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# MARY AS MISSIONARY: BALTHASAR'S MARIOLOGY AS A RESOURCE FOR ENGAGING THE FAITHFUL IN THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Patricia A. Sullivan, Ph.D. \*

## Introduction

Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote of Mary: "The radius of her circle [of influence] pervades all the others and includes them in itself. She is, in other words, coextensive with the Church, insofar as the Church is the Church of the saints, the 'bride without spot or wrinkle.'" <sup>1</sup> His Mariology, intertwined with a theology of the saints, grounded in his thought on nature and grace emphasizing the noetic dimension of concrete human reality grasped by the supernatural, presents Mary and the saints as guides in responding to Christ's redemptive work: paradoxically, we become freer in looking away from ourselves, performing God-given personal missions despite personal deficiencies. And so performance of our personal missions is inherently revelatory, even for ourselves, necessarily rendering us "evangelizers," "missionaries," in deed and word. This mission rubric offers theoretical understanding and practical guidance in the "New Evangelization" introduced at the Second Vatican Council and promoted by Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, while it presents helpful perspective on saints,

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 139; orig. ed., *Maria, Kirche im Ursprung*, 4th rev. ed. (Einsiedeln and Freiburg im Breisgau: Johannes Verlag, 1997).

especially in their role as models—with Mary as preeminent figure in the Body of Christ—in our task of evangelization. Among human persons, in Mary alone are person and personal mission indistinguishable, because of her complete submission to her Son in her expansive role in his salvific work. She is the “archetypal Church, whose form we have to take as our pattern,” Balthasar asserted.<sup>2</sup> She “live[s] in the midst of the basic law of revelation,” which is “that God casts down the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, and sends the rich away empty-handed.”<sup>3</sup> In Balthasar’s theology she cuts across boundaries of states of life, in a posture that in its exemplarity he reflected upon in its impact on the individual, the Church, and the world—moments to be appreciated via study of his theology of nature and grace and his theology of Mary and the saints as informed by his perspective on the nature-grace relationship, culminating in his thought on the theological and pastoral value of the saints generally and Mary particularly.

### **I. Dialectically Sacramental: the ‘Event Character’ of Our ‘Graced’ Ontology**

A statement easily overlooked in Balthasar’s *The Theology of Karl Barth* encapsulates Balthasar’s theology of Mary and the saints. Regarding conceptions of the relationship between nature and grace, apart from “whether de Lubac’s theory, . . . can hold up when all its implications are thought through to their logical conclusion,” Balthasar wrote that

it is a daring, almost aristocratic line of thought according to which what is most important to God always remains most important in actuality: de Lubac moves from above downward and does not judge the worth of heavenly realities by their sheer distance to us below but on their own terms. His is a thought that does not fear to make what has been revealed a function of the mysterious and esoteric. This is a style of thought that imitates the radicality of the saints, to whom everything seems insipid and meaningless that does not resonate with the name of Jesus Christ and is

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 124.

not brought before his light. De Lubac's is a thought, finally, that unites the highest confidence with the greatest fear of the Lord, because he knows that the deepest aspirations buried in the heart of nature are nothing but the obedience to a grace that has already gone forth.<sup>4</sup>

A theology of nature and grace that on one level can seem a conflation of revelation (contacting the mind) and grace (contacting the will) was by Balthasar intended to show the inextricability of these realities; this approach can be argued to be the distinctive feature of his thought. Deliberately less full than some of his contemporaries in conceptually demarcating the realms of nature and grace on the existential level, he prominently accented on the *existentiell* level the sovereignty and freedom of God as well as the freedom given by God to human beings.<sup>5</sup> This orientation of Balthasar's thought allowed a striking dialectic to emerge within the characteristically Catholic sacramental sense, wherein events of revelatory significance received particular emphasis.<sup>6</sup> Relevant to the New Evangelization, as will be shown, Mary and the saints lived personal missions to which they were called by God and which present messages from God.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 297 and elsewhere; orig. ed., *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (Köln: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1951).

<sup>5</sup> Balthasar did not dismiss discussion of a formal concept of "nature." See *The Theology of Karl Barth*, part III, chap. 2, 267-325.

<sup>6</sup> In my "Saints as the 'Living Gospel': Von Balthasar's Revealers of the Revealer, Rahner's Mediators of the Mediator," *The Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 2 (March 2014): 270-285, in comparison to the work of Karl Rahner, I also summarized Balthasar's theologies of nature and grace and of the saints without focus upon Mary or the New Evangelization. Some points made and quotations offered in that article reappear here in this new context of reflection. The terms "existential" and "existentiell" follow a translation note in Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995), 16; orig. ed., *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1976): "'Existential,' ... refers to an element in man's ontological constitution precisely as human being, ... which is constitutive of his existence as man prior to his exercise of freedom. ... 'Existentiell,' ... refers to the free, personal and subjective appropriation and actualization of something which can also be spoken of in abstract theory or objective concepts ..."

Balthasar, like Lubac, emphasized the impossibility of defining that which would remain of nature should it not have been ordered to grace; Lubac's theology, of course, famously rested in the paradoxical reality of human nature having a supernatural end.<sup>7</sup> Yet in Balthasar's focus upon "the interplay of natural knowledge (whose realm can never really be defined) and supernatural faith," he was particularly concerned with the intellectual dimension, "the noetic side of the problem,"<sup>8</sup> albeit as related to the volitional. He wrote: "Created being must be by definition created, dependent, relative, nondivine, but *as* something created it cannot be utterly dissimilar to its Creator. And if this creature is a spiritual and intellectual being, both its ontic as well as its noetic nature must bear some relation to its Creator."<sup>9</sup> The human person's relationship to God does not necessitate a "claim" upon God, though, for "just as one human being has no rightful claim to the full self-disclosure of another human being, which is inherently a free act, so *analogously* (and only so!) creatures have no right to God's self-disclosure in his gracious revelation."<sup>10</sup> He elaborated: "Here a true analogy governs inasmuch as a true analogy exists between the divine and human subject.... because the divine subject stands both much farther from, and yet that much nearer to, the creaturely subject than any other human Thou does."<sup>11</sup> Therefore "every 'claim' of the creature, even in the order of creation, is *de facto* so outmatched by the divine goodness that this goodness itself is expressed to the creature as a claim upon

<sup>7</sup> Balthasar, in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, noted that in "mov[ing] from a 'natural desire' to that answer to grace that must bear the name of grace," it is the case that "a dialogue on the theme of nature and grace is feasible without either side of the dialogue having to give up its own most deeply held position" (297). He asserted: "*The positive definition of grace can only be given through grace itself*. God must himself reveal what he is within himself. The creature cannot delimit itself in relation to this Unknown reality. Nor can the creature, as a theologically understood 'pure' nature, ever know wherein it specifically is different from God. Only the light of revelation can draw this distinction and make this clear..." (279).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 281-282.

it."<sup>12</sup> He remarked: "The real issue is the priority of God's activity in man overall: God's activity first touches man's being and transforms it by giving it a share in the divine nature so that it can then affect his consciousness and summon him to faith."<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, Balthasar's interest in the matter of the relationship of nature and grace was in a descending reflection, his starting premise being that "from all eternity God has willed one and only one thing: to open up his love to the human race."<sup>14</sup> By "participation and adoption" in and by God, human beings are, as Balthasar wrote, following Karl Barth in his early work on that theologian's thought, "similar to the God *who is* always ever dissimilar" (i.e., "the creature is not dissimilar to God because of its nature *as* a creature").<sup>15</sup> Balthasar explained: "The distance between subject and subject is not created by grace. It is a distance that belongs to nature, but it has its deepest foundation in the intradivine distance between the Persons in the Trinity, which only becomes visible to us in grace."<sup>16</sup> God's descent to our sinful world in the Incarnation (with "the history that flows from it"), "concreteness personified,"<sup>17</sup> reveals that "dissimilarity can really go—all the way to God's

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 279. Balthasar cautiously offered: "Naturally we should not conclude . . . that the 'grace' of creation is to be equated or approaches the actual grace of God's supernatural self-disclosure, for that would imply Pelagianism" (ibid.). He validated his approach by noting that Saint Thomas Aquinas and others before him "bind the connection between nature and the supernatural much more tightly than we would dare do (with their concept of the *desiderium naturale visionis* that moves toward a single, visible supernatural fulfillment)," at the same time that "they require that God freely disclose himself both as ontic grace as well as noetic revelation within history" (282). He cautioned that "because we are dealing with God's revelation and thus with his entire initiative in this exchange, we must grant an unconditioned priority to the ontological over the cognitive [which 'is a priority of a logical, not necessarily a temporal, order']. It is much more important that God has in fact taken hold of us than our awareness of this fact" (366).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 286. Balthasar noted that theology and philosophy form "a symbiosis" (285). Here "the theological analogy sheds definitive light on the philosophical one" (286).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 384.

own abandonment of himself."<sup>18</sup> In nature-grace reflections, "nature *emphasizes* the distance, while grace stresses the communion . . ." Human nature "is grounded in the Logos" such that "the possibility of creation being distant from God derives ultimately from the *divine* Son's readiness to empty himself in service and obedience to his Father."<sup>19</sup> It is the case that "only when grace is imparted to us is the distance between God and creature given the power to transform that distance into a genuine and fruitful conversation between God and faith."<sup>20</sup> And, "dialectically," Balthasar wrote, "the stronger the union between God and man becomes, which the Word of God effects, the more clearly we see the difference between them, especially as it applies to the categories of subjectivity and personal character."<sup>21</sup>

Our "graced" reality is revelatory, then, in the sense that "the openness of the horizon of knowledge all the way to knowl-

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 287. "The formal concept of nature, . . . , embodies the bare minimum of content: . . ." he wrote. "In using it, the theologian cannot strip it of its ambiguity and philosophical and theological double-sidedness. This is the case all the more when we try to inject some content . . . from the concretely existing world . . . into this formal concept, . . . expropriat[ing] elements that have already been affected by the *de facto* ordering of nature toward its supernatural destiny: such as man's original state, his fall from grace, God's redemption and the awaited transformation of the universe at the end of time" (ibid.). Human reality in the concrete, lived in reference to God, entails that all of our activity, "the very seat and center of these acts—nature itself and its entelechy—must *de facto* be radically transformed, raised up and realigned" (287-288). "Grace is still grace when it is rejected and refused. . . . God hears everything that man does as an *answer* to the Word he has spoken." Balthasar insisted: "There is *in fact* no slice of 'pure nature' in this world. Even though the sinner may be denied the life of actual grace, his 'nature' is still (precisely then!) no longer pure nature. A negative relationship to the God of grace is still a relationship, even a very real relationship, to him!" (288).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 292. He added that "if participation in this personal trinitarian life is the purpose for which the substrate of our creaturely, natural nature as subjects was established, then that goal is also what grounds and makes possible this natural substrate."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Therefore, as use of "the formal concept of nature" can admit, "everything touched by grace retains its natural side: grace is always a grace in a nature and for a nature. It remains modal to nature and is never itself substantial. But while this is all true, so is the converse: grace so radically transforms, exalts and irradiates nature with the divine reality that no aspect or corner of nature can escape its impact. Yes, even the most apparently god-forsaken realm—where sin took hold and reigned—was chosen as *the* site for God's revelation of grace in Christ!" (287).

edge of the Creator—for this alone grounds spirit and knowledge—opens up to the created spirit a way through nature to the Creator, but without thereby in any way surrendering God to the willfulness of the creature.”<sup>22</sup> Humanity “is by nature already so utterly beholden and submissive to its Creator and Lord that we must already speak of its foundational act in the sphere of nature and even more in that of revelation. The human spirit can be nothing other than a kind of ‘faith.’”<sup>23</sup> Although fallen, we have “from time immemorial been in touch with the sphere and the quality of the divine.” Remaining are “natural-supernatural contacts of the created spirit with the true God, equally Creator and Bestower of all grace,” and “the natural law demands that man adhere to that divine order that God himself has set before him.”<sup>24</sup> For “in sin, man cannot know God the way he *should* know him.”<sup>25</sup> Balthasar maintained, then, that “the circle between revelation and faith is not closed in the way Barth means it but is an open one, offering us access to God.”<sup>26</sup> And “it is precisely human reason that is summoned not only to come to know God but to acknowledge him in its logical thinking.”<sup>27</sup> He underscored that our “sharing

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 310. He explained: “Because nature in its ontological structure ‘continually’ points to the Creator, this reveals the ‘continuity’ of the Creator’s will and thus also of God’s self-revelation.”

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 322. Balthasar pointed out that this statement follows Vatican I teaching. Considering “to what extent natural knowledge of God remains and what value it has after sin,” he noted that, “dialectically,” there are “three moments that determine this question”: “first, the moment of abstract, absolutely defined nature that even in sin requires an authentic and lasting knowledge of God. Secondly, there is the moment of the decision of the will and of the whole person that already accompanies and determines every knowledge of depths in the natural and even more in the supernatural sphere. And, in the sinner, this decision, as a negative one, influences and muddies true knowledge even down to its very roots. And thirdly, there is the moment of supernatural grace (and perhaps even of God’s revelation of his Word) that already has undergirded and enwrapped all natural knowledge of, and relation to, God. And this moment modifies even more so the properties of nature” (319-320).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 324. Knowledge of the human being in a state of sin “remains in its decisive meaning a ‘miscarried knowledge’ (*peccatum*) in spite of all its correct moments. For it occurs in the basic attitude of refusing to obey (*apistia*: infidelity).”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 315.



in God's life must also be both something conscious and ontically real: . . . , it can only be understood as simultaneously involving both an event aspect as well as an ontological aspect." For "God cannot communicate his truth without at the same time giving us access to his Being."<sup>28</sup> So, Balthasar wrote, "it is an appropriate activity of our nature, *when* the order of grace is opened up, to explore not only the inner meaning and content of revelation (*fides quaerens intellectum*) but also to comprehend the meaning of nature and reason that grace and faith have given to nature (*intellectus quaerens fidem*)." He concluded: "Nature and grace have a meaning; and grace and faith are the ultimate meaning of this meaning."<sup>29</sup>

The co-present ontological and event aspects of human reality in God are manifest vividly in the lives of Mary and the saints, consistently described by Balthasar from the standpoint of personal missions flowing from charisms. Following an acknowledged lead by Erich Przywara, Balthasar took for the analogy of faith (functioning within an analogy of being) "the place of this concept in the intraecclesial relationship between the charisms lived out inside the Church and the one objective faith of the Church to which they all are bound."<sup>30</sup> This movement of charisms' work within the Church will be studied next; it is the impetus for authentic missionary work flowing outward into the world, as will be considered subsequently.

## II. Sent by God for the Church: The Revelatory Dimension of Personal Missions

Balthasar's concentration upon the noetic as well as the ontic dimension of the nature-grace dynamic led to his conclu-

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 395. This notion appears in the 1961 Foreword, which in current printings is placed as the Afterword. Balthasar explicitly employed the analogy of faith (held by Barth) and the analogy of being (the typically Catholic emphasis) for, as he observed in his dialogue with Barth's theology, "even the answer of faith that God brings about with his grace is an aspect of *being*" (394). He wrote: "I must stress . . . the purely *analogous* relationship between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith. . . . there is a dialectic hidden in the very concept of nature . . . and in the notion of man's natural desire for the beatific vision" (396).

sion that "the grace of God is fundamentally a call."<sup>31</sup> It is "being appointed to a service, unique as it is personal, and being endowed with a spark of God's own uniqueness."<sup>32</sup> Logically, then, according to Balthasar's manner of associating grace and revelation (or, more exactly, nature and grace to faith and revelation<sup>33</sup>), saints are such for their personal missions and the great depth of their commitment to them, which become revelatory for others. "In a saint, it is primarily the mission that is perfect; only secondarily is he himself described as perfect, insofar as he integrates the whole of his gifts and strength into fulfilling his mission," Balthasar wrote.<sup>34</sup> Saints are "gripped by the love of God in the event of the cross" and therefore any one of them "can do things that, while they seem natural to him, are extravagant as far as the average observer is concerned." They are "'sent,' in a very special sense, for their mission has so taken possession of them that now they are nothing more than a function of the divine task. By calling such people God has in mind a particular fruitfulness in the Church. . . ."<sup>35</sup> Balthasar stressed that "the task in view is never the person himself, but God's will, which he [the saint] is to carry out. To that extent no saint can strive for his own holiness, for with all his strength he strains away from himself and seeks to enter more deeply into the will of God. . . . to quench Christ's thirst for love."<sup>36</sup> The lives of the saints, then, illustrate the paradoxical human reality of nature grasped by grace such that the human being,

<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, trans. R. John Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 28; orig. ed., *In Gottes Einsatz leben* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1971), 2nd ed., 1972.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> In the Afterword (the Foreword in the 1961 edition) to *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 398–401, Balthasar acknowledged the work's continuing influence upon his projects to that date, including those about Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Blessed Elizabeth of Dijon.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 27; orig. ed., *Schwwestern im Geist: Therese von Lisieux und Elisabeth von Dijon* ([Einsiedeln]: Johannes Verlag, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 86; orig. ed., *Katholisch* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

precisely by "cooperation with the divine choice," "enter[ing] into the divine freedom," is made freer himself or herself. "Nothing makes the human individual more autonomous than the divine mission that he accepts in free obedience and with full responsibility," Balthasar wrote.<sup>37</sup> "The identification of one's own self with the mission received from God is an act of perfect faith and, as such, is the union of our work with the work of God in us (Jn 6:28-29). It is, at the same time, that which the Lord called 'truth' and equated with true freedom: . . ." <sup>38</sup> And so "the genuine saints desired nothing but the greater glory of God's love";<sup>39</sup> "every one of them wishes to point completely away from himself and toward love."<sup>40</sup>

A logical extension of his concern for the revelatory in our "graced" reality, Balthasar viewed great saints as those whose charisms "radiate across vast spaces of the Church" in personal missions.<sup>41</sup> "Mary's mission radiates throughout the whole Church," he noted.<sup>42</sup> Saints are "God's great gifts" to the faithful<sup>43</sup> so that "the whole gamut of Christ's experiences is distributed to the Church through the experiences of the saints."<sup>44</sup> For "only the picture the Spirit keeps before the Church has been able, down the centuries, to change sinful men into saints," "mediating knowledge of him [Christ]" to "change lives."<sup>45</sup> A charism defines an individual's personal

<sup>37</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 401; orig. ed., *Christlicher Stand* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1977).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 400. He quoted: "If you abide in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31-32).

<sup>39</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 121; orig. ed., *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*, interview with Angelo Scola, trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 83; orig. ed., *Prüfet alles, das Gute behaltet* (Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag AG, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>43</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us—Do We Know Him?*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 91; orig. ed., *Kennt uns Jesus—kennen wir ihn?* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1980).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

mission,<sup>46</sup> whether or not that mission and its value to the Church is fully comprehended even by the saint concerned.<sup>47</sup> Saints' "sheer existence proves to be a theological manifestation that contains most fruitful and opportune doctrine, the directions of the Holy Spirit addressed to the whole Church and not to be neglected by any of her members," asserted Balthasar.<sup>48</sup> And yet there is the diversity in saintly renown: "The kingdom of the saints knows many degrees, from the lowest limit, where the integrity of a mission is just preserved, to the highest level of all, where the mission and the person become indistinguishable. The Mother of God alone has reached that level," wrote Balthasar.<sup>49</sup> "In their broadest sense, the 'charisms' of Mary set forth the essence of what the Church is." Her "privileges" (along with Peter's) are "portrayals of general characteristics of the Church, since the Church is the one bride of Christ, virgin and mother, conceived immaculate, called in grace to share in the work of redemption, and taken up bodily in grace to share in the transfiguration of heaven."<sup>50</sup> In Mary and the saints the Church is, "vicariously for all," "poor, the virgin, obedient."<sup>51</sup> Mary and those Balthasar called "representative saints"<sup>52</sup> are sent by God for the Church, Mary being the "first cell of the Church of Christ," "the place where the Son of the Father can descend to earth."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Balthasar, *Test Everything*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Who Is a Christian?*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Newman Press, [1968]), 88; orig. ed., *Wer ist ein Christ?* (Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1965, and elsewhere). This does not negate Balthasar's observation concerning biblical exegesis as recorded in *Test Everything*: "Those whom Christ called 'the simple' comprehend directly 'what is hidden from the worldly-wise'" (31).

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2: *Spouse of the Word*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 310; orig. ed., *Skizzen zur Theologie*, II: *Sponsa Verbi* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 312. Balthasar noted that those called to the life of the evangelical counsels desire also to serve in this vicarious role.

<sup>52</sup> See Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 22-28. He wrote in *Test Everything* that "God sends the Church new saints" and "the old ones do not become dated because of it" (76-77).

<sup>53</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4: *Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 264; orig. ed., *Skizzen zur Theologie*, IV: *Pneuma und Institution* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974).

He explained: "The Yes of Mary (and with it, the Yes of all of us) enters, and is absorbed in, the total Yes of Christ to the Father (2 Cor 1:19-20)."<sup>54</sup> Mary is "the Mediatrix of all graces" because "all the grace that is mediated to the world through Christ alone (and therefore possesses a Christological, incarnational form) has also a Marian-ecclesiological aspect because this is how the Lord has freely disposed things in his grace."<sup>55</sup> In Mary, "faith and her readiness were the principle that, from the world's side, made the Incarnation possible."<sup>56</sup> She, "the archetype of a Church that con-forms to Christ," shows that "Christian sanctity is 'Christ-bearing.'"<sup>57</sup> Yet "we are not Mary or the bride Church" but instead "sinners who are in continual need of purification and sanctification."<sup>58</sup> In Christ, our "yes," following Mary's, must be said and lived.

Balthasar's use of the term "representative saints" is not without importance. A result of his accent upon God's (explicit) "self-disclosure" to us in grace, Balthasar presented a dichotomy in saints' source and function. Saints of "customary sanctity"<sup>59</sup> are "nurtured" in the Church "which offers them as first fruits to God," whereas saints of "representative sanctity" are those "whom God sets as cornerstones of the Church, whom he selects to serve for centuries as living interpretations of the gospel." The latter are "divine messengers"; "God has without question sent [them] to serve as models" whom the Church "receives" and "uses" so "to fertilize her sanctity."<sup>60</sup> As model in and for the Church, Mary, of course, above even the representative saints, is the standard.<sup>61</sup> Key for notice and imitation is "Mary's attitude": she points to that which is most important for and to her—"her Son's concern that God's name

<sup>54</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 2:318.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>56</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 4:264.

<sup>57</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed., Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 562; orig. ed., *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, I: *Schau der Gestalt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961; 2nd ed., 1967).

<sup>58</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 2:318.

<sup>59</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, 123.

be glorified on earth, that his kingdom come and his will be done on earth as in heaven."<sup>62</sup> Balthasar observed:

As Christ's Mother, Mary seems to enjoy a *prius* that no one else can equal. But let us not forget that she got this *prius*, not from her physiological motherhood taken in isolation, but from her total personal attitude of faith as perfect readiness to serve. And where does she get this faith if not from the grace that God communicates to the world through the work of Jesus Christ?<sup>63</sup>

Her life in Christ is revelatory in a preeminent way, and so her spirituality must be the ground of every other; her "radical renunciation of any special spirituality other than the overshadowing of the Most High and the indwelling of the divine Word" means that she "resolves all particular spiritualities into the one spirituality of the bride of Christ, the Church."<sup>64</sup> "In the midst of all the other circles [of saintly influence in the Church], Mary is the greatest," wrote Balthasar. She, "as the handmaid of the Lord, is in one sense placed on a level with everyone else in the Church. Everyone who like her is a handmaiden or servant of God can be a mother of Jesus who lets the divine Word become flesh in his own body."<sup>65</sup> So representative and customary saints alike spring from adoption of Mary's comportment to God. "And yet, she cannot be put completely on the same level as other believers, because only she was Jesus' physical Mother and thus 'pre-redeemed,'" Balthasar wrote.<sup>66</sup>

Mary can "combine in perfect harmony states of life otherwise incompatible: virginity and motherhood, the married and the religious state, even in a real, though analogous or eminent mode, the priesthood (as coredemptrix) and the lay state." Balthasar noted: "The circumincession in Mary of the different

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. I: *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 218; orig. ed., *Skizzen zur Theologie*, I: *Verbum Caro* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960).

<sup>65</sup> Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, 139.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

states of life and of what they involve is, of course, a participation in Christ's own transcendence of them, as God and man."<sup>67</sup> So critical is her place that even "incarnate office is the ecclesial counterpart of Mary's enfleshed Yes in the Church," asserted Balthasar.<sup>68</sup> He explained:

The Gospel of love ends with a great tribute to the Petrine office, but it subordinates this office to the service of a love that it, the office, can never fully oversee.

The duality of Mary and Peter, of the subjective holiness of the heart and the objective holiness of the structure, maintains the distance between body and head in the catholicity of the Church. And so in the empirical Church there are two critical organs: the office, which examines and criticizes the charisms to test their catholicity, and the sanctity that in the pure spirit of the Gospel, of Mary's Yes, can and must criticize office.<sup>69</sup>

As for the saints, while the hierarchy interprets scriptural revelation, the saints are the "living gospel," "a living and essential expression of the Church's tradition,"<sup>70</sup> "the link between the Marian and the Petrine in the Church."<sup>71</sup> Their "surrender

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 1:223.

<sup>68</sup> Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, 167. He explained: "Everything hangs, as if on a nail, on the election and empowerment of the Twelve, with Peter at their head. That this nail was hammered in by Jesus himself is beyond doubt." While maintaining all due qualifications vis-à-vis the hierarchy, with whom saints have a mutually-conditioning relationship, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4, he wrote: "Saints receive their task in the Church in their (one might say) 'transecclesial' encounter with the fountainhead out of which the Church arose" (292-293).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 173-174. In *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 4, Balthasar explained that sometimes saints must "take a stance against the empirical Church, perhaps even the hierarchical Church, in the name of the gospel," acting as "the embodied Church" and therefore "in the sending from the Lord and in ecclesial obedience to the Lord." They need "the patience of the gospel"; "they cannot go back on their mission, but in obedience to the Church they cannot go forward" in cases in which the Church is not ready to receive their message (297). Following Christ, they must trust that finally, perhaps after their own deaths, their missions will bear fruit (298).

<sup>70</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andr  e Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 225; orig. ed., *Der antr  mische Affekt* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder KG, 1974). The saints are in the place of John who "has the mediating role that prevents the Church from falling into two separate parts," Balthasar explained (224).

to the Infinite<sup>72</sup> is the proper posture even of theology which is structured in conformance to revelation on which it reflects (as "a function, a corrective, a preliminary to the official teaching"<sup>73</sup>) via the guidance of the Spirit who inspires "different kinds of sanctity and of missions"<sup>74</sup> that can illuminate doctrine lived and otherwise communicated in diverse historical contexts.<sup>75</sup> In *Love Alone Is Credible*, Balthasar wrote: "What is implicated in the transaction of the one acting in faith and the object of this deed, that is, the 'neighbor,' is nothing less than revelation itself, and, with it, the whole *network of dogmas*. Dogmatic theology is the articulation of the conditions of possibility of Christian action in the light of revelation . . ."<sup>76</sup> "True theology" is "the theology of the saints," Balthasar contended.<sup>77</sup> The various spiritualities of the saints, all encompassed in Mary's attitude, are "for Christ and the Church" and have their source in "the *free* distribution, by the Head of the Church, of his gifts and charismata,"<sup>78</sup> although the greatest missions have not these particularities chiefly in view but are fixed in the gaze of Mary upon the "'thing itself,' the gospel of Christ."<sup>79</sup> Thus Mary's fiat may be said to be expressive of the basic missionary task of Christians.

<sup>72</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 1:150.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-160.

<sup>76</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 111.

<sup>77</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 1:196. Balthasar wrote: "True theology, the theology of the saints, with the central doctrines of revelation always in view, inquires, in a spirit of obedience and reverence, what processes of human thought, what modes of approach are best fitted to bring out the meaning of what has been revealed. . . . Any intellectual procedure that does not serve this purpose is assuredly not an interpretation of revelation, but one that bypasses its true meaning and, therefore, an act of disobedience" (*ibid.*). He bemoaned the lack of coincidence of saints and theologians since the Middle Ages, after which theology became indebted to "secular science, including philosophy," not only to revelation (195).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 218. Balthasar cautioned that the ecclesiastical states cannot be thought to have individual, totally separable spiritualities (221). Christ is "the revelation of the triune divine life, that is, of the circumincession of the three Persons in a single nature, and so of three divine 'states' and 'spiritualities'" (224).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.



### III. Mary's Evangelical Comportment: "The One Spirituality of the Bride of Christ"<sup>80</sup>

As in Balthasar's theology of Mary and the saints "the interpenetrating circular waves"<sup>81</sup> of saintly spiritual influence move inside the Church and thereby enliven it for its outward mission, so, too, the New Evangelization must move. As reviewed, Balthasar showed that the personal missions that arise from charisms are activated by the grace of Christ operating on the individual human person fixated on Christ; Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have emphasized that the New Evangelization springs from conversion.<sup>82</sup> Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* that in the Church are "baptized [who] have lost a living sense of the faith." These need "new evangelization" or "re-evangelization."<sup>83</sup> Following the logic of Balthasar's theology, God sends us the saints to direct us in this which will render the "re-evangelized," with the rest of the Christian community, missionaries to others. Mary, as a "missionary," perpetually is before us as pre-eminent guide. Indeed, in Balthasar's theology it is clear that to be a saint (canonized or not) and to evangelize are one. As he

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>81</sup> Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, 139.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made such comments to the 64th General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference on 21-25 May 2012. For a report, see "Pope says personal conversion is first step of New Evangelization" (24 May 2012), available from Catholic News Agency, at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-says-personal-conversion-is-first-step-of-new-evangelization/> (accessed 18 August 2012). Pope Francis alluded to such during a Mass for members of confraternities on pilgrimage in Rome on 5 May 2013. See "True Evangelical, Ecclesial, and Missionary Spirit: Characteristics of Confraternities" (6 May 2013), available from Vatican Information Service, at [http://www.vis.va/vissolr/index.php?vi=all&dl=9bdf336e-ccc9-e30b-b98f-5187a5f4612f&dl\\_t=text/xml&dl\\_a=y&ul=1&ev=1](http://www.vis.va/vissolr/index.php?vi=all&dl=9bdf336e-ccc9-e30b-b98f-5187a5f4612f&dl_t=text/xml&dl_a=y&ul=1&ev=1) (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>83</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (7 Dec. 1990), no. 33, available from the Vatican, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html) (accessed 11 August 2012). The late Pope noted that, in the one mission of the Church to receive, live, and transmit the gospel today (no. 31), there are distinct existing "situations": in the world where the gospel is not yet known, in vibrant ecclesial communities already effectively witnessing to Christ, and in "intermediate situation[s]" in which those connected to the Church "live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (no. 33).

wrote, "God enlists us as the agents of his activity in the world, takes us for his own," and "in proportion as God makes us free in ourselves, so we are correspondingly free and at his disposal for his activity in the world."<sup>84</sup>

John Paul II explicitly presented the saints as models for missionaries. In the section of *Redemptoris Missio* entitled "The True Missionary Is the Saint," he wrote: "*The universal call to holiness is closely linked to the universal call to mission. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission.*"<sup>85</sup> Noting especially the "missionary mandate"<sup>86</sup> of the Gospel of John, he stated that "we are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word or deed.*"<sup>87</sup> In this understanding of God's way of working with us to spread the gospel, three considerations of the contemporary situation arise relative to the three "moments" noted in Balthasar's theology of Mary and the saints: the individual called by charism to personal mission, the personal mission's impact upon the Church, and the Church's successful impact upon the world thereby. Herein are found the practical contributions Balthasar's thought offers for fostering the faithful's active immersion in and understanding of the New Evangelization.

One, with regard to God's call to the individual, it must be noted that Mary and the saints have largely disappeared from much private and even some corporate traditions of veneration since Vatican II. It is perhaps not too bold to suggest that this has contributed to the need for new evangelization in the Church. Through Christ's saints we are compelled, on intellectual and affective levels, to our "destiny"—complete abandonment to God in love of him and neighbor, the very goal of any

<sup>84</sup> Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 90.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 11, 22, 23, 32, 37, 44, 45, 61, 63, 92.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23. Chap. 5 notes that mission "develops" by witness (nos. 42–43), proclamation (nos. 44–45), conversion and baptism (nos. 46–47), formation of local churches (nos. 48–50), fostering ecclesial base communities (no. 51), inculturation of the gospel (nos. 52–54), inter-religious dialogue (nos. 55–57), formation of consciences (nos. 58–59), and charity to the poor (no. 60).

saintly mission for the Church.<sup>88</sup> And the saints' lives (and deaths) show that discernment of charisms is key for the individual on pilgrimage in and to Christ, to use Vatican II's imagery.<sup>89</sup> Again, God's personal mission plan for each of us will flow from our charisms. "The Christian's supreme aim is to transform his life" according to the "idea of himself secreted in God, . . . freely promulgated for him by the pure grace of God," wrote Balthasar.<sup>90</sup> Every Christian must realize his or her own personal mission or vocation, which "is always an ecclesiastical 'charisma'—a call to service out of grace,"<sup>91</sup> grace that transforms amidst "all the petty details of daily life."<sup>92</sup> Balthasar contended: "The steps we take in this discipleship ['conversion, progress, backsliding, cooperation and obstacles']<sup>93</sup> have their own inherent meaning and weight. God takes our decisions seriously, working them into his plans by his holy providence."<sup>94</sup> Even saints have had fear in receiving God's call, Balthasar observed; this should comfort and embolden us in our adoption of our proper posture as human:<sup>95</sup> as did and do the saints, we must resist the temptation to escape the call by ignoring charisms or the personal missions they summon.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 75; orig. ed., *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, Bd. III, I: *Im Raum der Metaphysik*, teil II: *Neuzeit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1965).

<sup>89</sup> See esp. Chap. 7 of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (21 Nov. 1964), available from the Vatican, at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed 6 May 2013).

<sup>90</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Balthasar, *Who Is a Christian?*, 89.

<sup>92</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 378.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>95</sup> Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 398. "The higher the mission to which one is called by God, the more imperative it is that one *consent to the call*. For there is question here of the transferal to a human recipient of the personal word of God himself," Balthasar wrote.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 399. "The surrender of man's will to God's elective will means the sacrifice of his personal freedom insofar as it is regarded or exists as an entity distinct from the divine will . . . , so that man's will may live from the divine will and may have no other object than the divine freedom of choice itself," he explained (400). Similarly he wrote: "Mission, then, requires man's 'yes'—an act not less important than the act by which

Especially in the example of Mary there is clarity about Balthasar's contention that in the saints "what matters about them is not their personal 'heroic achievement' but the resolute obedience with which they have utterly surrendered themselves to serving a mission and have come to see their very existence in the light of it."<sup>97</sup> Thinking of saints of representative sanctity, those whom Balthasar described as "much less directly imitable" than those of customary sanctity,<sup>98</sup> their missions being "concrete yet beyond comprehension,"<sup>99</sup> the faithful could fail to see these striking figures' universal relevance or, in comparison with them, become discouraged in our own Christian tasks borne of charisms. And yet in Balthasar's thought, the representative saints and Mary above them emphatically show that, following charisms to personal missions, in "renunciation of love of self, self-will and self-disposition,"<sup>100</sup> "when one has given one's full 'yes' to the call he has received, the Holy Spirit does not let him fail. *It is as if God himself assumed the responsibility for the one he has called.*"<sup>101</sup>

Two, concerning the impact upon the Church of personal missions, Balthasar's theology asserts in the saints a diversity of "spiritual programs," different ways of living Mary's "yes," for our inspiration and sometimes for our adoption, to contribute to the vigor of the Church's witness in the actions of its individual members. Mary's own "yes," transcending states of life, serves as the most important model for the New Evangelization which itself has been an impetus for new programs and institutes. In deed and word, the personal missions of the saints

God calls his chosen one. For man's response to the call of God must be no less decisive and unlimited than the call itself. And yet . . . , man's word is but the acceptance of God's call and mission—his simple cooperation in the eternal 'yes' of God. . . . The act by which man chooses a vocation is but the acknowledgment of the choice God has made of him" (399-400).

<sup>97</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 27.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 25. Balthasar wrote, in *The Christian State of Life*, that "the greater the mission, the more unique it is" (499).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>100</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 4:293.

<sup>101</sup> Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 407.

offer spiritualities of theological import in their reception and communication of the gospel, some more defined than others, with Mary's encompassing all. So completely was she immersed in the mission of her Son that she is, therefore, the model of sanctity in her complete love of God in his love. (As an aside, it is not inappropriate to note that Mary, as were all saints, as are all human beings, was historically-culturally located and that as a result it is possible to identify, within her own eminently exemplary Christian attitude of surrender to God, myriad paradigms of holiness to inspire human beings in a variety of circumstances, obvious and otherwise—e.g., motherhood; disadvantage—social, economic or political; public scrutiny, religious surveillance or persecution, etc.) Balthasar affirmed that "the first thing presupposed by sanctity is the will to be a part of the Body, with its many counterpoised members, and to perform the whole will of God wherever one is situated, one thus and another quite differently." More pointedly, "no saint ever said that what he was doing was the *only* right thing," he wrote,<sup>102</sup> "for no one can tread simultaneously all the paths of the love given to the saints: . . ."<sup>103</sup> In all cases, "God reckons with the unique nature, strength and capacity of each individual," without our knowing precisely what in an individual case "he may decide upon to produce his overall effects."<sup>104</sup> We need not be concerned to understand fully the shape of the personal mission, then, since God chooses which of and to what extent he will employ his gifts to each of us.<sup>105</sup> This is the way of sainthood—living the personal mission, despite personal failings and lack of understanding.

That personal missions require constant care to ensure that we are using our charisms in submission to God may itself be a gift: in Mary especially but also in the saints generally we see that their lack of knowledge of the precise outlines of their

<sup>102</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 14; orig. ed., *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch: Aspekte des christlichen Pluralismus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972).

<sup>103</sup> Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us?*, 98.

<sup>104</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 21.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

personal missions while performing them made it as certain as possible that the tasks before them were given by God, not created by human persons, and accepted in authentic conversion. Prayer disposes us properly to mission: "outside prayer there is no means of discerning our path to sanctity," wrote Balthasar.<sup>106</sup> He reminded that saints "follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who was despised, abused, thought to be mad (Mk 3.21) and possessed (Mt 12.24; Jn 7.20; 8.48), and yearn, for the sake of Jesus, to be regarded as fools."<sup>107</sup> Remembering saints, "we must bring to light what they wished to bring to light, what they were bound to: their representation of Christ and the Scriptures."<sup>108</sup> Each person's mission carries the appropriate "form of sanctity" which is "essentially social and outside the arbitrary disposition of any individual," to position him or her in the Church as God intended.<sup>109</sup> That intent realized, "the saints found the Church. They receive her from the Lord in the loneliness of their hearts and spread her out into the world as *communio*."<sup>110</sup>

Three, to consider the mark upon the world of charisms activated in personal missions enlivening the Church, Balthasar's theology may have especial relevance for the laity who, in increasingly secular cultures, may be most precariously placed with respect to authentic reception of the gospel, but in its authentic reception may be most advantageously placed to transmit the gospel beyond the Church. While his references to the ideal "evangelical" state were abundant,<sup>111</sup> his work, including his Mariology, embraced the lay state that took on,

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>107</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 5:143.

<sup>108</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 27. He strikingly claimed: "We should leave in obscurity what they wished to leave in obscurity: their poor personalities."

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>110</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 4:294. Even the customary saints guide us in submission to God, wrote Balthasar: "There are the invisible saints of everyday life who step through the crowd without being noticed, and under their example hearts gather into a pattern the way iron shavings arrange themselves around a magnetic field. But they, the saints, are unaware of this. In this way, by the transformation of hearts, the structures of society are themselves transformed."

<sup>111</sup> See, e.g., Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 2:331, where he wrote: "The fullness of the subjective imitation of Christ lies in the counsels, ..."

especially with regard to mission, more ecclesial importance with Vatican II. The layperson, he noted, lives "on the margin (between Church and world)," yet this "is not a distance from the center but is a central ecclesial existence, because the Church herself is the place of the continued embodiment of God in the world, a reality that radiates forth and wells up beyond her own self."<sup>112</sup> He appreciated that "the duty of the layman, after his own sanctification, is the portrayal of what is holy in the realm of the profane, the realization of the Kingdom of God in the kingdom of this world" which "can come about only through Cross, tribulation, persecution, and martyrdom."<sup>113</sup> Observing in his fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* essentially the special need of the world for the New Evangelization, Balthasar wrote:

The Christians of today, living in a night which is deeper than that of the later Middle Ages, are given the task of performing the act of affirming Being, unperturbed by the darkness and the distortion, in a way that is vicarious and representative for all humanity: an act which is at first theological, but which contains within itself the whole dimension of the metaphysical act of the affirmation of Being. Those who are directed in this way to pray continually, to find God in all things and to glorify Him are able to do so on particular grounds (that is particular graces) which allow them to perform their 'creaturely duty' . . . But insofar as they are to shine "like the stars in the sky," they are also entrusted with the task of bringing light to those areas of Being which are in darkness so that its primal light may shine anew not only upon them but also upon the whole world; for it is only in this light that man can walk in accordance with what he is truly called to be.<sup>114</sup>

In Balthasar's theology, the lay state, clearly distinct from the life of the evangelical counsels, is not without its connection to it. Balthasar wrote in his second volume of *Explorations in Theology* that "perhaps the ultimate riches of the world of the laity can be unfolded from this lay world only when the understanding of the position and the responsibility of the layman

<sup>112</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 2:316.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>114</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 5:648-649.

in the consciousness of the Church has been linked organically to the understanding of the evangelical counsels." He noted that "the gospel is not inherently monastic, and its directives have a validity that goes further than this."<sup>115</sup>

Mary is not a nun, but she is Mother *because* a virgin. Christ is not a monk, but he is King *because* he is poor and obedient unto death. It is not through Catholic "action" that the world will be redeemed but through poverty and obedience and an exclusive orientation toward God. And it would be in keeping with our advanced age if Catholics were to learn better to understand that responsibility for the world goes well with obedience, disposition over the world goes well with poverty, experience of the world goes well with virginity—indeed, that the ultimate fruitfulness, even in the realm that is most truly that of the laity, can be expected precisely from this source.<sup>116</sup>

In the same vein and volume Balthasar contended that "a living analogy governs the relationship between office and charism. The layman, who does not belong to the hierarchy, is not in the least without his office in the Church, when he has his *charisma*, . . ." <sup>117</sup> It might be argued that in today's Church, understandably, given the alarming decrease in vocations to the priesthood and to religious life along with the attention necessary to remedy this, despite the rise in lay participation in visible liturgical and social ministries, considerably less theoretical instruction is available to practical life in the lay state. Balthasar's consciousness provides the theological foundation which, again, is rooted in the attitude of Mary toward Christ, by which only, whatever our state of life, we can be sure of our genuine witness through personal missions borne of charisms, bearing fruit in the Church and the world, for the advance of the Kingdom.

<sup>115</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, 2:330.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-331.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 314. He further offered that "those who belong to the hierarchy are under obligation to perceive, acknowledge, and develop with all their power these 'offices' too, which lie in the commissions given by God. Indeed, so much is it true that they have to orient their own privileged office toward the services rendered by the laity that they ought to understand and carry out this office of theirs much more as a charism than as an office: . . ."



## Conclusion

In summary, Balthasar's theology viewed through the lens of the New Evangelization provides a view of the saints generally, but of Mary especially, as "missionaries" or "evangelizers" by virtue of their submission to Christ. Indeed, Balthasar's entire theology of Mary and the saints, perhaps his theology entire, could be said to be a theology of mission, grounded, as has been shown, in his particular way of understanding the relationship between nature and grace and, by association, between faith and revelation. Personal missions occur in the Church but are unique callings that serve and invigorate the Church and in some cases influence the world in grand ways. Unities, yet distinctions of Being and event; grace and revelation; the dialectical and the sacramental—these are in the lives of the saints radically and efficaciously pronounced in the sense expressed in Balthasar's statement of the essential task of the Christian: "His duty is to experience the presence of absolute love, and himself to actualise it, and to make it visible, within his love for his neighbour; . . ." <sup>118</sup> Yet "it is not he who lifts his brother titanically out of the darkness by the strength of his own power of love; . . . he only testifies to the light, as Christ Himself, the Son of the Father to whom the light was given as His own, wanted in all His radiance only to testify to the Father." <sup>119</sup> The saints, but again Mary especially, are models in performance of personal missions by virtue of their direction away from self to Christ as they allow him in the Spirit to activate charisms for their salvation and the Church's vitality and witness to the world. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est* and repeated in his apostolic letter founding the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." <sup>120</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 5:649.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 649-650.

<sup>120</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (25 Dec. 2005), available from the Vatican, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html) (accessed 11 Aug. 2012), no. 1, and *Ubicumque et Semper* (21 Sept. 2010), available from the Vatican, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_apl\\_20100921\\_ubicumque-et-semper\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper_en.html) (accessed 11 Aug. 2012).

To repeat, in Balthasar's thought this encounter, this event, is manifested for each of us in Christ's universal call to saintliness which is also a call to personal mission. Following the pattern of Mary's "yes," saints' surrender to Christ, via performance of their personal missions, bespeaks the love of Christ Incarnate which revealed and effected our concrete "graced" reality directing us to God the Creator as our end and opening us to faith (and salvation). This is why personal missions stand, in a qualified sense, "over against" those living them; they are given by God and disclose a dimension of Revelation itself and therefore always make, as one, saints and "new evangelizers"—both in deed and in word. This is to be the pattern of every Christian life, even though every Christian is not to be of saintly "representative" status. And so, to take in Balthasar's perspective on the saints is to see the history and "method" of providence through which feeble servants of God-given missions,<sup>121</sup> lifted beyond deficient desires by participation in God via the grace of Christ,<sup>122</sup> of which Mary is Mediatrix, are finally strong in their tasks' completion for the good of the Church and of the world, thereby able to see more clearly the gospel message and be moved by it.<sup>123</sup>

"The sole credibility of the Church Christ founded lies, as he himself says, in the saints, as those who sought to set all things on the love of Christ alone," Balthasar wrote.<sup>124</sup> "It is in them that Christian love becomes credible; they are the poor sinners' guiding stars."<sup>125</sup> Mary more so than any of them is, as Balthasar's theology indicated and as Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "the Star of the evangelization ever renewed."<sup>126</sup> While the universal calls to holiness and mission are realized in specific states of life, as well as in official and unofficial ecclesial ministries—with witness in the world designated in a unique way for the laity, although often modeled

<sup>121</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 27.

<sup>122</sup> Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 377 and elsewhere.

<sup>123</sup> Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit*, 27.

<sup>124</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 122.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>126</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 Dec. 1975), available from the Vatican, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html) (accessed 10 May 2013), no. 82.

by saints in clerical and/or religious life—Mary, in Balthasar's explication, shows that personal missions and saintliness are attained in an attitude that must ground every Christian state and call of life. In living a personal mission which, by its nature as a personal calling from God for living the gospel through charism, is one's ecclesial purpose, each member of the Body of Christ can participate in the New Evangelization as a beacon of Christ in and to the Church and to the world.