, which does not reveal truth or transform the spectator through its revelation. These concepts can perhaps best be illustrated further through a consideration of Gadamer's work on drama, an art form in which there is a clear coincidence of a work of art disclosing truth and of play resulting in presentation.

### **Play and Drama**

Drama is only one of the various categories of artistic presentation that Gadamer analyzes, and even though it is perhaps not his central example of such presentation, it is ideal for this comparative study with Balthasar, who of course devoted several volumes to articulating the relationship between theology and drama. Furthermore, the very words "play," "presentation," and "spectator" in Gadamer's general thought on aesthetic ontology lend themselves to being understood in terms of drama.

Gadamer's thought on drama centers on the category of tragedy. The emotional experience of watching a tragedy, as discussed by Aristotle in terms of "pity" and "fear," exemplifies Gadamer's theory that the spectator's experience of artistic presentation involves an ecstasis, that is, a state of "being outside oneself, which testif[ies] to the power of what is being played out before us."<sup>48</sup> The spectator, through commiseration with the events being presented, recognizes the possibility that he could find himself in the same situation. This recognition involves an emotional battle between rebellion against the possibility of such a situation and acceptance of its possibility. In the latter, resolution is achieved, and also knowledge of the reality of the world is attained. In Gadamer's words:

There is a disjunction from what is happening, a refusal to accept that rebels against the agonizing events. But the effect of the tragic catastrophe is precisely to dissolve this disjunction from what is. It effects the total liberation of the constrained heart. We are freed not only from the spell in which the misery and horror of the tragic fate had bound us, but at the same time we are free from everything that divides us from what is.<sup>49</sup>

This immersion in the content of the play by the spectator illustrates what Gadamer means by aesthetic non-differentiation. The spectator does not separate the content of the play from its form, nor does she separate herself from its presentation in such a way that she is being critical of its aesthetic qualities during the performance. Rather, it reveals for her the reality of the world. The author of

the play is also subject to this reality, and the common recognition of the way things are, as it were, grounds the possibility of shared meaning between the author and spectator.<sup>50</sup>

Gadamer provides us with a hint of what he means by the "reality" that is revealed in tragedy in his discussion of disproportionate punishment. He holds that what is affirmed in tragedy is not the "justice of a moral world order," in which a guilty act is repaid by an act of proportionate restitution. Rather, "it is the disproportionate, terrible immensity of the consequences that flow from a guilty deed that is the real claim made on the spectator."<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, Gadamer does not enter into a theological discussion about this "metaphysical order of being that is true for all." One may speculate that such tragedies illustrate the futility of a world immersed in original sin (in fact, original sin is probably the ultimate illustration of tragedy from a Christian perspective). Tragedy illustrates a world of sin in which human beings are incapable of escaping the effects of corruption, failure, and death. To this degree, Gadamer's analysis of tragedy remains incomplete, for it does not discuss the possibility of redemption and eschatological fulfillment. These themes will, however, be treated in terms of Balthasar's theological dramatics in the following chapter.

It should be clear from this section that tragedy for Gadamer involves a dialogue between the spectator and the truth about the world that is "presented" in it. The recognition of this truth by the spectator is a form of participation which removes her from her self-enclosed autonomy and opens for her the possibility of transformation through this encounter with an Other (in this case, the truth about the world presented in the experience of watching a tragedy). Indeed, for Gadamer, it is not only tragedy that effects this dialogical participation, but all forms of artistic presentation (drama, painting, literature, etc.) Tragedy is merely a concrete example of the aesthetic experience that Gadamer discusses throughout Part One of *Truth and Method*. It remains now to devote a section to the underlying ontology of Gadamer's aesthetics, which depends on the metaphor of radiance to describe beauty.

### **The Radiance Theory of Beauty and Gadamer's Aesthetics**

A component of Gadamer's aesthetics that should not be ignored is his employment of the (Neo-)Platonic metaphor of beauty as *radiance*. This metaphor dovetails with his understanding of Heidegger's disclosure-concealment theory of truth (in which the work of art discloses or reveals truth), and with his under-

standing of the work of art as self-presentation of its own being. The use of this metaphor, found especially in the closing section of *Truth and Method*, does seem to place Gadamer more in the camp of traditional metaphysics than Heidegger would be. Gadamer himself hints at this when he says that

[w]ith the ontological turn that our hermeneutical inquiry has taken, we are moving toward a metaphysical idea whose significance we can show by going back to its origins. *The concept of the beautiful*...was once a universal metaphysical concept...We will see that this ancient conception of the beautiful can also be of service to the comprehensive hermeneutics that has emerged from the critique of the methodologism of the human sciences.<sup>52</sup>

Gadamer discusses the concept of the beautiful in terms of Platonic philosophy, in which he finds a “close connection, and sometimes even a confusion, between the idea of the good and the idea of the beautiful.” However, Gadamer recognizes that the beautiful is indeed distinct from the good in Platonic philosophy, especially on the basis of its visibility: “the beautiful is distinguished from the absolutely intangible good in that it can be *grasped*. It is part of its own nature to be something that is visibly manifest [*Erscheinendes*].”<sup>53</sup>

This visible manifestation of beauty is described by Gadamer in terms of “radiance” (*Hervorleuchtende* or *Hervorscheinen*). Gadamer finds this concept in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and claims that “beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance. This is the metaphysical crux of Platonism.”<sup>54</sup> Thus Gadamer uses the metaphor of light or radiance in order to demonstrate that beauty is a visible manifestation of truth. In fact, Gadamer says that “[t]he beautiful appears not only in what is visibly present to the senses, but it does so in such a way that it really exists *only* through it.”<sup>55</sup>

The radiance of beauty has an underlying ontology that is explicitly related to the concepts of disclosure and presentation discussed above. For example, in a lengthy quote that deserves to be given nearly in full, Gadamer claims that

‘[r]adiance’, then, is not only one of the qualities of the beautiful but constitutes its actual being. The distinguishing mark of the beautiful—namely that *it immediately attracts the desire of the human soul to it*—is founded in its mode of being. The proportionateness of the thing does not simply let it be what it is but also causes it to emerge as a harmonious whole that is proportioned within itself. This is the *disclosure* [*Offenbarkeit*] (*aletheia*) of which Plato speaks in the *Philebus* and which is part of the nature of the beautiful. Beauty is not simply symmetry but appearance itself. It is related to the idea of ‘shining’ (*scheinen*).... ‘To shine’ means to shine on something, and so to make that on which the light falls appear. Beauty has the mode of being of *light*.<sup>56</sup>

Thus what we have here is an ontology in which the appearance of a beautiful thing radiates outward from its essential being. Gadamer says this explicitly when he states that “[b]eauty is not radiance shed on a form from without. Rather, the ontological constitution of the form itself is to be radiant, to present itself in this way.”<sup>57</sup> The attractive appearance of the beautiful, then, is not merely an accident or a phenomenon, but is *inseparable* from its disclosure to the human being, through its form.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the metaphor of light, in addition to conveying the visible manifestation of inward being, also conveys the necessity of the relationship between disclosure and appearance. This means that the truth about being is not only known through ideas but through the world of the senses.<sup>59</sup> One might say that this radiance theory of aesthetics dovetails neatly with an emphasis on the incarnational or particular aspects of any work of art, text, or religious event.<sup>60</sup>

The concepts of the disclosure of being and the presentation of being, which have been discussed in this chapter mainly in relation to the work of art, are both based on this ontology of the radiance of beauty. Both concepts depend on the notion that being *reveals itself* through its beauty to the human being who is searching for truth. Beauty has a quality of immediate evidentness which is shown in its *self-presentation*: “what distinguishes the beautiful from the good is that the beautiful of itself presents itself, that its being is such that it makes itself immediately evident (*einleuchtend*).”<sup>61</sup>

Gadamer draws explicit parallels between this radiant self-evidentness of beauty and the evidentness of truth expressed through language. He explores this link first of all by extending the metaphor of light into the realm of intelligence in Plato: “The light in which not only the realm of the visible but also that of the intelligible is articulated, is not the light of the sun but the light of the mind, *nous*.”<sup>62</sup> The early Christian tradition picks up this metaphor and extends it to the Word through which (or rather through whom) all things were created:

[t]he Christian doctrine of the word, the *verbum creans*... follows the Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics of light... The light that causes everything to emerge in such a way that it is evident and comprehensible is the light of the word. *Thus the close relationship that exists between the shining forth (Vorscheinen) of the beautiful and the evidentness (das Einleuchtende) of the understandable is based on the metaphysics of light.* This was precisely the relation that guided our hermeneutical inquiry.<sup>63</sup>

It can be seen, then, that Gadamer is following this Platonic/Neoplatonic radiance theory of the beautiful and its later patristic application to the Christian theology of creation. In doing so, he is extending the radiance of beauty to the

sphere of truth that is expressed through language (word). Thus, under the rubric of the metaphor of radiance, there is an explicit link between Gadamer's aesthetics and his hermeneutics. He claims that the experience [i.e., *Erfahrung*] of interpreting tradition has a quality of self-evidentness (and transformation) that is also found in the experience of the beautiful: "The tradition asserts its own truth in being understood, and disturbs the horizon that had, until then, surrounded us."<sup>64</sup>

It is also noteworthy that for Gadamer beauty is that which "immediately attracts the desire of the human soul to it." Along the same lines, Gadamer also says that "that which manifests itself in perfect form attracts the longing of love to it." Thus the Platonic ontology lying behind the radiance of beauty has an anthropological element: human beings are drawn to participate in beauty. Gadamer quotes Thomas Aquinas favorably in this regard: "[t]he beautiful is that in the vision of which desire comes to rest." However, rather than appealing to a traditional substance metaphysics, Gadamer interprets these statements in light of the disclosure-concealment theory of truth. Hence, it is the *self-presentation* of a being that "finds its concrete form in the concept of participation (*methexis*)." Participation, as we have discussed above, results from allowing oneself to be transformed by the truth that is revealed (i.e., presented) in the aesthetic experience.<sup>65</sup>

We have discussed in this chapter, then, Gadamer's rejection of the subjectivization of aesthetics through Kant (with its presupposition of distance and neutrality), and his corrective to this trend employing the notions of *play* (involvement of the subject in a larger structure in which he loses himself), *presentation* (disclosure of truth through the representation of reality in a particular creative art form), and *aesthetic non-differentiation* (the refusal to separate the content and form of a work of art, or to separate the work of art from its performance). We have shown, briefly, how drama illustrates these notions.

We have also seen a number of the components of Gadamer's radiance theory of beauty. This theory underlies the dialogical structure that we have sketched in terms of Gadamer's notion of play, presentation (disclosure), and aesthetic non-differentiation: the work of art "presents" its own truth to the spectator (understood through the metaphor of radiance), who then becomes transformed through this experience of beauty. In doing so, the spectator becomes a participant in the event of truth that is conveyed through the work of art. In Chapter Four, we shall apply this dialogical structure to Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics proper (i.e., for traditional texts within the context of the pro-

gress of history). Our next task, however, is to recount Balthasar's aesthetics in Chapter Two, followed by a substantive comparison with Gadamer's aesthetics in Chapter Three.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989); originally published as *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 5th ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986). Hereafter cited in English translation as *TM*. Excellent overviews of Gadamer's aesthetics by Kathleen Wright, Joel Weinsheimer, and Jean Grondin, can be found in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 2, edited by Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 261–271.

<sup>2</sup>*TM* 53.

<sup>3</sup>*TM* 43.

<sup>4</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. by Nicholas Walker, edited with introduction by Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge University Press: 1986), 1–53, at 18; originally published as "Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest," found in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8, *Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 94–142. Hereafter cited as *RB*.

<sup>5</sup>*RB* 18–19.

<sup>6</sup>*TM* 53, emphasis mine.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* Also Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Truth of the Work of Art" in *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. by John W. Stanley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 95–109, at 100; originally published as "Die Wahrheit des Kunstwerkes" in *Heideggers Wege: Studien zum Spätwerk* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), also found in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3, *Neuere Philosophie I. Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 175–332. Hereafter cited as *TWA*.

<sup>8</sup>For example, in *RB* 30, Gadamer says that Kant's "creationist theology," which lies behind the ability of the human being to appreciate the beauty of nature, also "forms the self-evident basis from which he represents the production of the genius and the artist as an extreme intensification of the power that nature, as divinely created, possesses." This later evaluation does not affect Gadamer's negative judgment in *TM* of the aesthetics of genius in the German romantics, discussed below.

<sup>9</sup>See Robert Bernasconi's "Editor's introduction" in *RB*, xviii–xx.

<sup>10</sup>*TM* 58.

<sup>11</sup>This point is explicitly made in *TWA*, 101, in which Gadamer claims that with the removal of Kant's understanding of the "mysterious congruity" existing between nature and subjectivity in the perception of beauty (both in taste and in genius), "the grounding of aesthetics led inevitably to a radical subjectification in further development of the freedom of the genius from the rules. No longer derived from the comprehensive whole of the order of Being, art comes to be contrasted with actuality."

<sup>12</sup>*TM* 84.

<sup>13</sup>*TM* 85.

<sup>14</sup>*TM* 87.

<sup>15</sup>*TM* 68.

<sup>16</sup>*TM* 68.

<sup>17</sup>*TM* 70.

<sup>18</sup>*TM* 70, 81.

<sup>19</sup>*TM* 95.

<sup>20</sup>*TM* 96.

<sup>21</sup>*TM* 9.

<sup>22</sup>Gadamer states this explicitly in the foreword to the second edition of *TM*, in which he says “I believe that I have shown correctly that what is so understood is not the Thou but the truth of what the Thou says to us. I mean specifically the truth that becomes visible to me only through the Thou, and only by my letting myself be told something by it,” *TM* xxxv. Of course, in the case of revelation, the Thou and what is said by the Thou are virtually identical.

<sup>23</sup>Although this will be discussed in the next chapter on Balthasar, the prime theological example of “subject matter” is the self-revelation of the triune God, which finds its expression across time through the texts of Scripture and the events of salvation history. Another example of “subject matter” is the constitution of the human person, expressed for example through philosophical and theological speculation about creation, grace, morality, and death.

<sup>24</sup>Found in Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” translated by Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 15–87; originally published as “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in *Holzwege*, vol. 5, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 1–74.

<sup>25</sup>*TWA*, 99.

<sup>26</sup>*TWA*, 103–105.

<sup>27</sup>*TWA*, 106–108.

<sup>28</sup>*TWA*, 105.

<sup>29</sup>*TM* 102, emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup>*TM* 102. The contrast between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* is an important one, which is discussed in detail by Joel Weinsheimer in his translator’s preface to *Truth and Method*; see *TM*, xiii–xv. It will be recalled that for Gadamer *Erlebnis* is an experience which is an immediate symbol of infinite life (hence the German root *leben*). It is an infinite expression of the whole, and hence does not have a proper understanding of the finitude of the person experiencing it. By contrast, for Gadamer, *Erfahrung* is an experience that is integrated within the finite and temporally progressing understanding of the interpreter (hence the German root *fahren*, suggesting a journeying movement). More will be said about this distinction below in Chapter Four.

<sup>31</sup>*TM* 105–106. An additional observation, found in *RB* 22, is that in the “to-and-fro” movement, “neither pole of the movement represents the goal in which it would come to rest.”

<sup>32</sup>And, as we shall attempt to show in Chapter Two on Balthasar, it holds true for religious experience and revelation also, particularly as understood in terms of dramatic categories.

<sup>33</sup>*TM* 108. See also *TM* pp. 110–111.

<sup>34</sup>*TM* 108 (*GW* vol. 1, 114).

<sup>35</sup>*TM* 109.

<sup>36</sup>TM 110. Gadamer goes through and explains how each of the forms of art illustrate his theory of art as presentation or representation; e.g., tragedy is covered in TM 129–134, painting in TM 134–144, and literature in TM 159–164.

<sup>37</sup>RB 24.

<sup>38</sup>See RB 27.

<sup>39</sup>TM 110–112.

<sup>40</sup>TM 112.

<sup>41</sup>TM 115.

<sup>42</sup>TM 115.

<sup>43</sup>TM 116.

<sup>44</sup>TM 117.

<sup>45</sup>Gadamer actually employs the analogy of a faith claim, in which the preaching of the Gospel effects a “total mediation” of its message. Although Gadamer is Protestant and appeals to Lutheranism here, he also suggests that the Mass displays this same mediation, in which (in my words) what is believed is made present through the religious rite itself.

<sup>46</sup>This revelation of truth may result in ethical transformation on the part of the subject, as is explicitly suggested in Gadamer's use of the quote from Rilke: “Du mußt dein Leben ändern [“You must change your life”] at the end of his essay “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 95–104; originally published as “Ästhetik und Hermeneutik,” found in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8, *Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 1–8, at 8. The poem from which it is taken, “Archaic Torso of Apollo” can be found in German with English translation in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1982), 60–61. Interestingly, Balthasar also employs this same quote from Rilke in *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, 23.

<sup>47</sup>RB 29.

<sup>48</sup>TM 131.

<sup>49</sup>TM 131.

<sup>50</sup>TM 133.

<sup>51</sup>TM 132.

<sup>52</sup>TM 477, *emph. his.*

<sup>53</sup>TM 478, 481. One question that is raised here in terms of Gadamer's notion of “Platonic” beauty is the relationship of radiance metaphysics with the conventional interpretation of Plato as being “anti-art” or of relegating art to an inferior status in relationship to the realm of Ideas (see, e.g., Plato's *Republic*). It should be clear from the following presentation of Gadamer's radiance ontology, however, that it has strong resonance with “classical metaphysics” in general, which sees Being as one, uniting the transcendentals of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

<sup>54</sup>TM 481. He also says that the beautiful is “the hiatus (*chorismos*) between the world of the senses and the world of ideas,” TM 482.

<sup>55</sup>TM 482, *emph. mine.*

<sup>56</sup>TM 482, *emph. mine.*

<sup>57</sup>TM 487.

<sup>58</sup>Gadamer discusses this same idea in terms of “symbol” in RB, 31–34.

<sup>59</sup>Gadamer contrasts his aesthetics with Hegel's idealist aesthetics here, in which “[t]o expect that we can recuperate within the concept the meaningful content that addresses us in art is already to have overtaken art in a very dangerous manner,” RB 33. In other words, to reduce the truth of art to the idea or concept that lies behind it, while discarding the appearance or “form” in which it appears, is contrary to Gadamer's view of aesthetics.

<sup>60</sup>Although Gadamer does not suggest it, one might think that the event of the Transfiguration could be related most effectively to this radiance theory of aesthetics. Furthermore, his linking of form and radiance have obvious parallels with the theology of Balthasar, as will be evident in later chapters.

<sup>61</sup>*TM* 481.

<sup>62</sup>*TM* 483.

<sup>63</sup>*TM* 483. He also favorably quotes in particular Augustine's linking of word and light in a commentary on Genesis. See *TM* 484.

<sup>64</sup>*TM* 486.

<sup>65</sup>*TM* 418–82, 487.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BALTHASAR'S AESTHETICS

Just as Gadamer employs a dialogical aesthetics as a means of correcting overly subject-centered or methodological approaches to hermeneutics, so does Balthasar employ a dialogical aesthetics as a means of correcting overly subject-centered or methodological approaches to fundamental theology. This will entail a critique of an anthropological starting point that presupposes a neutral, *a priori* capacity for “religious experience,” which precedes the concrete particulars of any religion. It will also entail a critique of the *tendency* of an anthropocentric starting point to result in a reduction of religious experience to the striving of the finite spirit towards the infinite or transcendent, ultimately resulting in a self-enclosed atheism that leaves no room for divine revelation (e.g., Feuerbach).

Instead, Balthasar advocates an aesthetic approach to theology, which recognizes the need to be receptive to divine revelation (faith) and to allow oneself to be transformed by it (enrapturement). The metaphysical basis of his use of aesthetics is the belief that the transcendentals of Being (the true, the good, and the beautiful) are inseparable, and that modern theology has in large part neglected the beautiful.<sup>1</sup> Even more fundamental than this is his belief that God’s revelation can best be understood in terms of its radiant beauty, analyzed under the central concept of “glory” (*Herrlichkeit*).

Balthasar’s aesthetics can best be understood as a dialogical structure between the believer and the revelation of God out of love for humanity. He articulates two necessary and inseparable poles for doing theology in an aesthetic mode, namely subjective faith (understood as perceiving the beauty of revelation under the light of faith), and objective revelation (understood as the “form” or concrete realization of God’s self-communication in love towards us), the perception of which leads to enrapturement and transformation on the part of the believer.

I will separate this chapter into four sections. The first will contrast Balthasar’s style of fundamental theology with subject-centered, anthropocentric approaches. The next section on subjective faith will examine such ideas as light of faith, perception of the form, Christian attunement, the primacy of receptivity, and enrapturement. The third section will examine the objective pole, namely the “contents” of the form, understood as Christian revelation centered around the kenotic, loving sacrifice of Christ. The final section will explore the dialogi-

cal aspects of theo-drama, i.e., human participation in Christian revelation. In these sections I will draw primarily upon Balthasar's works *Glory of the Lord*, *Love Alone*, and *Theo-Drama*.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Rejection of Subjectivism in Aesthetic Fundamental Theology**

Balthasar's fundamental theology is based on a dialogical structure between the two poles of "subjective" faith and "objective" revelation. However, a word of caution must be interjected in regard to these terms. Balthasar's use of the terms subjective and objective actually point to an inseparability of the subject from the *object* of knowledge. In theological terms, this will mean that subjective faith cannot be separated from the particular truths of Christian revelation, which enrapture and transform the believer. In other words, there is a dialogical structure between believer and revelation.<sup>3</sup>

If one begins with the subjective pole, it should be remembered that for Balthasar, God's revelation precedes the believer's perception of it. The believer, through the "eyes of faith" is able to perceive the "splendor" of the form, which radiates God's beauty and God's self-giving love for humanity. The perception of the form is furthermore not merely a static examination of God's beauty, but results in the enrapturement and transformation of the believer.

The form itself [*Gestalt*] is the "objective" pole, and refers to the particular shape and contents of God's revelation to human beings, including creation, the promise-fulfillment dialectic of Old and New Testaments, the Incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ, the form of the Catholic Church, the drama of grace and salvation, and Christian eschatology. These aspects of Christianity are usually relegated to doctrinal theology, but for Balthasar one cannot deal with subjective faith without examining the *object* of faith. There is not for him an emphasis on the autonomous subject that is "bracketed" from his metaphysical and religious framework and analyzed in terms of isolated consciousness.

Thus, Balthasar will reject a style of fundamental theology that begins with the human subject's religious experience without taking into account the particular, revelation-based content that undergirds it. This will mean that fundamental and "dogmatic" or doctrinal theology are *inseparable*, and that fundamental theology cannot be done without an account of the specific contents of revelation.<sup>4</sup> It also means that Christian theology cannot be done without reference to particularly Christian spiritual experience.

This circular (because dialogical) structure of the inseparability of subjective and objective poles forms the basis for Balthasar's aesthetic approach to fundamental theology, which he contrasts in *Love Alone* with both "cosmological" and "anthropocentric" approaches. These two approaches are treated more fully in *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5, where they can be identified with the two major trends in the modern Western metaphysical tradition: "classical mediation," culminating in Hölderlin and especially Heidegger, and "the metaphysics of spirit," culminating in Hegel and Marx.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Cosmological Approach/ Classical Mediation**

The cosmological approach during the patristic era, saw the "natural and supernatural orders" to be "one thing," and hence saw the wisdom of ancient Greece and other religions to contain "anticipations of the God-Logos," who unites all their most valid insights and who became incarnate in Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> It saw Christ the Logos as the fulfillment of all philosophy, and saw all philosophy as pointing to Christ the Logos; this view resurfaced in the Renaissance, during which began the "reduction of Christianity to its simplest, most luminous truths," in short a "natural religion."<sup>7</sup>

In the modern period, this approach can be identified with what Balthasar calls "classical mediation" or the "resuscitation of antiquity," in *Glory of the Lord*, volume five. It surfaces with particular force in the German poets Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke, and culminates in the philosophy of Heidegger. For Balthasar, this post-Christian school of thought attempts to recover the truths of ancient metaphysics (particularly the sense of wonder at the gift of Being) that have been obscured through the "Titanistic" philosophies of Spirit that seek to identify finite mind and absolute Being.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately the school of classical mediation fails, even in Heidegger, whose philosophy is called by Balthasar "the most fertile one from the point of view of a potential philosophy of glory."<sup>9</sup> Even though it recognizes the wonder and giftedness of Being, and encourages an attitude of gratitude for existence on the part of the human thinker, it fails to recognize the giver as God. This is because it fails to acknowledge the ultimate distinction between God and created Being that one finds in the philosophy of "Ontological Difference" of Thomas Aquinas, to which Balthasar constantly makes reference in *The Glory of the Lord*, volume five. Being is seen in Heidegger as self-subsistent and not as the gift of a loving Creator.<sup>10</sup> It is here that Balthasar affirms the traditional Catholic concept of the "analogy of being," even though he stresses in Barthian fashion the ever-

greater *dissimilarity* between God and world.<sup>11</sup> In short, the cosmological approach fails because it sees classical thought about the cosmos as “comprehensive” rather than as an “Advent-like openness” to Christianity, and so it does not see the possibility of God breaking into the world, as it were.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Anthropological Approach/ Metaphysics of Spirit**

The other modern school of philosophy that Balthasar critiques is the anthropological approach. This is also called a “metaphysics of spirit,” which begins with the “turn to the subject” in Descartes and Kant and leads to philosophies of identity such as Fichte and Hegel. For Balthasar the tendency towards philosophies of “identity” (between finite and Absolute mind) reduces the “otherness” of Being and of God. They overemphasize the subject’s role in discovering truth, to the detriment of the “other,” and are thus not sufficiently dialogical. Balthasar often uses the Greek mythological terms “Titanic” or “Promethean” to describe this attitude of rejection of the distinction between God and human beings.<sup>13</sup>

It is necessary to describe in greater detail what is meant by the “identity” of finite and Absolute Mind. Balthasar sees such philosophies as construing a circular, enclosed structure in which the finite mind strives to comprehend the whole of Being, which is known by the Absolute Mind. In its orientation towards the full comprehension of Being that is known by the Absolute Mind, the finite mind already contains it within itself as a future projection.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the process of finite mind becoming like Absolute Mind suggests an identity between the two (to be realized in an unspecified future but occurring in an implied way in the present). In this way, all that the finite mind can know is already contained within itself *in nuce*.

More specifically, the main problem for Balthasar with these philosophies of identity is that they end up positing that the finite mind ends up taking control, as it were, with regard to infinity. As Balthasar says of “Kant and his followers [the German Idealists]”:

Infinity (or freedom) is the means of measuring our own finite nature; with it man measures his own diameter. If this means is previously given him (in nature), *he is able, to the extent that he grasps it [infinity] (in spirit), to take possession of it and steer himself.*<sup>15</sup>

The final implication of this system, which Balthasar rejects, is that it makes the human spirit (to the extent that it is moving towards the Absolute) into a self-enclosed entity that contains all being within itself. As Balthasar puts it,

“[a]s the circle between the ideal and the real gradually closes, all being is seen as contained within it.” To the extent that God is understood as “other” than this dynamic impulse of the finite mind towards containing being within itself, God becomes, in Balthasar’s words, “superfluous, unless one were to consider the establishment of human freedom a divine occurrence.”<sup>16</sup> Thus there is no room for a divine revelation that occurs outside of this dynamic of spirit.

While the philosophies of identity are most identifiable with the German Idealists (e.g., Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel), Balthasar sees Kant as one of the figures who leads up to this path. In particular, Balthasar is critical of the tendency that he sees in Kant to set up reason as the measure of revelation. This is illustrated by the following quote:

[for Kant] I carry within myself such a consciousness (autonomy) that I can measure all that is statutory-religious against it. But this means that there can be nothing ‘supernatural’ for Kant (despite all his genuine consciousness of mystery) in the sense that it could be located fundamentally beyond the human spirit in its opening as practical reason. Thus it is man who (in his freedom, which touches *and contains* the Absolute) finally measures out the space between himself and God.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of paths that modern theology took from this Kantian-Idealist shift, according to Balthasar. One is the move towards atheism, namely that one might so identify infinite subjectivity with “the transcendental structure of man,” that it could be argued that the divine is actually within (and only within) the human (e.g. Feuerbach). Within Protestant theology, Schleiermacher sought to avoid this move by stressing the “feeling of absolute dependency.” However, for Balthasar this is flawed because “Schleiermacher subsumes Christology under the heading of the consciousness of being saved, as the condition of its possibility [so that]...[o]nly in relation to the pious consciousness are dogmatic propositions in general to be called scientific.”<sup>18</sup> The historical kerygma is only an illustration of the structure of pious consciousness, not its foundation.

Within Catholic theology, Kant’s influence also played its part, in the phenomenon of Modernism and later proponents of immanence such as Blondel and Maréchal. Balthasar holds that “[t]he central proposition of the [Modernist] movement was the belief that the test of objective, dogmatic propositions was their meaning and significance for the individual and their efficacy to fulfill and complete him.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, even though the thought of Blondel and Maréchal “was anything but modernist, it does, however, debauch into an anthropological justification of revelation.”<sup>20</sup> Balthasar makes concessions for the thought of these two dynamists, but charges them primarily with focusing on

the finite striving of the human being towards the infinite, rather than on the revelation of God himself.<sup>21</sup>

Balthasar rejects this anthropological method, because it leads to an overly subject-centered approach to fundamental theology, and he places the primacy instead on the beauty of God's revelation that "enraptures" and transforms the believer. In his own words, "[God's message] is an act of God on man; an act done for and on behalf of man—and only then to man, and in him." Thus the subjective experience of "man" is analyzed by Balthasar in terms of "perception" of God's glory, which presupposes the "objective self-expression" of that glory, in revelation.<sup>22</sup> This dialogical structure has two interactive poles, the subjective and objective, each of which will be discussed further below.

### **The Subjective Pole: The Reception of Revelation**

Balthasar's approach to subjectivity, as opposed to the "Kantian" trends outlined above, focuses on the transformative encounter of the "subject" with the beautiful "object," namely Christian revelation. Thus, his approach will emphasize the need for the subject to perceive, appreciate, and receive (instead of methodically determine or reduce to an *a priori*) the truth of that particular revelation. This emphasis becomes most clear in his analysis of Christian attunement and active receptivity, which must be preceded by a look at the concept of the light of faith and perception.

#### **Light of Faith**

Balthasar sees the "light of faith" as the prerequisite for dealing with Christian revelation in aesthetic terms. He contrasts it with two styles of apologetics. The first style tends to focus on historical revelation as "signs of God" which point beyond themselves to God, and which ought to be believed primarily because of the credibility of the witnesses (i.e., the writers of Scripture). This is the style of "positive theology as developed primarily by the Baroque scholasticism and Neo-Scholasticism of the Jesuits."<sup>23</sup> For example, such a style would examine the historical credibility of the Apostles in order to "prove" certain statements made in the New Testament.

The second style of apologetics focuses on subjective dynamism. That is, it focuses on the correspondence between "the spiritual subject's cognitive dynamism" and God's self-revelation understood through "the luminous and illuminating character proper to absolute Being," which illumines the mind under the category of Logos. Balthasar associates both Augustine and Aquinas

with this style, and says that “they both see God’s active deed of self-revelation as the bestowal of the innermost light of Being,” which illumines the mind and suggests the inchoate beginning of the beatific vision of God. Modern theologians (such as Blondel, Maréchal, and Rousselot) who focus on subjective dynamism and argue from the “‘restless heart’ of man” to the “interior appropriateness and reasonableness of the transcendent faith-act, made possible by the light of grace,” are also placed into this category, of which Modernism is seen as the extreme version.<sup>24</sup>

Balthasar is not uncritical of this subjective-dynamic style of apologetics, although he prefers it to the apologetic style that is based on the historical credibility of witnesses. Particularly, in regard to subjective dynamism, he wonders if “the objective foundation of the specifically Christian fact is as successful as the subjective foundation” in the subjective-dynamic style of apologetics, and whether it thus becomes too dependent on philosophy, “which makes the internal standard of the striving spirit...somehow the measure of revelation itself.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, both styles of apologetics suffer from using the data of revelation as mere “pointers” toward a mystery that supersedes its historical basis.<sup>26</sup>

For Balthasar, this notion of pointer or sign (whether historically credible witnesses or the need for fulfillment of transcendent longings) towards a deeper mystery is insufficient to explain the light of faith. It fulfills the transcendentals of truth and goodness, but not that of the beautiful. A more adequate notion to explain the light of faith is that of form, because the “beautiful is above all a *form*, and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form’s interior.”<sup>27</sup> Here we see the unity of splendor and form, for the light of beauty radiates from within the boundaries of the form. In other words, the particular way that the beauty of God’s revelation is expressed (its form) is not merely a sign pointing to something behind it, but contains the beauty of truth within itself. As Balthasar says:

Visible form not only ‘points’ to an invisible, unfathomable mystery; form is the apparition of this mystery, and reveals it while, naturally, at the same time protecting and veiling it....[F]orm has an exterior which appears and an interior depth, both of which, however, are not separable in the form itself. The content (*Gehalt*) does not lie behind the form (*Gestalt*), but within it.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the light of beauty radiating from the form of revelation illumines the believer with the light of faith. This is an apologetics that emphasizes the beauty, as well as the truth and the goodness, of Christian revelation. In so doing, it eliminates the temptation of reducing the “contents” of Christian

revelation to mere signs that point to a deeper and more fundamental mystery. As we have seen above, Balthasar sees transcendental styles of apologetics as giving in to this temptation to reduction, under the influence of Kantian subjectivism.

### **Perception of the Form**

Another important category for Balthasar, related to the light of faith, is perception of the form. Perception of the form is assuredly an aesthetic category, however Balthasar does not employ this term to mean “a mere perception or a delightful vision.” Instead, “the divine Word of Light” effects an attitude of submission on the part of the believer, which is “expressed in the fact that the receiver is *a priori* ready to consider and recognize that every command issuing from the Light in its incomprehensible freedom is an expression of the deepest necessity on the part of the Light.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, perception of God’s revelation already entails response to it.

Furthermore, there is the “recognition that in the apparently non-necessary elements of revelation’s historical data there is also revealed the rightness of the divine dispositions and decisions as the expression of the divine Being itself.”<sup>30</sup> This means that the whole of revelation, even those parts which can be considered historically contingent, are seen as indispensable elements of the form. For example, many of the great works of art (e.g. one of Mozart’s symphonies) could have been different than they are (i.e., their artistic expression is not necessary but contingent). However, this does not diminish the greatness of these works, which now for us cannot be otherwise.<sup>31</sup> As Balthasar says, “[t]he study of aesthetic necessity starts with the strict givenness of the *completed* work.”<sup>32</sup> In like manner, the perception of God’s revelation takes into account its full givenness, even those parts which are historically contingent.

Thus, perception of the form is closely identified with the response of faith to Christian revelation in its particularity. In fact, for Balthasar, the perception of the form is a necessary element of doing theology (including fundamental theology). Christian theology is only possible if the theologian “renews, in a living way, his own primal act of *a priori* faith—that obedient surrender to the radiant light in which alone by faith and not by vision he partakes in the wisdom of the self-revealing God.”<sup>33</sup>

This notion of the *a priori* must be briefly clarified. Balthasar distinguishes two types of *a priori* dispositions in the human being; one (the “natural religious”) is part of the essence of human being, coinciding with “its ability to

understand all existents in the light of Being, which is analogous to and points to God," while the other (the "theological") refers to "the ontological and epistemological elevation and illumination of this [natural religious] *a priori* by the light of the interior fullness of God's life as he reveals himself." However, the latter "dawns on" all people, and not just to Christians, because of the universal call to "the vision of God in eternal life." Consequently, even the "natural religious" *a priori* is "shot through with elements of grace."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, and this must be stressed in order to affirm the particularity of Christian revelation, "[t]he expressive form of God's genuine light can become excessively obscured," much of which is "attributed to the sinner's perverted heart, his pride and his lust," creating many variations and disagreements about religious truth (i.e., the various non-Christian world religions and philosophies of religion).<sup>35</sup>

An account of Balthasar's category of perception would be incomplete without reference to the influence of Pierre Rousselot's work "Les Yeux de la Foi," on the "eyes of faith." Lying behind his appropriation of Rousselot is his awareness of the confrontation of theology with rationalism, which raises the following question to the Christian theologian: "Here we encounter a man who claims to be God, and who, on the basis of this claim, demands that we should believe many truths he utters which cannot be verified by reason. What basis acceptable to reason can we give to his authoritative claims?"<sup>36</sup> Neither a reduction of Christianity to "the reasonable" nor an attitude of fideism is the appropriate response to this question for Balthasar. Rousselot's category of aesthetic perception draws on the idea that "[i]f the spirit is to see and understand the facts as indicators of revelation, then it must receive as well the faculty to see what the signs are intended to express: it must include in anticipatory fashion that *point of convergence* which makes the signs comprehensible."<sup>37</sup> Such a point of convergence does not lie in the natural realm at all, and a person who remains, as it were, enclosed within this realm (including created human reason) will not be able to comprehend the meaning of revelation at all. Under the influence of grace, one sees "inductively" the whole of revelation, which fulfills the inner dynamism that drives "man's total orientation toward God."<sup>38</sup> Thus, one is taken out of oneself and allowed to perceive the whole through one's graced encounter with the revelation of God.

However, as suggested above, Balthasar believes Rousselot was tied too closely to Kantian subjectivism and spoke of "signs" instead of form.<sup>39</sup> In so doing, the "efficacy of the objective evidence of the form of revelation" is not sufficiently emphasized; Balthasar corrects this through his understanding of revelation as form instead of mere sign. For Balthasar, "the readiness of the inte-

rior light is wholly oriented toward the objective form of revelation.<sup>40</sup> Thus, one perceives the form (i.e., the full breadth and depth of God's revelation), through the light of faith in the manner of inductive reasoning. The following quote summarizes the complex relationship between light of faith, perception of the form, and subjective dynamism as Balthasar understands it, using a typically Balthasarian sentence:

Because the light of faith as the ability to encounter God's divineness is, on the one hand, bestowed and infused as grace, but, on the other hand, is infused into the spirit's central *a priori* and, therefore, is a thing which basically conforms to human structure and, as such, acts within the context of the sensual in its perception of reality: for these reasons we can say that the believer indeed possesses in advance the fundamental possibility of believing which has been implanted in him; but this possibility does not exempt him from the human effort of searching with a probing gaze for the correct form of what he is to believe and, having found it, from the effort of integrating it existentially into his very self.<sup>41</sup>

### **Christian Attunement and Active Receptivity**

It now remains to discuss the attitude of Christian attunement and active receptivity, which is necessary to receive the light of faith and to perceive the form. Balthasar makes it clear that faith is not an isolated faculty among several other human faculties. Instead, as is fitting in response to the beauty of God, faith "requires the reaction of the whole man." Indeed, the very definition of Christian faith is "to make the whole man a space that responds to the divine content."<sup>42</sup>

Balthasar explains this holistic response in terms of the transformative character of Christian experience, which is based on the believer's encounter with the power of Christian revelation, an encounter that has a dialogical structure. The believer offers herself to God in receptive response to the beauty of revelation, and the Christ-form is impressed upon her by God, resulting in transformation and conformity to the image of Christ. This conformity is described under the term "Christian attunement." In Balthasar's words,

Constant contemplation of the whole Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transforms the beholder as a whole into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). This holistic encounter from the outset both transcends every individual act of self-giving which springs from faith, hope and love and grounds it in a totality of both the subject and object, in such a way that we are here both entitled and compelled to speak of a Christian 'attunement' to or 'consonance' with God.<sup>43</sup>

Balthasar stresses that, instead of focusing on one or another of the human faculties such as reason or “feeling,” this holistic approach involves the “heart of human wholeness,” which grounds all those faculties. He appeals to Thomas Aquinas in order to elaborate this idea that it is through all man’s faculties as a whole that he is open “to the Thou, to things and to God”<sup>44</sup> This openness is described as an “attunement to Being as a whole,” which is an “ontological disposition” involving an “*a priori* concordance” to Being. This *a priori* openness precedes both passive and active experience, namely the “receptivity to extraneous im-pression” (sense experience) and the “ex-pressing of the self onto the extraneous” (interpretation and activity).<sup>45</sup> In other words, it is a disposition to openness that precedes all particular experiences, and is oriented towards God himself. The human being joyfully accepts both her orientation towards God and “whatever God, in his freedom, may mete out to” her.<sup>46</sup>

In articulating this prior passivity towards God, Balthasar stresses that God, both in creation and in historical revelation, possesses “the full initiative in the creature’s relationship to him.” The creature is already oriented towards God and the “grace of revelation” brings this orientation to its full reality. For this reason, in the creature’s relationship to God, “passivity has precedence over activity.” However, Balthasar wishes to clarify this notion by explaining that human passivity towards God is “that of a being which from the outset is active in its very receptivity...[and that of] a being whose fundamental act consists precisely in its ability to receive.”<sup>47</sup> It should be clear that, in speaking of passivity towards God, one is not speaking of a situation in which God’s power stifles the freedom of the human being, but rather of one in which the love of God enables the human being to respond freely in kind out of love.

This fundamental human state of active receptivity towards God (both as creator and revealer) is deepened and brought to fulfillment by the grace of the Holy Spirit indwelling within the human person. This grace enables perception of the beauty of the Christian form of revelation (through the light of faith), and results in that attunement towards God that results in becoming transformed into union with Christ. As Balthasar says, “[t]he love which is infused in man by the Holy Spirit present within him bestows on man the sensorium with which to perceive God, bestows also the taste for God and, so to speak, an understanding for God’s own taste.”<sup>48</sup> Active receptivity, then, can be summarized as “a transformation of feeling which takes place under the permanent norm of a passive readiness to participate in the Holy Spirit’s own manner of feeling.”<sup>49</sup>

### Transformation

Balthasar has discussed the subjective pole not only in terms of “beholding” the form, but also in terms of “being enraptured” by the form.<sup>50</sup> Thus, he uses terminology that suggests a complete engagement with the beautiful subject matter that is being perceived. While this is an aesthetic category, it also suggests the type of desiring self-surrender that is proper to the category of eros.<sup>51</sup> In other words, the human being, as it were, *falls in love* with God through the perception of the revelation of God’s prior love for us. Thus, once more, it must be said that the category of autonomous subject is inappropriate in Balthasar’s fundamental theology, for love desires to give oneself over to the other.<sup>52</sup>

Balthasar views the relation between the form and enrapturement as one which does not reduce the form to the subjective experience of the believer but retains it in all its fullness, that is in its full depth (its infinite *truth*) and full breadth (the range of its particular embodiment *across history*, namely salvation history). In regard to the depth of the form, he states that “in [the form], the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating.”<sup>53</sup> In regard to its breadth, he states that

[w]e behold the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being. We are ‘enraptured’ by our contemplation of these depths and are ‘transported’ to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths.<sup>54</sup>

This point is illustrated further by Balthasar’s assertion that “just as we can never attain to the living God in any way except through his Son become man, but in this Son we can really attain to God in himself, so, too, we ought never to speak of God’s beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation-history.”<sup>55</sup>

So, enrapturement results from an encounter with the full form of God’s revelation across time. It is clear that for Balthasar this enrapturement has as its result a full, graced participation of the human being in the life of God. Furthermore, this participation is a necessary condition of doing theology, for as Balthasar states “[i]n theology, there are no ‘bare facts’ which, in the name of an alleged objectivity of detachment, disinterestedness and impartiality, one could

establish like any other worldly facts, without oneself being...gripped so as to participate in the divine nature."<sup>56</sup>

### **Dialogue as Mutual Ecstasis through Love**

This participation of the human being in God can be understood as a *dialogue between God and human beings* which, for Balthasar, "from God's perspective, is actualized as 'revelation' (culminating in Christ's Godmanhood) and which, from man's perspective, is actualized as 'faith' (culminating in participation in Christ's Godmanhood)."<sup>57</sup> Thus the objective and subjective poles are united in the human being's enrapturement through the perception of God's revelation through the light of faith. God's revelation and the human response in faith is a "double and reciprocal *ekstasis*" between God and man, which "constitutes the very content of dogmatics, which may thus rightly be represented as a theory of rapture: the *admirabile commercium et conubium* between God and man in Christ as Head and Body."<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately, this dialogue between God's revelation and the human response of faith, resulting in enrapturement, can only be understood under the category of love. Balthasar characterizes love most often in terms of self-surrender and self-sacrifice for the sake of the other. On the part of the human, "[t]heology has always seen clearly that, in its very vitality, the self-surrender of faith is rooted in love" and that "[t]he heart of faith is the encounter of person with person." Particularly, human love for God is the highest form of love and "can indeed dispense with every precaution and care since the self-surrender to the person one adores is at the same time self-surrender to the promise of eternal bliss and, as such, is an act which could never be surpassed by a greater or better."<sup>59</sup> Thus, human love for God can be expressed in terms of complete self-surrender, without being affected by those issues of power that often impede love between human beings, through mistrust and the desire to protect one's freedom from being abused by the other. One trusts that God, as expressed through his own self-surrender in Christ's kenotic sacrifice for humanity, truly loves humankind and wills its happiness unconditionally.

### **The Objective Pole: The Kenosis of God**

In the preceding section on the subjective pole, covering the light of faith, perception of the form, Christian attunement, active receptivity, and transformative ecstasis, it became clear that for Balthasar the subject (i.e., the human being) cannot be considered in isolation or abstraction from God and Christian

revelation. An openness and responsiveness to God and his revelation is essential to humanity, both as created and redeemed being, prior to any reflection or action on his part. In fact, openness and responsiveness to God's loving initiative in communicating himself, and the perception of the "form" of that communication through the light of faith, already results in graced transformation on the part of the subject, as we have seen. Thus the human experience of God's revelation is inherently dialogical, with the human being actively receiving this divine self-communication and responding by applying it to the concrete experience of his own graced life in relationship to God.

This discussion of the human response of loving self-surrender to God leads naturally into a discussion of the form of God's revelation itself, which has as its center the kenotic self-sacrifice of Christ. For Balthasar, the objective form precedes, in a sense, the subjective perception of the form. In other words, it is God who takes the initiative in revealing himself to humanity, and so God's revelation is the starting point for theology, not the human subject. It is important to remember that God reveals himself out of love for humanity, and it is the awareness of this love that elicits the response of faith and self-surrender on the part of the human being. This loving initiative of God on our behalf is best illustrated by Balthasar's famous example of the love of a mother and child: "[a]fter a mother has smiled for some time at her child, it will begin to smile back; she has awakened love in its heart, and in waking the child to love, she awakes also recognition."<sup>60</sup>

This example is explicitly applied to the divine-human relationship through the categories of creation and grace, when Balthasar states

[w]e are his creatures and so a seed of love, God's image, lies dormant within us. But just as no child can awaken to love until it is loved, no human heart can come to the knowledge of God without the free gift of his grace, in the image of his Son.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, God's loving initiative towards us is primary, and the center of the form of his revelation to us is Christ. Balthasar, in his opening discussion of the "objective" form, claims that there are three layers in God's manifestation towards us in "the form." The first layer is interior experience, which includes the most intimate I-Thou experience of God and the interior of the human heart, however this standpoint "remains abstract for us because, in the concrete, we have always already made some contact with God as we approach him through the worldly and material creation, knowing nothing of a pure communication between two interiorities."<sup>62</sup> It seems that Balthasar is saying that the human-

divine interpersonal encounter is always mediated, at the very least through the event of creation. Indeed, much has already been said on the topic of Christian attunement, or the *a priori* openness that human beings have towards the experience of God through his self-manifestation in particular, Christian revelation. This shows that the interior experience of God by human beings is for Balthasar never abstract but already oriented towards God's fuller revelation in Christ.

The second layer of revelation of the form is found in God as creator, in which the form of God is revealed through the "form of the world." In this layer, metaphysics points towards God in such a way that "the 'vision' of the invisible God through the mediation of creatures allows us to 'grasp' his divine Being, different though it is from all creatures, and his eternal might, which is revealed in his act of creation." Here, however, it is important to note Balthasar's understanding of the analogy of Being (articulated most fully in his *The Theology of Karl Barth*), in which "everything which is said of God—his divinity, his eternal might and glory, his power as Creator—consistently underscores the ever-greater difference between him and creatures." Nonetheless, God's glory does "radiate in the visibleness of Being of the world," and so creation is part of the self-manifestation of God in the form.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted here that Balthasar uses the rather Heideggerian concepts of manifestation (i.e., disclosure) and concealment to explain the mystery of God's revelation in Being (however, he uses different German words than Heidegger does: in place of *Aletheia/Unverborgenheit* and *Verborgenheit*, Balthasar uses *Offenbarkeit*, with its connotation of "revelation," and *Verhülltheit*, with its connotation of being "veiled."). For example, in discussing the Thomistic notion that every human act of the intellect is implicitly oriented towards God, Balthasar states that "[t]his quality of 'being enfolded' in man's mental acts is nothing other than God's manner of being manifest [*der Offenbarkeit Gottes*] in the creature: revealed in ever-greater concealment [*Verhülltheit*]."<sup>64</sup> More explicitly, concealment is applied to the explanation of Christ's kenosis (Incarnation and passion); Balthasar states that the Incarnation

is *manifestness* [*Offenbarkeit*] because here God is explained to man by no means other than himself...[but also the Incarnation] is *concealment* [*Verhüllung*] because the translation of God's absolutely unique, absolute, and infinite Being into the ever more dissimilar, almost arbitrary and hopelessly relativised reality of one individual man in the crowd appears to be an undertaking condemned to failure.<sup>65</sup>

The self-disclosure (manifestation or revelation) of God contains an element of concealment in its placement into the particular form of Christian revelation,

however concealment is essential to any revelation of truth through the beautiful (as Heidegger in his own way has also shown). The notion of concealment is frequently referred to in terms of “mystery”; for example, Balthasar holds that mystery is an essential aspect of understanding Being that can never be “uncovered,” so to speak, by scientific method:

It is only when such [scientific] progress rests on the presupposition that the mystery of Being may be fundamentally dissolved by progressive stages (something which at best becomes plausible in terms of the materialistic hypothesis) that the blindness sets in which is no longer capable of seeing the objective phenomenon.<sup>66</sup>

It can be seen then that for Balthasar Being and revelation itself always contain more than the human being can possibly comprehend. Being and revelation have the qualities of both manifesting and concealing God at the same time, which is an essential concept to keep in mind when considering such Balthasarian themes as the form, the analogy of being, and kenosis when explaining Christian revelation. Also, the disclosure-concealment theory of revelation undergirds Balthasar’s rejection of a Kantian subjectivism, in which knowledge of reality is reduced to that comprehensible by human *a priori* categories. Mystery, on the other hand, clearly takes the subject out of herself into the wonder of Being that always contains more within it than can be comprehended or explained.<sup>67</sup> This “characteristic [of an element of incomprehensibility] will not be lost to the form of revelation even in the vision of God face to face.”<sup>68</sup> “*Si comprehendis non est Deus,*” as Balthasar is fond of saying.<sup>69</sup>

The third layer of God’s manifestation of the form, and the most essential, is that of the triune God revealed through the Incarnation of Christ. It is important to understand that creation and Incarnation-redemption are not seen by Balthasar as opposed to one another, nor does the latter abolish the former; instead, “the revelation in the creation is seen to have occurred for the sake of the revelation in Christ, serving as the preparation that made it possible.”<sup>70</sup> Incarnation does intensify the manifestation of the form, however, for it reveals the triune God (put briefly, “the whole *pleroma* of the Godhead dwells corporeally in Christ.”)<sup>71</sup> Christ truly is the center of the form, for through him is revealed the relationship between divine and human nature and the relationship of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit (in other words, the interior life of the Trinity). Furthermore, through Christ is revealed the necessity of the mediation of the Church (as “the Body of Christ...insofar as Christ’s fullness is fulfilled in her”), the structure of salvation history revealed through Scripture (promise-

fulfillment), and finally, the goal of eschatology (the Resurrection, which Balthasar calls the "horizon" that transforms Christian hermeneutics and enables each individual to understand the meaning of his life.)<sup>72</sup> These topics cannot be fully discussed here, but are mentioned now to display the vast scope and breadth of Balthasar's understanding of the Christian "form."

One final aspect of Christ as form must be mentioned here because of its centrality to Balthasar's thought, and that is the importance of the kenotic sacrifice of Christ that reveals God's love for humanity. It explains, on the one hand, the sinfulness of humankind: "[t]he whole extent of man's freedom to oppose the will of God is revealed when God in the loving freedom of his kenosis descends into the world of despair."<sup>73</sup> This sinfulness of humankind can be understood as a refusal on the part of "man" to enter into dialogue with God. The kenosis of Christ (Incarnation and passion) is God's loving response to draw "man" back into dialogue with him. Balthasar's notion of kenosis will be discussed more fully below in the section on Drama.

It has been shown then that for Balthasar theology must break out of the confines of Kantian subjectivism and of philosophies of identity, both of which seem to reduce religion to the workings of human religious experience. Instead, theology must be understood as a *dialogical* interaction between human beings and God. On the one hand, there is the human subject who is already predisposed to be attuned to God and who, with the help of grace, is able to perceive the form of God's revelation through the light of faith. This human subject is enraptured and transformed by his encounter with the beauty of the form of revelation. On the other hand, there is the form of God's self-revelation itself, which has the structure of disclosure/ concealment and which reaches its ultimate expression in the Incarnation and kenotic sacrifice of Christ, which draws the human being into participation in the life of the triune God. This participation must now be further elucidated in terms of Balthasar's explanation of the "drama" of the dialogue between God's freedom and human freedom; that is, the drama of grace and salvation.

### **Theo-Drama as Dialogical Participation in the Revelation of God**

#### **The Relationship of Aesthetics and Theo-Drama**

In the preceding sections, there has already been mention of the transformative effect of the believer's perception of the form of revelation. In Balthasar's theological aesthetics, transformation was discussed in terms of faith and the

*credibility* of the Christian revelation, which is ultimately based on an awareness of the prior love that God has for us and the plan of salvation that is centered in Christ's kenotic sacrifice for us (as suggested by the German title of *Love Alone: Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* or "Love Alone is Credible"). In other words, the transformation involved an "attunement" on the part of the believer to be able to *understand* God's self-revelation to us. Balthasar's theo-dramatics take up this notion of transformation from another angle; presupposing the transformation due to perception of the beauty of God's form of revelation, the dramatics focus on the transformation of the believer in terms of responding to God's grace and of existential *participation* in salvation history itself, including action within the world. As Balthasar states succinctly:

[R]ight at the heart of the *Aesthetics*, the "theological drama" has already begun. "Catching sight" of the glory (*die Erblickung*), we observed, always involves being "transported" by it (*die Entrückung*). But this was all seen from within the aesthetic purview. Now we must allow the encountering reality to speak in its own tongue or, rather, let ourselves be drawn into its dramatic arena. For God's revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence "understand," through action on *its* part.<sup>74</sup>

Balthasar, then, sees theo-dramatics as the application of theological aesthetics into the sphere of history as the point of interaction between God and humanity. This "application" occurs through the participation of the believer in God's revelation in history. Although this application has "horizontal" elements (for example, the problem of development in understanding), the present description of theo-drama will attempt to focus on the *vertical dialogue* that occurs between God and human beings. Of course, since this dialogue occurs within "salvation history," it is impossible to separate entirely these vertical and horizontal elements of theo-drama, but a fuller discussion of theo-drama as the hermeneutics of salvation history will be deferred until Chapter Five.

### **Dialogical Aspects of Theo-Drama**

For Balthasar, the dialogical aspect of theo-drama is primarily that between God and human beings, with God taking the initiative and "setting the stage," as it were. Hence for Balthasar, a dialogical understanding of theo-drama consists of

God's trinitarian, salvific decision, which manifests itself as the 'mystery' of the Son in the unifying power of the Spirit, and always in such a way that it addresses man's free-

dom and solicits the latter's most distinctive commitment. Here, therefore, *the whole intramundane dialogue of standpoints, world views and perspectives is overtaken by an ultimate dramatic dialogue*, which, while it lets God have the first and last word in all things, acknowledges that this same God has determined to send his Word into the world and leave it there.<sup>75</sup>

Thus we can see that theo-drama reflects a broad *dialogue* between God and human beings over time in which God, in the person of Christ, is the primary actor, who enables human beings to participate in this drama of salvation by their own free decisions. This drama extends beyond the life of any individual to include the full activity of God in human history and a full account of human response to that activity.

Balthasar explicitly relates drama and dialogue in the first volume of *Theo-Drama*, in the section in which he discusses various trends in modern theology that attempt to rescue theology from the "sandbank of rationalist abstraction."<sup>76</sup> In terms of what we might call "intramundane" dialogue, or dialogue between human beings, Balthasar finds the employment of this interpersonal approach very helpful:

Today when we hear the word "dialogue" in theology and in the Church, more often than not it refers to the attitude that remains open to further listening, that allows the other his "otherness" even when there seems nothing more to say; it is the attitude that refuses to give up, that is, it is closely related to *hope*.<sup>77</sup>

However, dialogue with non-believers and indeed the whole concept of hope is affected by different views about the horizon of death, which the Christian believes is transformed by the Resurrection. So, the Christian can share a dialogue with non-believers about the future of humanity only from an "infrahistorical horizon," but "the Christian's hope reaches beyond this death...and in that sense may be more absolute than that of his dialogue-partner, who is equally concerned for the (earthly) future of man and humanity."<sup>78</sup> To the degree that common ground becomes no longer possible in a dialogue, "the Christian's last word in such a dialogue is the testimony of his existence- or of his blood."<sup>79</sup> In this way, we can see that for Balthasar the priority lies with the dialogue between God and humanity that leads to the acceptance of Christian revelation, even to the extreme degree of accepting martyrdom when "intramundane" dialogue can find no common ground with believers in that revelation.

Balthasar discusses further these two types of dialogue in another context, namely that of discovering one's personal identity through an encounter with an

Other. This relationship between “I” and “Thou” is called the “*dialogue principle*”. He maintains that such a principle has two axes, dialogue between and among human beings (the horizontal axis), and dialogue between the human being and God (the vertical axis). He insists that the dialogue principle cannot be properly applied without “the vertical axis of biblical revelation,” the omission of which he calls “reductionistic.”<sup>80</sup>

Theo-drama, then, emphasizes the character of *free dialogue and response between God and human beings*. The fact that Balthasar emphasizes free response opens up for him the capacity to explain failures on the part of human beings in this dialogue (in other words the free human choice *not* to respond to God or participate in the drama, which is traditionally termed sin and exemplified most strikingly in demonic rebellion against God.)<sup>81</sup> This “no” to God will feature prominently in his unique and controversial Christology, in which Christ takes on all of humanity’s “Godforsakenness” on the Cross, and consequently becomes separated from the Father during his Passion and Death. It is in this capacity that we can employ the category of tragedy in theo-drama, which is precisely the human “no” to God in the face of redemptive love. In this sense, then, tragedy is ultimately overcome by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.<sup>82</sup>

### **Cross and Resurrection as Center of Theo-Drama**

Theo-drama basically corresponds with traditional Catholic doctrine of the “plan of salvation history”, and thus begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth (“the stage”). Its two principal characters are the triune God and man, although, since the triune God reveals itself as triune within the context of the Incarnation, which also ultimately grounds the God-human relationship, Christ is in a sense a third character in the drama. Balthasar presupposes, in phenomenological fashion, the fallen state of humanity whose effects we actually experience, regarding it as useless to speculate about what pre-fallen humanity may have been like. In fact, one rough system of classification that Balthasar uses for his theo-drama is the “four acts” which describes the different states of humanity: the state before the Fall, the fallen and unredeemed state, the pilgrim redeemed state, and the final, glorified, heavenly state.<sup>83</sup> In a sense, the second and third states co-exist for humanity at the present time and their tension creates much of the drama known as conversion and repentance, while the fourth is of course the domain of an as-yet unattained eschatology.

In this brief summary of Balthasar’s theo-drama, I am going to concentrate on the elements of dramatic soteriology, passing over many of his reflections on

pre-Christian humanity (including the covenant with Israel on the promise-fulfillment dialectic of interpreting Scripture, which will be addressed in Part Two on hermeneutics) and the philosophical relationship between finite and infinite freedom which grounds the nature-grace debate. Instead, I will focus on what I take to be the center of the drama, namely the Incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ and its effect on humanity now in the world and the Church.<sup>84</sup>

Balthasar's soteriology deals with the following motifs: through the initiative of divine love, the Son gives himself, through the Father, for the salvation of the world. This salvation is effected by an exchange that takes place between the Son and sinful humanity (i.e., he takes our sins upon himself, the doctrine of atonement), which results in the redemption of human beings from sin and death. Furthermore, human beings are taken into the life of the divine Trinity (i.e., the patristic notion of divinization) through this process.<sup>85</sup>

This reflects the dramatic descent-ascent motion that characterizes much of patristic theology: God sends the Son to become human for the sake of redeeming human beings from sin and death (descending Christology, with an emphasis on kenosis), and through this redemption effected through the Cross and resurrection, human beings are able to enter into the life of God and to hope for eternal life with him (divinization, ascension into heaven and recapitulation of all creation). What is most unique (and controversial) in Balthasar's rendering of this story is his notion of the Son taking on the Godforsakenness of sinful humanity to the degree that he seems to be completely separated from the Father. This notion must now be explained in more detail.

Balthasar's theology of the Cross depends upon the prior distinction between the person of the Father and the person of the Son in the immanent Trinity; the Father is the one who gives his divinity over to the Son (in generation), while the Son is the one who receives this kenosis of the Father and in turn is thus able to give himself up as well.<sup>86</sup> The Holy Spirit binds the two in love together, even during the moment of their greatest separation on the Cross. The separation of the Father and Son on the Cross is due to the fact that, for the sake of making the "exchange" between divinity and sinful humanity, Christ takes on the form of sinful humanity itself. That is, he takes upon himself everything that represents humanity's "no" to God, or humanity's misuse of the finite freedom that God has opened up for them in creation. (This presupposes that humanity's freedom is fulfilled only through participation in the life of the divine freedom, but that the human being does have the "freedom" to reject this fulfillment).<sup>87</sup>

In this “exchange” where the Son takes on the form of sinful humanity in order to redeem humanity and restore it to communion with the life of the triune God, the Son becomes, in a sense, unrecognizable to the Father. Also, the Son is unable to recognize the Father’s presence as well (this is the theme of being “abandoned” and forsaken on the Cross by the Father). The Son “appear[s] before the Father bearing the No of the whole world,” and “[t]he omnipotent powerlessness of God’s love shines forth in the mystery of darkness and alienation between God and the sin-bearing Son.”<sup>88</sup> This moment of separation is a moment of grave tragedy in the entire drama between God and humanity, but was necessary in order to counteract the sin of Adam and the sins of all human beings. *The Cross restores, then, the full dialogical relationship between the divine and human that was intended in God’s plan of salvation*, which relationship alone can bring human beings to the fullness of truth, goodness, and beauty to which they are oriented.

The Cross is incomplete without a consideration of the Resurrection. In fact, Balthasar says that “the Cross and burial of Christ reveal their significance only in the light of the event of Easter, without which there is no Christian faith.”<sup>89</sup> Balthasar describes the Resurrection as the Son’s “return to the Father,” which also opens the way back to the Father for those human beings with whom Christ shared solidarity in their experience of sin and death (the latter during the Holy Saturday experience).<sup>90</sup>

The restored relationship between God and human beings through the Cross and Resurrection is one that is lived most fully in the life of the Church, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist, which makes present (represents) the drama of the Cross “through the continual representation of Christ, bodily delivered up ‘for us’.”<sup>91</sup> In the Eucharist, the praying Church becomes a symbol of Mary at the foot of the Cross, assenting to God’s will in this salvific event, even in its tragic and painful sacrificial elements. (It must be recalled that Mary is the ultimate archetype of the believing Church for Balthasar.)<sup>92</sup>

It can be seen from this brief description of the soteriology of Hans Urs von Balthasar that the events of salvation history can be understood in dramatic fashion, with God taking the initiative to restore a proper relationship between himself and sinful humanity, and human beings responding through grace and the sacraments (or resisting through sin). The eschatological, glorified state of human beings in the Resurrection is discussed by Balthasar in terms of the “last act” of the drama and can be considered its completion. The human being’s role in this dialogue is that of actively receiving this revelation (which is the plan of

salvation) and thus participating in its historical actualization (its "application" within the life of the world).

We have seen, then, in our treatment of Balthasar's aesthetics in the course of this chapter, that for him the problem raised by the subjectivization of fundamental theology is corrected by an emphasis on the transcendental of beauty, which has the effect of taking the isolated subject out of himself and into dialogue with the content of God's self-revelation (the form). Through the graced power of the radiance of God's truth, the subject becomes attuned to God and is able to perceive the form of his revelation and to become enraptured by it. But, we have seen also that this enrapturement (which in *Glory of the Lord* has primarily to do with an interior credibility of the Christian revelation) also leads into a participation which can be understood in dramatic terms and opens up a dialogue between God and the human being (initiated by God) which results in the human being's salvation and fulfillment through union with God. It remains now to sketch some of the conceptual and structural similarities (and differences) that can be found between the aesthetics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, volume one, *Seeing the Form*, trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, edited by Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), foreword; originally published as *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik, Band I: Schau der Gestalt*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967). Hereafter cited as *GL I*. See pp. 45–56 and 70–78 of the same volume for an account of the neglect of aesthetics in Protestant and Catholic theologies, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. and edited by Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969); originally published as *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963). Hereafter cited as *LA*. The relevant volumes of *Theo-Drama* will be cited individually in footnotes below. For a full-length monograph on the subject of Balthasar's aesthetics and fundamental theology, see Michael Hartmann, *Ästhetik als ein Grundbegriff fundamentaler Theologie: Eine Untersuchung zu Hans Urs von Balthasar* (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag Erzabtei St. Ottilien, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>*GL I*, foreword.

<sup>4</sup>*GL I*, foreword.

<sup>5</sup>*Glory of the Lord*, volume 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward and Rowan Williams, ed. by Brian McNeil and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991); originally published as *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik, Band III, I: Im Raum der Metaphysik, Teil II: Neuzeit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965). Hereafter cited as *GL 5*.

<sup>6</sup>*LA 12*.

<sup>7</sup>*LA 17–18*.

<sup>8</sup>*GL 5*, passim, esp. 298–451.

<sup>9</sup>*GL 5*, 449.

<sup>10</sup>*GL* 5, esp. pp. 445–450. Balthasar here relates this metaphysics of wonder and giftedness to the kenosis (free self-giving) of God in creation.

<sup>11</sup>See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. by Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992); originally published as *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Cologne: J. Hegner, 1951). Cited hereafter as *KB*.

<sup>12</sup>*GL* 5, 451.

<sup>13</sup>It will be recalled, of course, that the Titans and particularly Prometheus were human beings who attempted to rebel against the Olympian gods. As such, for Balthasar they are a symbol of the tragic “rebellion” of finite beings against the divine.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, *GL* 5, 454, and *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. by Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1969), 61–66; originally published as *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1966). Hereafter cited as *MCW*.

<sup>15</sup>*MCW* 63 (emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup>*MCW* 65.

<sup>17</sup>*GL* 5, 503, my emphasis. This shows that Balthasar believes that a dynamic understanding of reason’s orientation to the Absolute (that is, one which holds that the human being implicitly contains the Absolute within itself) sets up the human being as the implicit measure of what the Absolute can reveal to the human being. Thus, “Kant initiates the whole tradition of German Idealist religious philosophy and does so in such a way that *a priori* all theology will be dragged before the judgment seat of philosophy,” *GL* 5, 504. Another way of saying this is that this style of philosophy (as Balthasar understands it) is not open to the *dialogue* between God (in revelation) and human beings, but explains this interaction as taking place solely within the dynamic of the human mind itself (and is thus “monological”).

<sup>18</sup>*LA* 31.

<sup>19</sup>*LA* 33.

<sup>20</sup>*LA* 34.

<sup>21</sup>It is regrettable that Balthasar did not offer a more detailed analysis of the works of Catholic transcendental theologians such as Maréchal and company in his theological trilogy (as he did with so many individual metaphysicians, poets, dramatists, and theologians) or in *Love Alone* (where he refers to them only in generalities). His most concentrated critique of Idealism and its effect on Christianity, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, devotes only 13 pages to criticizing the theological implications of the system of Karl Rahner in particular (*MCW* 100–113), plus a 3 page apologia for this critique in the appendix of the revised edition (*MCW* 146–149).

<sup>22</sup>*LA* 8.

<sup>23</sup>*GL* I, 147–148.

<sup>24</sup>*GL* I, 148–149. See also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 5–18 and *passim*, for a more extensive, Anglo-American explanation of these two styles of fundamental theology.

<sup>25</sup>*GL* I, 149.

<sup>26</sup>*GL* I, 150.

<sup>27</sup>*GL* I, 151.

<sup>28</sup>*GL* I, 151.

<sup>29</sup>*GL* I, 163.

<sup>30</sup>*GL* I, 163.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. *LA* 44.

<sup>32</sup>*GL* I, 164, emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup>*GL* I, 165.

<sup>34</sup>*GL* I, 167.

<sup>35</sup>*GL* I, 169.

<sup>36</sup>GL I, 173.

<sup>37</sup>GL I, 175, emphasis mine.

<sup>38</sup>GL I, 176.

<sup>39</sup>GL I, 176.

<sup>40</sup>GL I, 177.

<sup>41</sup>GL I, 179.

<sup>42</sup>GL I, 220.

<sup>43</sup>GL I, 242.

<sup>44</sup>GL I, 243.

<sup>45</sup>GL I, 244.

<sup>46</sup>GL I, 245.

<sup>47</sup>GL I, 245–246.

<sup>48</sup>GL I, 249.

<sup>49</sup>GL I, 250.

<sup>50</sup>GL I, foreword.

<sup>51</sup>For example, Balthasar says that “[the transport of the soul by eros] must be understood not as a merely psychological response to something beautiful in a worldly sense which has been encountered through vision, but as the movement of man’s whole being away from himself and towards God through Christ, a movement founded on the divine light of grace in the mystery of Christ,” GL I, 121.

<sup>52</sup>Balthasar does ascribe limits to *eros* which, when directed in its totality towards another human being, leads to an attitude that he terms “the melancholy of eros.” This is a theme that runs throughout Western literature from Petrarch through the “novel(s) of bourgeois realism” of the 19th century which reduce “the thrust of a transcendent eros” to “an interpersonal problem of love.” See GL 5, esp. pp. 410, 264–284.

<sup>53</sup>GL I, 118.

<sup>54</sup>GL I, 119.

<sup>55</sup>GL I, 124.

<sup>56</sup>GL I, 125.

<sup>57</sup>GL I, 125.

<sup>58</sup>GL I, 126.

<sup>59</sup>GL I, 192.

<sup>60</sup>LA 61.

<sup>61</sup>LA 62.

<sup>62</sup>GL I, 430.

<sup>63</sup>GL I, 431. See also *KB*, passim.

<sup>64</sup>GL I, 450.

<sup>65</sup>GL I, 457, emphasis mine. Balthasar briefly states the matter by saying “*Menschwerdung des Wortes aber besagt...höchste Offenbarkeit in tiefster Verhüllung*,” (“the Incarnation of the Word means the most extreme manifestness within the deepest concealment”) in *Herrlichkeit*, vol. 1, 439 (GL I, 457). See also the discussion of the disclosure and concealment of man in God through the Incarnation, GL I, 458–459. Balthasar also uses the verb *enthüllen* here for disclosure.

<sup>66</sup>GL I, 446. Balthasar’s attitude toward the scientific method in general and its application to Scripture in particular will be dealt with in greater detail in Part Two below.

<sup>67</sup>See GL I, 447.

<sup>68</sup>GL I, 461.

<sup>69</sup>GL I, 450.

<sup>70</sup>GL I, 431.

<sup>71</sup>GL I, 433.

<sup>72</sup>GL I, 433; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 2, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 94; originally published as *Theodramatik: Zweiter Band: Die Personen des Spiels Teil 1: Der Mensch in Gott* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976). Cited hereafter as TD 2.

<sup>73</sup>LA 75.

<sup>74</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 15, emphasis his; originally published as *Theodramatik: Erster Band: Prolegomena* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1983). Hereafter cited as TD I.

<sup>75</sup>TD 2, 128. Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup>TD 1, 25. Balthasar calls dialogue “one of the most fruitful new approaches of Christian life and thought,” in TD 34.

<sup>77</sup>TD 1, 36.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>TD 37.

<sup>80</sup>TD 2, 628. In this section, pp. 626–643, he discusses (not uncritically) many thinkers who operate within an I-Thou framework, including Buber (pp. 632–636). While agreeing with the general dialogical framework of the I-Thou, Balthasar claims that “[Buber’s] *I and Thou* lacks the very category we are looking for, namely, man’s being directly addressed, summoned, called and sent by God, TD 2, 636. Instead, Balthasar prefers the dialogical philosophy of Ferdinand Ebner (TD 2, 639–643), which incorporates God’s initiative within the dialogue principle.

<sup>81</sup>See for example his reflections on the increasingly apocalyptic opposition in a secularized, post-Christian society between those who have chosen Christ and those who have not: *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume four, *The Action*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), e.g. 427ff; originally published as *Theodramatik: Dritte Band: Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980). Hereafter cited as TD 4. See also, e.g., TD 2, 314–316, for an account of the different states of alienation from God.

<sup>82</sup>It will be recalled that Gadamer’s account of tragedy in *Truth and Method* remained wholly on the level of ancient Greek drama, which explained tragedy as the disproportionately negative effect of a poor human decision. For Balthasar, tragedy in theo-drama has an even stronger negative effect (that is, sin as alienation from God), but also contains a remedy that is more powerful: the redemptive love of God in Christ, who restores communion (and dialogue) between God and humanity through the Cross and Resurrection.

<sup>83</sup>TD 2, e.g. 342, 335.

<sup>84</sup>For pre-Christian humanity, see for example TD 2, 346–393; for the Israelite Covenant in general, see *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 6, *Theology: The Old Covenant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), passim, esp. 144–211; for the relationship between finite and infinite freedom see TD 2, 189–334.

<sup>85</sup>TD 4, 317.

<sup>86</sup>TD 4, 323.

<sup>87</sup>TD 4, 331.

<sup>88</sup>TD 4, 335–336.

<sup>89</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. by Aidan Nichols, O.P. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 189; originally published as *Theologie der Drei Tage* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1970). Hereafter cited as MP.

<sup>90</sup>On Balthasar’s distinctive theology on Holy Saturday and the true death of Christ, see MP, 148–188.

<sup>91</sup>TD 4, 390.

<sup>92</sup>*TD* 4, 352–361 and 395–398. See also *GL* I, 338–343 and 362–365 for more on Balthasar's thoughts on the Marian archetype. Balthasar also analyzed the archetypes of other disciples, such as John, Paul, and Peter. His analysis of Peter and the Petrine ministry can be found in *GL* I, 352–354, and his *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. by Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986); originally published as *Der antirömische Affekt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder KG, 1974).