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And Still We Wait:
Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday
and Its Implications for Christian Suffering and Discipleship

**A Thesis Presented for the Degree of Ph.D in Systematic Theology
at the University of Edinburgh**

**by
Riyako Hikota**

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Signed Declaration

This thesis was entirely composed by Riyako Hikota, Ph.D candidate in Systematic Theology. It has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. The work resulting in this thesis was done by Riyako Hikota. All quotations in the body of this work have been distinguished by quotation marks and sources have been specifically acknowledged.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Abstract

The significance of Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, is often ignored in Christian life. The most influential modern theologian who has taken its importance seriously is the Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar. He has presented a very innovative but also controversial interpretation that on Holy Saturday Jesus Christ suffered in utter solidarity with the dead in Hell and took to himself our self-damnation. However, this interpretation and several other aspects of his theology related to it seem to depart from the traditional teaching in an idiosyncratic way and have invited various critiques.

What this thesis aims to do is to critically examine Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday and present its implications for Christian suffering and discipleship, while doing full justice to the genre within which he is working (a combination of theology and spirituality) and at the same time taking into consideration the main critiques made against him. First of all, we will argue that Balthasar does not try to present a radical reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Descent into Hell in contrast to the traditional teachings but rather tries to fully appreciate the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday as the day of transition from the Cross to the Resurrection, in other words, from the old aeon to the new. Balthasar says that Christ Himself descended into Hell as victor over sin and death objectively, but He still had to wait for the victory to arrive subjectively. Further, we will claim that this silent waiting on Holy Saturday, which marks the transition from the Cross to the Resurrection, helps us to deepen our understanding of the meaning of suffering in Christian discipleship. The waiting on Holy Saturday represents the fundamentally 'tragic' state of the Christian (understood as "tragedy under grace") torn between the law of this world and the truth of Christ. As a paradoxical being in transition, the Christian believes that their victory is both already there and not there yet. In this sense, the Christian still lives in Holy Saturday. This notion deepens our understanding of suffering in the Christian life, because now we could translate the meaning of suffering into 'tragic waiting,' while fully facing the subjective reality of suffering and at the same time maintaining the hope of finding its salvific meaning by relating it to the paschal mystery. Our conclusion will be that this 'tragic waiting,' which itself is our lives, now can be seen in a Christological light. In short, we can patiently endure our Holy Saturday because of Christ's Holy Saturday in Hell.

Lay Summary

In the Catholic Church, Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, is perhaps the strangest day of the year. Liturgically speaking (particularly since the liturgical reforms of the 1950s), on the one hand, Holy Saturday is characterized by silent mourning. We have no Mass on Holy Saturday and no administration of the sacraments except the one of reconciliation, (which means no marriage or baptism unless it is for the dying, and no holy communion is given except as a Viaticum), until the evening when we celebrate the Easter Vigil Mass. On the other hand, in stark contrast to this aspect of mourning and waiting, the doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell presents Christ as 'fully alive' in Hell, for He is the glorious victor over sin and death (there were many works of art and literature portraying this so-called "Harrowing of Hell" in the medieval period). In short, in the Catholic tradition, Holy Saturday is characterized by silent waiting for the victory of Easter. This 'in-betweenness' of Holy Saturday as a time of waiting is actually represented in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil Mass, at the beginning of which we light the Paschal candle and wait in the dark until the Resurrection of the Lord is declared.

It is the 20th-century Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar who has taken this 'in-betweenness' of Holy Saturday with utmost seriousness. He has presented a very innovative interpretation that on Holy Saturday Jesus Christ suffered in utter solidarity with the dead in Hell and took to himself our self-damnation. Balthasar says that Christ Himself descended into Hell as victor over sin and death in an objective sense, but He still had to wait for the victory to arrive subjectively. We will claim that this silent waiting on Holy Saturday helps to deepen our understanding of the meaning of suffering in Christian discipleship. While Christ waited in Hell for the victory of the Resurrection on Holy Saturday, His mother Mary and His followers waited in silent faith at His tomb. Christians today still do this waiting in faith. The Christian is a paradoxical being whose existence is located between the old aeon and the new and contains the Cross and the Resurrection within themselves. The Christian is forgiven their sin, but yet still is exposed to sin, therefore not exempt from judgment. The Christian believes that their victory is both already here and not here yet. In this sense, the Christian still lives in Holy Saturday. This notion helps our understanding of the meaning of suffering in the Christian life, because now we could somehow translate the meaning of suffering into 'tragic waiting,' while fully facing the subjective reality of suffering and at the same time maintaining the hope of finding its salvific meaning by relating it to Christ's suffering. In short, we could patiently endure our Holy Saturday because of Christ's Holy Saturday in Hell.

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Dedication

To Dr. Michael Purcell

1956-2013

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Introduction

The Context: the Debate concerning Christ's Descent into Hell

In recent years, Holy Saturday and Christ's Descent into Hell have been quietly gaining more and more scholarly attention,¹ but there is still more to be said about its significance. The most influential modern theologian who has seriously engaged with this doctrine is the Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). Inspired by the mystical visions of his collaborator and friend, Adrienne von Speyr, he has presented a very innovative but also controversial interpretation that on Holy Saturday Jesus Christ suffered in utter solidarity with the dead in Hell and took to himself our self-damnation. For Balthasar, this 'act' of Christ reveals the full depth of our redemption. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Balthasar's interpretation is that he reads this doctrine as a Trinitarian event and emphasizes the passivity of the Son, who, in sheer "obedience of a corpse," underwent the Godforsakenness in solidarity with the sinful humanity as the final point of His salvific mission received from the Father.

However, Balthasar's innovative interpretation has caused controversies, leading critics such as Alyssa Lyra Pitstick to argue that Balthasar's theology is even heretical.² On the surface, Balthasar's interpretation seems to be quite far from the mainstream Catholic teaching of the doctrine (known as the harrowing of Hell), which obviously presents Jesus Christ in Hell as being already crowned with the glory of Easter and emphasizes the salvation of the patriarchs from *Sheol* (or Hades, the realm of the dead, which contains both the righteous and the wicked). For example, the current Catholic Catechism, which was promulgated by Pope John Paul

¹ See, for example, Hilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009); David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001); Lois M. Miles, "Obedience of a Corpse: the Key to the Holy Saturday Writings of Adrienne von Speyr" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Aberdeen, 2013).

² Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007).

II in 1992, summarizes this doctrine as follows:

By the expression “He descended into hell”, the Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus did really die and through his death for us conquered death and the devil "who has the power of death" (*Heb 2:14*). In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him.”³

The Catechism also explains that Jesus “descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there”⁴ and also “Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him.”⁵ This statement of the current Catechism of the Catholic Church basically reflects the teaching of the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) (the so-called “Roman Catechism”), which had a dominant influence for more than four centuries. The Roman Catechism provides two reasons why Christ descended into Hell: to liberate the just⁶ and to proclaim His power.⁷

Turning to such authorities as these, Pitstick has summarized the traditional teaching by focusing on the following four points:

First, Christ descended in His soul united to His divine Person only to the limbo of the Fathers. Second, His power and authority were made known throughout all of hell, taken generically. Third, He thereby accomplished the two purposes for the descent, which were ‘to liberate the just’ by conferring on them the glory of heaven and ‘to proclaim His power.’ Finally, His descent was a glorious one, and Christ did not suffer the pain proper to any of the abodes of hell.⁸

In short, Pitstick has argued that there does exist a ‘traditional’ Catholic doctrine of the Descent and that the creeds, magisterial teaching, Scripture, the liturgy, the consensus of the saints, and the *sensus fidelium* expressed in sacred art all

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), §636-637. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/pl22a5pl.htm>

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §632.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 633.

⁶ See *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1923), 64: “Christ the Lord descended in to hell, in order that, having despoiled the demons, He might liberate from prison those holy Fathers and the other just souls, and might bring them into heaven with Himself. This He accomplished in an admirable and most glorious manner; for His august presence at once shed a celestial lustre upon the captives and filled them with inconceivable joy and delight.”

⁷ See *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 65: “Another reason why Christ the Lord descended into hell is that there, as well as in heaven and on earth, He might proclaim His power and authority, and that every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.”

⁸ Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 28.

unanimously show that the Descent is “glorious in the first and proper sense of the word,” in other words, ‘glorious’ in the sense of Easter, while Balthasar seems to interpret it in the sense of Good Friday.⁹

In response to Pitstick, Edward T. Oakes has taken the position to defend Balthasar, and the series of their debates on this topic has been published.¹⁰ While admitting that “Balthasar is a disturbing theologian. Even among some of his most vocal enthusiasts, he seems ‘not quite right,’”¹¹ Oakes has attempted to defend Balthasar against Pitstick’s harsh critiques by mainly focusing on the following three points: Protestantism, papacy, and purgatory.¹² As it is well known, Balthasar is hugely influenced by the Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, in many areas of his theology including his famous ‘hope’ for universal salvation. Oakes criticizes Pitstick’s curt dismissal of Reformed theologians in general. This point is worth noting because, as Oakes reminds us, it is nothing less than St Paul’s doctrine of atonement that Balthasar has tried to bring back into the centre of Catholic theology through his engagement with Barth. Therefore, Oakes argues that it is actually St Paul’s teachings that Pitstick is denying by dismissing Barth’s influence on Balthasar. Further, Oakes turns to the authority of the two Popes, namely, St John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who are known to have greatly commended Balthasar’s contributions to the Catholic Church.¹³ (The former is the

⁹ Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 22-29.

¹⁰ See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes, “Balthasar, Hell and Heresy: An Exchange,” *First Things* (December 2006): 25-29; “More on Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy,” *First Things* (January 2007): 16-18. Also see Oakes, “The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (2007): 184-99; and “*Descensus* and Development: A Response to Recent Rejoinders,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no.1 (2011): 3-24; and Pitstick, “Development of doctrine, or Denial? Balthasar’s Holy Saturday and Newman’s Essay,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 11, no.2 (2009): 129-145. For various scholars’ responses to the debate between Pitstick and Oakes, see “Responses to Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy,” *First Things* (March 2007): 5-14.

¹¹ Pitstick and Oakes, “Balthasar, Hell and Heresy: An Exchange,” *First Things* (December 2006): 29.

¹² See Pitstick and Oakes, “Balthasar, Hell and Heresy: An Exchange,” and “More on Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy.”

¹³ Speaking of papacy, naturally we wonder how the current Pope Francis I views Balthasar and his treatment of Holy Saturday. So far we have not found any official comment made by him on Balthasar, but it is worth noting that the wording of the following Easter message he gave in 2013 more or less sounds like Balthasar’s interpretation of Christ’s Descent into Hell: “*This same love for which the Son of God became man and followed the way of humility and self-giving to the very end, down to hell - to the abyss of separation from God - this same merciful love has flooded with light the dead body of Jesus, has transfigured it, has made it pass into eternal life.*” (See *Urbi et Orbi Message of Pope Francis, Easter 2013*:

one who insisted that Balthasar be a Cardinal,¹⁴ and the latter's own interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell sounds similar to Balthasar's.¹⁵) Finally, as to Pitstick's treatment of Purgatory, Oakes points out that Pitstick's argument admits a pre-Christian purgatory, which does not make sense, as not only Balthasar but also the traditional teaching states that the 'Hell' Christ descended into was *Sheol*.¹⁶ In short, through a series of articles and responses on this topic, Oakes has tried to present Balthasar's interpretation as an authentic development of the doctrine which can stand the norms set by Cardinal John Henry Newman.¹⁷

Another scholar whose response to Pitstick is worth noting here is Paul J. Griffiths.¹⁸ His focus is not on Balthasar's interpretation itself but on the scope and doctrinal weight of what Pitstick has called the 'traditional' teaching. Regarding her four-point summary of the 'traditional' teaching, Griffiths has argued that Pitstick "drastically overestimates the extent to which there is settled doctrine on this topic,

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20130331_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html) Italics added.

¹⁴ St John Paul II appointed Balthasar a cardinal in 1988, but he passed away two days before the ceremony.

¹⁵ For example, the following passage sounds very much like a summary of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday: "God himself suffered and died... He himself entered into the distinctive freedom of sinners but went beyond it in that freedom of his own love which descended willingly into the Abyss. While the real quality of evil and its consequences become quite palpable here, the question also arises... whether in this event we are not in touch with a divine response able to draw freedom precisely as freedom to itself. The answer lies hidden in Jesus' descent into Sheol, in the night of the soul which he suffered, a night which no one can observe except by entering this darkness in suffering faith. Thus, in the history of holiness which hagiology offers us, and notably in the course of recent centuries, in John of the Cross, in Carmelite piety in general, and in that of Thérèse of Lisieux in particular, "Hell" has taken on a completely new meaning and form. For the saints, "Hell" is not so much a threat to be hurled at other people but a challenge to oneself. It is a challenge to suffer in the dark night of faith, to experience communion with Christ in solidarity with his descent into the Night. One draws near to the Lord's radiance by sharing his darkness. One serves the salvation of the world by leaving one's own salvation behind for the sake of others. In such piety, nothing of the dreadful reality of Hell is denied. Hell is so real that it reaches right into the existence of the saints. Hope can take it on, only if one shares in the suffering of Hell's night by the side of the One who came to transform our night by his suffering... The doctrine of everlasting punishment preserves its real content. The idea of mercy... must not become a theory. Rather is it the prayer of suffering, hopeful faith." (Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 217-218.)

¹⁶ In relation to Purgatory, Oakes argues that Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell as *Sheol* provides the best solution regarding the possible salvation of unevangelized non-Christians. For a critical response to Oakes' argument concerning this issue, see Gavin D'Costa, "The Descent into Hell as a Solution for the Problem of the Fate of the Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar's Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers and Purgatory," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no.2 (April 2009): 146-171.

¹⁷ See Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar."

¹⁸ Paul J. Griffiths, "Is There a Doctrine of the Descent into Hell?" *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 3 (2008): 257-268.

and therefore also misconstrues the nature of her own enterprise.”¹⁹ Pitstick herself clearly appeals to the *consensus fidelium* to support her argument. However, as Griffiths says, “Appeal to the *consensus fidelium* to support or rule out some doctrinal is, therefore, while quite legitimate, always difficult and never prima facie probative.”²⁰ Specifically, Griffiths has pointed out that the technical language she uses in her summary (such as the phrase “limbo of the Fathers”) “has never been the subject of definition by any council, that appears in no creed, and that, so far as I can tell, is almost entirely absent from ordinary magisterial teaching.”²¹ Further, concerning the meaning of ‘glory’ in the sense of Easter which Pitstick emphasizes, Griffiths criticizes the way she uses the notion “to close thought down” rather than “to break open and suggestively expand the meaning of the descent in ways whose limits cannot be specified in advance.”²² As a conclusion he writes, “the church doesn’t teach very much about that matter, which means that the scope for such discussion is wide.”²³ In short, Griffiths has shown that the ‘traditional’ teaching presented by Pitstick is “nothing that requires assent from Catholics.”²⁴

However, Griffiths’ article is far from being the final word on this debate concerning Balthasar’s innovative interpretation of Holy Saturday. While it has certainly helped us to see that Pitstick’s accusation of Balthasar of heresy may not be as solidly grounded as she claims, some of the serious concerns raised by Pitstick against Balthasar have been shared by others (mostly concerning his treatment of the Trinity, Christology, and universal salvation).²⁵

¹⁹ Griffiths, “Is There a Doctrine of the Descent into Hell?”, 258.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

²² *Ibid.*, 265.

²³ *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 265. If we turn to the scholarship on Adrienne von Speyr, who has provided the inspirational source for Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday, similar defenses have been done for her too. See Matthew Lewis Sutton, *Heaven Opens: the Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 179-184; Miles, “Obedience of a Corpse,” 200-207. Also, for a debate concerning von Speyr’s orthodoxy (similar to Pitstick vs. Oakes), see Anne Barbeau Gardiner, “The Dubious Adrienne von Speyr,” *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 31-36; Jacques Servais, “A Response from Jacques Servais,” *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 36-42; and Gardiner, “Anne Barbeau Gardiner Answers Jacques Servais,” *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 42-45.

²⁵ For example, see Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012); Gavin D’Costa, “The Descent into Hell as a Solution for the Problem of the Fate of the Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar’s Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers and Purgatory”; R.R. Reno, “Was Balthasar a Heretic?” *First Things*, October 15, 2008: <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2008/10/was-balthasar-a-heretic>

Going back to the statement of the current Catechism on this doctrine, while it is true that it sounds far from Balthasar's interpretation on the surface, we should also note that when this Catechism was presented to the public at first some scholars actually said it should have left some room for interpretations like Balthasar's. For example, a Rahnerian scholar Peter C. Phan has written,

There are, however, elements in the CCC's exposition of the Creed that are "old" in the pejorative sense of outmoded. For example, in its interpretation of the formula "he descended to the dead," the Catechism seems to take it literally to mean that Jesus descended into the realm of the dead... While such an interpretation is not to be ruled out of course, it would have helped matters immeasurably to state unambiguously that such a phrase need not be taken literally and that other interpretations (such as Hans Urs von Balthasar's or Karl Rahner's) are theologically plausible.²⁶

It is further worth noting that Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the editor of the Catechism, has specifically mentioned Balthasar in his introduction to the Catechism's teaching of this doctrine in a very subtle way. He has said,

The fifth article... concerns an equally central good of the Christian patrimony of faith. The brief paragraph on Jesus' descent into hell keeps to what is the common property of the Church's exegetical tradition. Newer interpretations, such as that of a Hans Urs von Balthasar (the contemplation of Holy Saturday), *however profound and helpful they may be, have not yet experienced that reception which would justify their inclusion in the Catechism.*²⁷

We may not read too much into this "not yet," but the subtle way that Balthasar is mentioned here is worth noting. His interpretation has been neither received as orthodox nor rejected as heterodox. In other words, there is still room and even a need to evaluate Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday critically.²⁸

²⁶ Peter C. Phan, "What is Old and What is New in the Catechism?," in *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ed. Berald L. Marthaler (London: SPCK, 1994), 63.

²⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 75. Italics added.

²⁸ For example, Gavin D'Costa too appreciates this statement made by Cardinal Schönborn: "It is in this spirit of reception that Balthasar is to be critically evaluated, even if Pitstick has given good grounds for rejecting his reception." (D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 208.)

The Contributions of This Thesis in Terms of Its Approach and Its Scope

Now let us clarify the position of this thesis and the contributions we aim to make in terms of critical evaluation of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. Despite its very polemical tone, there is no doubt that Pitstick's work has been a great achievement for it has certainly stirred much scholarly interest in this topic. As we have noted above, she has also raised some serious concerns about Balthasar's theology, which have been shared by other critics. First of all, does Balthasar's theology not bring some kind of a rupture into the Trinity? Secondly, does he not depart from the Chalcedonian Christology by confusing the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ? Finally, does his theology not inevitably lead to admitting universal salvation in a systematic sense despite his insistence that it is merely a 'hope'? We will discuss these questions in Part I as we expound his theology of Holy Saturday.

On the other hand, we find three significant problems with Pitstick's approach to Balthasar, which are directly related to the contributions this thesis aims to make. First of all, we have to note the huge genre difference between Balthasar and Pitstick. While Balthasar is known for his utter distaste for neo-scholasticism,²⁹ Pitstick's entire work is precisely written in a neo-scholastic style.³⁰ This genre difference should not be ignored, as it seems to be one of the causes which lead her to miss the exploratory nature of his treatment of Holy Saturday and to misread him as if he attempted to reshape the Catholic dogma in a radical way. Throughout this thesis, our position is that Balthasar does *not* try to present a radical reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Descent into Hell in contrast to the traditional teachings but rather tries to appreciate the 'in-between' state of Christ in *Sheol* on Holy Saturday more seriously than any other theologian has ever done. We will argue for it while paying full respect to the genre he is working within, which we understand to be a contemplative combination of theology and spirituality.

This point leads us to the second point: the problem concerning the sources. First of all, Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday would not have been possible without the mystical visions of Adrienne von Speyr, and in order to evaluate his interpretation fully, it is crucial to examine what the actual contents of her visions

²⁹ For this point, see Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 16-23.

³⁰ See Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 11.

were and how he has developed his own theology by using them as its inspirational source while also turning to various sources for support. In contrast to Pitstick, who almost entirely ignores her writings, we will start this thesis by discussing the actual contents of von Speyr's mystical visions in *Kreuz und Hölle*,³¹ which has been so unfairly overlooked in both the Balthasarian and Speyrian scholarships despite its significance.³² Further, we will emphasize the importance of the spiritual writings of saints in history for him: St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux in particular.

Finally, the entire scope and angle of this thesis differs from Pitstick's work and the other previous studies on Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. In the last analysis, our focus is on Holy Saturday itself, the day between the Cross and the Resurrection, which includes Mary's Holy Saturday and the Christian's Holy Saturday experience today as well as Christ in Hell. We believe that this angle is significant in order to do full justice to Balthasar's treatment of this subject. After all, he himself has preferred this liturgical term "Holy Saturday" to the more doctrinal term "Christ's Descent into Hell." His preference for this liturgical term also implies the wide scope his theology potentially has. It is not only about what Christ did or where He was on this particular day in what condition, but it also has in its scope the whole "Holy Saturday experience," which can be characterized by silent waiting. For example, the Roman Missal clearly states, "On Holy Saturday the Church *waits at the Lord's tomb* in prayer and fasting, meditating on his Passion and Death and on his Descent into Hell, and awaiting his Resurrection."³³ We also believe that this element of waiting is important to understand the way Balthasar remains faithful to the Catholic tradition. In his own words,

We could, simply put, distinguish the two great movements of the tradition: that of the East and that of the West. For the East, the Icon of Christ's Descent makes the main representation of our salvation. Christ strides over the gates of Hell which lie across under His feet, as victor over death, and extends His saving hand to those waiting in the darkness of *Sheol*...In the West, theology and liturgy mainly honor the silence of death, so the Church watches quietly and prayerfully with Mary at the grave. However, both traditions have an inner limit. The Eastern tradition shows us not the dead but

³¹ Adrienne von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, vol. 3 of Die Nachlasserke (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1966); *Kreuz und Hölle* II, vol. 4 of Die Nachlasserke (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972).

³² Partly because of the difficulty of obtaining a copy of it.

³³ *The Roman Missal*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (London: the Catholic Truth Society, 2010), 374. Italics added.

the one who is fully alive, namely the Christ of Easter... The Western tradition with their pure silence remains somehow eventless, and nothing seems to happen between Good Friday and Easter. Is there a possibility to reconcile both theologies by criticizing their weak points?³⁴

This passage helps us to see why Pitstick's main question (whether the Descent was glorious in the sense of Easter or Good Friday) can be actually misleading for evaluation of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. His own concern does not lie so much in clarifying the meaning of the glory as in fully appreciating this strange pause between death and life, or between suffering and victory. This point can be further justified by noting that Pitstick's argument does not really answer the question why the Church actually waits a whole day before the celebration of the Easter Vigil mass on Holy Saturday night.³⁵

Further, once we note Balthasar's emphasis on the 'in-betweenness' of Holy Saturday, we start to see the possibility to widen its scope and explore its implications for Christian life. In addition to his innovative treatment of Holy Saturday, Balthasar is also regarded as a pioneer in the area of theological engagement with tragedy, but the profound connection between these two areas has not yet been fully examined. Balthasar fundamentally sees something 'tragic' in an in-between state. We will present a close connection between his theology of Holy Saturday and his tragic view of the paradoxical existence of the Christian by focusing on the element of waiting. In the last analysis, we will explore the implications for Christian suffering and discipleship by connecting the in-between state of Christ in *Sheol* and the in-between existence of the Christian in this world.

³⁴ Balthasar "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle," in *Adrienne Von Speyr Und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten D. Röm. Symposiums, 27. - 29. September 1985* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), 140-141. The translation is mine.

³⁵ Regarding this point, we have to note that even though the Easter vigil mass had been celebrated on the Saturday morning after the 8th century, the time for this celebration was restored to the night preceding Easter Sunday in 1955 (after the restoration was started *ad experimentum* by *Dominica Resurrectionis Vigiliam* from 1951 and continued as an experiment until confirmed in 1955), as a result of recognising "the original symbolism" and "authenticity" as well as a great number of petitions sent to the Holy See. (See Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy: The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (Farnborough: Saint Michael's Abbey Press, 2004), 159-169; "Holy Saturday" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New Advent, 2012): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07424a.htm>.

The Research Questions

The specific research question which we will deal with in this thesis is what kind of implications Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday can provide for Christian suffering and discipleship. To put it more specifically, how does Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday help Christians to find meaning and hope in their suffering while avoiding the pitfall of systematized theodicy, that is, avoiding presumptuously theorizing or explaining away the reality of suffering? Through the process, we would also like to explore how his theology of Holy Saturday helps us to reflect on the questions concerning Hell as well as the relevance of Hell for our world today.

The Outline of the Chapters and the Specific Questions to Discuss

Finally, let us explain the structure of this whole thesis and specify the contents and issues we will discuss in each of the chapters. We divide the whole thesis into two parts. In Part I, our focus is on Christ's Holy Saturday. We will examine Balthasar's thoughts on Christ's Descent into Hell by dividing it into four chapters. After we see Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions as a short introduction to our topic (Chapter 1), we will go on to examine his theology of Holy Saturday in three chapters. This structure is based on Balthasar's idea that the mystery of Holy Saturday should be explored in the following three dimensions: the Trinity, Christology, and Soteriology. In Part II, our focus is on Mary's and the Christian's Holy Saturday. On the basis of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday examined in Part I, we will widen the scope and explore the implications it provides for Christian suffering and discipleship in two chapters.

The actual contents of the chapters are as follows:

In Chapter 1, as a short introduction to our topic, we will see Balthasar's inspirational source: Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions of Hell. Especially, we will look at the accounts of her visions in *Kreuz und Hölle*, which is a very important source for our topic but has not been investigated carefully in the Balthasarian or Speyrian scholarship. Also, we will mention the difficult question concerning their spiritual and ecclesial relationship, which has puzzled many scholars.

In Chapter 2, we will discuss Balthasar's Trinitarian theology and how it

provides the fundamental framework for Christ's Descent into Hell. We will see how he seeks a subtle and nuanced relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity and how he presents the essential nature of the Trinity as divine kenotic love. We will also discuss the basic notion that permeates his entire theology: that the infinite distance between the Father and the Son encompasses the finite distance between God and His creation, including Hell. This infinite distance is forever supported and maintained by the Holy Spirit, who, even in the lowest part of Hell, objectively unites the Father and the Son, while the Son experiences the utter Godforsakenness in solidarity with the sinful humanity. Only in this Trinitarian framework, the Son's Descent into Hell (the place where everything anti-divine is) is made possible. We will also deal with the serious concern raised against Balthasar's treatment of the Trinity, namely, the concern that he has *the tendency to* bring a rupture within the eternally blissful unity within the Trinity and eventually ends up elevating and divinizing suffering as well.

In Chapter 3, our focus will be on Balthasar's Christology. We will narrate Balthasar's kenotic Christology as the one that has the Descent into Hell as its centre by following the four principal themes: form, kenosis, mission, and obedience. We will emphasize the idea lying at the core of his Christology: Christ's full divinity is expressed in His full humanity. In the end, we will see how the passive, obedient, disfigured Christ in Hell paradoxically reveals what the Triune God really is in Himself: kenotic love. The question that we have to deal with in this chapter is whether Balthasar departs from the Chalcedonian formula or not. Does he confuse the divinity and humanity of Christ?

In Chapter 4, we will discuss 'Hell' itself. We will explore it as a Christological concept as Balthasar says. After referring to the distinction between *Sheol* and *Gehenna*, we mainly interpret Hell to be defined as *absolute loneliness of the sinner* separated from God. Based on this understanding, we will compare the Hell presented by Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday (based on von Speyr's visions) to the dark night of the soul experienced by St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux. Through the writings of these two Carmelite mystics, we will continue with our discussion of the Christological problem mentioned above. Also, we will discuss Balthasar's famous hope for universal salvation and the possibility of

eternal damnation. The issue we will deal with in this chapter is whether Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday eventually leads to systematic universal salvation or not. As a conclusion to this chapter, we will state our appreciation about how Balthasar and von Speyr have brought back the topic of Hell into our postmodern Christian life by providing the insight that we should meditate on it in terms of our relationship with God.

In Part II, we will explore how his theology of Holy Saturday can be relevant for the questions concerning Christian suffering and discipleship on the basis of what we have discussed in Part I. In other words, we will explore the meaning of *our* Holy Saturday experience.

In Chapter 5, our focus is on Mary. Balthasar presents Mary as the perfect role model of Christian discipleship. We will discuss the significance of the Marian principle and how Mary obediently participated in her Son's suffering of the sinner's Godforsakenness. We will also critique Balthasar's view of the feminine, which is revealed in his Mariology. In relation to this point and also as a preparation to the final chapter, we will discuss his critics' concern that Balthasar's theology does not really serve the cause of social justice.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we will broaden our scope further and try to locate his theology of Holy Saturday within his tragic view of Christianity. We will argue that the element of waiting which characterizes Holy Saturday between the Cross and the Resurrection represents the fundamentally 'tragic' state of Christian existence (understood as "tragedy under grace"). In the last analysis, we will argue that if we locate Christian suffering in the in-between existence represented by Holy Saturday, we could somehow interpret the meaning of suffering into 'tragic waiting.' This could help us to avoid simply explaining away the reality of suffering while also leaving the hope to find meaning in suffering. Our conclusion is that the 'tragic' waiting in our lives, which is represented by the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday, now can be seen in a Christological light. In this chapter, we will also discuss the question: whether Balthasar is actually concerned with the *concrete* reality of human suffering or not.

Notes:

All the translations from German to English in this thesis are mine unless stated otherwise. (Special thanks to Michael Braeutigam, Georg Schauer, and Alexander Utkin for checking and proofreading my translations.)

All the scriptural citations in this thesis are taken from *the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, New Revised Standard Version*, 4th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Part I.

Hans Urs von Balthasar on Christ's Descent into Hell

Overview of Part I

In Part I, our focus will be on Hans Urs von Balthasar's (and Adrienne von Speyr's) interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell. We will examine it by dividing it into four chapters. In Chapter 1, we will see von Speyr's mystical visions as a short preparation for our discussion. After that, we will go on to expound and evaluate Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell in three chapters by focusing on its three principal aspects: its Trinitarian framework (Chapter 2), its Christological significance (Chapter 3), and its soteriological effects (Chapter 4). This structure is based on Balthasar's idea that the mystery of Holy Saturday should be explored in the following three dimensions: the Trinity, Christology, and Soteriology. As we expound his theology in Part I, we would like to note two points in particular; first, Balthasar tries to appreciate the 'in-between' state of Christ in *Sheol* on Holy Saturday instead of departing far from the 'traditional' interpretation that seems to emphasize Christ as victor over death and sin; and secondly, Balthasar seems to show a deep interest in the reality of human suffering. Both points will be of particular importance for Part II, where we will widen the scope and discuss Mary's Holy Saturday as well as the Christian's Holy Saturday today in order to explore the implications of Balthasar's theology for Christian discipleship and suffering.

As we give our exposition of Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell, we will also discuss the three main critiques raised against his treatments of the Trinity, Christology, and universal salvation. As we noted in Introduction, the following questions have been raised by Pitstick and also shared by other critics; first, does Balthasar's theology not bring some kind of a rupture into the Trinity? Secondly, does he not depart from the Chalcedonian Christology by confusing the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ? Thirdly, does his theology not inevitably lead to admitting universal salvation in a systematic sense despite his insistence that it is merely a 'hope'? In the last analysis, we will argue that Balthasar himself is aware of these points and at least he is consistent with his logic of kenotic love throughout his theology. At the end of Part I, we will briefly reflect on what we could learn about

Christian discipleship and suffering from Balthasar and von Speyr on the basis of these chapters. In particular, the concept of the dark night of faith is significant for understanding Christ's suffering as well as the Christian's. In the end, even Hell (the seemingly exact opposite of love and communion) could be explained only because of the divine self-giving love. Now we can see that the Triune God's love is deeper than Hell and that God is actually with us even when He seems to be absent or dead in the midst of our suffering. We will also point out that his theology is very sensitive to the paradoxical mystery of love and faith instead of simply blurring the distinction between love and loss or between joy and suffering in an overarching way as some of his critics argue.

Chapter 1.

The Inspirational Source:

Adrienne von Speyr's Mystical Visions

Introduction

Let us start our examination of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday by first turning to its main inspirational source: his friend and mystic, Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions. Whenever Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday is discussed, it is usually mentioned (even if just briefly) that he was greatly inspired by her mystical experiences. However, it is surprisingly rare that the actual contents of those mystical experiences are discussed. Von Speyr had these visions each Holy Week from 1941 to 1965. We can read the whole accounts of these visions in *Kreuz und Hölle*.¹ Some images (for example, the stream made of human sins running in Hell) were more or less the same every year, while there were different sub-themes running through these visions from year to year.² Balthasar himself witnessed her going through the extremely painful and disturbing visions about the entire Passion of Christ. Those visions were fragmentary but vivid and powerful, and deeply affected him. Therefore, it is helpful to start our examination of his theology of Holy Saturday by discussing them in order to fully appreciate it. Let us see below the fragments of these visions by mainly turning to the account of 1941 (the first vision), which was recorded by Balthasar himself.³ We believe that the 1941 account is particularly important as it shows us most vividly Balthasar's own surprise and struggle to understand what is

¹ Adrienne von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle I*, vol. 3 of Die Nachlasserke (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1966); *Kreuz und Hölle II*, vol. 4 of Die Nachlasserke (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972). Also we can read some fragments from these visions in von Speyr, *The Passion from Within*, trans. Sister Lucia Wiedenhöver (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

² Balthasar himself gives a list of these subthemes: Hell and Confession (1944), Hell and the Trinity (1945), Hell and Confession with a Marian theme (1946), Hell and Choice (1948), Hell and Co-redemption (1949), the Wood (1951), Anxiety (1953), Searching (1955), Patience (1956), the Truth and Importance (1957), Excessive Demand (1958), Fatigue (1959), Futility (1960), the seamless dress (1961), Time (1963), the Cross and the Church today (1964), and Prayer (1965). (Balthasar, "Einleitung," in *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 8.)

³ See Balthasar, "Einleitung," in *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 12.

happening in front of him.⁴ We also make reference to the accounts of the other years on the basis of his own summary⁵ accordingly.

Throughout this thesis, we make reference to Von Speyr when it is relevant. In this chapter, our focus will be on the state of Hell in her visions, the deeply Trinitarian aspect of her visions, and the spiritual relationship between Balthasar and von Speyr. The other important aspects of her visions, namely, the concept of sin-in-itself and the presence of Mary will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The section titles of this chapter are as follows: 1) the state of Hell, 2) the Trinitarian drama of love in Hell, 3) the spiritual relationship between Balthasar and von Speyr, and 4) evaluation: why should we not ignore von Speyr's influence on Balthasar?

The State of Hell

Von Speyr's first experience of Hell started on Good Friday of April 11, 1941. Balthasar records this beginning as follows:

In the Friday afternoon, the suffering ended exactly at 3 pm, as I had suspected. I had expected that only a strong relief would follow; I was not able to imagine anything for Holy Saturday for sure, but there came something totally different.⁶

Balthasar goes on to describe how at half past 3 pm von Speyr started to feel the odor of death coming out of her body. Then at 5 pm the visions of Hell began. She did not see anyone or any soul in Hell. She was not sure if anyone was there or not. Von Speyr described the state of Hell as "incalculable emptiness and desertedness."⁷ In Hell she

⁴ In the later years (after around 1945), they established their system of dictation, which means Balthasar's perspective and voice increasingly fades into the background (more as an interviewer) in these accounts as the years went by. Shelly Rambo, for instance, implies that something unique and vivid was lost after they 'theologized' these visions into a theology of Holy Saturday. She writes, "Holy Saturday, as it is developed in their thought, loses the traces of a more textured and entangled witness to the 'hiatus' of Holy Saturday." (*Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 62.)

⁵ For his own summary of von Speyr's visions, see Balthasar, "Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags," *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 10 (1981): 32-39; For a more analytical summary of these visions, see Balthasar, "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle," in *Adrienne Von Speyr Und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten D. Röm. Symposiums, 27. - 29. September 1985* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1986), 138-146.

⁶ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 27-28: "Am Nachmittag des Freitags war, wie ich vermutet hatte, das Leiden ziemlich genau um deri Uhr zu Ende. Ich hatte erwartet, daß nun eine starke Erleichterung eintreten würde; ich konnte mir unter dem Karsamstag nichts genaues voerstellen. Doch es kam ganz anders."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28: "Unabsehbare Leere und Verlassenheit."

saw a slowly flowing river of mud. There were no 'flames' of Hell in her sight.

It was impossible for her to pray or confess on Holy Saturday, because "everything is distant. She is like without any soul, like 'misplaced.'"⁸ She described her feeling on Holy Saturday as "enormous loneliness. Separation from all men."⁹ She could hardly talk with people on that day. There seemed to be an infinite distance even between her and the person nearest to her. On the other hand, she felt "the burning need to communicate and express herself and to explain everything," as intensely as she had never felt before.¹⁰

Further, her unwillingness to pray and confess on Holy Saturday was closely connected to the strange sense of isolation or 'indifference' she experienced towards sin on the day. Balthasar writes, "The complete isolation from sins, both her own and strangers', increasingly became the central mystery of Holy Saturday for her."¹¹ Von Speyr described sin as "a rock," before which one stands powerless and helpless. The sense of loneliness one feels before the rock of sin is so strong that, as she described, "it seems to be a sort of happiness to have sins themselves" though such an idea seems to be "a completely paradoxical and probably a wrong sort."¹² However, such is the kind of loneliness a sinner feels in Hell. As she described, it is a kind of loneliness "which really had nothing human in itself."¹³

To some extent, von Speyr's descriptions of these visions themselves already are theological interpretations. The Son on the Cross atones for all the sins of the world (including the sins which have not yet occurred). Von Speyr says, "One cannot suffer unless they are really faced with sins."¹⁴ The burden of these sins is unimaginable, "but still the Lord suffers what must be suffered for the sins of the world."¹⁵ The Son must experience from inside the absurdity of sins and their remoteness from God, which

⁸ Ibid., 30: "Alles ist fern. Sie ist wie ohne Seele, wie 'verlegt'."

⁹ Ibid., 29: "Eine ungeheure Einsamkeit. Trennung von allen Menschen."

¹⁰ Ibid.: "das brennende Bedürfnis, sich mitzuteilen, auszusprechen, alles zu erzählen."

¹¹ Ibid., 30: "Das völlige Getrenntsein von den Sünden, den eigenen und den fremden, wird ihr immer mehr zum zentralen Geheimnis des Tages."

¹² Ibid.: "scheint es eine Art von Glück zu sein, selber Sünden zu haben—der Satz erscheint ihr als völlig paradox und vielleicht als falsche Art."

¹³ Ibid., 31: "eine Einsamkeit, die eigentlich nichts Menschliches mehr an sich hatte."

¹⁴ Quoted by Balthasar in "Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags": 32: "Leiden kan man nicht, ohne wirklich von der Sünde getroffen zu sein."

¹⁵ Ibid.: "Dennoch leidet der Herr mehr, als was für die Sünde der Welt gelitten werden müßte."

takes the form of absolute anxiety, in which “nothing makes sense anymore.”¹⁶ The Son is “crushed” and “suffocated” by the sins.¹⁷ In the cry of dereliction, “the Son cannot see any longer that He is doing the will of the Father.”¹⁸

Von Speyr's sharing in the passion, which lasted till the afternoon of Good Friday, was not only physical but also (or rather) spiritual torture, because she had to go through the inner state of Jesus, namely, anxiety, shame, horror, sense of futility, and “the inner night He had to suffer,”¹⁹ (which is similar to ‘the dark night’ of St John of the Cross.) Von Speyr's experience could be characterized by curious two-foldness. On the one hand, her self was completely lost in these visions, but on the other hand, she experienced the deep fear about her own sinfulness. Also it is interesting that von Speyr did not distinguish between her own personal sins and those of all the other human beings.

In her experience of the Descent into Hell, which began in the afternoon of Good Friday, she had no more physical pain, but there was “another, even deeper form of timelessness,” because in Hell “duration is standing still”²⁰ and “everything is only the ‘now.’”²¹ The Cross itself is ‘atemporal,’ because all the sins of the world from the past and future are gathered on the Son, who is ‘made sin.’ In this sense, the Cross is the zero hour. However, Hell is atemporal in a completely different way. The timelessness of Hell is characterized by the sense that nothing can last, the crushing weight of sins, and the finality of meaninglessness, so it is in stark contrast to Heaven, where “all time is fulfilled in the eternity of God.”²²

On Holy Saturday, every contact with human beings is shut out. Von Speyr's behaviours on Holy Saturdays were mechanical and she was “like a puppet, or better, like someone with catatonia, who adopts any position that another person gives her.”²³ According to her, the human beings in Hell “have nothing infinite any more, but they

¹⁶ Ibid.: “in der “nichts mehr entspricht,” und alles “umsonst” scheint.”

¹⁷ Ibid.: “erdreht,” “erstickt.”

¹⁸ Ibid.: “sieht der Herr in keiner Weise mehr, daß er den Willen des Vaters tut.”

¹⁹ Ibid., 33: “innere Nacht zu erleiden.”

²⁰ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 273: “Die Dauer ist Stillstand.”

²¹ Ibid., 276: “In der Hölle ist alles nur Jetzt.”

²² Ibid., 365: “es in der Ewigkeit Gottes die Erfüllung aller Zeit gibt.”

²³ Ibid., 49: “wie eine Puppe, oder besser, wie ein Katatoniker, der jede Stellung annimmt, die ihm ein anderer gibt.”

are *pure finitude*.”²⁴ Von Speyr herself was in Hell not as one of ‘the damned’ but as someone in a paradoxical state. Further, she tried to find the traces of Christ in Hell but she found it impossible. On earth, the traces of the grace of Christ can be found everywhere, but not in Hell, where “the dead Christ is no longer active.”²⁵

In short, “loneliness,” “hopelessness,” and “emptiness” are the examples of the words that she uses to describe the state of Hell.²⁶ These images seem to be quite different from the more popular image of the medieval ‘fiery’ Hell, but as we will argue later in Chapter 4, these images help us to see the relevance of Hell for our postmodern mindset. The Hell in von Speyr’s visions is characterized by the separation from God and from fellow human beings as well as a complete loss of communication. Since these negative experiences of alienation have been so commonly shared in our postmodern world, von Speyr’s visions of the Hell of loneliness help us to argue for the relevance of the doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell for human suffering today.

The Trinitarian Drama of Love in Hell

In von Speyr’s mystical visions, the Descent into Hell is vividly narrated as a drama of love involving all the three Persons of the Trinity and the creation.²⁷ First of all, it is the drama of the Son’s return to the Father through Hell. The Son has to descend into Hell, for it is “the shortest way to the Father.”²⁸ This is because Hell, which is the supreme consequence of perverted human freedom, belongs to the Father in the first place.²⁹

Von Speyr often speaks of the fullness and perpetual “newness” in the eternal life within the Trinity.³⁰ According to her, (humanly speaking), there is always a new

²⁴ Quoted by Balthasar in “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 33: “hat nichts Unendliches mehr, er ist reine Endlichkeit.” Italics added.

²⁵ Ibid., 34: “Der tote Christus ist in der Hölle nicht mehr aktiv.”

²⁶ “Einsamkeit,” “aussichtslosigkeit,” and “Vergeblichkeit.”

²⁷ For recent substantial studies on Von Speyr’s Trinitarian theology, see Michele M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology: Adrienne von Speyr & Hans Urs von Balthasar in Dialogue with Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: the Catholic University of America Press, 2014); Matthew Lewis Sutton, *Heaven Opens: the Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

²⁸ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 63.

²⁹ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, the Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Carlk, 1990), 175: “If the Father must be considered as the Creator of human freedom—with all its foreseeable consequences—then judgment belongs primordially to him, and thereby Hell also.”

³⁰ See Balthasar, “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 36.

“surprise” or a state of “being overwhelmed (*Überwältigtwerden*)” in God Himself. Based on this idea, she explains that in Hell the Son is introduced to the profound depths of the Father’s love. In her words,

the Son has been living in trust together with the Father up to now, but has not yet seen in the last dungeon of the Father His total incomprehensibility, the mystery of the origin of the paternal generative power itself.³¹

In other words, Holy Saturday is “almost a day of the Father rather than a day of death and Hell.”³² Hell had been kept from the Son until His entry there, because it had been reserved for the Father as His “dark mystery,”³³ which is, in other words, the mystery of divine love. Hell itself is the product of the Father’s love for the world,³⁴ for it is out of love that He creates the world, gives perfect freedom to the creation, including the freedom to reject Him permanently.

Further, the Son in Hell confronts not only the Father’s dark mystery but also His own divine origin. The darkness of the Father as Creator is also the darkness of the Father as the infinite origin of the Son, who eternally generates the Son out of love. Therefore, in von Speyr’s words,

the Son’s going through Hell as a mystery of the Father is an indication of the Father’s fatherhood with respect to the Son. Through the darkness of Hell the Son fumbles into the mystery of origin.³⁵

Such revelation of the Fatherhood to the Son can only happen in the deepest silence, but this silence is not the result of indifference but the expression of “the most extreme discretion of love”³⁶ or “the considerateness of the fatherly love.”³⁷ After all, the Son is the Word of God. Even after the Cross and the Descent into Hell, He does not stop being the Word. Rather, He becomes “the silent Word of the Father.”³⁸ Because the

³¹ Quoted by Balthasar in “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 36: “Er hat bisher mit dem Vater im Vertrauen zusammengelebt, hat aber noch nicht in das letzte Verlies des Vaters gesehen, seine ganze Unbegreiflichkeit, das Geheimnis des Ursprungs der väterlichen Zeugungskraft selbst.”

³² Ibid.: “Der Karsamstag fast mehr ein Tag des Vaters als ein Tag des Todes und der Hölle.”

³³ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 91. Also see Balthasar, “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 36.

³⁴ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 106.

³⁵ Ibid., 107: “Der Gang des Sohnes durch die Hölle als Geheimnis des Vaters ist ein Anzeichen der Vaterschaft des Vaters gegenüber dem Sohn. Durch die Finsternis der Hölle tastet sich der Sohn in das Geheimnis des Ursprungs hinein.” Also see 265.

³⁶ Quoted by Balthasar in “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 36: “äußersten Diskretion der Liebe.”

³⁷ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 337: “Rücksichtnahme der väterlichen Liebe.”

³⁸ Ibid.: “er ist zum schweigen Wort des Vaters geworden.”

divine Word, the Son, enters the complete speechlessness of death, the Father becomes silent as well “in order to be one with the Son.”³⁹ Therefore, the Father's silence is a form of response to the silence of the Son, who is now a dead human being who cannot speak. In a way, the Father ‘accompanies’ Him in silence out of “reverence for the Son”⁴⁰ and waits for Him to speak again after the Resurrection.⁴¹

Further, the Son must encounter “sin-in-itself,” the ultimate embodiment of human beings turning away from God,⁴² in order to see the darkness of the Father. Therefore, by descending into Hell, the Son encounters two kinds of darkness simultaneously: the darkness of human sins and the darkness of the Father's love.⁴³ The drama between the Father and the Son also involves the creation. The Son enters Hell in sheer obedience to the Father because He loves the Father's creation as well as the Father Himself. The Father shows the Son Hell, which is His own dark mystery, because He loves the Son as well as His creation. The Father wants the Son to experience the furthest point of being human.

Further, von Speyr describes Hell as “the second chaos,” which is “a chaos of sins, a kind of reflection of the chaos at the beginning of Creation.”⁴⁴ Therefore, it makes perfect sense that the Son, the Saviour of the creation, must descend into this second chaos, so that He can fulfill His mission to save the world and create a new order. We have to note the importance of this notion of Hell as the second chaos, as it suggests that for von Speyr and Balthasar it is Hell where the new creation starts.⁴⁵ As we will see in the later chapters, this point is significant for us to appreciate the in-

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Therefore, “human beings also have to learn to share this silence between Death and Resurrection.” (Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 337: “Und die Menschen sollen lernen, in diesem Schweigen zwischen Tod und Auferstehung mitzuschweigen.”) This point is related not only to the silence in the liturgical sense, but also to the Gospel's silence on Christ's Descent into Hell. (See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148.)

⁴² We will discuss this concept in Chapter 4.

⁴³ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 265.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 175: “das ein Chaos der Sünde ist, ist wie ein Spiegelbild zum Chaos bei Schöpfungsbeginn.” Also see Balthasar, “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 35.

⁴⁵ For example, Balthasar explores this notion in a poetic form in his *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979), 152: “And is this wellspring in the chaos, this trickling weariness, not the beginning of a new creation? The magic of Holy Saturday. The chaotic fountain remains directionless. Could this be the residue of the Son's love which, poured out to the last when every vessel cracked and the old world perished, is now making a path for itself to the Father through the glooms of nought? Or, in spite of it all, is this love trickling on in impotence, unconsciously, laboriously, towards a new creation that does not yet even exist, a creation which is still to be lifted up and given shape?”

between state of Christ in Hell.

Last but not least, we must never forget the role of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, the Descent into Hell would be impossible. Just as the Holy Spirit reveals the eternally unbreakable bond of communion between the Father and the Son on the Cross, which is the very moment where the Son is abandoned by the Father, the Holy Spirit reveals the maximal possible intimacy between the Father and the Son in Hell, where they seem to be the most separated from each other.

Therefore, following Adrienne's visions, we can see that God's very presence is paradoxically revealed in His absence. Closeness is found in distance. Love is expressed in abandonment.

So Hell serves the inner mysteries of God and reveals them: In Hell the highest distinction of the Persons as well as their ineffable unity and reunion is vividly made and proved. At the place where the Son believed Himself to be most abandoned by the Father, the abandonment is used to break open the prison of abandonment, Hell, and to admit the Son, along with the redeemed world, into the Heaven of the Father.⁴⁶

Thus, the Descent into Hell dramatically reveals the Trinity, in other words, God as love. This vivid account of the drama among the three Persons of the Trinity is shared by Balthasar's own Trinitarian theology, which we will discuss further in the next chapter.

The Spiritual Relationship between Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr

When we read the accounts of these visions, we are struck by how they actually happened in the middle of the context of their daily lives.⁴⁷ Balthasar records that von Speyr went about her daily businesses as much as she could during the Holy Week (as the sufferings she went through varied from emotional anxiety to physical pain.)⁴⁸ For

⁴⁶ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 190-191: "So dient die Hölle den innergöttlichen Geheimnissen und ihre Offenbarung: an ihr [Hölle] wird die höchste Unterscheidung der Personen und ihre unvermutbare Einheit und Wiederbegegnung anschaulich gemacht und bewiesen. Dort wo der Sohn meinte, vom Vater am verlassensten zu sein, wird die Verlassenheit benützt, um den Kerker der Verlassenheit, die Hölle, zu sprengen und den Sohn mitsamt der erlösten Welt in den Himmel des Vaters einzulassen." Also see Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory II: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 353-355.

⁴⁷ In particular, this point is notable in the 1941 account. See Balthasar, "Einleitung," in *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 8.

⁴⁸ See Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 22.

example, Balthasar describes the immense sense of isolation von Speyr went through on Holy Saturday as follows:

When she goes out into or drives in a street, she “feels a twitching in her” when she encounters people. Because she loves them all, she can do something good to everyone, caress the children, address to the old people and say something kind. (but) today, complete indifference to all of them. The people appear to her only like traffic barriers in front of the car. She must make efforts not to run over a couple by mistake.⁴⁹

It is also noting that none of Adrienne von Speyr's families and friends knew that she had mystical visions when she was alive. Balthasar was the only witness, as she hid her mystical gift from everyone else around her. Therefore, when Balthasar first published the account of her life after her death, everyone who knew her in person was shocked and stunned.⁵⁰ The fact that Balthasar is the only witness makes it difficult to assess the authenticity of her visions in the first place, but even if we give her the benefit of doubt for the time being, the relationship between Balthasar and von Speyr has been a difficult topic for many scholars. Let us discuss it below.

The uniqueness of their spiritual relationship seems to defy any categorization, though their relationship can be roughly placed within the long tradition of various couples composed of the female mystic and the male confessor.⁵¹ Balthasar himself declares that von Speyr has influenced him more than the other way around, and he even has written a whole book just “to prevent any attempt being made after my death to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr.”⁵² However, this statement certainly does not mean that we can simply treat their writings as if they co-authored them. Their relationship is definitely one of the areas in the Balthasarian scholarship where more research and more insight are still needed.⁵³

In the studies on Balthasar, the weight placed on the influence of von Speyr

⁴⁹ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 29.

⁵⁰ See Lois M. Miles, “Obedience of a Corpse: the Key to the Holy Saturday Writings of Adrienne von Speyr” (Ph.D Diss., University of Aberdeen, 2013), 19-20.

⁵¹ For a survey of this tradition, see, for example, John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Powers: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁵² Balthasar, *Our Task: a Report and a Plan*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 13.

⁵³ The most substantial work done on this point by thoroughly examining both Balthasar's and von Speyr's writings is Michele M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology*.

on Balthasar varies from scholar to scholar;⁵⁴ on the one hand, there are those (though a minority) who treat the two more or less like co-authors (John Saward, for example). On the other hand, there are those who almost entirely ignore her influence (for example, Edward Oakes, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, and Kevin Mongrain).⁵⁵ Certainly, there are also those who take a middle-position between these two extreme poles and attempt to analyze the nature of their relationship somehow (for example, Raymond Gawronski, Aidan Nichols, Angelo Scola, Jacques Servais, Justin Matro, Blaise Berg, Johann Roten, Matthew Lewis Sutton, Shelly Rambo, and Michelle Schumacher). It also depends on the topics the scholars deal with.

As far as our topic is Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, we cannot skip over von Speyr's influence on him. There is no doubt that von Speyr's mystical visions are the main inspirational source for his theology of Holy Saturday and any examination of Balthasar's interpretation of the topic would not be complete without discussing her visions. We can even say that without her vision it would not have been possible in the first place.⁵⁶

Further, it would not be enough just to say that his theology of Holy Saturday has been inspired by her visions. She went through these painful visions every Holy Week from 1941 to 1965, and Balthasar himself witnessed her suffering. As he was not a dictating machine, it would be natural to say that witnessing her intense suffering through the years should be considered as his own painful experience as an accompanying friend. His presence seemed to have a comforting impact on her too as she went through these horrible sufferings (except those times she was completely in a trance and therefore could not recognize anyone around her.)⁵⁷ For von Speyr, Balthasar was both an intellectual and spiritual guide to interpret her mysterious visions and a friend who accompanied her through her painful suffering.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For a concise summary of the main interpreters' positions regarding von Speyr, see Matthew Lewis Sutton, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr's Ecclesial Relationship," *New Blackfriars* 94, no.1049 (January 2013): 56-59.

⁵⁵ Even in this category, we have to note that there is a difference in the reasons for this neglect, depending on whether it is done with a minimum amount of respect for von Speyr (Oakes) or simply with a distaste for her (Mongrain).

⁵⁶ This point seems to be justified by Balthasar's own surprise when she had the first Holy Saturday vision, as we have seen in the 1941 account.

⁵⁷ For example, Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 26.

⁵⁸ For a few of the examples that von Speyr asked for Balthasar's advice to interpret her visions and experiences, see Balthasar, *Our Task*, 83-86.

On the other hand, as to their writings, we have to note both the similarities and differences between the two. Von Speyr certainly provides a substantial amount of material for Balthasar and sometimes he simply seems to accept them at face value. We can find some places in his writings where he simply quotes from her (for instance, on Purgatory) as if her writings were a completely reliable source whose authenticity we hardly need to question.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Balthasar clearly has his own agenda. He does not develop certain themes received from von Speyr (effigies, for example). Further, the theological distinction between *Sheol* and *Gehenna*, which is central to his theology of Holy Saturday, has been added by himself. (As we have seen in the accounts of *Kreuz und Hölle*, von Speyr herself does not speak about such a distinction. For her, Jesus was simply in 'Hell.')

Therefore, while there is no doubt that she is the main source of *inspiration* for Balthasar to develop a theology of Holy Saturday, he evidently has developed it on the basis of his own agenda. (For example, von Speyr herself does not seem to share his deep interest in the issue of the encounter and conflict with human and divine freedom.⁶⁰)

Therefore, despite his claim that his work and hers should not be separated, we have to carefully read these two authors. In the last analysis, von Speyr is not a trained theologian in any sense of the word. Her writing style is less theologically sophisticated than Balthasar's, but it is more spiritual and contemplative in nature. In this sense, von Speyr's contribution to Balthasar's theological project of combining theology and spirituality cannot be ignored, as she is unquestionably one of the most influential source of spirituality for him.

Evaluation: Why Should We Not Ignore Von Speyr's Influence on Balthasar?

In this chapter, we have examined several aspects of Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions as a preparation for our examination of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. We have seen her depiction of Hell, which is characterized by an overall

⁵⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 247-256, 360-369, and 510-521; *Theo-logic II*, 345-361.

⁶⁰ See Miles, 199-200.

sense of loneliness and isolation. We have also seen her vivid narration of the Trinitarian drama of love, which paradoxically reaches the climax in Hell, the most anti-divine place. In addition, we have mentioned a few unique concepts such as “sin-in-itself” and “the second chaos.”

All these aspects have been received and developed by Balthasar in his own theology of Holy Saturday, so we will discuss them further from the next chapter on. Before we proceed to do so, however, let us pause to clarify why it is important to include von Speyr's writings in our examination of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. After all, some scholars (most notably Pitstick) do not consider it necessary to take into account her influence even when discussing Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell. Further, some scholars even question the way he relies on her as a useful source at all (particularly concerning his innovative interpretation of Holy Saturday).⁶¹

There are mainly two reasons why we believe that it is important to include her writings in our examination of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. They are directly related to the main two points we maintain throughout this thesis: to be respectful to the combination of theology and spirituality valued by Balthasar and to argue that Balthasar remains faithful to the Catholic tradition even in his innovative interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell.

Regarding the first point, as we have mentioned above, von Speyr is one of the main spiritual sources for Balthasar, so it is important for us to examine her writings in order to pay full respect to the genre within which he is working. Also, we have to point out that at least he carefully supports her ideas by appealing to various sources within the Catholic tradition, including Scripture, and other mystics', saints', and patristic authors' writings. As a proof of this point, for example, we should note that in his major work on the paschal mystery, *Mysterium Paschale*, he hardly refers to von Speyr. In this book, he is mostly concerned with how to construct a theological interpretation on the basis of the spiritual material provided

⁶¹ For example, Karen Kilby finds it problematic that Balthasar appeals to the experiences “of someone in whose house he lived and with whom he himself was closely involved” (Kilby, *Balthasar: a (Very) Critical Introduction*, 30.) Fergus Kerr also questions the way Balthasar relies on von Speyr's visions to ‘revise’ the traditional interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell, saying, “It is not a very traditional way in which to develop Catholic doctrine.” (Fergus Kerr, “Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *New Blackfriars* 79, no. 923 (January 1998): 32.)

by her. Further, as we will see in detail in the later chapters, Balthasar combines von Speyr's concept of "sin-in-itself" with the notion of "*visio mortis*" presented by Nicholas of Cusa, and compares von Speyr's vision of Hell with the dark night of the soul experienced by St John of the Cross. In short, while von Speyr could be considered as the main source of *inspiration* for Balthasar, she certainly is not the only one source for constructing his theology. It is important to take her writings into consideration in order to have a balanced view of Balthasar's sources and to see how he actually uses von Speyr's unique concepts by supporting it with various traditional writings. Therefore, in order to see how Balthasar remains faithful to the traditional teaching, it is necessary to examine von Speyr's visions as his inspirational source.

Nevertheless, we also have to note that the focus of this whole thesis is on Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, not on the comparison or contrast between Balthasar and von Speyr. Therefore, throughout this thesis, we will make reference to her only when it is relevant.

As we have seen the mystical visions which inspired Balthasar to develop his theology of Holy Saturday, let us proceed to examine it in depth from the next chapter on.

Chapter 2.

The Framework: the Trinitarian Drama

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed Adrienne von Speyr's mystical theological visions. As we pointed out, one of the distinctive characteristics of her accounts of the paschal mystery is her vivid narration of the Trinitarian drama of love. Now, in this chapter, we turn to Balthasar's Trinitarian theology. We will explore it as a fundamental framework to understand the Cross and the Descent into Hell as well as a basis for our argument concerning Christian suffering, which we will develop in Part II.

There are many approaches and themes related to his thoughts on the Trinity in general, but because of the scope of this thesis, our focus will be placed on the Trinity revealed on the Cross and in Hell, while reference will be made to relevant topics. First, we start by describing Balthasar's subtle and nuanced approach to the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. Then, following his thoughts, we discuss kenosis as the essential characteristic of the immanent Trinity. After this preparation, we will examine his interpretation of the Cross and the Descent into Hell as the abandonment of the Son by the Father, which is actually the radical form of mutual love between them. We will also examine the problem concerning the beatific vision. This point seems to be at the core of the difference between Balthasar's (and Von Speyr's) interpretation of the Descent into Hell and the traditional teachings of the doctrine, and it gives Pitstick one of the reasons for concluding that his interpretation is heretical. As a conclusion of this chapter, we will evaluate his Trinitarian theology by considering the serious concern raised against his treatment of the Trinity, namely, the concern that he has *the tendency to* bring a rupture within the eternally blissful unity within the Trinity and eventually ends up elevating and divinizing suffering as well.

The section titles of Chapter 2 are as follows: 1) the immanent and economic Trinity, 2) kenosis—the essential character of the immanent Trinity, 3) the

Trinity and the Cross, 4) Christ's Descent into Hell as a Trinitarian event, 5) the question concerning the beatific vision, and 6) evaluation: the Trinity and the problem of suffering.

The Immanent and Economic Trinity

The economic Trinity is the God revealed in history, while the immanent Trinity is the God as God in Himself. Regarding the relationship between these two forms of the one Trinity, Karl Rahner uttered a now-famous dictum: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."¹ This axiom, now often dubbed "Rahner's Rule," is a result of Rahner's intention to present the Trinity "as a mystery of salvation (in its reality and not merely as a doctrine)."²

On the one hand, Balthasar agrees with this axiom in the sense that it is only through the economic Trinity that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity. It is only through the figure and disposition of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, that we can encounter the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the divine Persons of the Trinity. On the other hand, Balthasar departs from Rahner's rule and strongly insists that the economic and immanent Trinity cannot be simply identified with each other. He is especially critical of the way Rahner treats the immanent Trinity, even when distinguished from the economic, merely as "a kind of precondition for God's true, earnest self-revelation and self-giving."³ Balthasar ascribes such a treatment to Rahner's "concern to preserve God's inner, triune nature as the mystery of mysteries."⁴ In Rahner's model, 'God' refers to the Father, who communicates Himself in history as the Son and the Spirit, while He Himself remains the unoriginate source, in other words, the incomprehensible mystery. According to

¹ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 22.

² Ibid., 21-22. This is because Rahner thinks that neo-scholastic, manualistic theology of the Trinity (what he calls *Schultheologie*) has turned the Trinity into an object of psychological and metaphysical speculation which is isolated from the history of God's self-communication. See Peter C. Phan, "Mystery of Grace and Salvation: Karl Rahner's Theology of the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192-207.

³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 320.

⁴ Ibid.

Balthasar, Rahner makes the divine self-communication within the immanent Trinity appear to be “strangely formal,”⁵ as Rahner admits no reciprocal ‘Thou’ within the immanent Trinity because God has only one self-consciousness.⁶ As a result, in Balthasar’s view, the immanent Trinity becomes “hardly credible as the infinite prototype of God’s ‘economic’ self-squandering.”⁷ Instead, Balthasar himself proposes a very lively inter-personal ‘drama’ within the immanent Trinity, which can ontologically ground and support the drama in the economic Trinity.

Balthasar is extremely careful to maintain a clear distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, so that immanent would not “dissolve into the economic.”⁸ In other words, he believes that we must not let God “be swallowed up in the world process.”⁹ He says this as a criticism of a Hegelian process theology, the position allegedly taken by such theologians as Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann’s position is also based on Rahner’s rule. However, Moltmann not only blurs the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, but goes further to claim that the economic Trinity *becomes* the immanent Trinity. In Moltmann’s own words, “The economic Trinity completes and perfects itself to [the] immanent Trinity when the history and experience of salvation are completed and perfected.”¹⁰ For Moltmann, the Cross in history is the fulfillment of the Trinity. His utmost concern is to show God’s intimate involvement with the world and eventually to claim that God Himself suffers in the midst of all the sufferings of His creation. He writes, “God suffers with us—God suffers from us—God suffers for us; it is this experience of God that reveals the triune God.”¹¹

Balthasar shares Moltmann’s concern to some extent and tries to avoid separating the immanent and economic Trinity in such a way that the events of the economy of salvation leave the immanent Trinity unaffected. Nevertheless, he is critical of Moltmann’s view, because the God entangled in the world process in this

⁵ Ibid., 321.

⁶ Rahner, *The Trinity*, 75-76, notes 28-30.

⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* IV, 321.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 151.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

way ends up becoming “a tragic, mythological God.”¹² God’s immutability and sovereignty must be preserved. God does not *need* the world for His self-fulfillment. God is love, but God does not *become* love just because He has the world as ‘Thou’ to love. God is love already in Himself. In Balthasar’s words,

He does not *become* “love” by having the world as his “thou” and his “partner”: in himself, in lofty transcendence far above the world, he “is love” already. Only in this way, in complete freedom, can he reveal himself and give himself to be loved.¹³

Therefore, Balthasar neither merely separates the immanent Trinity from the economic nor hastily concludes that the former remains unaffected by the latter. We must neither simply identify nor separate them. A way must be sought to let the immanent Trinity ground the economic Trinity so that the former remains the transcendent reality while relating to the latter more than just formally. In his own words,

We have to think of the immanent Trinity as that eternal and absolute self-giving, so that God in Godself is seen as being absolute love. This is the only thing that will explain God’s free self-giving to the world as love, without God needing the cosmic process and the cross to become (and “mediate”) Godself.¹⁴

While avoiding both Rahner’s and Moltmann’s positions, Balthasar’s own way of treating the immanent and economic Trinity is to *analogically* relate the ‘event’ in the economic Trinity to the ‘event’ of the divine processions within the immanent Trinity. For instance, he interprets that the kenosis of the Son in the paschal event is the economic form of the divine love of the Father and the Son, so it provides *an analogy* for the interpersonal relations within the immanent Trinity. Thus he maintains the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity in a subtle way. It is significant to maintain such a nuanced relationship, for it is closely linked to both a proper understanding of God and a proper understanding of soteriology. What is at stake here is both God’s sovereignty and the actuality of redemption. We would not want an unapproachable, sublime God who is not in living communication with the world or a mere mythical character who is at the mercy of the events of

¹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, 322.

¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory III: The Dramatis Personae: the Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 509.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, 323.

history and in need of redemption himself. Carefully avoiding these extreme positions, Balthasar's approach to the relationship between the economic and immanent Trinity enables us to see God as both being independent from the world and as communicating with the world.

Further, the treatment of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity is closely linked to the problem of divine suffering, and ultimately, the problem of human suffering and God's response to it. Balthasar is careful not to attribute suffering to God, though he comes very close to doing so. He only attributes to God something *analogous* to suffering. According to Balthasar, since the immanent Trinity ontologically grounds the economic Trinity, the grounds for the possibility of what takes place in the economic Trinity are to be found in the immanent Trinity. Therefore, the God on the Cross and in the Descent into Hell reveals only what God already is immanently, namely, kenotic love.

Moltmann, as one of the main advocates of 'the suffering God' in the 20th century, believes that God redeems the world through His suffering. However, for Balthasar, suffering merely has a secondary place next to kenotic love. He does speak about suffering as a possible result of the recklessness of His self-giving love, but he never directly ascribes suffering to God. In the following passage, we can see that he is extremely cautious about this point:

If we ask whether there is suffering in God, the answer is this: *there is something in God that can develop into suffering*. This suffering occurs when the recklessness with which the Father gives away himself (and *all* that is his) encounters a freedom that, instead of responding in kind to his magnanimity, changes it into a calculating, cautious self-preservation. This contrasts with the essentially divine recklessness of the Son, who allows himself to be squandered, and of the Spirit who accompanies him.¹⁵

Thus, we can only affirm that there is something *analogous* to suffering in God that is the reckless self-giving of the inter-Trinitarian love, which "can develop into suffering." It is significant how to read this nuanced passage in order to evaluate Balthasar's position about divine suffering (we will come back to this point later). He tries to maintain both the view that God does not need to be involved in the world process and the view that the possibilities of drama in the world must be grounded in

¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, 327-8. The italics in the first sentence are added.

God. Balthasar himself admits that such an approach is “to walk on a knife edge”¹⁶ and describes his own approach as follows:

It avoids all the fashionable talk of “the pain of God” and yet is bound to say that something happens in God that not only justifies the possibility and actual occurrence of all suffering in the world but also justifies God’s sharing in the latter, in which he goes to the length of vicariously taking on man’s God-lessness.¹⁷

This “vicariously taking on man’s Godlessness” refers to the Son’s descent into Hell. While criticizing “all the fashionable talk” of divine suffering, Balthasar tries to deal with the issue of human and divine suffering in his own way, and Christ’s descent into Hell can be placed at the centre of this context.

In the last analysis, we have to seek not only the God who suffers for us, from us, and with us (as Moltmann does) but also the God who absolutely transcends suffering so that He can save us (as Rahner does). This issue requires a razor’s edge kind of approach, which is made possible exactly by Balthasar’s subtle and nuanced treatment of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. We have seen *how* Balthasar treats the immanent and economic Trinity. Next, we turn to *what* he sees in the Trinity.

Kenosis—the Essential Characteristic of the Immanent Trinity

For Balthasar, the essential characteristic of the immanent Trinity is kenosis. He says that the generation of the Son by the Father is “an initial ‘kenosis’ within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis.”¹⁸ In this self-giving act, the Father gives all His divinity away to the Son without remainder. However, the Father does not exist prior to this kenosis, which would be an Arian mistake. Rather, this generation must be considered beyond the temporal sphere. Rather, “he *is* this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back.”¹⁹ Moreover, by giving all that is

¹⁶ Ibid., 324.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, 323. He admits that he is following Sergei Bulgakov’s idea on this point. For an examination of how Balthasar exactly adopts and modifies Bulgakov’s kenotic Trinitarian theology, see Katy Leamy, *The Holy Trinity: Hans Urs von Balthasar and His Sources* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

¹⁹ Ibid.

His, the Father does not lose Himself at all. Though He does not keep back anything from the Son, He does not extinguish Himself either by thus surrendering Himself without reserve. Balthasar explains,

For in this self-surrender, he *is* the whole divine essence; Here we see both God's infinite power and his powerlessness; he cannot be God in any other way but in this "kenosis" within the Godhead itself. (Yet what omnipotence is revealed here! He brings forth a God who is of equal substance and therefore uncreated, even if, in this self-surrender, he must go to the very extreme of self-lessness.)²⁰

Through this initial kenosis, the Son possesses divinity in a manner equal to the Father. This generation of the Son, who is "the second way of participating in (and of *being*) the identical Godhead,"²¹ reveals both God's powerlessness and omnipotence at the same time. God lets go of His divinity, so it shows His powerlessness, but He is omnipotent because He does not lose Himself even in letting go of Himself. The paradoxical truth about God is already revealed here, as God's omnipotent power is shown in His very act of giving it up. According to Balthasar, God exists already in Himself in no other way but this way of kenosis. He does not need the world as 'Thou' in order to be kenotic love.

On the other hand, the Son's response to the gift of Godhead can only be "eternal thanksgiving" to the Father as the Source, which is "a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender."²² Thus, there is a reciprocal self-giving relationship between the Father and the Son. It is the Holy Spirit that "as the essence of love" that "maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it, and since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it."²³ Here we have the basic model of the dynamic relationships between the divine Persons within the immanent Trinity, which is reciprocal self-giving love.

As the Father generates the Son in the primal kenosis, also generated there is room for *Other*. In his words,

This Son is infinitely Other, but he is also the infinitely *Other of the Father*. Thus he both grounds and surpasses all we mean by separation, pain and

²⁰ Ibid., 325.

²¹ Ibid., 323.

²² Ibid., 324.

²³ Ibid.

alienation in the world and all we can envisage in terms of loving self-giving, interpersonal relationship and blessedness.²⁴

Along with such key words as ‘kenosis,’ ‘self-giving,’ and ‘self-surrender,’ another striking feature that permeates Balthasar’s theology of the Trinity is this emphasis on the ‘otherness,’ ‘separation,’ and ‘distance’ between the Father and the Son. The ‘infinite distance’ between the Father and the Son is significant for us, because eventually it encompasses and surpasses even the utmost distance between God and us human beings, namely, between God and Hell. That is because the finite distance between God and His creation is paradoxically smaller than the infinite distance between the Father and the Son. Balthasar writes,

It is the drama of the ‘emptying’ of the Father’s heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world. For any world only has its place within that distinction between Father and Son that is maintained and bridged by the Holy Spirit.²⁵

Thus, the relationship between God and the world, which belongs to the limited temporal sphere, can only be contained in the eternal drama of the Trinity. It should also be noted that Balthasar expands this basic immanent Trinitarian model to explain not only the divine-human relationship but also the interpersonal relationships among human beings. (Especially his locating the basis of sexual differentiation within the Trinity is unique and controversial.²⁶) The way the Father relates to the Son is reflected in the way God relates to the world. As the Father generates the Son in an act of kenosis, God the Father freely chooses to create the world out of love, not out of necessity in any way. Just as the Son responds to the love of the Father with love, the world is required to return God’s love. However, God also gives His creation freedom, including the freedom to reject His love, thus binding Himself in some sense. However, Balthasar reminds us that even this ‘No’ from the creature’s side is possible only because of God’s limitless love.

Man’s refusal was possible because of the Trinitarian “recklessness” of divine love, which, in its self-giving, observed no limits and had no regard for itself. In this, it showed both its power and its powerlessness and fundamental vulnerability (the two are inseparable). So we must say both things at once: within God’s own self—for where else is the creature to be found?—and in the defenselessness of absolute love, God endures the

²⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, IV, 325.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁶ We will discuss this point further in detail in Part II.

refusal of this love; and, on the other hand, in the omnipotence of the same love, he cannot and will not suffer it.²⁷

Since God is limitlessly self-giving love, he unconditionally loves His creature even to the point of selflessness, which is what Balthasar calls ‘recklessness’ (more or less similarly to the way the Greek Fathers boldly called God’s love of humanity ‘foolish.’) In this selflessness, God grants His creation genuine freedom, including even the freedom to reject His love. However, since God is omnipotent, God’s freedom remains intact, whatever His creation does in the world He creates. Even when we reject God, we are still within God’s love. First of all, as Balthasar says, creation can only be explained within the generation of the Son: “The world belongs to him and has him as its goal; only in the Son can the world be ‘recapitulated.’”²⁸ Since the creature’s freedom is analogous to the Son’s autonomy received from the Father, even the creature’s ‘No’ “must be located within the Son’s all-embracing Yes to the Father, in the Spirit.”²⁹ Therefore, we can see that the Son, ‘the infinite Other of the Father,’ can encompass and surpass all possible human responses to God’s love, which means even the possibilities of Heaven and Hell are contained within the Trinity. Thus, dismissing a statement of a Hegelian process theology, ‘love is as strong as hell,’ Balthasar can declare, “no, it is stronger, for hell is only possible given the absolute and real separation of Father and Son.”³⁰

Considering his description of divine and human freedom, it is not difficult to see that the ultimate point where these two freedoms meet cannot be anywhere else but Hell. This is why we cannot fully comprehend the cost of redemption without considering the Son’s Descent into Hell. However, before we examine the Descent into Hell as a Trinitarian event, we have to examine the Cross as being revelatory of the Trinity.

The Trinity and the Cross

As Rowan Williams writes, the question which motivates the entire theological

²⁷ Ibid., 329.

²⁸ Ibid., 326.

²⁹ Ibid., 329.

³⁰ Ibid., 325.

vision of Balthasar, especially his thoughts on the Trinitarian life of God, is what it means to identify someone who declares himself abandoned by God as God.³¹ The abandonment (*Verlassenheit* in German) of the Son by the Father, which is expressed most poignantly in the so-called ‘cry of dereliction’ on the Cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34), is the key to Balthasar’s Trinitarian theology of the Cross. The Son is forsaken by the Father. God is forsaken by God Himself. Balthasar interprets the Cross as abandonment of the Son by the Father (and this abandonment reaches the climax in His Descent into Hell). First, let us discuss whether such an interpretation of the cry of dereliction is exegetically legitimate enough or not, as apparently this is one distinctive interpretation of the Cross among many.

Referring to this cry, G.K. Chesterton famously writes that Christianity is “only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.”³² However, it is not the existence of God or the power of God that Jesus is questioning here but His ‘silence.’ The fact that Jesus addresses God as “God” here is significant, because the common form of address Jesus used towards God was “Father” up to this point. He is the one who declares, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). Even in Gethsemane, he prays, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). However, here, on the Cross, feeling utterly forsaken, Jesus no longer presumes to speak intimately to the ‘Father’ but employs the address common to all human beings, ‘God.’ In Von Speyr’s words, “As Father he has disappeared. The ‘Father’ has forsaken him: he calls to ‘God’—this is all that remains of their relationship.”³³

Nevertheless, even though He feels utterly forsaken, He still calls God as ‘my’ God, which implies trust. This point is not diminished by the fact that this questioning cry is the opening line of Psalm 22, which continues as follows:

Why are you so far from helping me,

³¹ Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

³² G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: J. Lane, 1909), 257.

³³ Adrienne von Speyr, *The Cross, Word and Sacrament*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 39.

from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
And by night, but find no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2)

It goes on to describe what is actually played out on Golgotha³⁴ but eventually ends on a note of triumph:

Posterity will serve him;
Future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it. (Psalm 22:30-31)

The fact that this Psalm ends by such glorification of God leads some scholars to argue for the importance of interpreting the cry of dereliction as an allusion to Psalm 22 in its entirety.³⁵ Such an interpretation suggests that this cry is not evidence that Jesus was feeling rejected and forsaken on the Cross but rather that He maintained solid confidence in ultimate triumph even in the midst of suffering.³⁶ This exegetical question is a difficult topic and a thorough examination of all the possible interpretations is far beyond the scope of this chapter, so let it suffice to note that Balthasar's and von Speyr's interpretation is possible. (For example, after examining the arguments on both sides regarding how to interpret this cry (abandonment and victory), the renowned biblical scholar Raymond Edward Brown concludes that there is "no persuasive argument against attributing to the Jesus of Mark/Matt the literal sentiment of feeling forsaken expressed in the psalm quote."³⁷)

³⁴ Psalm 22:6-8: "But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'"

³⁵ For example, see Robert Holst, "Cry of Dereliction : Another Point of View," *Springfielder* 35, no. 4 (March 1, 1972): 286–289; L Paul Trudinger, "Cry of Dereliction : Some Further Observations," *Springfielder* 38, no. 3 (December 1, 1974): 232–235. Also, see John Yocum, "A Cry of Dereliction? Reconsidering a Recent Theological Commonplace," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 1 (January 2005): 72–80.

³⁶ On the surface, this kind of interpretation seems to make it easier to harmonize the sentiment expressed in the cry of dereliction with those expressed in the other words from the Cross such as "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46. Another citation from Psalms. (Psalm 31.5)). There is also a hermeneutic principle that a citation of a specific Old Testament passage in the New Testament supposes that the readers are familiar with the context of that cited passage. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the evangelists assume that the readers of the Gospels would instantly know the entire (positive and confident) sentiment expressed in Psalm 22 by hearing its opening sentence, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Nevertheless, even if these points are taken into account, one cannot help feeling bewildered: why should it be this word? Why should it be this very word, which could be so misleading? Certainly could the evangelists have simply chosen a different word from Psalm 22 if it is only the note of victory or joy that they want to convey?

³⁷ Raymond Edward Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, vol. II, The Anchor Bible Reference

Even if it is legitimate to regard this cry as that of abandonment, it must not be understood simply as a cry of despair, because that would contradict Jesus' sinlessness, as despair (the loss of hope in God or of salvation) is a grave sin against God.³⁸ Balthasar and von Speyr argue that the cry of dereliction is a cry of *obedience*, which can only be explained by God being Triune. To put it succinctly, the abandonment of the Son by the Father understood in the light of the Son's obedience is their central interpretation about the Cross.

The Son is forsaken both for the sake of the Father and the sinners. The Son loves the Father so much that in the ultimate form of obedience to the Father's plan for the redemption of the world He agrees to let go of His own intimacy with the Father. In other words, the Son chooses to be abandoned by the Father in order to experience the Godforsakenness of the sinners to the fullest, because He wants to do everything He can do to renew the Father's fallen creation as a result of the foolish 'recklessness' or 'selflessness' of divine love as we have seen above. In Balthasar's words,

On Good Friday the Son's love renounces all sensible contact with the Father, so that he can experience in himself the sinner's distance from God. (No one can be more abandoned by the Father than the Son, because no one knows him

Library (London: Doubleday, 1994), 1051. Brown points out that, considering the other appropriate citations of psalms unambiguously done by Matthew and Mark, it is not very convincing to conclude that the evangelists intended this cry to be understood only on a note of triumph based on the entire context of Psalm 22. At the same time, Brown observes that the consideration of the whole context of Psalm 22 helps to show that in attributing to Jesus such a sentiment of abandonment the evangelists did not think that Jesus was guilty of despair or had lost hope. Because they were aware that the Passion eventually would culminate in victory, they considered it appropriate to portray Jesus at his lowest and loneliest moment uttering such a tragic verse. (Apparently Luke and John too find this word very troubling, so they omit it and insert words from other Psalms instead.) (See Brown, 1050-1051, 1066-1078.) Also, it should not be ignored that Mark records this word specifically in Aramaic, Jesus' mother tongue, with a translation, and thus not in Hebrew, the official language of the Psalms. This point seems to indicate this very word itself is emphasized, not as a beginning of Psalm 22. The almost identical way the evangelists attract specific attention to this cry is also significant. They introduce the verse with Jesus crying out "with a loud voice" around three o'clock (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). All this seems to indicate that the cry is not merely indicated as a recitation of the Psalm but rather is intended to be understood for the literal sentiment of forsakenness. In addition to Brown, see Gérard Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross: a Biblical and Theological Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 104-105.

³⁸ Another significant point to note in relation to this matter is the word of the centurion who watched the way Jesus died, which both Matthew and Mark report in their narratives of the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:54 and Mark 15:39). The centurion, after observing the whole thing, declares that Jesus was really the Son of God. This is not the kind of statement one would expect from someone who thought the Son of God just died in despair like other human beings do. The way this declaration is inserted after the death of Jesus (especially in Mark, where the declaration immediately follows His death) also implies that the two evangelists do not intend this cry to be interpreted as a cry of despair either.

and depends on him as much as the Son.³⁹

Also, considering from the side of the Father, because the Father loves the Son and His creation so much, He wants the Son as a human being to experience the ultimate Godforsakenness of His creation. No one has ever been so close to the Father as the Son, so the Godforsakenness the Son experiences is paradoxically far greater than any sinner can ever experience. Therefore, surprisingly, Balthasar says that the abandonment on the Cross is actually the ultimate form of mutual love between the Father and Son, which also involves the creation. In other words, such abandonment of the Son by the Father is made possible exactly because of the eternal mutual love between them, which is expressed as the Holy Spirit working as a bond.

It is because of His salvific mission that the Son enters into solidarity with all who feel abandoned by God. Therefore, the Cross reveals God's boundless love towards sinful humankind and God's intention to save the whole humanity. The Cross also reveals the great love within the eternal Trinity. As Balthasar says, "only this *double* love gives the key to the understanding."⁴⁰

Christ's Descent into Hell as a Trinitarian Event

If the Cross reveals the Trinity, hence God as love, so does the Son's Descent into Hell. Moreover, this event is both inevitable and possible because of God being Triune. Let us examine the former point first.

First of all, Hell, which is the supreme consequence of perverted human freedom, belongs to the Father. Balthasar explains as follows:

If the Father must be considered as the Creator of human freedom—with all its foreseeable consequences—then judgment belongs primordially to him, and thereby Hell also; and when he sends the Son into the world to save it instead of judging it, and to equip him for this function, gives 'all judgment to the Son' (John 5, 22), then he must also introduce the Son *made man* into 'Hell' (as the supreme entailment of human liberty).⁴¹

³⁹ Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 65.

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 207. Italics added.

⁴¹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, the Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 175.

God the Father creates the world out of love and gives it freedom, including the freedom to reject Him, so Hell ('the supreme entailment of human liberty') also belongs to Him. We have already seen above that the possibilities of Heaven and Hell are all encompassed within the Trinity. (Also as we have seen in Chapter 1, von Speyr expresses Hell as the "dark mystery" of the Father,⁴² which means the mystery of divine love.) Therefore, as the Father sends the Son in order not to judge the world but to save it, the Son descends into Hell as "the final consequence of the redemptive mission he has received from the Father."⁴³

As we have seen above, God gives the world genuine freedom out of love, but this implies the risk of humanity choosing to reject God and so becoming lost. However, God can assume such a risk because He is able to gather such possible (or actual) lostness into Himself. It is exactly through the Son's Descent into Hell that such gathering up of the lostness of humanity into God is accomplished. As Balthasar says, God gathers the abyss of lostness of humanity into "the abyss of absolute love."⁴⁴ This is not difficult to see, if we consider Hell as the ultimate point where human and divine freedom meet.

By placing Himself in solidarity with the sinners, the Son, a cadaver in Hell, proves two things: God's utmost respect for human freedom to the point of allowing us to reject Him completely and God's all-embracing love to the point of accompanying us even in Hell. The Son descends there to be in solidarity with sinners. He is dead together with them "out of an ultimate love."⁴⁵ Thus, the sinner, who "wants to be 'damned' apart from God,"⁴⁶ ends up being with God after all. The sinner cannot escape from God's love even in Hell. As Balthasar writes, the Son "disturbs the absolute loneliness striven for by the sinner."⁴⁷ (If one aspect of the traditional interpretation of the Descent into Hell was the belief that there is no place (even Hell) where God's power does not reach, then Balthasar too stresses this point, even though he places more stress on the depth of God's love.) Therefore, while

⁴² Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 91.

⁴³ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 174.

⁴⁴ Balthasar, "Trinity and Future," in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 52.

⁴⁵ Balthasar, *The Von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, trans. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 153.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

remaining a real possibility for the sinner, Hell can also be placed in the limitless love of the triune God. The creation's freedom is not at all undermined, but God also freely chooses to be in solidarity with sinful humanity in Hell.

Therefore, if we fully pursue the notion of God as Trinity, who is love itself, and also consider Hell as “the supreme entailment of human liberty,” which itself is a consequence of God's ‘reckless’ love, we can clearly see that the Son's Descent into Hell is inevitable. Hell must be the final destination of His mission to save sinful humanity.

Further, the Son's Descent into Hell is possible only because God is Triune. Balthasar describes the mystery as follows:

*God can simultaneously remain in himself and step forth from himself. And, in thus stepping forth from himself, he descends into the abyss of all that is anti-divine; God does nothing anti-divine—the sinner does—but he can experience it within his own reality. This is Christ's descent into hell, into what God has utterly cast out of the world. This descent can take place in obedience (the uttermost, absolute obedience, of which only the Son is capable) because absolute obedience can become the economic form of the Son's absolute response to the Father.*⁴⁸

Because of the immanent distance between the Father and the Son, God can even descend into Hell, which is the abyss of all that is alien to God's nature, while remaining God. This is because even in this utmost separation between the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is working as a bridge between them to unite them. Without the Holy Spirit, the Descent into Hell would be impossible. Just as the Holy Spirit reveals the eternally unbreakable bond of communion between the Father and the Son on the Cross, which is the very moment where the Son is abandoned by the Father, the Holy Spirit reveals the maximal possible intimacy between the Father and the Son in Hell, where they seem to be the most separated from each other. The separation between the Father and the Son is only possible because of the Holy Spirit, who eternally accompanies them both. Balthasar states, “because he is triune, God can overcome even what is hostile to God within his eternal relations.”⁴⁹ We have seen that the Cross, interpreted as the abandonment of the Son by the Father,

⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* III, 530. Italics added.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

paradoxically reveals the eternal Trinitarian communion. In the same way, Hell too paradoxically reveals the Trinity.

In sum, the Descent into Hell is both inevitable and possible because God is Triune. By emphasizing Descent into Hell as the climax of the Son's economic mission, Balthasar and Von Speyr do not diminish the significance of the Cross in any way. Rather, they believe that it is crucial to take the Descent into Hell with utmost seriousness in order to grasp fully the meaning of the Cross, in other words, the cost of redemption. We can never appreciate the abyss of God's love without taking the Son's suffering in Hell seriously.

The Question concerning the Beatific Vision

By interpreting the Cross and the Descent into Hell as the abandonment of the Son by the Father and stressing Christ's suffering in solidarity with sinful humanity, Balthasar departs from the traditional teaching, though we still have to stress that his position is *not* a complete reversal of it. The difference between the two becomes most notable in his discussion of the beatific vision. Pitstick strongly objects to Balthasar's treatment of this subject, and her objection is directly related to her concern that his theology threatens the unity of the Trinity and also of the consciousness of Christ.⁵⁰ This concern is worth considering, and we have to examine if his position could stand this criticism.

Traditionally speaking, St Thomas Aquinas affirms (along with other scholastic authors) that even during his Passion and Descent into Hell Jesus did not cease to enjoy the beatific vision of the Father, though He underwent the greatest suffering of all human sufferings.⁵¹ St Thomas balances these two points by referring to the different levels or ranges of experiences in Christ's human soul. In other words, while "Christ suffered in all his lower powers," His "superior reason" did not suffer.⁵²

⁵⁰ Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 166-190. This concern is also shared by Gavin D'Costa. See "The Descent into Hell as a Solution for the Problem of the Fate of the Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar's Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers and Purgatory," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no.2 (2009): 146-171.

⁵¹ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, vol. 54, trans. Richard T.A. Murphy (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), III, q.46, a.6 and 8.

⁵² St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.46, a.7.

The higher part of his soul kept on enjoying the beatific vision, which was prevented only by His human will to suffer for humankind from flowing into the lower part, where He was in utmost agony.⁵³

Balthasar, however, refuses to accept this interpretation, mainly because he does not think it does full justice to the drama of redemption. Apparently, he wants to take with utmost seriousness the other notion of St Thomas', namely, the notion that Christ suffered the most of all human beings. In his words,

Any theology (including present-day echoes) which says that Christ on the Cross suffered only in the "lower" part of his soul, while the "peak of his [created] spirit" continued to enjoy the heavenly beatific vision, breaks the top off the drama of redemption. It does not see that the Son, as a whole takes on himself the situation of the sinful world that has turned away from God; indeed, by his absolute obedience he has "infiltrated" it and rendered it impotent. The Triune God is capable of more than pious theologians imagine.⁵⁴

On the other hand, John Paul II, for example, takes the position in the middle between St Thomas and Balthasar. Consider the following catechetical address on the cry of dereliction:

If Jesus felt abandoned by the Father, he knew however that that was not really so. He himself said, "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). Speaking of his future passion he said, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (Jn 16:32). Jesus had the clear vision of God and the certainty of his union with the Father dominant in his mind. But in the sphere bordering on the senses, and therefore more subject to the impressions, emotions and influences of the internal and external experiences of pain, Jesus' human soul was reduced to a wasteland. He no longer felt the presence of the Father, but he underwent the tragic experience of the most complete desolation.⁵⁵

Here John Paul II seems to go some way towards Balthasar's position without abandoning that of St Thomas'. It should also be noted that St Thomas understands the Father's 'abandonment' as the Father's non-protection of the Son from his enemies rather than the abandonment purposefully done.

Placing Balthasar in contrast to these two authors, John Saward criticizes him

⁵³ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.46, a.8.

⁵⁴ Balthasar, "Ist der Gekreuzigte selig?", *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 16 (1987), 108. The translation used here is the quotation from John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (Washington D.C.: the Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 56-57.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" General Audience on November 30, 1988.

for failing to distinguish between “the *feeling* of abandonment and its *reality*.”⁵⁶

Saward cautiously suggests,

It is at least arguable that the greatest possible spiritual suffering is not so much the Godforsakenness of One who hitherto has enjoyed the vision of the Father but rather the feeling of God’s absence in a soul that still, at some level, rests in his presence.⁵⁷

On the other hand, David Lauber opposes Saward’s criticism by arguing that Balthasar is fully aware of the significant distinction between Jesus’ feeling of abandonment and the objective relationship between the Father and the Son, which is unbroken love. He further says that it is rather Balthasar “who actually distinguishes between ‘feeling’ and ‘reality,’” while Saward, John Paul II and the Scholastics fail to affirm “the profound gap between Christ’s subjective experience and the reality of the unbroken relationship between the Father and the Son.”⁵⁸

Though these two scholars reach the seemingly opposing conclusions, they are actually referring to the same truth of the relationship between the Father and the Son. While Lauber is right to say that Balthasar is fully aware of the distinction between the subjective experience of Jesus and the objective reality of the Father and the Son, his criticism of Saward is misplaced. What Saward refers to here is the distinction between the feeling of abandonment *and its* reality, not the distinction between the feeling of abandonment *and the reality of the unbroken love* between the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, Saward’s criticism that Balthasar does not distinguish between the sentiment of abandonment and its reality is not necessarily fair. Rather, it is important that he does not make such distinction, because, after all, the abandonment too is a form of love, as Balthasar repeatedly says. In his words,

It is absolutely true that this “derelection” between Father and Son (made possible through their common Spirit) is a most extreme form of their mutual love and of God’s Triune love for the world.⁵⁹

We cannot stress too much that in Balthasar’s theology the abandonment of the Son by the Father is the most radical form of the mutual love between the two and that it is made possible exactly because of this unchanging love, though some critics of

⁵⁶ Saward, *The Mysteries of March*, 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁸ David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 73.

⁵⁹ Balthasar, “Ist der Gekreuzigte selig?”, 108. The translation used here is the quotation from Saward, *the Mysteries of March*, 57.

Balthasar including Pitstick seem to place a strong emphasis on the negative notion of abandonment. In the last analysis, as Aidan Nichols writes regarding this problem, though Balthasar denies the traditional teaching that the peak of Jesus' human soul continued to enjoy the beatific vision on the Cross and in Hell, it would "not amount to a complete reversal of the dogmatic intention of Aquinas's teaching to the contrary."⁶⁰ As Balthasar repeatedly says, after all, the abandonment of the Son by the Father is the ultimate form of their mutual love. Such abandonment itself is paradoxically made possible because of the eternal communion within the Trinity.

Since Balthasar himself does emphasize the unity of the Trinity, Pitstick's concern that Balthasar brings a rupture into the Trinity would not be so easily justified. Nevertheless, the way Balthasar puts together love and abandonment (and eventually joy and suffering) has been critiqued by other scholars too. It is actually one of the important questions concerning his theology that we deal with throughout this thesis, but let us discuss it below as far as it concerns his Trinitarian theology.

Evaluation: the Trinity and the Problem of Suffering

As we have seen so far, Balthasar's description of the Trinity is characterized by its dynamic liveliness and powerful vividness using such words as "distance," "difference," and "otherness." Partly because of the strong influence of von Speyr, whose visions are strongly characterized by the Trinitarian drama, Balthasar's Trinitarian theology too is quite dramatic. This characteristic can be one of its strengths. Rowan Williams, for example, affirms that Balthasar gives "at least three novel and immensely suggestive insights"⁶¹ to the schema involving the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the world. First of all, his Trinitarian theology defines the otherness between the Father and the Son in a new way, which leads to the second contribution, namely, his analogizing Trinitarian difference and sexual differentiation.⁶² The first and second contribution lead to the third one that

⁶⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide through Balthasar's Theology beyond the Trilogy* (Washington: the Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 183.

⁶¹ Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," 49.

⁶² We also have to clarify that Williams does *not* approve of Balthasar's view of sexual differentiation itself. Williams clearly states that "What makes his analysis tantalizing is a central unclarity about how far sexual differentiation really can be said to partake of the differentiation of the Trinitarian

Trinitarian difference is effectively made “the basis of all analogy, all identity in difference, so that there truly is a metaphysic, an account of reality as such, that emerges from doctrine.”⁶³ In other words, Balthasar’s notion of infinite distance and radical otherness within the Trinity opens a new way of understanding about us, human beings, in terms of the relationship with God.

However, unsurprisingly, some theologians pose a question exactly because of this strength. *How can he know all this? Is he not too vivid? In fact, does he have a right to be so vivid?* This is one of the central questions raised against Balthasar by one of his critics Karen Kilby. She says that the problem “lies not in what Balthasar says about how one should reflect on the Trinity but in how he in fact *does* it.”⁶⁴ According to Kilby, Balthasar contradicts himself about his own insistence on what she calls “epistemological humility” or “epistemic humility.” Kilby argues that even though he does make “gestures of epistemic humility” at some points, Balthasar taken as a whole, writes confidently and fluently like a “novelist who, with a particular vision of the climactic scene (the cross) as starting point, freely fills out background, adds character details, and constructs prior scenes.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, Kilby’s criticism of Balthasar is aimed at his alleged “presumption of a God’s eye view.”⁶⁶

This critique leads to another central issue she raises against Balthasar, which is directly related to the topic of this thesis, namely, how Balthasar’s theology could deepen our understanding of Christian suffering. As we have seen, in Balthasar’s theology distance can paradoxically reveal closeness and abandonment can reveal love.⁶⁷ As we repeatedly mention, even Hell can be located within the Trinity. However, this kind of integration is exactly what Kilby finds problematic.

persons, a differentiation in which there is no unilateral and fixed pattern of priority or derivation but a simultaneous, reciprocal conditioning, a pattern of identity *in* the other without remainder.” (Williams, “Afterword: Making Differences,” in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, ed. Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, and Graham Ward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 177.) We will discuss Balthasar’s view of sexual differentiation in Chapter 5 as far as it is related to his Mariology.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁴ Karen Kilby, “Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 214. Also for Kilby’s more extensive examination of Balthasar’s Trinitarian theology, see Kilby, *Balthasar: a (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 94-122.

⁶⁵ Kilby, “Balthasar on the Trinity,” 218. Also see *Balthasar a (Very) Critical Introduction*, 114.

⁶⁶ Kilby, *Balthasar a (Very) Critical Introduction*, 161-167.

⁶⁷ This is also true of von Speyr’s theology. See Chapter 1.

Though she is well aware that Balthasar does not attribute suffering directly to the Trinity, she still accuses Balthasar of “fundamentally blurring the distinction between love and loss, joy and suffering.”⁶⁸ (Interestingly, this accusation sounds similar to Balthasar’s criticism of Moltmann.) Kilby argues that because of *this tendency* in Balthasar’s theology suffering and loss are ultimately given “a positive valuation” and “eternalized,” which could eventually threaten Christianity being “good news.”⁶⁹

It would be helpful here to note that Kilby’s critique sounds very similar to Johann Baptist Metz’ criticism of the so-called “Suffering God.” He critically discusses the overall tendency of the 20th century theology, which (according to his summary) tries to see the Trinitarian motifs to offer an interpretation of the human history of suffering. He says,

Does it not indeed belong to the “specifically Christian” concern with the theodicy-question to see suffering “raised up” into God’s self? Do the theologians not discuss with great seriousness—from Barth to Jüngel, from Bonhoeffer to Moltmann, and in the realm of Catholic theology most of all in Hans Urs von Balthasar—the suffering God, suffering between God and God and suffering in God? Certainly they do.⁷⁰

While admitting that he listens respectfully to such discussions of divine suffering, Metz himself is hesitant and critical of it. One of the reasons he raises is that the talk of a suffering God actually seems to underestimate the negativity of suffering. In his words,

How is it that the talk of the suffering God is not in the end merely a *sublime redoubling* of human suffering and of human powerlessness? How is it that the talk of suffering in God, especially of suffering between God and God, does not lead to *an eternalisation* of suffering? Do not God and humanity here fall under the quasi-mythical *universalisation* of suffering, which finally also breaks the upswing of opposition to injustice?... I have asked

⁶⁸ Kilby, “Balthasar on the Trinity,” 220. Also see *Balthasar a (Very) Critical Introduction*, 120.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, “Suffering from God: Theology as Theodicy,” *Pacifica* 5, no. 3 (1992): 286. Interestingly, despite his critique against Balthasar on this point, Metz also argues for the importance of ‘Holy Saturday Christology’ apparently under Balthasar’s influence. Metz writes, “If I can put it this way, in Christology we have lost the way between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We have too much Easter Sunday Christology. I feel that the atmosphere of Holy Saturday has to be narrated within Christology itself. For a long time now not everybody has experienced Easter Sunday as the third day after Good Friday.” (Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Bochert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak out on the Holocaust*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 45.) For a substantial comparison and contrast between Balthasar and Metz as two different styles of apocalyptic theology, see Cyril O’Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: von Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity volume 1. Hegel* (Chestnut Ridge: the Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014), 424-466.

myself again and again whether or not in this talk of a suffering God there may operate a secret *aestheticisation* of suffering. But suffering, which causes us to cry out or finally to be pitifully silent is never something lofty, it is nothing great or exalted. In its roots it is completely different from a strong, compassionate solidarity. It is not even a sign of love, but far more frighteningly a symptom of not being able to love any more.⁷¹

These words warn us not to make sense of the negativity of human suffering too hastily in the name of God and love. Kilby too seems to share a similar sensitivity concerning the matter. In the context of criticizing Moltmann, she comments that “the insistence that God suffers, especially when presented as something new and important, is in danger of being a cheap move.”⁷² In short, Metz and Kilby argue that blurring the distinction between suffering and joy (or love) leads to the failure to maintain the perfect divinity of God and to the failure to take the negativity of human suffering seriously. Their moral concerns are obvious, so worth considering in depth.

Probably Moltmann can be more easily accused of blurring the distinction between suffering and love than Balthasar, as he unabashedly attributes suffering directly to God and blurs the economic and immanent Trinity. As we discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Balthasar himself is critical of Moltmann on this point. However, we have to pause before we use the same kind of criticism that Balthasar makes of Moltmann against Balthasar himself. While Metz’ critique might be merely due to his misreading of Balthasar (as can be seen in the somewhat violent way he lumps together Balthasar and Moltmann), Kilby seems to be well aware of their difference. Nevertheless, referring to the extremely nuanced passage from *Theo-drama* where Balthasar says “*there is something in God that can develop into suffering*,”⁷³ she affirms that he does speak about something in the Trinity which can develop into suffering, of a ‘supra-suffering,’ and that he tries to “root the Cross firmly in the immanent Trinity.”⁷⁴ Here Kilby seems to be saying that Balthasar is actually even more guilty of blurring the distinction between suffering and bliss than Moltmann. The problem probably lies in how to interpret the sentence, “*There is something in God that can develop into suffering*,” or more specifically, whether or

⁷¹ Metz, “Suffering from God: Theology as Theodicy,” 286. Italics added. Also, see Metz, “Suffering Unto God,” trans. J. Matthew Ashley, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994): 611–622; *Hope against Hope*.

⁷² Kilby, “Evil and the Limits of Theology,” *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 983 (January 2003): 21.

⁷³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV*, 328. Italics added.

⁷⁴ Kilby, *A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 120-121.

not we appreciate the very careful way Balthasar puts it. If we read this statement more or less as an affirmation of suffering in God, even though remotely, then we may end up criticizing Balthasar on this point as Kilby and Metz do.

What does Balthasar's careful and nuanced position about suffering and love have to do with the issue of suffering? Regarding this topic, Kilby states that Christian theology ought *neither* to construct theodicies, *nor* ignore the kinds of problem theodicies try to address.⁷⁵ In the last analysis, this thesis entirely shares this position of Kilby's regarding systematized theodicy, and we believe Balthasar's own position about theodicy is not so different from Kilby's.

In terms of recent efforts to examine Balthasar's theology, especially his thoughts on the Trinity, as an answer to the problem of suffering, we should briefly mention Jacob Friesenhahn. He presents Balthasar's Trinitarian theology as an answer to the problem of evil. His argument is that since God manifests His utmost solidarity with sinful humanity through His own suffering on the Cross and in the Descent into Hell, the suffering of the whole humanity can be transformed and taken up into the life of perfect love that is the Trinity, so there is hope for those who suffer. He concludes by saying, "All human suffering and death, conformed by God's grace to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, has ultimate meaning as grounded in the Triune God through the Incarnate Son."⁷⁶ However, if this conclusion is the whole answer to the problem of suffering we gain by studying Balthasar's Trinitarian theology, perhaps we cannot help feeling a little disappointed. Even though he is perfectly aware that Balthasar does not affirm divine suffering and that Balthasar seeks to occupy the middle ground between the impassibility and passibility of God, Friesenhahn's conclusion rather ends up indirectly supporting Kilby's criticism, because in the end it would not be too different from what she calls the "cheap move."

It is true that Balthasar repeatedly stresses that Christ's suffering on the Cross and in Hell has been the greatest of all sufferings (as can be seen in his discussion of the beatific vision, for example). He states that the Cross is a greater

⁷⁵ Kilby, "Evil and the Limits of Theology," 13.

⁷⁶ Jacob H. Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy: the Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 173-174.

tragedy than Auschwitz.⁷⁷ He even writes, “Jesus Christ is the heir of all the tragedy of the world, that of the Greeks as well as that of the Jews, that of the so-called unbelievers as well as that of the so-called believers.”⁷⁸ However, we should neither hastily conclude that Balthasar simply ‘explains away’ human sufferings by including them in Christ’s suffering nor easily ‘explain away’ Balthasar’s answer to the problem of suffering as such. Although his sensitivity toward human suffering is revealed in most of his writings, he does not propose a clear-cut ‘answer’ to the problem of suffering, although he apparently thinks that the idea that Christ suffered the greatest suffering out of divine love certainly could entail hope for those who suffer. Rather, it should be noted that he actually refuses to give such an ‘answer.’ To do so would lead to the failure to take the Cross and the Descent into Hell with utmost seriousness as well as human suffering. Metz suggests that the right attitude towards human suffering could be “passionate re-questioning that arises out of suffering, a re-questioning of God, full of highly charged expectation” (and Kilby’s statement seems to be in agreement with this attitude).⁷⁹ One should never settle down for a consoling answer to explain the negativity of suffering, but rather should keep on asking, “why, God, why?” without turning away from Him. At least we can say that Balthasar’s complex theology seems to respect this point, because, in his theology, we can find the possibility of giving hope for those who suffer while carefully refusing to explain away human suffering even in the name of God’s love.

Consider the word “abyss (*Abgrund*)” he often uses. After all, both God’s love and human suffering are all described as an “abyss,” which defies human comprehension and imagination. He speaks about “the abyss of absolute love which embraces all abysses.”⁸⁰ He says “every pain can, as such, without being denied its quality as pain, participate in the blessedness of the triune love.”⁸¹ However, before we can participate in such eternal bliss, the abyss of divine love already will have put

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. David Kipp (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 97.

⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 400. We will discuss this particular statement in detail when we examine Balthasar’s theological engagement with tragedy in Chapter 6.

⁷⁹ Metz, “Suffering unto God,” 621.

⁸⁰ Balthasar, “Trinity and Future,” 52.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

to shame “our all too easy talk of the incomprehensibility of God.”⁸² Shown here is another significance of the Descent into Hell. There is no word to describe the depth of God’s love. Even God sank into ‘silence’ of Hell in order to reveal His boundless love. His love is revealed by “a deed which sinks down into total darkness,” no longer even a ‘word.’⁸³ Balthasar seems to be well aware that an easy, clear-cut explanation about suffering does not justice to the abyss of human suffering or to the even greater abyss of divine love.

All these points are related to the very topic of this entire thesis. For the time being, let it suffice to say that in the end we will attempt to deal with the question by connecting the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday and the in-betweenness of Christian existence, which is located between suffering and victory. What we would like to do in the end is to reflect on the meaning of suffering in Christian life by emphasizing the fundamentally ‘in-between’ state of the Christian represented by Christ Himself in Hell on Holy Saturday, and thus attempt to affirm the victory that is hidden but already present without explaining away the concrete reality of suffering.

For this purpose, we have focused on the Trinitarian framework of Christ’s Descent into Hell in this chapter. Because God is Triune, in other words, completely self-giving love, the Son can descend into Hell, which is everything anti-divine, for the sake of sinful humanity. We have also examined the concern about whether Balthasar brings a rupture into the unity of the Trinity, which is most explicitly shown in the problem concerning the beatific vision. We have stressed that for Balthasar separation or abandonment is a paradoxical form of love and unity. In relation to this point, we have further discussed the critique that he blurs the distinction between love and suffering and eventually ends up divinizing and elevating the negativity of suffering. Concerning these points, we have attempted to argue that Balthasar takes a subtle and nuanced approach to divine and human suffering so he could escape the critique. (After all, we have to note that even Kilby only accuses of *the tendency* of his theology.)

In order to investigate Balthasar’s interpretation of Christ’s Descent into Hell fully, we also have to examine the Christological significance and the concept

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

of Hell on the basis of the Trinitarian framework we have seen. As the Trinity and Christology are closely interlinked, let us turn to his Christology in the next chapter.

Chapter 3.

The Significance: the Centre of Kenotic Christology

Introduction

In Chapter 2, we saw Balthasar's thoughts on the Trinity and how Christ's Descent into Hell is both possible and inevitable within his Trinitarian framework. Also, we briefly discussed the implications his Trinitarian theology may have for the problem of suffering. In this chapter, we will examine his Christology, which is deeply grounded in the Trinity.

The task of summarizing Balthasar's Christology is intimidating, not only because it is spread throughout his vast theological corpus, but also he himself does not express it in an explicitly overt way. There are many approaches possible, depending on the specific interests and issues his readers want to address by referring to his Christology.¹ Now, the main interest of this thesis centre around Christ's Descent into Hell and the meaning of suffering in discipleship. Therefore, we can limit the aim of this chapter to presenting the Descent into Hell as a Christological

¹ For example, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame, Ind.; London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24-36; Edward T. Oakes, "'He Descended into Hell': the Depth of God's Self-Emptying Love on Holy Saturday in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 218-245; Oakes, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 362-372; Donald MacKinnon, "Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar's Christology with Special Reference to Theodramatik II/2 and III," in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Kenneth Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 164-174; Guido Vergauwen, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: Two Christological models which constructively accept modernity," in *Jesus Christ Today: Studies of Christology in Various Contexts. Proceedings of the Académie Internationale Des Sciences Religieuses, Oxford 25-29 August 2007*, ed. Stuart G. Hall (*Theologische Bibliothek Tapelmann*), (New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 2009), 209-234; Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 131-194; Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995); Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Kevin Tortorelli, *Christology with Lonergan and Balthasar* (Ely: Melrose Books, 2005), 74-120.

event, or rather, showing the Descent into Hell as the very centre of his Christology.² For this purpose, we will focus on the following principal themes: form, kenosis, mission, and obedience.

Specifically, we will start by briefly examining Jesus Christ as Form of God (*Gestalt Gottes*) as well as the entire ‘form’ or ‘style’ of Balthasar’s theology. Next, we will discuss the actual ‘content’ of the Form of God. We characterize the main characteristic of his Christology as kenosis after the Trinity, so we will focus on the two concepts most relevant to kenosis, namely, mission and obedience (also the central concepts for Christian discipleship). After examining these concepts which are relevant for the Descent into Hell, we present this event as the centre of his kenotic Christology. In Hell, where the economic mission of the Son reaches the last destination, in other words, where no further obedience is possible, the divine love is revealed in the supreme form. Paradoxically, the beauty or glory of God is revealed most in the passive, obedient, disfigured Form of Christ in Hell.

The section titles of Chapter 3 are as follows: 1) Jesus Christ as Form of God—Balthasar’s style as a whole, 2) kenosis, again— the essence of Balthasar’s Christology grounded in the Trinity, 3) mission, 4) the Son’s obedience—the economic expression of the eternal love within the immanent Trinity, 4) the Descent into Hell as the centre of kenotic Christology, 5) evaluation: the importance of ‘analogy’ in Balthasar’s theology.

Jesus Christ as Form of God—Balthasar’s Style as a Whole

First of all, Balthasar sees Jesus Christ as “Form (*Gestalt*).”³ He is the Form through which the transcendent glory of God’s Triune love shines, and He is the

² From this perspective, Aidan Nichols’ very concise summary of Balthasar’s Christology and the Descent into Hell is very helpful. See “Introduction,” in Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 1-10.

³ Regarding Jesus Christ as ‘Form (*Gestalt*)’, see Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 42-58; Vergauwen, “Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar”; Oliver Davies, “The Theological Aesthetics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131-142; Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 12-48; Scola, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar: A Theological Style*; Noel O’Donoghue, “A Theology of Beauty,” in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Kenneth Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1-10.

Form which shapes all finite, created forms. The concept of form not only is essential for Balthasar's theological aesthetics but also is related to the 'form' or 'style' of his entire theology itself (including his Christology). As Guido Vergauwen points out, the overall characteristic of Balthasar's theology can be described as "the superiority of Form over critique."⁴ However, this emphasis on form, which is supposed to speak for itself and work as its own standard, is apparently one of the central points that has invited critiques.⁵

In the first part of his trilogy, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, the first volume of which is significantly subtitled "Seeing the Form," Balthasar proposes that we look at the whole Christian theology in the light of 'beauty,' which is the transcendental forgotten in the modern world in the shadows of the other two: 'truth' and 'goodness.' There are two dimensions in his conception of beauty (which we might be able to call 'horizontal' and 'vertical' respectively⁶): form and splendour. For example, he writes,

Those words which attempt to convey the beautiful gravitate, first of all, toward the mystery of form (*Gestalt*) or of figure (*Gebilde*). *Formosus* ('beautiful') comes from *forma* ('shape') and *speciosus* ('comely') from *species* ('likeness'). But this is to raise the question of the 'great radiance from within' which transforms *species* into *speciosa*: the question of *splendor*. We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing.⁷

What he means is that when we encounter something beautiful we are confronted not only with the form but also with the splendor, in other words, the 'content,' which shines forth from it. We should also note that for Balthasar this splendour, or this 'content (*Gehalt*),' does not lie outside the form but within it. In other words, the form is not understood as a frame separated from its content, splendour, but as its very appearance. The form and the splendour within it produce beauty together. In his words,

⁴ Vergauwen, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar," 225. He also mentions Balthasar's colleague Cornelia Capol's remark regarding this point: "What he could not stand is want of Form."

⁵ As we saw in Chapter 2, Kilby accuses him of having the tendency to assume an over-reaching "God's eye view."

⁶ See Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 18.

⁷ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 19-20.

Species and *lumen* in beauty are one... 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.⁸

Further, the language of ‘depth’ which he uses to describe this splendour within the form is also important, because it is ultimately the ‘depth of being,’ in other words, the splendour or glory of being, that is considered as shining from the form. In his own words,

The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence of the depths, of the whole of reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths... We ‘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.⁹

When we apply these ideas theologically, beauty corresponds to God’s glory, which is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. For Balthasar, Jesus Christ is the Form of God, through whom the mysterious splendour of God’s being, which is the transcendent Triune love itself, radiates. Further, not only Christ Himself is regarded as a form, but also all Christians, who would be otherwise ‘formless,’ are considered as shaped into a form by Christ. As Balthasar declares, “Christian form is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm.”¹⁰

All this may be best described as Balthasar’s ‘basic intuition’ (as Aidan Nichols does¹¹), considering the way he proposes it. In short, the way he presents these ideas seems to defy reasoning or even leave no room for criticism from the beginning. For example, consider the following passage: “Whoever is not capable of seeing and ‘reading’ the form will, by the same token, fail to perceive the content. Whoever is not illuminated by the form will see no light in the content either.”¹² This kind of attitude is exactly one of his characteristics that has invited critical responses. For example, his critic Karen Kilby cautiously points out that there are some dangers in such a way of thinking. In her words,

Quite often what one meets in Balthasar’s texts is not so much a sense of the progressive and never wholly successful struggle to perceive something that

⁸ Ibid., 151.

⁹ Ibid., 118-119.

¹⁰ Ibid., 28. Also, Balthasar discusses this topic in “The Christian Form,” in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 41-64.

¹¹ Nichols, “Introduction,” in *Mysterium Paschale*, 5.

¹² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord I*, 151.

is too much for us, but of the rather simpler all-or-nothing logic surrounding the notion of seeing, and around the question of who can and who cannot 'perceive' the form.¹³

Admittedly, the kind of 'all-or-nothing' attitude, in which he seems to draw a clear discriminating line between 'those who understand' and 'those who do not,' can be often found in his writings. For example, he writes as follows in *Man in History: a Theological Study*:

Jesus Christ is the Word. He is the word and language as such, the word and the speech of God in the word and speech of men. As mortal man he is the speech of the immortal God. The form of his word carries its own conviction, just as much as, and even more than, the words of a great poet are their own witness. The words of a great poet cannot be affected by philological criticism: they are what they are, and achieve what they intend, unconcerned by the praise or blame of philologists. Praise and blame will pass away, but the words of Shakespeare will not pass away. Equally, and even more so, is the word of God exalted above all positive or negative, analytical or systematic exegesis. It tolerates these activities, but they will pass away whereas the word will remain.¹⁴

This passage (which Vergauwen actually cites as an example of "the superiority of Form over critique"¹⁵) reveals several key characteristics found in Balthasar's entire theology: his emphasis on Form, which "carries its own conviction" and will remain while its "praise and blame will pass away"; his disapproval of the 'modern' biblical studies, which has the tendency to ignore the unity of the Bible as a whole and tears it into fragments; his love of art and unabashed usage of works of art (e.g. Shakespeare and Goethe) as models for theological arguments. Especially, his reference to works of art, or more accurately, reference to appreciation of works of art is important, as the central image underlying Balthasar's theological aesthetics (and consequently his entire theology) is a person looking at a great work of art, entranced by its beauty. In a similar way, we are to face the glory of God in Jesus Christ, captivated by its power, (even though the analogy is not complete, as he says "the image of Christ cannot be fully 'taken in' as can a painting; its dimensions are objectively infinite, and no finite spirit can traverse them"¹⁶). Hence, his theological

¹³ Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) Critical Introduction*, 55.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *Man in History: A Theological Study*, trans. W. G. Doepel (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 239.

¹⁵ Vergauwen, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar," 225.

¹⁶ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord I*, 512.

aesthetics is ultimately to do with what he thinks is faith in God, so his aesthetic approach is the key for understanding his entire theology.

Now we have to stop to consider what Balthasar aims to do by bringing the concept of beauty into Christian theology. He is more often than not described as ‘anti-modern’ and his emphasis on beauty, which is the transcendental forgotten in the ‘modern’ world, is one clear sign of his strong resistance against modernity. For example, at the beginning of “Seeing the Form,” he writes, “We can be sure that whoever sneers at her[beauty’s] name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not—can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.”¹⁷ In particular, Balthasar has self-consciously resisted rationalistic neo-scholasticism, which dominated the Roman Catholic philosophy and theology in his days.¹⁸ We have to bear this fact in mind when we consider the overall style of his theology, including his emphasis on beauty and form, which is supposed to be ‘given’ to us rather than reached through carefully constructed rational arguments. Further, we have to note that by taking such an aesthetic approach, he is considered as overcoming the so-called divide between theology and spirituality, which is another often-lamented tendency in the modernity.¹⁹

As we noted in Introduction, it is extremely important to pay respect to the genre in which Balthasar is working and be conscious of his overall style. Because some of the critiques raised against him seem to be caused by the genre difference, or more specifically, the different notions of the nature of faith itself. For Balthasar, the nature of faith is basically contemplative. The notion of contemplation is also closely related to the image of a spectator standing in front of a painting, capturing it as a whole, entranced by its form and beauty. Moreover, even the nature of his entire theology can be described as contemplative, just as his mentor Henri de Lubac characterizes his spirituality with “Holy Saturday of contemplation” in contrast to

¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹⁸ Kilby, *Balthasar: a (very) Critical Introduction*, 11, 16-23, 49, 74-75. We mentioned this ‘genre’ difference in the Introduction. Also for a discussion of how Balthasar has countered Neo-Scholasticism by his emphasis on aesthetical experience, which is considered as “a gateway to an agapic theology,” see Francesca Aran Murphy, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: Beauty as a Gateway to Love,” in *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar*, ed. Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 6-10.

¹⁹ For example, Mark A. McIntosh appreciates Balthasar’s Christology from this perspective. See McIntosh, *Christology from Within*; “Christology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Balthasar*.

G.W. F. Hegel's "speculative Good Friday."²⁰ (The notion of contemplation is relevant to the topic of this thesis in another sense, for, as we will see below, Balthasar describes Jesus, the Form of God Himself, as contemplatively seeing the mass of 'formless' sin-in-itself in Hell ("a *visio mortis*").

On the one hand, all this allows for profound depths in his theology. Faith regarded as contemplative seeing could take us to where mere words or rational arguments fail to describe. It is significant in many ways that Balthasar's theology centers around Holy Saturday, that is, the day for which no human witness can tell what actually happened. It is only by faith that we can speak about it as the day the Word of God was silent in the formless chaos of Hell. When we contemplate Jesus Christ, the Form of God, through whom the Triune God's unconditional love for the world shines in the deepest abyss of Hell, we cannot help being awed by His sheer glory or beauty and at the same time we are reminded of what formless, in other words, 'ugly,' sinners we are.

On the other hand, we have to pause to think whether this strength in his theology can also be the exact point for inviting criticisms. For example, Vergauwen writes as follows,

In this superiority to the critique which Balthasar rejects, is to be seen the basic movement of modern subjectivity...Balthasar is in fact totally anti-modern by the methods of modernity itself: he will not let the world in which he lives destroy itself for the worthless prize of the triumphant rational critique.²¹

By taking an 'anti-modern' attitude toward the sometimes destructive power of critical reason, which is exactly reflected in his prioritizing Form over rational critique, the kind of theology Balthasar presents is what he himself calls "kneeling theology," which is a kind of mediation between faith and revelation. Believers are required to contemplate *obediently* the Glory of God, which is revealed in Jesus Christ, whose 'life stories' constitute a perfect unity in Scripture, rather than rationally analyze the form or beauty of such glory by deconstructing it into fragments. In other words, the last thing Balthasar aims to do himself is to presumptuously assume what Kilby calls

²⁰ Henri de Lubac, "A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 284-285.

²¹ Vergauwen, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar," 225-226.

“God’s eye view,” so it is rather ironical that his very ‘form’ or ‘style’ invites such a criticism. Even though he himself emphasizes obedience or prayer, critics like Kilby say that his voice does not sound like the one of someone obedient or praying. As we will discuss in Part II, despite his apparent interest in human suffering, the way he treats human suffering and tragedy is often criticized as being “oppressive” or “overarching.” We will deal with these criticisms in more depth in the later chapters. For the time being, it suffices to note that there is such a tendency in the overall style of his theology (including his Christology).

Having seen the overall ‘form’ of Balthasar’s Christology, now let us proceed to examine its actual ‘content.’

Kenosis, Again—the essence of Balthasar’s Christology grounded in the Trinity

The ‘content’ which radiates from the Form of Christ is the kenotic love of the Triune God (though the idea of a ‘kenotic’ content sounds paradoxical). In the previous chapter, we saw that Balthasar’s understanding of the Trinity is most strongly characterized by the concept of kenosis. This is also true of his Christology, which is anchored in the Trinity.²² His theology pursues to the fullest what is stated in this pre-Pauline kenosis hymn:

Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the *form of God*,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but *emptied himself*, taking the *form of a slave*,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in *human form*,
he humbled himself and became *obedient to the point of death*
—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).²³

In this hymn, the Incarnation is described as self-emptying of God into a human form. What Balthasar’s insight adds to it is that this kenosis of the Incarnation is made possible by the kenosis within the immanent Trinity itself.²⁴ In his own words, “The ultimate presupposition of the Kenosis is the ‘selflessness’ of the Persons

²² Regarding Balthasar’s treatment of kenosis, see Edward T. Oakes, “‘He Descended into Hell’”; Graham Ward, “Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection,” in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, ed. Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, and Graham Ward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 15-68.

²³ Italics added.

²⁴ Under the influence of Sergei Bulgakov as he admits. See Chapter 2.

(when considered as pure relationships) in the inner-Trinitarian life of love.”²⁵

However, we have to note that Balthasar applies the kenosis to the immanent Trinity only *analogically*. While the kenosis of the Incarnation is the assumption of human nature by the Son, the Trinitarian kenosis refers to the giving and receiving among the divine Persons within the immanent Trinity. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Balthasar stresses “the Trinitarian ‘recklessness’ of divine love, which, in its self-giving, observed no limits and had no regard for itself.”²⁶ We have to bear it in mind that what Balthasar wants to stress by speaking of the kenosis within the Trinity is that God is absolute love, first and foremost, rather than absolute power.²⁷

Also, the concept of kenosis enables Balthasar to argue that “the Incarnation is ordered to the Cross as its goal,”²⁸ as the Incarnation as described as a kenosis “takes on the quality of the Passion from the very beginning.”²⁹ In the last analysis, the economic kenosis started in the Incarnation, which is grounded in kenosis within the immanent Trinity, reaches its climax on the Cross followed by the Descent into Hell. Balthasar links the Jesus’ literal “obedience of a corpse”³⁰ in Hell to the Son’s absolute response or thanksgiving to the Father’s eternal generation. We always have to remember that Balthasar grounds the economic missions within the processions in the immanent Trinity. It is also important that he does not say that the Son’s obedience in the economic mission *is identical with* the Son’s absolute response to the Father within the immanent Trinity. As we saw in the previous chapter, Balthasar’s nuanced and subtle treatment of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity must always be kept in mind. The immanent relationship between the Father and the Son united in the Holy Spirit grounds the Son’s economic

²⁵ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 35.

²⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 329. Also, regarding the kenosis within the Trinity as well as the kenosis of creation, see Chapter 2.

²⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 28. Some might ask *why* true love has to be self-emptying at all. See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 214-215. It might be relevant to refer to what Jesus Himself says about the greatest form of love: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13).

²⁸ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 22.

²⁹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 12. Regarding the concept of kenosis, which connects the Incarnation and the Cross, especially see 12-36.

³⁰ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 174.

mission in the world. Since the immanent relationship can be characterized by its inter-personal kenotic love, the Son's mission in the world is also kenotic.

Working as a mediator between the Father and the world, everything the Son does is directed towards both the Father and humankind. By obeying the Father out of love, the Son loves and saves humankind out of love. There can be no conflict between the Son's love for the Father and love for the world, because the Father loves the world as Creator in the first place. The Father and the Son, united in the Holy Spirit, share the one and same will to save humankind. In order to complete the salvific work, the Son must experience the consequences of humankind's rejection of God's love, which is the extremity of creation's freedom, namely Hell.

This is a rough sketch of Christ's Descent into Hell as a Christological event which is strongly characterized by kenosis. In order to examine further how this event should be regarded as the centre of Balthasar's kenotic Christology, we will see the two other significant concepts he relates to kenosis: mission and obedience.

Mission

In the third volume of *Theo-drama*, Balthasar begins his Trinitarian theology by reflecting on the person of Jesus Christ, and he places His consciousness of *mission* at the very centre of His existence. Balthasar identifies Jesus Christ with His mission. In other words, he claims that He *is* His mission itself. This statement underlies Balthasar's Christology, and by using the concept of mission Balthasar smoothly links Christology and the Trinity. To put it more specifically, by using the concept of mission, Balthasar smoothly integrates the economic and immanent Trinity, or Christology and the Trinity, or even anthropology and Christology.

Balthasar develops the concept of mission (the 'sending' and 'coming' of the Son) on the basis of the New Testament, throughout which Jesus is portrayed as the eternal Son sent into the world by the Father. It is the Gospel of John which speaks the most frequently of the mission of the Son, so Balthasar's position is strongly Johannine in a sense, but nevertheless the idea is supported by the Synoptic Gospels and the

Pauline letters as well.³¹ As Balthasar says, “The Johannine *missio* Christology is only the logical development of implications already present in the Synoptics, which testify to a unique sense of mission on the part of Jesus.”³²

What Balthasar means by Jesus’ ‘mission-consciousness’ will be clarified when we compare it with the case of other human beings. The question regarding the nature of the being of Jesus Christ is related to that of the being of human beings in general. He analyzes the concept of ‘person’ by pointing out that human beings “share in a specific nature that is identical in all individuals, but they do so in a way that, in each instance, is unique and incommunicable.”³³ In other words, we are all like each other since we are all human beings, but we are all different from each other because each of us is a different individual. The latter point is related to an essential question: *who* are we? Each of us can easily give a list of characteristics which set us apart from others, such as physical characteristics, family, language, and race, but such information is merely “an accumulation of chance details.”³⁴ Such a collection of superficial characteristics does not really show who we really are. Balthasar goes further to say that even in our interpersonal relationships the question of *who* we really are remains unanswered. In other words, none of us can really tell each other *who* we really are. Even those who love us the most can only tell us what we mean to them, in other words, *who* we are *for them*. Ultimately, Balthasar says, only God can show *who* we really are. He writes,

It [the guarantee of *who* we are] can only be given by the absolute Subject, God. It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence—that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorized mission—that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a “person.”³⁵

Thus, according to Balthasar, being a ‘person’ is equal to being given a mission by God. This connection between person and mission can also be applied to the existence

³¹ For example, the verses in the NT Balthasar refers to are as follows: Mark 1:38, Matthew 10:40, Luke 4:43, 9:48, John 5:43, 8:42, 13:16, 16:28, Galatians 4:4, Romans 8:3-4. See Balthasar, *Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory III: the Dramatis Personae: the Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 150-154.

³² *Ibid.*, 154.

³³ *Ibid.*, 204. This is also true of other living things at least from the higher animals upward, according to Balthasar.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

of Jesus, but there is a fundamental difference between Him and other human beings. We human beings may have a mission, but we have to go through a process in order to accept it. We can never be completely identified with our mission, while Jesus is fully His mission itself at all times. In Balthasar's own words, "We only receive our mission on the basis of our coming to faith, whereas Jesus always has and *is* his mission."³⁶

By placing Jesus' mission-consciousness at the center of His self-consciousness, Balthasar smoothly integrates the immanent Trinity into Jesus' human life on earth, since His mission and person are identified as the Son eternally proceeding from the Father. As Balthasar points out, the concept of mission has two elements.³⁷ One is the relationship to the One who sent (the Father), and the other is the temporal and developmental aspect of a mission which must be implemented by the human energies of Jesus. For example, the latter point is related to the temptations (not only the temptation by Satan in the desert but also the temptation on the Mount of Olives as well others which may have happened) and prayers of Jesus. Why does the Son of God have to go through temptations? The Son of God is plunged into this world, which offers him other possible ways to carry out his mission, but He rejects them all. Jesus sees the Father's presence behind His mission, but it is not the Father but the mission itself that coincides with the freedom of Jesus as the Son. Citing from Matthew 26:53-54 ("Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"), Balthasar writes, "It is as if the mission's central position indicates the 'economic' revelation of a decision freely made in concert by the whole Trinity."³⁸ Why does the Son of God have to pray? The One who is sent must pray to the One who sends, because the mission is not open to the former in its entirety. The Son has to carry it out step by step by following the Father's instructions and it is in the Holy Spirit that he does so.

The divine consciousness and the human consciousness coincide in Jesus Christ in His entire awareness of His mission given by the Father. By placing His mission-consciousness at the center of His self-consciousness, we can solve the

³⁶ Ibid., 171.

³⁷ Ibid., 168.

³⁸ Ibid.

question of the relation between His human consciousness and divine consciousness. As we completely identify the person of Jesus with His mission, we can avoid turning Jesus into a docetic super-historical being or a mythical chimera of two distinctive natures. As Balthasar says,

The task given him by the Father, that is, that of expressing God's Fatherhood through his entire being, through his life and death in and for the world, totally occupies his self-consciousness and fills it to the very brim. He sees himself so totally as 'coming from the Father' to men, as 'making known' the Father, as the 'Word from the Father,' that there is neither room nor time for any detached reflection of the 'Who am I?' kind.³⁹

Jesus' human consciousness is entirely aware of His divine self in relation to the Father. His mission, which is "to reconcile the whole world with God,"⁴⁰ is universal and has no temporal beginning. Such a mission is beyond any human capacity and "cannot be a secondary and accidental development of a human consciousness."⁴¹ On the other hand, we should also remember that it is *only within the limits* of His mission that Jesus' divine consciousness and human consciousness coincide. This limitation enables us to see that Jesus' awareness of His filial relationship with the Father is not any innate theoretical knowledge but something progressively discovered in practice.

This point brings us to the question of Jesus' self-knowledge, but before we discuss the topic further, let us refer to the role of the Holy Spirit.⁴² Balthasar's theory

³⁹ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Also Balthasar refers to the importance of Mariology here, which is worth noting (see *Theo-drama* III, 175-177). If Jesus does not acquire knowledge of His mission all at once, it makes sense that the child Jesus depended on Mary for the initial awakening of His self-consciousness as well as His mission-consciousness. This is because human children need a special 'I' to awaken the unique 'thou' of themselves. Jesus Himself commends the spirit of childhood: "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). These words of Jesus' make more sense if He Himself possesses the very spirit He commends. Also, Mary's handing-on of the religious tradition which looks to the fulfillment of Israel's hope was significant to awaken the mission-consciousness latent in the child Jesus. In Balthasar's words, "Without this spiritual handing-on, which takes place simultaneously with the bodily gift of mother's milk and motherly care, God's Word would not have really become flesh. For being in-the-flesh always means receiving from others. Even if the One who receives the word of tradition is himself "the Word from the beginning," from whom all genuine tradition takes its origin, he must accept this earth-grown "wisdom" as a form—in the terms of the world—of his Father's will and providence." (Ibid., 177.) Therefore, Mary plays an important role in connecting the Incarnate Word of God, who brings the promised fulfillment, in other words, 'the New Covenant,' with the tradition before Him, in other words, 'the Old Covenant.' Thus, Mariology is actually a significant component of Christology.

of “Trinitarian inversion”⁴³ is worth noting here. His mission Christology allows us to pay great attention to the role of the Spirit. This theory of “Trinitarian inversion” is important not only because it emphasizes that the Son of God really took on human nature but also it is related to one of the central concepts in Balthasar’s theology, namely, the obedience of the Incarnate Son to the Father. In the eternal Trinitarian life, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. However, throughout the Son’s life on earth, a certain ‘inversion’ of the divine processions occurs, and the Spirit works as a guide *in* the Son as well as a ‘rule’ *over* Him. For example, Balthasar starts discussing this point by very strict reading of the Apostles’ Creed, which states “He was conceived *by the power of the Holy Spirit* and born of the Virgin Mary.”⁴⁴ Here the active role is taken by the Holy Spirit, and the Son is portrayed as passive. Therefore, Balthasar argues that “the Son’s obedience does not come after an incarnation actively brought about by him: rather, his soteriological obedience starts with the Incarnation itself.”⁴⁵ Certainly the Son’s ‘passive’ obedience is always a form of ‘action’ freely chosen by Him. Nevertheless, we can see that already in the Incarnation process that the Son “becomes in one respect a product of the Spirit who brings him forth *ex Maria Virgine*, although within the Trinity itself the Spirit is the product of the united spiration of Father and Son.”⁴⁶ Hence, it is called ‘inversion.’

Moreover, as Balthasar argues, without the Holy Spirit working between the Father and the Son as “the objective witness to their difference-in-unity or unity-in-difference,”⁴⁷ the Son’s obedience would not be possible. The difference between the Father and the Son means that while the Father is the one that sends the Son into the world, the Son is the one that chooses to carry out the mission at all costs. Therefore, the Holy Spirit has to operate between them to keep their unity. Throughout the Son’s life on earth, the Spirit works ‘in’ the Son to guide Him to be aware of His mission step by step in order to complete it, working as the rule of the Father ‘over’ Him at the same time. For example, in the midst of the Passion, it is the Spirit that presents the

⁴³ Ibid., 183-191.

⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/credo.htm (Italics added.)

⁴⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 184. Also see Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 27-34; *Theo-Logic* III: *The Spirit Of Truth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 48-51, and 171-176.

⁴⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 186.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 187.

suffering Son with the Father's will, which seems rigid and pitiless. It is as if the Spirit is saying, "This is what you have wanted from all eternity; this is what, from all eternity, we have determined!"⁴⁸ Balthasar sees the presence of the Spirit within the Incarnate Son as the economic form of the *filioque* that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. If we accept the *filioque*, then we have to conclude that there must be 'a priori obedience' on the side of the eternal Son, which is determined within the immanent Trinity, prior to the Incarnation. After all, what Balthasar calls the 'inversion' is "ultimately only the projection of the immanent Trinity onto the 'economic' plane, whereby the Son's 'correspondence' to the Father is articulated as 'obedience.'"⁴⁹ Ultimately, it is the eternal love of the Son to the Father within the immanent Trinity that the Son's human obedience reveals.

After all these discussions, Balthasar goes back to the question of Jesus' knowledge.⁵⁰ On the one hand, there is the position taken by patristic and scholastic theologians which insists on the total omniscience of Jesus from his conception, and on the other hand the modern position which limits His knowledge to that of a prophet. Balthasar seeks a middle way between the opposing extremes. He not only affirms that the Son of God really took on human nature but also states that even the limitations of the human nature are the vehicles through which the Son of God reveals both the true humanity and divinity. Balthasar's whole Christology is permeated by the idea that Christ's divinity is revealed *exactly in* His humanity.⁵¹ Again, Balthasar's argument is extremely Johannine. Balthasar points out that John emphasizes Jesus' obedience as well as His supramundane knowledge and that, because of this obedience, Jesus 'laid up' the knowledge He could have had for the reasons of the economy of salvation. As Balthasar concisely summarizes, "He knows just as much and just as little as is necessary so that he can carry out his unique, all-embracing mission of world atonement."⁵² Jesus knows of His unique mission as the Redeemer of the World, who

⁴⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 191-197. Also see Balthasar, "The Self-Consciousness of Jesus," in *You Crown the Year With Your Goodness: Sermons Throughout the Liturgical Year*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 315-319.

⁵¹ Balthasar owes this idea to Maximus the Confessor. For his engagement with the patristic author, see *Cosmic Liturgy: the Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

⁵² Balthasar, "The Self-Consciousness of Jesus" in *You Crown the Year*, 318-319.

is portrayed as the Suffering Servant in the Book of Isaiah. Also, He knows that God's saving plan will triumph through Him, whatever happens during the process. However, He is completely ignorant of 'the hour' ("But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32)), even though from the beginning Jesus is entirely aware that His whole life directs towards this coming 'hour.' Balthasar emphasizes this point and insists that we should take these words literally (unlike the scholastic position that Jesus merely *pretended* not to know). The Son of God is also God, so there is no doubt that He is omniscient. Therefore, His genuine ignorance is nothing but the result of His wish to become fully human. He could have known everything, but He chose not to know some things. It is only out of love for the world that the Son deposits His own divine attributes with the Father in heaven.

This interpretation is supported by the kenosis hymn in Philippians 2:6-8 we have seen above. This element of ignorance or unknowing of the Incarnate Son is crucial and it is repeatedly stressed when Balthasar (as well as Adrienne von Speyr) discusses the Passion.⁵³ It is especially significant for our discussion of suffering in Christian discipleship (which we will take up in Part II) that Balthasar's so-called 'high' Christology enables us to take seriously the authenticity and intensity of the extremely negative human experiences that the Son of God went through, namely, the suffering, unknowing, and Godforsakenness on the Cross and in the Descent into Hell. Interestingly, Balthasar refers to mystical experience of God to gain the idea of the scope of Jesus' human knowledge and experience of God as follows:

The equally great variations found in Christian mystical experience of God—ranging from moments of illumination to the constrictions of dryness and forsakenness—can give us an inkling of the possible variety of forms of knowledge experienced by the earthly Jesus.⁵⁴

Christ's full divinity is expressed in His full humanity. This thesis means that His divinity is paradoxically revealed in the very fact that Jesus suffered, died, and descended into Hell as (and probably, more than) a finite human being. In Balthasar's own words, "The *paradox* must be allowed to stand: in the undiminished humanity of

⁵³ In particular, Pitstick critically deals with this problem in detail. See Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 158-190.

⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 197.

Jesus, the whole power and glory of God are made present to us.”⁵⁵

The Son's Obedience

—the Economic Expression of the Eternal Love within the Immanent Trinity

Christ's full divinity is expressed in His full humanity. We need to consider this point by examining further the concept of obedience, the recurring theme in Balthasar's theology. The obedience of Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of His divinity.⁵⁶ Obedience (*Gehorsam*) permeates Jesus' whole life from the Incarnation to the Descent into Hell. This idea is supported by the kenosis hymn as well as the whole narrative of the Gospel of John, which, as we have seen, supports the mission Christology. It is by the kenotic obedience of Jesus Christ that the disobedience of the whole creation is redeemed.

However, it should be noted that there can be no 'obedience' within the Trinity in the sense of human obedience in the first place. The three divine Persons are one, and the Son is equal to the Father, so they have only one divine will. On the other hand, the creation owes their being to the Creator forever, so human obedience is basically a result of necessary dependence on God. Nevertheless, since the Incarnate Son of God is obedient, as testified by the Scripture, there must be a way in which obedience is not foreign to God. The concept of obedience is closely linked with the mission Christology, for the Son's mission to reconcile the world with God requires total obedience from Him. Therefore, as His mission is the appearance in this world of His eternal procession from the Father, obedience can be considered as expressing the eternal love within the Trinity, which, as we have stressed, is most strongly characterized by kenosis.

In the last analysis, for Balthasar (as well as von Speyr), obedience “is the revelation in human form of the eternal love of the divine Son for his eternal Father, who has eternally begotten him out of love.”⁵⁷ In other words, the Son's eternal love

⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 33.

⁵⁶ Further, for a discussion of Christ's obedience as well as the Christian's obedience based on the former, see Balthasar, “Obedience in the Light of the Gospel” in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 228-255.

⁵⁷ Balthasar, *First Glimpse at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sr. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 59.

for the Father is expressed as human obedience, in which the Son is conceived by the Holy Spirit in Virgin Mary and lives as a fully human being until the Cross and the Descent into Hell. This insight is supported by the following words in John 14:31 for example: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” Here is *analogical* obedience. There is a primordial ‘obedience’ within the immanent Trinity, which is explained as the filial way in which the Son responds to the Father, who eternally begets Him. This archetype grounds the human obedience of the Incarnate Son of God. Human obedience is basically rooted in the necessity on the side of the creation, who is dependent on the Creator, but when this concept is applied to God, it expresses perfectly self-less love without any hint of subordination. In other words, the concept of obedience, which has the element of subordination and necessity when described as a human experience, gains the positive element of freedom, when applied to God.

In his use of the word “obedience,” Balthasar seems to be concretely working out St Thomas Aquinas’s analogical method of applying words to God.⁵⁸ As St Thomas says, we cannot apply concepts or names to God either purely univocally or equivocally. On the one hand, there is a great dissimilarity between the Creator and the creation, as can be shown in the difference between the creation’s ontological dependence on the Creator and the perfect freedom of God. On the other hand, we have to grant some kind of similarity between the two, so that ‘obedience’ can actually be a form of expression of God’s eternal love. As we will see later, Jesus Christ is called the concrete “analogy of being (*analogia entis*).” He is both “the unmediated unity of the divine and the human natures within the simplicity of his Person” and “the representation of the infinite distance between God and creature, exponentially raised and abysmally ruptured by sin.”⁵⁹ We should also note that this double significance of Christ is possible only because of God being Triune, more specifically, because of the infinite distance between the Father and the Son, which encompasses the finite distance between God and the world. After all, “Christ’s

⁵⁸ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, vol. 3, trans. Herbert McCabe (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), I, q.13, a.5.

⁵⁹ Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 61-62.

essence is itself Trinitarian.”⁶⁰ In other words, the real analogy between God and the world is based on the eternal Trinitarian dissimilarity between the Father and the Son.

This framework enables Balthasar to discuss the possibility of *analogous* suffering in the divine nature.⁶¹ In fact, the Cross can be seen even as the highest revelation of the Father’s *pathē* in the face of humanity’s sinfulness. Balthasar writes,

We can even say that, in the cry of dereliction on the Cross, Jesus reveals how God is forsaken by sinners. Jesus’ whole existence, including the aspect that the Greeks found so difficult, his *pathē*, is in the service of his proclamation of God.⁶²

The Son’s cry of dereliction should not be understood merely as a cry of despair or protest but an expression of obedience.⁶³ Jesus is really abandoned by the Father, but only for the sake of His love for the Father and the creation. We should not think that in the Jesus’ cry of dereliction there is any bitter resentment toward God. The Son’s love for the Father is complete and eternal. We should not either think that God ‘punishes’ Jesus instead of the sinner or that Jesus feels ‘damned’ by God. Rather, out of obedient love for the Father, the Son chooses to experience fully what the sinner deserves, namely, *separation from God*, which finally culminates in Hell of Godforsakenness.

Furthermore, as Balthasar repeatedly argues, because His whole life is unity with the Father, the Son suffers Godforsakenness more profoundly than any other human being. Thus, this experience of Godforsakenness is a result of the Son’s complete obedience to the Father, expressed as complete solidarity with the sinner. This obedience is totally Trinitarian and engaging the three divine Persons. As we have seen in our discussion of the Trinitarian inversion, the Son’s obedience is directed to the Father but lived out in the Holy Spirit. In Balthasar’s words, “in all ‘economic’ situations, there is no question of an ‘I-thou’ relationship between Son and Spirit. *The Son’s only ‘thou’ is the Father; and he is this ‘thou’ in the Spirit.*”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁶¹ For example, see Gerard O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 44-46.

⁶² Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 225. Also, this idea seems to be expressed in the beautiful poem “Twelfth Station” of “The Last Five Stations of the Cross,” in *Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, ed. Martin Redfern, *Theologians Today* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1972), 121-122.

⁶³ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Logic* III, 174. (Italics added)

Further, as we will see in Chapter 5, the Son's obedience not only is the "interpretation" of the Trinity's life of love but also the "epitome" of the creation's proper attitude towards God, especially of the Church's proper attitude as His Body and Bride.⁶⁵ As Christ's obedience is the model and source of the obedience of the Church, which begins with Virgin Mary's "Yes" to the Annunciation, all of us are invited to follow His footsteps of obedience as His creation. We catch a glimpse of the real meaning of "personhood" in the mission of Christ, and this mission shows us that true freedom is attained in freely abandoning it. As Balthasar says, the Christian's required identification with their Christian mission "stands in an analogy to the identity that characterizes Jesus Christ. Thus, in the very discipleship in which the Christian 'loses his soul,' he can attain his true identity."⁶⁶

Furthermore, this Christological analogy of being, which is grounded in the Trinity and most explicitly expressed in His obedience on earth, helps us to see the way we can be included "in Christ." After all, Jesus Christ's is "the sum total of the world's reality," who embraces all that is possible in this world, from utmost bliss to Hell of Godforsakenness.⁶⁷ Eventually, we might be able to find hope in Christ in the midst of suffering, because He is the one who knows all possible sufferings and griefs in the world. This is because no suffering has been as great as His suffering on the Cross and in the Descent into Hell. As Balthasar says,

we cannot know how much of humanity's endless suffering—the countless Auschwitz and Gulag Archipelagoes—has a direct relation to the Lord's expiatory suffering; if the latter were not in the background one would wonder how God could bear to behold it.⁶⁸

The Descent into Hell as the Centre of Kenotic Christology

So far we have examined the four principal themes in Balthasar's Christology (form, kenosis, mission, and obedience), which centre around the Cross and the Descent into Hell. Now we will put them together to describe the Descent

⁶⁵ Balthasar, *First Glimpse at Adrienne von Speyr*, 59.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-drama III*, 162. The relevant passages from the Scripture are Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, and Luke 9:24.

⁶⁷ Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat*, 56.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us—Do We Know Him?*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 38.

into Hell as the centre of his Christology. In short, it is in the Descent into Hell that the economic mission of the Son reaches its final point and His kenotic obedience reaches its climax.

We saw in the previous chapter that Balthasar's Trinitarian framework explains that the Son's descent into Hell is both possible and inevitable. The salvation of humankind planned by all the three Persons of the Trinity would not be complete without the Son's entrance into Hell. First of all, we have to note that this 'Hell,' which He entered, should rather be called *Sheol* (or Hades) of the Old Testament, in other words, the realm of the dead, which contains both the righteous and the wicked. The Hell in the New Testament sense (*Gehenna*, the Hell for the eternally damned) cannot have existed before Christ. According to Balthasar, *Gehenna* was actually a state Christologically determined, in other words, a direct result of Christ's descent into *Sheol*.⁶⁹

Since Jesus was fully human, it was only natural that he descended in *Sheol* after he died. Traditionally, this has been the first meaning of the doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell; Jesus was really dead.⁷⁰ In his account of the Descent, Balthasar too starts with this point. The crucified Incarnate Son of God was as dead just as any human being. Balthasar expresses it as follows: "In the same way that, upon earth, he was in solidarity with the living, so, in the tomb, *he is in solidarity with the dead*."⁷¹ The word 'solidarity' here sounds paradoxical. Death is a state where there is no living communication, so this 'solidarity' means that Jesus was "solitary like, and with, the others."⁷² Balthasar describes death as "a situation which signifies in the first place the abandonment of all spontaneous activity and so a *passivity*, a state in which, perhaps, the vital activity now brought to its end is mysteriously summed up."⁷³ Jesus experienced death as a "passivity," just as any human being does. Therefore, Balthasar rejects all kinds of 'activities' including Jesus' combat with the Devil in Hell, which was traditionally ascribed to Him. Holy Saturday is first and foremost characterized by this 'passivity' of Christ, which is in contrast with His

⁶⁹ The concept of Hell and *Sheol* will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

⁷⁰ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §632 and 636.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a5p1.htm

⁷¹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148-149. Italics added.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 148. Italics added.

‘active’ self-surrender on Good Friday. In other words, the Descent into Hell is a natural consequence of the Incarnation. Christ had to go down to Hell not because the Cross was insufficient but because He assumed all the defects of a human being.⁷⁴ Since the penalty of sin was not only the death of the body but also the descent into Hell, the Incarnate Son of God too had to descend into Hell after death. Therefore, Hell is the last destination of the Son’s economic mission in this rather literal sense.

However, not only did the Son experience death in the usual sense but also he went through “the second death” or “a vision of death (*visio mortis*).⁷⁵ Here Balthasar is following the insight of Nicholas of Cusa, who writes,

The vision, *visio*, of death by the mode of immediate experience, *via cognoscentiae*, is the most complete punishment possible. And since the death of Christ was complete, since through his own experience he saw the death which he had freely chosen to undergo, the soul of Christ went down into the underworld, *ad inferna*, where the vision of death is...Christ’s suffering, the greatest one could conceive, was like that of the damned who cannot be damned anymore...He alone through such a death entered into glory. He wanted to experience the *poena sensus* like the damned in Hell for the glorifying of his Father, and so as to show that one should obey the Father even to the utmost torture.⁷⁶

Jesus is not only truly human but also truly divine as the Son of God, so He goes through something only He can endure. The “vision of death” is beyond what any other human being can endure. In this “second death,” the Son encounters “sin as such,”⁷⁷ which is a concept indebted to von Speyr.⁷⁸ It is “sheer sin as such, no longer sin as attaching to a particular human being, sin incarnate in living existences, but abstracted from that individuation, *contemplated in its bare reality as such* (for sin is a reality!)”⁷⁹ He goes on to say “the object of the *visio mortis* can only be the pure substantiality of ‘Hell’ which is ‘sin in itself.’”⁸⁰ Thus, Balthasar integrates the insight of Nicholas of Cusa with von Speyr’s visions.

⁷⁴ Balthasar admits following Augustine and Thomas Aquinas on this point. See *Mysterium Paschale*, 164.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-52, 168-174.

⁷⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Excitationes* 10 (Basle 1565), 659. Quoted by Balthasar in *Mysterium Paschale*, 170-171.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 172-174. We will discuss this problematic concept in Chapter 4.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 173. Italics added.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

In this rather roundabout way, the Son's encounter of "sin as such" in *Sheol* becomes Balthasar's version of Christ's 'triumphant' descent into Hell. This vision of "sin as such" that Christ experiences is actually nothing other than a vision of His own triumph. On the Cross, Jesus Christ bears the world's sin. The sin is separated from humankind and laid upon Christ on the Cross, and through His death He takes it away from the world. Thus, the "sin as such" that He 'contemplates' passively in the "second death" is exactly "the product of the active suffering of the Cross,"⁸¹ hence a sign of His triumph. However, He does not yet *subjectively* recognize this "vision of death" as triumphant. There is no comfort for Him yet. He still has to *wait* for the Resurrection to recognize His triumph subjectively to the fullest. In Chapter 4, by referring to the dark night of the soul, we will discuss this profound mixture of objective victory and subjective suffering, and eventually in Part II we will explore its significance for the issue of Christian suffering. Here let us note the significance of Christ's *waiting* in Hell for the victory the objective proof of which is already there in front of him.

Further, it is this "sin as such" that Balthasar and von Speyr regard as the "substance of Hell." Here we have to note that Balthasar and von Speyr are interpreting the following verse in 2 Corinthians in an almost literal sense: "For our sake *he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21).⁸² Putting this idea and the kenosis hymn together, we could say that the Son became *obedient to the point of becoming sin*. Therefore, Balthasar says,

Hell is a *product* of the Redemption, a product which henceforth must be 'contemplated' in its own 'for itself' by the Redeemer, so as to become, in its state of sheer reprobation that which exists 'for him'; that over which, in his Resurrection, he receives the power and the keys.⁸³

Thus, we can see the Descent into Hell is not only the centre of Balthasar's Christology but also the very centre of his soteriology. Balthasar quotes Irenaeus' principle that "only what has been endured is healed and saved," and uses it as his own grounding principle.⁸⁴ The very 'passive' presence of Christ in Hell is salvific. The

⁸¹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 173.

⁸² Italics added.

⁸³ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 174.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 165. Quoting from Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III. 23, 2.

presence of the Form of God can shape the formless chaos of Hell into a new order. Von Speyr describes the mass of sin in Hell as “formless.”⁸⁵ The image of the form of God in the midst of formless sin is metaphorically important, because for Balthasar and von Speyr Hell is “the second chaos,” which is “a chaos of sins, a kind of reflection of the chaos at the beginning of Creation.”⁸⁶ Therefore, it makes perfect sense that the Son in the economic mission descends into Hell so that He can save humankind and re-form the creation. In *the Heart of the World*, his early work, Balthasar poetically expresses this idea:

The magic of Holy Saturday. The chaotic fountain remains directionless. Could this be the residue of the Son’s love which, poured out to the last when every vessel cracked and the old world perished, is now making a path for itself to the Father through glooms of nought?...Is it a protoplasm producing itself in the beginning, the first seed of the New Heaven and the New Earth?⁸⁷

We have to pause to consider further the full significance of the concept of the second chaos. Balthasar and von Speyr describe the Hell into which Christ descended and where He waited for victory in a subjective sense as the chaos similar to the beginning of the creation. It means, for them, it is in Hell that the new creation started. Therefore, as von Speyr reminds us, it is not from the Cross but from Hell the Son is resurrected. Hell is the starting point of the Son’s glorious Resurrection. As a result of the Son’s Descent into Hell, a way is paved towards Heaven. Purgatory too comes into being. Now, *Sheol*, the realm of the dead, makes a transition into Hell in the New Testament sense (*Gehenna*, Hell for the damned). Therefore, for Balthasar and von Speyr, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven are all Christological concepts.⁸⁸

The emphasis on Hell as the second chaos as the starting point of the new creation is significant for our stance concerning Balthasar’s interpretation of Christ’s Descent into Hell, because, in this way, we can see that Hell represents “the turning point of the old and new Eons.” Hell was not only the last destination of His economic mission but also the starting point of the new creation. Holy Saturday is the day Christ the Saviour Himself went through this transition from the old to the

⁸⁵ See Balthasar, “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karstamstags,” *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift “Communio”* 10 (1981): 34.

⁸⁶ von Speyr, *Kreuz Und Hölle* I, 175: “das ein Chaos der Sünde ist, ist wie ein Spiegelbild zum Chaos bei Schöpfungsbeginn.”

⁸⁷ Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980), 152.

⁸⁸ We will discuss this point in Chapter 4.

new aeon. This is why the aspect of waiting is significant. This point eventually enables us to connect Christ's waiting in Hell to the long 'waiting' of the Christian in this world. Balthasar clearly affirms this point:

When does the old change into the new? We must recall one of the things Paul said that we cited earlier: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor 5:17) The turning point lies in Christ, or, more exactly, in the drama of the Paschal transition from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. Christians exist in this event."⁸⁹

We have already suggested the way Christ's own obedience in following His mission shows the perfect role model for Christian discipleship, but now we start to see that the Christian's "life in transition" between the old and new aeon itself has already been assumed by Christ Himself. (We will discuss this point further in Chapter 6.)

How is all this related to kenosis? Hell, where the obedience of the Son is described as the "obedience of the corpse," is the point where no further obedience is possible. Therefore, the Descent into Hell is the climax of the Son's economic kenosis. The Son identified Himself with the sinner to such an extreme point, in other words, the point of becoming sin. This is all because of the economic mission to save humankind out of love. Further, as the economic mission is grounded in the immanent Trinity, we can conclude that the passive, obedient, disfigured Christ in Hell reveals what the Triune God really is in Himself: kenotic love. If we apply the concept of form and glory we have seen above, we can say that the glory of God's eternal love is paradoxically revealed in such a human form of Christ in Hell. In Balthasar's own words, "God's splendor...reveals and authenticates itself definitively precisely in its own apparent antithesis (in the *kenosis* of the descent into hell) as love selflessly serving out of love."⁹⁰

Evaluation—the Importance of 'Analogy' in Balthasar's Theology

On the one hand, the appealing points of his Christology (as well as his entire theology) are not difficult to see. Balthasar presents Jesus Christ on Holy

⁸⁹ Balthasar, "Eschatology in Outline," in *Explorations in Theology* IV, 463.

⁹⁰ Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect*, trans. Cornelia Capol (San Francisco: Communio Books, 1993), 81.

Saturday as the embodiment of the divine, kenotic love. As his readers often admit, it is all very vivid and powerful.

Donald MacKinnon, for example, hugely appreciates his Christology as “one of the profoundest contributions to Christology made by any theologian since the second world war.”⁹¹ By referring to John 3:16 (“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son”), he commends Balthasar as one of “those very few theologians who have devoted superlative scholarship and talent to constrain their readers to attend to the height and to the depth of that love.”⁹² He also reads Balthasar as a theologian who considers the horrors of Holocaust with utmost seriousness, even though his sensitivity to evil and human suffering is not overtly expressed in his writings. In MacKinnon’s own words,

In the pages of his work with which we are here concerned [*Theo-drama*] there is comparatively little that treats directly of these horrors; but the nervous tension of the whole argument bears witness to the author’s *passionate concern to present the engagement of God with his world in a way that refuses to turn aside from the overwhelming, pervasive reality of evil*. It is not that Balthasar indulges in any facile cult of pessimism; for one thing he is too well schooled in the great traditions of European literature for such triviality. It is rather that he insists on a vision that can only be won through the most strenuous acknowledgement of the cost of human redemption.⁹³

MacKinnon is not the only one that senses Balthasar’s sensitivity to the overwhelming reality of evil as well as his “passionate concern to present the engagement of God with his world.” While admitting he feels somewhat puzzled by Balthasar’s (and von Speyr’s) account of the Descent into Hell, John Seward also recognizes its theological and apologetical importance. He writes,

Hell is an exact description of the life on earth of many human beings today... There is nowhere God has not been, no depth of Godforsakenness which he has not explored in person, no darkness into which he has not poured light. However deep we may feel we have descended, God made man has descended more deeply.⁹⁴

⁹¹ MacKinnon, “Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology with Special Reference to Theodramatik II/2 and III,” in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Kenneth Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 173.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 165. Italics added.

⁹⁴ John Seward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 132.

In other words, it is implied that Balthasar's account of Holy Saturday has significant implications for the problem of evil and suffering, because it explains that God Himself descended into Hell of Godforsakeness. There is no place at all where God's love and power does not reach. Aidan Nichols concisely summarizes this point, "For Balthasar, the Descent 'solves' the problem of theodicy, by showing us the conditions on which God accepted our foreknown abuse of freedom; namely, his own plan to take to himself our self-damnation in Hell."⁹⁵

On the other hand, this strength in his theology can cause uneasiness among his critics. For example, Pitstick, among many other things, is extremely critical of the way that the image of divine glory is "perverted in the image of mankind's sins."⁹⁶ Pitstick's main concern is expressed as follows: "It [the traditional doctrine of the ('triumphant') Descent] is essential to preserving and preaching the full truth of Christ and His redeeming work on our behalf— and this also specifically in the oh-so-mature and demythologized contemporary age."⁹⁷ Apparently, for Pitstick, Balthasar's theology is categorized as 'tragic Christianity,' and "it would be the worst betrayal of this age...to offer it elaborate theological platitudes suggesting its wounds are its life, thereby remaking God in its image."⁹⁸ This perspective is more or less shared by Kilby. In particular, she criticizes the way Balthasar "moves us towards a high perspective where resolution begins to seem possible: sin and suffering find a place, and can be made sense of, in the context of the eternal distance between Father and Son."⁹⁹ Even if we leave aside the question of whether it is actually a bad thing that "resolution begins to seem possible," Kilby's accusation that Balthasar has the tendency to take a "high" perspective (in other words, an overarching perspective) must be seriously considered.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps it would be helpful to note here that the criticisms expressed by Pitstick and Kilby are partly reminiscent of Karl Rahner's criticism of Balthasar. When asked by an interviewer to respond to the criticism that his own Christology lacked a sufficient *theologia crucis*, (which is an accusation famously made by

⁹⁵ Nichols, "Introduction," in *Mysterium Paschale*, 7.

⁹⁶ Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 348.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 167.

¹⁰⁰ We discussed her criticism about this point (in the context of the Trinity) in Chapter 2.

Balthasar against Rahner),¹⁰¹ Rahner said, “there is a modern tendency...to develop a theology of the death of God that, in the last analysis, seems to me to be gnostic. One can find this in Hans Urs von Balthasar and in Adrienn von Speyr.”¹⁰² Then, after critically referring to Moltmann and the Patripassianism found in others as well, he said,

first of all: what do we know then so precisely about God? And second, I would ask: What use would that be to me as consolation in the true sense of the word? ...Perhaps it is possible to be an orthodox Nestorian or an orthodox Monophysite. If this were the case, then I would prefer to be an orthodox Nestorian.¹⁰³

What Rahner means here is that he himself values the distinction between the two natures in Christ so as not to threaten the impassibility of God or to deprive the inner-Trinitarian life of its mystery, but a theology of the Cross seems to overstress the kenotic meaning of the Cross and thus claims to *know too much* about the inner life of God. We have to note that this criticism is also closely connected to the difference between Rahner and Balthasar concerning their treatments of the immanent and economic Trinity, which we saw in the previous chapter. Let us repeat here what we emphasized then. Balthasar’s method is strongly characterized by *analogy*. As we have noted at several points in this chapter too, his use of words and concepts is almost always analogical.

We need to say a few more words about Balthasar’s treatment of the relation between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, though we have to continue with this issue in the next chapter when we discuss Hell as a Christological concept. (As we mentioned in Introduction, Pitstick shows the concern that Balthasar fails to distinguish the divinity and humanity of Christ.) Just as the way he maintains a nuanced position about the relation between the immanent and economic Trinity, he goes beyond the traditional Chalcedonian Christology, which affirms both the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, while trying to walk “the knife-edge between

¹⁰¹ Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 108-109.

¹⁰² Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, trans. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 126.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 127. For a contrast and comparison between Balthasar and Rahner, see Rowan Williams, “Balthasar, Rahner, and the Apprehension of Being,” in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM, 2007), 86-105; Karen Kilby, “Balthasar and Karl Rahner,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 256-268.

Nestorianism and Monophysitism.”¹⁰⁴ While distinguishing the two different natures and simultaneously maintaining the unity in Christ, Balthasar refuses to limit the human experiences of Jesus to His human nature alone.¹⁰⁵ After all, if the human nature of Christ does not affect His divine nature in any way, it merely ends up being Nestorianism. Balthasar takes seriously the Theopaschist formula: “One of the Trinity suffered.” On the other hand, Balthasar refuses to attribute suffering to the immanent Trinity directly. Likewise, he refuses to attribute suffering directly to the divine nature of Christ. He does so only analogically.

Further, in relation to this, let us see what Balthasar says about Jesus Christ as the concrete “analogy of being.” He writes that

the person of the Logos in whom the hypostatic union takes place cannot function, in any way, as the (“higher”) unity between God and man; this person, as such, is God. Since the person of the Logos is the ultimate union of divine and created being, it must constitute the final proportion [Mass] between the two and hence must be the “concrete *analogia entis*” itself. However, it must not in any way overstep this analogy in the direction of identity.¹⁰⁶

The analogy between the Creator and His creation, which is established in the Incarnation, does not abolish the great abyss between the two. Analogy is not equal to identity. However, still there must be a real analogy between the two in some way. Similarity must be sought within dissimilarity, and vice versa. In other words, analogy makes sense only when there is both similarity and dissimilarity.

We have to bear in mind that Balthasar locates the finite difference and distance between the Creator and His creation within the infinite difference and distance between the divine Persons of the Trinity. Therefore, already at the outset, there is room for linking humanity to divinity in a somewhat positive light. The difference of the creaturely being should not be merely negatively construed or completely eliminated in their reconciliation with the Creator. There is some goodness in the world, so this goodness has to be preserved in its very difference from God. After all, there is an analogy between the Father’s eternal generation of the Son and His creation of the world. In relation to this point, it is also significant that Jesus Christ simultaneously

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 221.

¹⁰⁵ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 23-41.

¹⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 221-222.

reveals the true nature of the human being and the true nature of the Triune God. Furthermore, as Balthasar repeatedly suggests, Christ's divinity is expressed exactly in His humanity. If there were not any analogy between God and human beings, it would be impossible for Christ's divinity to be expressed in His humanity.

All these points are crucial, especially for our discussion of suffering in Christian discipleship, for Balthasar's nuanced treatment of the relation between the divinity and humanity of Christ, along with his discussion of the Christological analogy of being, enables us to see that eventually all human beings can be 'included' in the person of Jesus Christ and the whole human history can be defined by reference to Him, without collapsing the necessary 'distance' between God and human beings. Therefore, as an answer to respond to the critique that Balthasar blurs the distinction between the divinity and humanity of Christ, we emphasize the significance of analogy for his entire theological style.

In sum, in this chapter, we have attempted to present the Christological significance of the Descent into Hell by narrating it as the centre of kenotic Christology. In particular we highlighted the four principal themes: form, kenosis, mission, and obedience. Jesus Christ, the Form of God, descended into Hell, which is the last destination of His salvific mission, in the literal obedience of a corpse. The kenotic love of the Triune God for humanity is revealed in this self-giving 'act' of the Son. Further, we have mentioned how Christ's perfect obedience to the point of becoming sin in Hell is supposed to be the role model for the Christian's obedience in carrying out their mission from God. Furthermore, we have pointed out that Hell is not only the last destination of the Son's economic mission but also the place where the Son *waited* until the new creation started. (We will come back to these points in Part II.) On the other hand, as a main critique raised against Balthasar's Christology, we have examined his treatment of the divinity and humanity of Christ. Similarly to the way we discussed Balthasar's treatment of the immanent and economic Trinity in Chapter 2, we have argued that Balthasar's way of treating this subject is also cautious and analogical.

However, we cannot fully discuss the question concerning Balthasar's treatment of the divinity and humanity of Christ without considering his concept of Hell, which is itself Christological. Therefore, we will discuss it in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.

The Effects: Hell as a Christological Concept

Introduction

In the previous three chapters we have summarized the Trinitarian and Christological bases of Christ's Descent into Hell presented by Balthasar as well as Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions of Hell. As we have seen, Hell, which is considered as being encompassed within the infinite distance between the Father and Son, hence the ultimate destination of the economic mission of the obedient Son, is the place their inseparable unity and their limitless love for the world is most vividly revealed.

Now in this chapter we will focus on Hell itself. As we saw in Chapter 1, von Speyr provides abundance of material for Balthasar to reflect on the state of Hell. According to Balthasar's summary, the Hell which von Speyr experienced is

actually more horrible than the hell depicted for us by medieval imagination; it is the knowledge of having lost God forever; it is being engulfed in the chaotic mire of the anti-divine; the absence of faith, hope and love; the loss as well, therefore, of any human communication. It is the metamorphosis of thought into a meaningless prattle of lifeless logic.¹

Also, as we saw in her accounts in *Kreuz und Hölle*, such words as "loneliness," "hopelessness," and "emptiness," are repeatedly used to describe the state of Hell.²

Most importantly, they consider Hell as a Christological concept first and last, and this point can be explained in the following four senses: 1) only Christ has fully suffered separation from God, by virtue of his kenosis; 2) His abandonment to death by the Father is a unique one which is made possible only by the Trinity; 3) He experiences what Nicholas of Cusa calls "*visio mortis*" and faces the whole fruit of the Cross, "sin-in-itself," in Hell; and 4) only after going through all this, He

¹ Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne Von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 66-67.

² See Chapter 1.

becomes the “judge” and thus the true possessor of Hell.³ In the previous chapters, we have already mentioned these four points. In this chapter, we will endeavour to examine the third and fourth points further on the basis of the first and second.

First of all, we will examine the problematic but central concept of “sin-in-itself.” We will then discuss the distinction between *Sheol* and *Gehenna*, and go on to explore Hell as the absolute loneliness of the sinner. We will also examine the Christological significance of Hell, as both Balthasar and von Speyr argue that no human being has ever suffered the horror of Hell as fully as Christ, because no one can be more abandoned by the Father than the Son, because no one is as close to Him. This is actually a working out of the idea that the infinite distance between the Father and the Son encompasses the finite distance between God and creation, including Hell. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this notion permeates both Balthasar’s and von Speyr’s thoughts. However, how can anyone who is in perfectly intimate union with God actually *be* or *feel* abandoned by Him? This Christological paradox is one of the questions we have to explore further in this chapter. It is not only on von Speyr’s mystical experiences that Balthasar bases his thoughts. In order to gain insights into the inner mystery of Christ’s suffering in Hell, he also turns to the writings of the saints in history, such as St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux, who wrote about their own versions of ‘descent into hell.’ These experiences are described as “the dark night of the soul.” We will examine the impacts which these saints have on Balthasar’s theology. In relation to this point, we will continue to discuss the Christological problem we have briefly seen in the last chapter, namely, Balthasar’s treatment of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

Further, we have to explore where all these ideas lead to. By arguing that Christ descended into Hell more deeply than any human being, Balthasar seems to suggest universalism (at least to some extent). We will briefly refer to his famous (or notorious) notion of ‘hope’ for universal salvation, and then go on to discuss how his theology can actually take the encounter between human freedom and divine love with utmost seriousness.

³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics VII: Theology: the New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 233.

Lastly, we will conclude this chapter by reflecting on how Balthasar's thoughts on Hell are still helpful for the Christian life today.

The sections titles of this chapter are as follows: 1) "sin-in-itself", 2) Hell as the absolute loneliness of the sinner, 3) Hell as the dark night of the soul, 4) a Christological problem—concerning the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, 5) 'hope' for universal salvation, and 6) evaluation: how should we reflect on the questions concerning Hell?.

Now let us start by discussing "sin-in-itself," which is what the Son faces in Hell as the whole fruit of His redemptive work.

"Sin-in-itself"

Perhaps the theologically most problematic image in von Speyr's visions is the one concerning "the substance of Hell." She says that Hell is made of human sins. The Son descends into Hell before He returns to the Father in order to see "the result of His Passion," which is "the removal of sin from the sinners."⁴ Von Speyr says, "Hell is the reality of the sins removed from the world."⁵ In her visions, sins actually look like a river of stinking mud. It is "an immense, brown, stinking river, whose movement is dead and mechanical" and every Holy Saturday von Speyr saw "the totally slow river of the sin becoming formless."⁶ She says, "In Hell, human beings will confront their own sins: in this stinking mud must they recognize themselves."⁷

Further, in Hell, the Son also encounters what von Speyr calls "effigies."⁸ The effigies are hollow impressions made from individual sinners, because each sinner is supposed to give something from their own substance to a sin they commit. Balthasar explains as follows:

They [The effigies] are what in each sinner God has condemned and cast out,

⁴ Quoted by Balthasar in "Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karfreitags," *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 10 (1981): 34: "was das Ergebnis seiner Passion ist; die Trennung der Sünde von den Sünden."

⁵ Ibid.: "Die Hölle ist die Wirklichkeit der von der Welt getrennten Sünde."

⁶ Ibid.: "Ein unermesslicher, brauner, stinkender Strom, der sich tot und mechanisch bewegt"; "Ganz langsamen Fluß der formlos gewordenen Sünden"

⁷ Ibid.: "In der Hölle wird der Mensch mit seiner Sünde konfrontiert: in diesem stinkenden Schlamm muß er sich erkennen."

⁸ Ibid., 35. Also see Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory II*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 355-356.

hence what he had to throw into Hell in order to save the living person and make him through Christ into a child of God. The effigies are not unreal, because the sinful person has given away some of their own reality to sin. So each redeemed sinner has a kind of their own reproduction in Hell.⁹

Therefore, what human beings have lost of their own substance due to their sins is replaced by the grace of Christ. The concepts of “sins removed from sinners” and “effigies” are inseparably connected.

However, as we consider their meanings, we have to refer to the fundamental question of what sin is, or rather, what it really means for a human being to sin. John Saward, for instance, tries to see the image of the effigies as “a way of saying that sin depersonalizes.”¹⁰ For example, Satan, ontologically a real personal entity, can be seen as an ‘unperson.’ Of von Speyr’s description of the effigies, Saward writes, “Here is the ‘unadmirable exchange’ of human iniquity: the impersonal and insubstantial becomes personal; the personal becomes impersonal.”¹¹ If we believe that human beings can only be fully human through union with Christ, we can say that to sin, or to turn away from God, is to lose one’s true humanity. Interestingly enough, Balthasar himself does not develop the notion of the effigies very much. (Basically, he mentions this notion only in the context where he presents von Speyr’s visions.)¹²

Setting aside the effigies, we have to examine “sin without sinners” or “sin removed from sinners.” Balthasar develops it as “sin-in-itself” in his own theology, but it seems to stand in tension with the traditional understanding of sin, because traditionally sin has been regarded not as substance but as an event.¹³ St Thomas

⁹ Balthasar, “Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle,” 143: “Sie sind das, was Gott von jedem Sünder von sich weg verdammen, also in die Hölle werfen mußte, um ihm als den lebendigen Menschen zu retten, aus ihm durch Christus ein Kind Gottes zu machen. Die Effigien sind nicht unreal, weil der sündige Mensch der Sünde etwas von seiner lebendigen Wirklichkeit weggeschenkt hat. So hat jeder erlöste Sünder etwas wie ein Abbild seiner selbst in der Hölle.“

¹⁰ John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

¹² For a few places he mentions this concept, see, for example, Balthasar *Theo-logic* II, 355-356; “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 35.

¹³ See “Sin” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New Advent, 2012): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm>; William E. May, “Sin,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot Lane (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987), 954-967; Stephen J. Duffy, “Sin,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 889-901; Joy Ann McDougall, “Sin” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. David A.S. Fergusson et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 473-475; Sean Fagan, “Sin,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, revised and expanded (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 777-780.

Aquinas, for example, writes that

sin is nothing else but a bad human act. A human act is human because it is voluntary, whether it is internal, e.g. to will or to choose; or external, e.g. to speak or to act. A human act is evil because it does not meet the standard for human behaviour. Standards are nothing other than rules.¹⁴

In other words, sin is an act that “does not meet the standard for human behavior.” Citing from St Augustine, St Thomas goes on to write that sin is a word, deed, or desire contrary to the eternal law.¹⁵ Also the Catechism of the Catholic Church cites this sentence in its definition of sin:

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”¹⁶

Again, such words as “failure” and “wound” here suggest that sin, in so far as it is evil, is the privation of the good just as sickness or a wound is the privation of health. However, we must also note that sin as an act is still understood as a ‘reality.’ In short, the difference between the traditional teachings and the von Speyr-Balthasar theology concerns how to express the reality of sin. Traditionally evil has not been understood to have any ontological existence. What could we gain from describing the reality of sin as “sin-in-itself” or even as a kind of substance?

For one thing, it has been pointed out that such reification of sin allows for clear distinction between the sinner and their act so both the God’s abhorrence of sin and God’s deep love for the sinner can be powerfully expressed.¹⁷ Also such distinction enables us to see the enormity of evil in a somewhat symbolic way, so such an image of sin could help us consider corporate or institutionalized sin in which the human being is not only an agent but also a victim. Also, in such a concrete image of sin, we can see the stark contrast between God’s infinite love and the finitude of sin. On this matter Anne Hunt writes, “While the horror and reality of sin is powerfully acknowledged, in reifying it von Balthasar effectively diminishes it in contrast to the

¹⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, vol. 25, trans. John Fearon (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), I-II, q.71, a.6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1849.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a8.htm

¹⁷ See Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: a Development in Recent Catholic Theology*, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1997), 73.

infinity of God's love."¹⁸ Therefore, some merits can be found in such a graphic description of sin separated from sinners. As Hunt suggests, such separation of sin from sinners and concrete visualization of sin allows for an abstract argument about evil per se.

Further, we should add that this concept could act as a significant bridge between von Speyr-Balthasar's version of the Descent into Hell and the traditional interpretations of this doctrine. In the traditional interpretations, Christ is believed to have descended into Hell as the conqueror of sin and death, and some sort of combat between Christ and Satan, the personified evil, is often depicted. In Balthasar's and von Speyr's theology of the Descent, Christ's vision of sin-in-itself in Hell is *objectively* a vision of His victory over sin and death, though He must wait for the Resurrection to appreciate His triumph *subjectively*. Thus, this notion of sin-in-itself enables us to regard Christ's Descent into Hell as the victory over sin and death, even if in a roundabout way. Therefore, we can say that while the traditional interpretations are characterized by the glory of Easter rather than the suffering of Good Friday, Balthasar's and von Speyr's version of Holy Saturday presents a real middle-point between the Cross and the Resurrection. The victory of Easter is objectively already there, but its subjective sentiment is not there yet. Sin-in-itself is thus a crucial concept for us to see how they take the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday seriously while staying within the traditional interpretations.

Hell as the Absolute Loneliness of the Sinner

We have been simply using the word, 'Hell,'¹⁹ so far (rather intentionally), but technically speaking the place Christ entered after He died should be called *Sheol* or Hades.²⁰ This point is also shared by the traditional interpretations.²¹ The word 'Hell' used in the Apostles' Creed does not mean the Hell of eternal damnation as we imagine

¹⁸ Ibid.,74.

¹⁹ For examination of the concept of Hell, see, for example, Zachary Hayes, "Hell" in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1987), 457-459; John Saward, *Sweet and Blessed Country: the Christian Hope for Heaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 96-108.

²⁰ For an extensive study of the concept of *Sheol*, see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002).

²¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §633.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a5p1.htm

today. In Latin, the word translated as hell in English is *inferna*. In the ancient world, this word had the generic meaning of ‘underworld’, which is translated as *Sheol* in Hebrew and *Hades* in Greek. In the Old Testament,²² *Sheol* is described the abode of the dead, a place of darkness cut off from God, which includes the good and the bad alike, though it “does not mean that their lot is identical.”²³

It is only as a consequence of Christ’s Descent there that the “Hell” of eternal damnation, in other words, *Gehenna*, came to exist. *Gehenna* is the name used in the New Testament to refer to the Hell of the damned.²⁴ It is a Greek adaptation of a Hebrew name, *ge’hinnom*, the valley of Hinnon, which is an area to the south-west of the city of Jerusalem used for casting rubbish. This image is also relevant when we consider the sin-in-itself, as it is the ‘residue’ of human sin and the whole fruit of Christ’s redemptive work. This point helps us to see how the theological ‘transition’ from Hell as *Sheol* to Hell as *Gehenna* took place.

In *Summa Theologiae*, St Thomas Aquinas poses the question of whether Christ descended into the Hell of the damned and responds that the soul of Christ had *an effect* on all the inhabitants of the underworld, including the damned, those in the Purgatory, and the holy fathers in Abraham’s bosom, but *in its essence* the soul of Christ visited only the holy fathers.²⁵ Balthasar argues that this question is wrongly posed in the first place, because there was neither Hell as *Gehenna* nor Purgatory nor Heaven before Christ’s Descent into *Sheol*. Rather, these three states are its results, hence *Christological* concepts.

First of all, *Sheol* is a place where there is no vision of God. Balthasar summarizes that in *Sheol* “all that reigns is the darkness of perfect loneliness.”²⁶ For Balthasar, loneliness is an important concept that connects sin and salvation. In his own words,

²² For instance, Job 10:21-22, 17:13, 26:5, and Psalms 89:48, 88:6.

²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §633. For example, there is “Abraham’s bosom” into which the poor man Lazarus was received (Luke 16:22).

²⁴ It appears 11 times in the Synoptic Gospels, typically accompanied by the imagery of fire, darkness, worms, howling and gnashing of teeth. See Matthew 5:22, 29, 30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33, Mark 9:43, 45, 47, Luke 12:5, and James 3:6.

²⁵ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, vol. 54, trans. Richard T.A. Murphy (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965), III, q. 52, a.2.

²⁶ Balthasar, “the Descent into Hell,” in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 408. As we saw in Chapter 1, von Speyr too repeatedly describes Hell as “loneliness.”

And exactly in this Christian, eventually *Christological loneliness* lies a hope for the one who condemns himself, rejecting all love. Will the one, who wants to be completely alone, eventually not find someone even lonelier, the Son abandoned by the Father, who will prevent him from experiencing his self-chosen Hell to the end?²⁷

The loneliness of the sinner who locks themselves up in their own shell and rejects God's love is redeemed by the deeper loneliness of Christ, who descended into Hell fully forsaken by God and humankind. (Balthasar further argues that the foundation of the community of love, which is the Church, has its foundation on this "Christological" loneliness.²⁸)

Theologically speaking, the concept of Hell as absolute loneliness makes perfect sense, since loneliness can be considered as a product of sin, as long as it is understood as the inability to step outside of oneself or as the state of being that one lives only for oneself. This view seems to be shared by other theologians. Piet Schoonenberg, for example, writes that "sin always and necessarily makes for loneliness."²⁹ He even writes that "the whole punishment of sin in Genesis iii may be conceived as loneliness and may be summarized in that concept" and that "Hell, too, the final consequence of sin, may totally be summarized as extreme loneliness which man has chosen for ever and to which God delivers him."³⁰ Similarly, the former Pope, Benedict XVI, too, once wrote (long before he became Pope) that Christ's Descent into Hell means that He "strode through the gate of our final loneliness, that in his passion he went down into the abyss of our abandonment."³¹ He also reminds us that death (the consequence of sin) and Hell were identical before Christ and actually that is what the word *Sheol* conveys.³² Only after Christ's Descent into *Sheol*, death can mean either a path for Heaven (as communion with God), Hell (as *Gehenna*), or Purgatory.

²⁷ Balthasar, "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle" in *Adrienne Von Speyr Und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten D. Röm. Symposiums, 27. - 29. September 1985* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1986), 145-146.

²⁸ See Balthasar, "The Loneliness of Death and the Mission" in *The Moment of Christian Witness* trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 30-38; "Loneliness in the Church," in *Explorations in Theology IV*, 261-298.

²⁹ Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 91.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Porter (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 229.

³² *Ibid.*

We should note that not only *Sheol* but also *Gehenna* is eventually characterized by such loneliness caused by separation from God, while the difference between the two is that the former is a ‘pre-Christ,’ temporal state and the latter ‘post-Christ,’ self-chosen eternal punishment. This point is confirmed by the Catechism itself:

To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “Hell.”³³

If the essence of Hell (whether it is as *Sheol* or *Gehenna*) is understood as the absolute loneliness of the sinner caused by separation from God, there is no human being that has suffered it as fully as Christ. Balthasar stresses that because He is closest to God, He can be more abandoned than any sinful human being. We will explore below this Christological paradox by examining Balthasar’s reading of two Carmelite saints, namely, St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux.

Hell as “the Dark Night of the Soul”

Von Speyr herself often compares the Descent into Hell she has gone through to the “dark night of the soul” explored by St John of the Cross (1542-1591),³⁴ and Balthasar follows her on this point.³⁵ If we read both mystics’ accounts together,³⁶

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1033.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm

³⁴ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 201-202, 204, 210, 237, 265, and *Kreuz und Hölle* II, 58, 396, 406, 407, 439, 449, 450, 459. It would be worthwhile to explore comparison and contrast these two mystics further in detail. Especially, it might be interesting to examine the ‘influence’ of Martin Luther on both (one is a mystic in the counter-reformation context, and the other is a convert from the Lutheran faith.)

³⁵ Balthasar, “Adrienne von Speyr über das Geheimnis des Karsamstags”: 33; “Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle,” 142.

³⁶ For the writings by St John of the Cross, see *The Complete Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, ed. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns Oates, 1943). (All the following quotations from St John are from this version of translation.) As a summary of St John of the Cross, the following books are helpful: Gerald Brenan, *St John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Rowan Williams, “the Secret Stair” in *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990), 159-179; Noel O’Donoghue, “Part II Darkness and Light: St John of the Cross” in *Mystics for Our Time: Carmelite Meditations for a New Age* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 53-109.

we cannot help noticing the similarities between them even on a superficial level, even though Balthasar and von Speyr are critical of St John's "neo-platonic representation of the purification of the soul"³⁷ and they are well aware that St John himself does not directly connect his dark night to Christ's Descent into Hell (he only connects it to the Cross).

First of all, the mysticism of both St John and von Speyr is deeply Trinitarian.³⁸ The structure of *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* of St John as "the active night" and *The Dark Night of the Soul* as the "passive night" is also reminiscent of von Speyr's interpretation of the Cross as the active suffering and the Descent into Hell as the passive one. Most of all, the dark night of the soul is a sign that the soul is right on the way to the intimate union with God (hence 'the midnight before the dawn'), while the Son's Descent into Hell is "the shortest way back to the Father" and it itself is already the victory against sin. In short, 'objectively' speaking, the suffering of the dark night of the soul itself is already a gift of grace, even though it is still unbearably painful in a 'subjective' sense. It is exactly due to this distinction between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' that von Speyr regards the dark night of St John as "the night of Holy Saturday," rather than that of the Cross.³⁹

With their similarities in mind we can examine Balthasar's reading of St John of the Cross⁴⁰ to explore the Hell into which Jesus descended. In short, the Hell Jesus entered in full solidarity with the sinful humanity is considered as being similar to the dark night of the soul on the way to its union with God. This point is directly related to the mystery of separation of sin from sinners, which itself is a blessing in an 'objective' sense, but it is still felt for the soul as Hell 'subjectively.'

If light and darkness are the two poles of all Christian mysticism, St John is

³⁷ Balthasar, "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle," 142. Balthasar distinguishes the kind of Christian mysticism which is rooted in the paschal mystery and the kind which is not free from the Neo-platonic inheritance. In short, he appreciates the former but criticizes the latter, because it is the kind of mysticism in which the soul tries to transcend itself to be united with the Absolute One but tends to be self-preoccupied with analyses of its own states. (See Balthasar, "Understanding Christian Mysticism" in *Explorations in Theology IV*, 309-335.)

³⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory V: the Last Act*, 429-433. Also, regarding St John's insights into the mystery of the Trinity, see Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 144-167.

³⁹ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 265.

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, John Seward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 105-171.

obviously classified as ‘a mystic of the dark,’ and he has the tendency to seek light *within* darkness.⁴¹ This characteristic seems to be true of Balthasar’s theology in general as well, so it is not difficult to see why the mysticism of St John of the Cross appeals to him. In short, for both of them (and von Speyr), the way to Heaven is paved through Hell.

According to St John’s account of the spiritual journey, before the soul enters into intimate union with God, there is a stage where God seems to be hostile and even absent. This is what Balthasar interprets as St John’s version of the Descent into Hell. In Balthasar’s words, St John “must enter the night of Hell, for only in the absolute distinction between the sinful creature and the absolute God in his total purity can the divine in its truth be perceived.”⁴² Since there is an insurmountable disparity between God and His creation, the deeper the soul experiences God, the more it is bound to feel its own death and the ‘absence’ of God. St John expresses this condition of the soul as follows:

What the sorrowful soul feels most in this condition is its clear perception, as it thinks, that God has abandoned it, and, in His abhorrence of it, has flung it into darkness; it is a grave and piteous grief for it to believe that God has forsaken it...the soul feels very keenly the shadow of death and the lamentations of death and the pains of hell, which consist in its feeling itself to be without God, and chastised and cast out, and unworthy of Him.⁴³

Moreover, the soul feels that this ‘absence’ of God will last forever and consequently it loses all hope. At this stage, even a prayer becomes impossible for the soul.⁴⁴ However, this dark night of the soul is in reality a way to the union with God. This sense of ‘absence’ is actually a form of God’s brightest ‘presence’, which only feels as a dark night for the soul, for God’s light is too blinding for it. In the following passage, Balthasar summarizes St John’s dark night using the distinction between ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ which we have mentioned above⁴⁵:

⁴¹ See O’Donoghue, *Mystics for Our Time*, 68-69.

⁴² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* III, 110.

⁴³ St John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, II, 6, 2. Quoted by Balthasar in *The Glory of the Lord* III, 110.

⁴⁴ As we saw in Chapter 1, von Speyr too said she cannot bring herself to pray on Holy Saturday.

⁴⁵ In relation of this mixture of objectivity and subjectivity, let us briefly note that it also plays a significant role in Balthasar’s interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, which say that the gospel was preached to the dead. This text has traditionally been the “locus classicus” for the doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell. As Balthasar denies any kind of activity in death, he explains that the preaching described here cannot be a subjective kind of preaching meant to move the audience to conversion.” Rather, it is “an objective announcement of the fact” that is the fact of God’s reconciliation with

At first the night is *subjectively* death, although *objectively* it is already resurrection; but as the way of the soul's dying, it has its twilight, midnight, and dawn that ushers in eternal life, when the veil that separates her from the vision of God is stretched to the breaking point. And yet the midnight is already *objectively* the brightest of light.⁴⁶

Further, Balthasar points out that St John of the Cross himself connects this dark night to the paschal mystery. In his words,

One must rather consider that...John has entirely in view the living, elective God of the Bible, who 'descended into Hell and leads back out again'; even the Cross, upon which the Son is abandoned by the Father, as seen by the Father, is purest light, the light that is glorified even *in extremis*.⁴⁷

Thus, in St John's account of the dark night of the soul of the sinner, Balthasar finds the link to the paschal mystery. This point is significant for us to understand Balthasar's Christology, as he argues that the Son, by virtue of His kenosis, suffered the full fate of the sinful humanity to the point of Hell. Therefore, the abandonment of the Son by the Father, which is expressed in the cry of dereliction and in the Descent into Hell, is understood in terms of what the *presence* of God feels like for the soul of the sinner.⁴⁸

Further, such an account of the dark night of the soul seems to explain how the closer the soul is to God, the possibility for the soul to feel His absence increases, or even how abandonment could actually be a form of union. Therefore, we might start to think that the dark night of the soul gives us a clue to the Christological mystery that the Son could be abandoned by the Father more fully than any human being. However, we have to consider another Carmelite saint's contribution to Balthasar's Christology before we reach such a conclusion.

The saint in question is St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), a French discalced Carmelite nun, who is also known as "the little flower."⁴⁹(She was a great reader of St

humanity, which was achieved on the Cross as an accomplished event." This point is important, because Balthasar never says that the Descent into Hell completed something which the Cross had not. Christ has already defeated sin, death, and evil by His death on the Cross. It is in the Descent into Hell that this fact of victory is proclaimed first. In this sense, Balthasar is trying to stay in the tradition that Christ's Descent into Hell is a victorious event. (For Balthasar's interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19, see *Mysterium Paschale*, 156-160, and 180-181.)

⁴⁶ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* III, 136-137.

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* III, 137.

⁴⁸ See Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame, Ind.; London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 99-101.

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols, Anne English Nash, and Dennis D. Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992). The following books on St Thérèse are relevant and helpful for reflection on the topic of this chapter:

John of the Cross too.⁵⁰) Her spirituality, which is characterized by what she called the “little way,” greatly inspired Balthasar, especially on the topic of Hell. Her influence should not be underestimated.

St Thérèse is relevant for our discussion here, because she also experienced her own version of the dark night (even though it was “a half-night,” according to Balthasar.) Towards the end of her life, she experienced the condition of what she herself calls *La nuit du néant*, the night of nothingness. This is the state of being, which (interestingly enough) might have been used by Martin Heidegger or Jean Paul Sartre about thirty years later.⁵¹ During the Easter of 1896, after the Good Friday when she first spat up blood (which is the symptom of tuberculosis, which led her to death eighteen months later), God showed her “that there really are souls without faith who, by misusing graces, lose these precious gifts, the only source of true and pure joy.”⁵² St Thérèse wished to suffer vicariously for the sake of these damned souls, and God granted her wish. In her words, God allowed “my little soul to be darkened by the thickest gloom, so that the thought of heaven, so sweet to me up until then, becomes an occasion of torment and agony.”⁵³ This condition (the condition she herself calls “my dark night”⁵⁴) lasted until her death, and she declared that she herself was ready to remain in this night. St Thérèse herself writes about this condition as follows:

When I want to rest my heart, weary of the surrounding darkness, by the memory of the luminous country after which I aspire, my anguish only increases. It seems as if the darkness, echoing the voices of sinners is mocking me, saying, “You dream of light, of a fragrant homeland, you dream that you will possess the Creator of these wonders for all eternity, you believe that you

O’Donoghue, *Mystics for Our Time*, 113-151; Barnard Bro, *The Little Way: the Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Alan Neame (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979).

⁵⁰ Especially, Balthasar points out that his manner of interpreting Scripture had an impact on her. See Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 82, and 91-92.

⁵¹ Regarding the profound connection between St Thérèse’s night of nothingness and the existential Hell, see O’Donoghue, *Mystics for Our Time*, 122-123; Barnard Bro, *The Little Way*, 5. For example, the following words of Sartre seem to share the same sentiment of Godforsakenness experienced by St Thérèse, “I prayed, I pleaded for a sign, I sent Heaven messages: no reply. Heaven doesn’t even know my name. I kept wondering what I was in God’s eyes. Now I know the answer: nothing. God doesn’t see me, God doesn’t hear me, God doesn’t know me. You see the void above our heads? That is God. You see this hole in the ground? That’s what God is. You see this crack in the door? That’s God too. Silence is God. Absence is God. God is human loneliness.” (Quoted by Barnard Bro in *The Little Way*, 5.)

⁵² St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul: the Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. John Clark (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), 211. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 339.

⁵³ St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 212. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 339.

⁵⁴ St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 214. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 339.

will one day emerge from this gloom...Go on! Look forward to death, which will give you—not what you hope—but a still darker night, the night of nothingness!’⁵⁵

This experience of “the night of nothingness,” which she herself wanted to suffer vicariously out of love for God and for sinners, appears to be St Thérèse’s version of the dark night of the soul. However, Balthasar critically analyzes her experience and declares her “night of nothingness” does *not* reach the same depth as the dark night of the soul explored by St John of the Cross (let alone Christ’s Descent of Hell).⁵⁶ According to Balthasar, this is partly because St Thérèse was able to keep faith itself even in the midst of this ‘night.’ He also points out that she was able to sense a higher kind of joy in this suffering. In St Thérèse’s own words, “the road I follow is one that affords me no consolation, yet it brings every consolation.”⁵⁷ Balthasar further argues that even her seemingly most extreme statement (“I no longer believe in eternal life; it seems to me there is nothing beyond this mortal life. Everything is brought to an end. *Love alone remains.*”⁵⁸) would only serve to show that hers was not a complete dark night, for if she knew *love alone remains*, that would not be the dark night of the soul (in other words, that would not be Hell).⁵⁹ Balthasar calls her night “a sort of ‘half-night,’” because

*The complete night involves complete solidarity with the sinners and the damned; it means identifying oneself with their lot and sharing their fate utterly. But how could Thérèse, knowing herself to be a saint, abandon herself unconditionally to the community of sinners? She would have to relinquish all her truth. She would have to give up the meaning of her theological existence.*⁶⁰

In other words, St Thérèse’s ‘night’ cannot be the complete dark night of the soul, because she cannot be “*in complete solidarity with the sinners and the damned.*” This is partly due to her peculiar relationship to sin, which is regarded as her “self-conscious sanctity”⁶¹ at some point. It is important to consider Balthasar’s critical analysis of her ‘night’ in the context of his Christology. In the first place, as a saint, St Thérèse lacks

⁵⁵ St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 213. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 340.

⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 340.

⁵⁷ St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Collected Letters*, ed. Abbé Combes, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), 139. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 341.

⁵⁸ Quotation from Ida Frederike Görres, *The Hidden Face: A Study of St Thérèse of Lisieux* (Pantheon, 1959), 358, 360. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 342. Italics added.

⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 342.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 342-343. Italics added.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

the normal self-awareness of a sinner, so she lacks the real understanding of the Cross and Hell as well. As Balthasar writes, “Preserved from sin, she stands outside all relationship with hell.”⁶² Also, “Hell only shows up in her vision of the world when *others* seem in danger of going there. It is simply that *from which* souls must be saved”⁶³ Because of her peculiar relationship to sin, as Balthasar analyzes, her theology significantly lacks some of the central mysteries, such as the mystery of bearing sins and of solidarity in sin, the mystery of how love may be coupled with an awareness of sin, and above all the mystery of confession.⁶⁴ In other words, she cannot fully understand the mystery of the Cross and the Descent into Hell because of her lack of awareness as a sinner. As Balthasar writes,

Thérèse’s world remains immune from the effects of elemental evil—a fact that confirms our opinion that her night of the soul never reached the dimensions of the night of the Cross, that point where the Son is brought face to face with the sinner’s absolute abandonment by God.⁶⁵

This logic is significant to appreciate the paradox in Balthasar’s Christology. A saint like St Thérèse, who lacks self-awareness as a sinner, cannot reach the full dimensions of the inner night suffered by the absolutely sinless man Jesus Christ. As Balthasar writes, “Thérèse’s little way leaves her at the beginning of the Passion; it confines her to the Mount of Olives.”⁶⁶

Further, along with Balthasar, we have to note the way St Thérèse can never fully identify herself with the sinners and the damned, even though that is what she wishes to do as she proudly declares, “At last I have found my vocation! My final vocation is love.”⁶⁷ It is impossible for her to carry it out because she can never let her own sainthood be completely lost. As Balthasar says, for St Thérèse, the community of sinners “would be the self-destruction of her being, and, in her eyes, the abandonment of her mission to holiness. God might ask it, perhaps, of other saints who are not always meditating on their own sanctity. But not from Thérèse.”⁶⁸ This is her

⁶² Ibid., 354. This was originally caused by two peculiar experiences during her childhood. She experienced a miracle, and she was declared sinless. See Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 97-114.

⁶³ Ibid., 355. This perspective is also relevant for Balthasar’s hope for universal salvation.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 108. Adrienne von Speyr also notes St Thérèse’s “peculiar knowledge of sin.” See von Speyr, *Confession*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 259-260.

⁶⁵ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 356.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ St Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 194. Quoted by Balthasar in *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 203.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 343.

limitation as a human being in terms of the identification of one's mission and person,⁶⁹ even though she is a saint. As Balthasar says, "her Carmelite mission demands that *she should identify herself with the community of sinners*, but her self-conscious sanctity makes such solidarity impossible."⁷⁰ This is also the limitation of her self-giving love, even though as Balthasar appreciates, "she lives out of love, through love, for love; a love that is not her own but God's within her."⁷¹ As we saw in the chapter on Balthasar's Christology, these two elements (identification of mission with person and self-giving love) are fully realized only in Jesus Christ.

While Balthasar's reading of St John and St Thérèse helps us to have a glimpse into Christ's wish for vicarious suffering on behalf of the sinner and His full experience of Hell as the sinner's absolute separation from God, a significant question arises naturally. The dark night of the soul is after all the spiritual journey of a sinner, even if a saint. If the Hell experienced by the Son is considered as being similar to such a night, is the Christ presented by Balthasar not too human? Moreover, is Balthasar not significantly blurring His divinity and humanity? As we mentioned in Introduction and Chapter 3, this is one of the criticisms presented by Pitstick against Balthasar.⁷² We will discuss it further below.

A Christological Problem—concerning the Divinity and Humanity of Jesus Christ

First of all, we have to clarify one point concerning union with God and abandonment by Him. On the basis of St John's account of the dark night of the soul which is supposed to happen on the way to its intimate union with God, we seem to be able to explain how the closer the soul is to God, the possibility for the soul to feel His absence increases, at least to some extent, or even how abandonment could actually be a form of union. However, this kind of abandonment on the way to union cannot be the case for Jesus Christ, even if Balthasar's reading of St John of the Cross seems to suggest it in some way. This is because such abandonment is a form of *ascent* for the

⁶⁹ We discussed this point in Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in Spirit*, 343. Italics added.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 72. Here reference is made to *Story of a Soul*, 256.

⁷² Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 293-302. For a response to Pitstick's criticism concerning Balthasar's Christology, See Edward T. Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): 184-199.

sinful soul, while Jesus, being sinless, never needs such a purification process, even as a full human being. His unique abandonment by God can only be a form of *descent* for Him, because He chooses to be abandoned by Him *exactly because He is already with Him*. Therefore, Balthasar writes,

Only the person who has truly ‘possessed’ God in the Covenant, knows what it means to be truly abandoned by him. But all the experiences of night in both Old and New Testaments are at best approaches, distant allusions to the inaccessible mystery of the Cross—so unique is the Son of God, so unique is his abandonment by the Father.⁷³

Thus, when Balthasar says that no one can be more abandoned by the Father than the Son, what he means is rather that only the Son *can afford to be fully abandoned* because of His perfect union with the Father. When we think about the case of St Thérèse, this point becomes clearer. She shows that the closer the soul becomes to God, the more it becomes love itself even to the point of wishing to be abandoned. We ordinary sinners can only try to ascend to be united with God, and as we are already far from him, we cannot be abandoned further than we already are. This way of explanation also clarifies the other definitive expression made by Balthasar, namely, that the infinite distance between the Father and the Son encompasses the finite distance between God and the sinner. As we saw in Chapter 2, only the two-fold love directed both at the Father and at the world could explain the paschal mystery.

Further, as we saw in Chapter 3, Balthasar’s main Christological thesis is that *Christ’s full divinity is expressed exactly in His full humanity*.⁷⁴ This is how he both maintains the Chalcedonian formula and departs from it, but at the same time this paradoxical idea can make sense only in terms of kenosis. At least Balthasar is consistent in following the logic of self-giving love to the fullest. That is why his reference to St Thérèse’s example is important (though Pitstick curiously omits it from her discussion). Why could the sinless Son of God experience the dark night of the sinner to the fullest? Why could He feel the ‘absence’ of God most strongly (even though it is not despair)? This is a paradoxical mystery, but at least Balthasar presents a clue to solve it by referring to the actual example of St Thérèse’s self-giving love. If a human being (though a saint) could wish out of love to be in Hell but fails to do so

⁷³ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, the Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Carlk, 1990), 78-79.

⁷⁴ This thesis is based on his reading of Maximus the Confessor.

perfectly, because of her limitations as a human being, it is not illogical at all to say that the Son of God wished for it even more strongly and succeeded in doing so. St Therese's wish for vicarious suffering and her actual experience did really happen, so it would not be too far-fetched to speculate that something similar happened in the case of Christ as well.

Balthasar turns to the writings of various saints and mystics in history, because they present the best examples of those who were actually drawn into the inner life of Jesus Christ. For Balthasar, they can give us not only the insights into the inner mystery of Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and Descent into Hell but also the concrete examples of how to live as His followers.⁷⁵ We should bear this point in mind, as it is one of our goals to pay full respect to the genre in which he is working, which we understand to be a combination of theology and spirituality.

'Hope' for Universal Salvation

St Thérèse is again a source of inspiration for Balthasar along with many others⁷⁶ when it comes to his famous hope for universal salvation. It is well known that towards the end of his life he was harshly criticized by conservative Catholic circles for this 'hope.' It is true that he was inclined to hope that Hell might be empty, but that 'hope' itself was based on a strong fear of Hell, a glimpse into which he gained by witnessing von Speyr's mystical suffering year after year. In his own words,

Her [von Speyr's] experience of it [Hell] was so real that, *in view of it, it would be ridiculous and blasphemous* to speak of the nonexistence of hell or even just of *apokatastasis* in the "systematic" sense.⁷⁷

Balthasar and von Speyr remind us that the true answer cannot be a simple Either/Or of Origen and Augustine. As von Speyr says, "Both are part of an expression of the whole truth."⁷⁸ Along with von Speyr, Balthasar takes a nuanced position in the issue of universal salvation. While denying the universalism in the systematic sense, he proposes that we have a right and even a duty to 'hope' for the salvation of the whole

⁷⁵ See McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 89-113; *Mystical Theology: the Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 101-114.

⁷⁶ Another major influence on this point is Karl Barth, as we mentioned it in the Introduction.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *First Glimpse at Adrienne Von Speyr*, 67. Italics added.

⁷⁸ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* II, 85: "Beides ist ein Teilausdruck der totalen Wahrheit."

humanity, as it may be possible that even the worst sinners are moved by God's grace to repent before they die. He also points out the opposite possibility. Since we are able to resist the grace of God, none of us is really 'safe.' We must therefore leave the question speculatively open, thinking primarily of the danger in which we ourselves stand. Balthasar writes, "'Hell' here is something that falls to me personally—not hypothetically but by full rights—which, without any side glances at others, I have to withstand in utmost seriousness."⁷⁹ After all, it is not our business to brood on who is or will be in Hell 'objectively' as if we ourselves were just curious onlookers. Our first priority is to take personally the profound depth of the love of God, who even descended into Hell to save us from damnation. There is a popular idea that the only people in Hell are those who would like other people to be in it, but there is something profound to the idea.

In *A Short Discourse on Hell*, Balthasar somberly refers to St Paul's poignant willingness to be accursed and cut off from Christ himself for the sake of his brethren,⁸⁰ which Paul states in the epistle to the Romans 9:3. In the preceding passage, Paul declares rather proudly that nothing in the world could ever separate him from the love of God, but then, right after it, he expresses his sorrow on account of his own people, saying, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh" (Romans 9:3). Balthasar refers to this statement of Paul as an example of extreme love. He further points out that in the history of the saints there have been many other similar wishes made to sacrifice one's own salvation for the sake of salvation of others (as we have seen in the case of St Thérèse).

Contemplation of such examples of love makes us think that the ultimate faith in God cannot simply be about believing that one has secured a place in Heaven. Certainly, such a wish cannot be, and in fact must not be, made lightly. As Paul's example suggests, only the one that has no doubt about their love for God or only the one that is living in perfect union with God could have such a wish. And Jesus is the only one that fully satisfies the condition. After all, "Only One has descended into Hell," as C.S. Lewis says in *The Great Divorce*, because "Only the Greatest of all can

⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 189.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 204-206.

make Himself small enough to enter Hell.”⁸¹ We can see that the saints’ loving willingness to be in Hell for the sake of others is actually encompassed within Jesus Christ’s obedient love towards the Father and the world, which was revealed in the abandonment on the Cross and in the Descent into Hell.

The abyss of divine love encompasses that of Hell, but the reality of Hell along with the human freedom to commit sin is not at all undermined. Hell still remains a possibility for those who reject the love of God, for it is considered as a Christological concept or a result of Christ’s Descent into *Sheol*. However, Pitstick has argued that despite the fact Balthasar presents universal salvation merely as a ‘hope,’ this structure necessarily leads to universal salvation in a systematic sense.⁸² As this point is also related to the question concerning whether Balthasar’s theology stays within the tradition or not, let us discuss this point below further.

For example, the following passage from *Love Alone is Credible* is quite suggestive for our discussion:

The ultimate abysses of man’s freedom to oppose God open up at the place where God, in the freedom of his love, makes the decision to descend kenotically all the way into the forsakenness of the world. With his descent, he reveals this forsakenness: to himself, insofar as he wants to experience abandonment by God, and to the world, which only now measures the entire breadth of its own freedom to oppose God against the dimensions of God’s love... *From this point on, true, deliberate atheism becomes possible for the very first time, since, prior to this, without a genuine concept of God, there could be no true atheism.*⁸³

What Balthasar presents as “true atheism” here is no mere unbelief or doubts about the existence of God. It is rather a real, deliberate rejection of God based on the full understanding of the cost of redemption. Pitstick argues that such a complete rejection of God is impossible before death so Balthasar’s theology *necessarily* leads to universal salvation, despite the fact that he only presents it as a ‘hope.’⁸⁴ However, is such a total rejection really impossible? We can put the question in another way: can we not know God’s existence and His love and still reject Him? If not, we are left with

⁸¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2009), 139.

⁸² See Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 263-274.

⁸³ Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C.Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 91-92.

⁸⁴ Pitstick, *Light in the Darkness*, 268-269.

the classic problem of Hell.⁸⁵ In fact, Balthasar is among many who take the self-choice of Hell with utmost seriousness. For example, the following passage written by C. S. Lewis is quite insistent on this matter:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.⁸⁶

In the last analysis, Balthasar’s hope for universal salvation seems to balance well this kind of self-choice for eternal damnation and the universal scope of salvation, which seems to be attested by Scripture itself. Balthasar’s theology has the potential to take the human freedom to commit sins and the depth of God’s love far more seriously than any other. Hell is the place where the human freedom and divine freedom ultimately meet, but Balthasar tries to present the love of God as being deeper than the sinner’s refusal. Balthasar’s thesis is that the love of God is deeper than Hell, but at the same time he tries to maintain the human freedom to the fullest. In this sense, Balthasar’s description of the lonely sinner with the even lonelier Saviour beside them makes perfect sense. In his own words,

There can be no more talk of doing violence to freedom if God appears in the loneliness of the one who has chosen the total loneliness of living only for himself (or perhaps one should say: who thinks that is how he has chosen) and shows himself to be as the One who is still lonelier than the sinner.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For examination of the problem of Hell, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1999); Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Charles Steven Seymour, *A Theodicy of Hell*, vol. 20 of *Studies in Philosophy and Religion* (Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2000); and Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Thanks to these scholars, the doctrine of Hell has been gaining the revival of interest for the past several years but the problem of Hell remains one of the most difficult problems facing Christianity. Why does all-loving and all-powerful God punish anyone eternally? Traditionally, Hell was justified as a matter of retributive justice which God imposes on sinners who deserve it. (For example, St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, St Anselm, and Jonathan Edwards take this position). Though once a very popular idea, today it has very few defenders. Many scholars who take up the issue of Hell seriously today argue that the punishment model of Hell is not the best way to defend the doctrine, mainly because ‘infinite’ punishment cannot be proportional to any sins that ‘finite’ beings can ever commit. Instead, now the most common way of explaining Hell is to appeal to human freedom which includes the freedom to reject God eternally (see Seymour and Walls.) Some people actually choose Hell themselves. The freedom theory of Hell could give a convincing alternative to the problematic punishment model of Hell, but still is not free from criticism. For instance, strong criticisms come from those who advocate universalism (see Adams). Therefore, we still have to seek a way to solve the conflict between the freedom model of Hell and universalism. This is the context where Balthasar’s treatment of Hell and hope for universal salvation should be evaluated.

⁸⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 75.

⁸⁷ Balthasar, “Eschatology in Outline” in *Explorations in Theology* IV, 456-457.

Evaluation: How Should We Reflect on the Questions concerning Hell?

Lastly, let us briefly reflect on why the discussion of Hell (and consequently Heaven too) is important. These days Hell seems to be far from being a ‘popular’ topic both among theologians and lay Christians, while the belief in Hell itself still seems to be very common.⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt once said that “the most significant consequence of the secularization of the modern age may well be the elimination from public life, along with religion, of the only political element in traditional religion, the fear of hell.”⁸⁹ However, this “elimination of the fear of Hell” could have serious consequences. Anthony Kelly, for example, discusses the alarming consequences of evading the issue of Hell and makes a point that Hell can reemerge “in a secular guise.” He writes,

When the topic of hell cannot be mentioned, the destructive force of evil is unacknowledged. Talking only of the goodness of God becomes nauseatingly unreal and so fuels an angry despair over the evils of the world.⁹⁰

As a consequence, we end up with the situations too often described as ‘hell on earth.’ The ‘hellish’ situations can be socially or politically determined ones, but not always.

In the beginning of his interpretation of the article of the Descent into Hell in the Apostles’ Creed, Benedict XVI writes, “possibly no article of the Creed is so far from present-day attitudes of mind of this one.”⁹¹ Then he goes on to “demythologize” the article and points out that this article, which at first seems so outdated, is in reality

⁸⁸ For example, according to a survey conducted by Gallup in 2011, 75 percent of the Americans surveyed said “Yes” to the question, “Do you believe in Hell?” (whereas 85 percent said “Yes” to the question, “Do you believe in Heaven?”) Considering that in the same survey 92 percent answered that they believe in God, it would be safe to say that the belief in Heaven and Hell is still an important aspect of religious faith. (See Gallup.com: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>) If we turn to Catholics, there is one online survey reporting that 83 percent of the Catholics surveyed believe in Hell, but interestingly, very few of them (0.4 percent in this survey) actually believes that they will go to Hell after they die themselves. Further, this tendency not to believe in Hell for oneself but for others seems to be found more or less in any denomination. This point should be taken rather seriously, for it is one thing to believe in Heaven and Hell, but it is entirely another to believe that there are actually some specific people suffering in there. Is there not something even selfish or unethical about such a belief? We should rather take a nuanced and sophisticated approach when we consider the questions about Hell and Heaven. (See Beliefnet.com: <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2007/01/What-Catholics-Believe-About-Hell.aspx> Accessed August 17, 2015)

⁸⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 133.

⁹⁰ Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 139.

⁹¹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 223.

“particularly close to our day and is to a particular degree the experience of our century.”⁹² Balthasar himself often mentions the impact of Holy Saturday on the modern “death-of-God” philosophy.⁹³ He locates this ‘modern’ image of Hell as “the condition of the self-enclosed ‘I,’ the ‘I’ unliberated by God”⁹⁴ in his theology of Holy Saturday. Balthasar certainly has the 19th-20th century philosophy and literature in the scope of his theology of Holy Saturday, and he even writes that the world probably had to wait for the modern experience of the ‘death of God’ in order to appreciate von Speyr’s mystical visions of Hell,⁹⁵ which is characterized by such ‘modern’ words as loneliness, emptiness, futility. (It is in this context that, for example, Matthew Lewis Sutton argues that “to comfort, to redeem, to heal, the theology of Holy Saturday as the descent of God into Hell is the only compelling belief in God for us in this postmodern age.”⁹⁶)

If we turn to the area of literature, we still find a variety of authors portraying the hellish realities in an existential sense, which are characterized by anxiety, despair, loneliness, and other negative sentiments⁹⁷ and Balthasar himself refers to a variety of authors who wrote on this topic.⁹⁸ There are two well-known definitions of Hell written in the 20th century. T. S. Eliot, in *The Cocktail Party*, has one character saying, “What is hell? Hell is oneself, Hell is alone, the other figures in it merely projections. There is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to. One is always alone.”⁹⁹ On the other hand, the seemingly opposite expression of Hell is given by Jean Paul Sartre in his play, *No Exit*. One character, who is locked up with two despicable women forever in Hell shouts at the end of the play, “Hell is other people!”¹⁰⁰ These two

⁹² Ibid., 224.

⁹³ For example, Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 51-52.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁵ Balthasar, “Introduction” in *Kreuz und Hölle I*, 10.

⁹⁶ Matthew Lewis Sutton, “Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Holy Saturday” in *On Suffering: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Narrative and Suffering*, ed. Nate Hinerman and Matthew Lewis Sutton (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012), 179.

⁹⁷ For example, see Wilhelm Maas, *Gott und die Hölle: Studien zum Descensus Christi* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1979). Maas refers to Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Claudel, Sartre, etc. as those who have experienced their own ‘Hell.’ For a survey of more contemporary approaches to Hell, see Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature: Western Descent Narratives Since 1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

⁹⁸ For example, Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord III; Theo-drama V*, 300-321.

⁹⁹ T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), 87.

¹⁰⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and Lionel Abel (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 45.

expressions seem to describe the opposite states of being on the surface, but in fact they could be understood to describe Hell as absolute loneliness in different ways, because it is the state of being where one is separated from God and isolated from other human beings, whether one is in a crowded room or literally by oneself. In short, the reality of ‘Hell’ as loneliness caused by separation from God or from other people cannot be emphasized too much. Therefore, it is crucial for serious Christian theologians to deal with the issue of Hell and seek to provide some ‘hope’ for an answer. For this purpose, Balthasar’s and von Speyr’s contributions are still worthy of our recognition.

In this chapter, on the basis of their writings, we have explored Hell as the state of absolute loneliness of the sinner and as a Christological concept. Let us conclude this chapter by reflecting on why such an approach is important. In the last analysis, it is significant to think about Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven as Christological concepts, in other words, the direct results of Christ’s redemptive work, because it means that these states are determined entirely by *our relationship with Jesus Christ*. To put it differently, these states cannot be merely about our afterlife, but should be directly related to our present, current states of being in this world. Pope John Paul II once said that Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven should be understood as “states of being” in relation to God rather than actual places. He described Heaven as “a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity”¹⁰¹ and likewise Hell as “the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy.”¹⁰² We also have to note that we should consider these states in terms of the divine-human relationship because the language of place is inadequate to describe the realities of these states, not because they only have symbolic meanings. Further, this point is directly related to the quality of faith.

As we mentioned briefly when we discussed the hope for universal salvation, faith in God cannot just mean reservation of a place in Heaven. Rather, it should be the transformation in our present life based on our living, dynamic relationship with

¹⁰¹ Pope John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English*, 28 July 1999, accessed via Eternal Word Television Network:

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2HEAVN.HTM#Heaven> Accessed August 17, 2015.

¹⁰² Pope John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English*, 4 August 1999, accessed via Eternal Word Television Network:

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2HEAVN.HTM#Hell> Accessed August 17, 2015

God. Likewise, damnation cannot merely be a bad fate which falls on us only after we die. If we choose to reject the love of God, then our present life leads to loneliness caused by separation from God. After all, God is the living God for the living, so our belief in Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell should be exactly reflected in our present way of life. Heaven should not be sought as a reward for faith, even though Heaven is unquestionably is a place for those who seek God lovingly. Balthasar, who combines theology and spirituality by turning to the examples of saints in history such as St John and St Thérèse, clarifies this point. Apparently, his concern does not lie so much in shaping the Catholic doctrine of Hell as in exploring aspects of Hell for the sake of the life of Christian faith.¹⁰³ His insistence (inspired by von Speyr) that we should overcome the Either/Or between Origen and Augustine shows this point well (for if we try to systematize the doctrine, we would have no choice but to accept either Origen or Augustine). Rather, he tries to show a way of contemplating the state of Heaven and Hell with a healthy sense of fear and hope understood in terms of our relationship with God. He does so by following the examples of the saints like St John and St Thérèse. In the last analysis, Balthasar proposes that we should seek God Himself alone, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, as these saints do. In his words,

God is the “last thing” of the creature. Gained, he is heaven; lost, he is hell; examining, he is judgment; purifying, he is purgatory. To him finite being dies, and through and to and in him it rises. But this is God as he presents himself to the world, that is, in his Son, *Jesus Christ*, who is the revelation of God and therefore the whole essence of the last things.¹⁰⁴

In short, we consider it one of the contributions made by Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday that he has given a clue to how we should reflect on the matter of Hell in our age where the topic of Hell is not popular anymore in Christian life but still highly relevant. We should not exclude discussion of Hell and Heaven from our life of faith as something obsolete or even unpleasant, for, as Balthasar and von Speyr have shown, it is directly related to the quality of our faith.

In sum, in this chapter, we have examined Hell as a Christological concept. After discussing “sin-in-itself” as a significant concept for appreciating the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday captured by Balthasar and von Speyr, we have

¹⁰³ Balthasar, “Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle,” 146.

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar, “Some Points of Eschatology” in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 260-261.

described the Hell into which Christ descended as the absolute loneliness of the sinner, which is also called the dark night of the soul. On the basis of Balthasar's reading of St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux, we have explored the Christological paradox that Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God has experienced Godforsakenness more deeply than any human being. We have taken up the issue of Balthasar's treatment of the divinity and humanity of Christ again, and have argued that at least Balthasar is consistent with his logic of kenotic love. We could even say that his Christological thesis that Christ's divinity is expressed in His humanity would make sense only in the name of kenotic love. Balthasar values the logic of love in his 'hope' for universal salvation as well. Despite the critique that his theology of Holy Saturday inevitably leads to affirming universal salvation in a systematic sense, we have attempted to argue that Balthasar actually seems to balance well the human freedom to reject God and God's universal love for humanity.

In addition, we have pointed out how the concept of Hell is still relevant for the Christian life today, and argued that the Hell described as the loneliness of the sinner separated from God and from fellow human beings makes it easier for us to see the relevance of the doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell for our postmodern world, where many people seem to suffer from the sense of isolation or alienation in various forms. Therefore, one implication that Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday can provide for Christian suffering is related to the concept of Hell as the dark night of the soul. Let us discuss this point further in Conclusion of Part I.

Conclusion of Part I: Love Alone Can Descend into Hell

In Part I, we discussed Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell as well as Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions as its inspirational source. We highlighted two points in particular; first, Balthasar attempts to appreciate the 'in-between' state of Christ in *Sheol* on Holy Saturday instead of departing far from the 'traditional' interpretation; and secondly Balthasar apparently shows a deep interest in the reality of human suffering. Both points will be discussed further in detail as we connect them to the 'tragic' in-between state of Christian existence in Chapter 6. As a conclusion of Part I, let us discuss below what we can learn to deepen our understanding of Christian suffering and discipleship on the basis of what we have examined so far.

In particular, we would like to stress again the significance of the dark night of the soul for Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. The concept is significant because it helps us to locate clearly the genre within which Balthasar is working and to understand the spiritual aspect of Christ's suffering as well as the Christians'. In particular, we have focused on St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux as the main influences on Balthasar and von Speyr concerning this matter. These two Carmelites show one distinctive form of suffering in Christian discipleship. Their examples tell us that God is in fact with us even when He seems to be absent or dead in the midst of our suffering. They also show us one Christian way to persevere in the seeming absence of God for the sake of love for our brethren.

These points are significant for examination of Balthasar's treatments of the Trinity, Christology, and universal salvation as well. After all, throughout his theological writings, he is not so much concerned with presenting a systematic view of theological concepts as with contemplatively exploring the abyss of kenotic divine love to the fullest. This attitude permeates his entire theological corpus, so something will be missed if we seek to systematize his thoughts in a strictly scholastic way. At least he seems to be aware of the potential issues and endeavours to avoid them

subtly, so even his critics can only accuse of the ‘tendency’ of his theology. At least he is consistent with his logic of kenotic love, and he explains even Hell (the exact opposite of love and communion) on the basis of the divine love, which is perfectly self-giving to the point of sheer recklessness. On the other hand, this kind of exploration has invited a criticism that his style is presumptuously overarching and has the potential danger of blurring the distinction between love and loss or between suffering and joy.¹ Regarding this point, we would rather suggest that he may be only sensitive to the paradoxical mystery of love and faith.

In order to clarify this point, let us discuss one of the recent examples of the dark night of the soul persevered for the sake of others: Mother Teresa. She is probably the most unexpected person in our age that has confessed to having experienced a dark night of the soul.² Certainly, Balthasar himself did not know that Mother Teresa was going through the dark night but this connection seems to be relevant for our discussion. She said, “In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not existing.”³ She also confessed, “when I open my mouth to speak to the sisters and to people about God and God’s work, it brings them light, joy and courage. But I get nothing out of it. Inside it is all dark and feeling that I am totally cut off from God.”⁴ She is known to have undergone the dark night to the end of her life. While she used to feel ashamed of herself having lost faith in God, eventually she reached the stage that she was able to accept it with joy because she realized that this experience could unite her even more closely with the poorest and the loneliest. As she said, “The physical situation of my poor left in the streets unwanted, unloved, unclaimed—are the true picture of my own spiritual life.”⁵ Further, in the following words of hers we can see a certain sense of joy paradoxically coexisting with the suffering of the dark night:

Thank God all went well yesterday, sisters, children, the lepers, the sick and

¹ See Chapter 2.

² For examination of Mother Teresa’s dark night of the soul, see, for example, Paul Murray, *I Loved Jesus in the Night: Teresa of Calcutta a Secret Revealed* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008).

³ Mother Teresa, quoted in *The New York Times*, 23 August, 2007. Quoted by Addison Hodges Hart in *Knowing Darkness: On Skepticism, Melancholy, Friendship, and God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 1.

⁴ Mother Teresa to Bishop Picachy, 21 September, 1962. See *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2007), 238. Quoted in Murray, 63.

⁵ Mother Teresa to Father Neuner, 12 May, 1962. See *Come Be My Light*, 232. Quoted in Murray, 68.

our poor families have all been so happy and contented this year. A real Christmas. — Yet within me— nothing but darkness, conflict, loneliness so terrible. I am perfectly happy to be like this to the end of life.⁶

This is certainly one exemplary form of Christian suffering in the sense that the suffering from a loss of faith or the apparent absence of God was patiently persevered out of love for other brethren.⁷ One important merit of examining such an experience is that now we can see that our suffering of loss of faith can be of service for God and for our brethren instead of merely causing embarrassment or a sense of guilt within us. In Balthasar's words, "where tangible joy is withdrawn from us, we are right to hope that other hearts may light up because of our darkness,"⁸ though it does not mean at all that we should actively seek to go through the dark night of the soul ourselves. Certainly this kind of suffering is *not* accessible for everyone. Nevertheless this is one of the insights Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday can provide for Christian suffering.

As ultimately shown in the case of Christ's suffering in the Hell of Godforsakenness, Balthasar's theology dramatically presents the paradoxical mystery of love. The more intimate our relationship with God is, the more likely we are to experience Godforsakenness. Therefore, we can even argue that love alone can descend into Hell, which is nothing less than the exact opposite of love. This is not a contradiction or a mere theological word play. The actual examples of St John, St Thérèse, Mother Teresa, and many other saints and mystics in history show us that there is some profound truth in this paradox appreciated by Balthasar.

Thus, we would like to suggest that his approach to the relationship between love and loss or between suffering and joy should be described as "paradoxical" rather than "overarching" or "epical" as some critics say. However, this point cannot be fully justified until the end of Part II, where we will discuss the in-between state of the Christian, whose paradoxical existence can be characterized by the long waiting between the times. Now let us proceed to Part II.

⁶ Mother Teresa to Bishop Picachy, 26 December, 1959. See *Come Be My Light*, 198. Quoted in Murray, 66.

⁷ Von Speyr's mystical experience of Christ's Passion too can be placed within this context. After all, she accepted this mystical suffering for the sake of other brethren and Balthasar presented it as a great charismatic gift for the whole Church.

⁸ Balthasar, "Joy in the Midst of Anxiety," in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons throughout the Liturgical Year*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 30-31.

Part II.
Holy Saturday
And Its Implications for Christian Suffering and
Discipleship

Overview of Part II:

In Part I, we examined Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday by focusing on its four principal aspects: Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions as its inspirational source (Chapter 1), its Trinitarian framework (Chapter 2), its Christological significance (Chapter 3), and its soteriological effects (Chapter 4). As the conclusion of Part I, we discussed that, paradoxically, love alone can descend into Hell (the opposite of love) and that God is in fact with us even when He seems to be absent or dead in the midst of our suffering. We also pointed out how Balthasar's theology is rooted in the tradition of the dark night of the soul, which reveals one Christian way to bear suffering out of love for other brethren. In addition, we highlighted two points in Part I: first, that Balthasar does not try to present a radical reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Descent into Hell in contrast to the traditional teachings but rather endeavours to appreciate the 'in-between' state of Christ in *Sheol* on Holy Saturday more seriously than any other theologian has ever done; and secondly that Balthasar shows a deep interest in the reality of human suffering throughout his theological corpus.

Now, in Part II, we will discuss these two points in more depth and try to present the implications of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday for Christian suffering and discipleship. The specific question we will explore further in Part II is as follows: How does Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday help us to understand the role of suffering in Christian discipleship and help Christians to deal with their suffering? This question is worth exploring for the following two reasons.

First, even if Christians have the means to find salvific meaning in their suffering by regarding it as a participation in the paschal mystery in theory,¹ suffering still remains an immense challenge for many Christians. Therefore, it has

¹ One exemplary Christian response to the problem of suffering is St John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris*: See John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, to the Priests, to the Religious Families and to the Faithful of the Catholic Church on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering* (February 11, 1984): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/hlthwork/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html

always been an open topic, and it would be helpful if we could add some insights into this problem by focusing on the specific position of Holy Saturday as the day between the Cross and the Resurrection. As we will discuss in Chapter 6, in many ways, the Christian life seems to be best characterized by the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday. In short, *our* Holy Saturday can be meaningful and bearable because of Christ's Holy Saturday.

Secondly, scholars' opinions actually divide concerning Balthasar's treatment of human suffering. For some, Balthasar's theology provides an ideal approach (even an answer) to the problem of suffering and evil. Balthasar roughly belongs to the one tradition in the Church which 'tends to' align love with suffering and faith with dying to self and which even regards some form of suffering as a necessary part of Christian discipleship.² Some scholars seem to be critical of this tendency or 'genre' itself.³ However, some of the critiques raised against him seem to arise from something more than a mere 'genre difference.' We could largely summarize such critiques into two points: first, that Balthasar does not engage with concrete social and historical contexts despite his deep concerns for human suffering, and secondly, that he presents too positive a view of human suffering. In Part II, we will deal with these critiques and examine whether or not Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday could stand them. In the last analysis, we will conclude that his theology of Holy Saturday can provide a hopeful message for those who are suffering, but we will do so with some reserve.

Part II is divided into two chapters. In Chapter 5, which works as a bridge between Part I and Chapter 6, we will discuss the Marian Principle and the Virgin Mary's Holy Saturday. For Balthasar, Mary embodies the role model of Christian discipleship. She knows how to receive and follow Christ better than any human being. After all, as often said in the Catholic Church, Mary was the first disciple. Through our discussion of his Mariology, we see Balthasar's ideas of the perfect form of Christian obedience in the midst of suffering. Our reflection on Mary's Holy Saturday works as a preparation for Chapter 6, which discusses the Christian's Holy

² We have already discussed the dark night of the soul as a significant concept for Balthasar's theology.

³ For example, Pitstick and Kilby belong to this group. See Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 118-119.

Saturday here and now. After all, as Balthasar reminds us, on Holy Saturday we wait for Easter at the tomb with Mary.

In Chapter 6, we will explore *our* Holy Saturday. Specifically, we will discuss the tragic state inherent in Christian existence itself, which we believe is best represented by the silent waiting of Holy Saturday located between the Cross and the Resurrection. We believe that this point should be emphasized in order to give Holy Saturday the place it really deserves within Christian life, even though this particular day still seems to be neglected or simply ignored in many lay Christians' lives. We believe that this point has significant implications for Christian suffering and discipleship. Now we could translate the meaning of suffering into 'waiting,' which itself can be seen in a Christological light. In sum, the Christian's Holy Saturday here and now (the waiting in transition from the old aeon to the new) can be endured because of Christ's waiting in Hell on Holy Saturday.

Chapter 5.

Waiting in Silent Faith: Holy Saturday and Mary

Introduction

In Part I, our focus was on Christ's Holy Saturday. As we have seen, Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, inspired by Adrienne von Speyr's visions, provides profound material for us to contemplate on Christ in *Sheol* on Holy Saturday, so we have examined them from Trinitarian, Christological, and soteriological perspectives. Most of the discussion on this subject usually terminates here. Many commentators have discussed the abyss of God's kenotic love, which descends as deep as Hell. However, we believe that it does not do full justice to the wide scope that Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday potentially has, if we limit our examination to Christ's Descent into Hell alone. As we mentioned in the Introduction, Balthasar himself has preferred this liturgical term "Holy Saturday" to the more doctrinal term "Christ's Descent into Hell." It is not merely about the activity or passivity of Christ in Hell. It is not only about what Christ did, or where He was on this particular day, or in what condition, but it has in its scope the whole "Holy Saturday" experience, which is characterized by silent waiting. We also believe that this aspect of waiting is important to understand the way Balthasar remains faithful to the Catholic tradition. Throughout this thesis we attempt to read him as the one who fully appreciates the strange silent pause between death and life, and between suffering and victory. For example, in his meditation on the fourteenth station of the Cross ("Jesus is laid in the tomb") he writes as follows:

So already his unquiet image haunts heads and hearts.
Already the spirit is freed.
Already the Easter question takes shape...
But silently.
For tomorrow is only Holy Saturday.
The day when God is dead,
and the Church holds her breath.
The strange day that separates life and death

in order to join them in a marriage beyond all human thought.¹

As we have noted, once we pay attention to Balthasar's emphasis on the 'in betweenness' of Holy Saturday, hence, on the aspect of waiting, we start to discern the possibility of widening its scope to explore its implications for Christian life. On Holy Saturday, Christ waited in Hell for the Resurrection, while Mary (and other women) waited at the tomb in faith and trust to God. Liturgically, we relive this waiting every year on Holy Saturday.

For Balthasar, Mary's *fiat* is the perfect role model of Christian discipleship, which has originated in Christ's own kenotic obedience (as we discussed in Chapter 3). In this chapter, we will discuss how Mary obediently participated in her Son's mission from the beginning to the end. However, Balthasar's Mariology also has a serious problem because of his departure from Vatican II's Mariology. He attempts to incorporate his outdated view of sexual differentiation into Mariology and as a consequence his Mariology becomes fragile and indefensible against critiques. In relation to this point and also as a preparation for the final chapter, we will discuss his critics' concern that Balthasar's theology does not really serve the cause of social justice, including gender equality.

Chapter 5 is divided into the following sections: 1) The Marian principle and the significance of Mary in Balthasar's theology, 2) Mary's *fiat* from the Annunciation to the foot of the Cross, 3) Mary on Holy Saturday, 4) Balthasar's view of childlikeness, and 5) evaluation: the problem with Balthasar's view of sexual differentiation.

The Marian Principle and the Significance of Mary in Balthasar's Theology

First, let us start discussing the place and significance of Our Lady in Balthasar's theology and clarify why it is relevant for us to discuss her here. For Balthasar, Mariology is clearly located within both Christology and ecclesiology.²

¹ Balthasar, "The Last Five Stations of the Cross," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, selected and edited by Martin Redfern, Theologians Today (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972).

² For example, see Balthasar, "The Marian Principle," in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 65-66. As to the secondary sources on Balthasar's Mariology, see Francesca Aran Murphy, "Immaculate Mary: The Ecclesial Mariology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (London: Continuum, 2007), 300-313; Lucy Gardner,

However, this position does not in the least mean that Mariology is a minor subject which would not affect our understanding of his theology even if we skip it. Rather, as John Saward states, for Balthasar “there can be no Christology without Trinitarian doctrine, but there can likewise be no Christology without Mariology, neither Incarnation nor Cross without the Virgin who said Yes.”³ In the Apostles’ Creed the name of Mary appears in the context of the Incarnation, and this point indicates that Mariology is first of all located in Christology. The inseparable link between Christology and Mariology can be traced back to the patristic writings, and Balthasar unquestionably endeavours to work within this long tradition. As has been pointed out by some,⁴ he evidently believed himself to be living in the era where Mariology was neglected and tried to return Our Lady back in the position she deserves within the Church and theology. Balthasar also warns about how “inhuman,” “soulless,” and “boring” the Church would be without the presence of Mary:

Without Mariology Christianity threatens imperceptibly to become *inhuman*. The Church becomes functionalistic, *soulless*, a hectic enterprise without any point of rest, estranged from its true nature by the planners. And because, in this *manly-masculine* world, all that we have is one ideology replacing another, everything becomes polemical, critical, bitter, humourless, and ultimately *boring*, and people in their masses run away from such a Church.⁵

As can be detected from this quote, the Marian principle is believed to add distinctively ‘feminine’ characteristics to the Church. The question of what is meant by the word ‘feminine’ underlies this whole chapter, and in order to fully understand it, we must first refer to Balthasar’s concept of “the Christological constellation” as the foundation of the structure of the Church.

Like all areas in his theological corpus, Balthasar does not offer a systematic ecclesiology. Rather, his ecclesiology is composed of his reflections on a

“Balthasar and the Figure of Mary,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 64-78; Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 2000); Aidan Nichols, “Marian Co-redemption: A Balthasarian Perspective,” *New Blackfriars* 95, no. 1057 (May 2014): 252.

³ John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (Washington D.C.: the Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 61.

⁴ For example, Aidan Nichols explains how Balthasar tried to overcome the false dichotomy between the maximalistic and minimalistic understandings of the role of Mary existent in the Catholic Mariology of his time. (*Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide through Balthasar’s Theology beyond the Trilog* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 235-236.)

⁵ Balthasar, “The Marian Principle,” 72. Italics added.

constellation of the following three figures who embody the Church: the Virgin Mary, St Peter, and St John, who respectively represent the Marian, the Petrine, and the Johannine principles. This emphasis on the subjective principles derived from these three figures who were closest to Christ is based on Balthasar's strong conviction that the Church is first of all the primordial subject of believing. (On this point, he follows his mentor Henri de Lubac and goes further.⁶) Therefore, for Balthasar, the question concerning the identity of the Church should be addressed as "Who is the Church?" instead of "What is the Church?"⁷

Who, then, is the Church? He explores this question throughout his theological corpus, but perhaps the most concise answer is the following one:

The Church in her deepest reality is the unity of those who, gathered and formed by the immaculate and therefore limitless assent of Mary, which through grace has the form of Christ, are prepared to let the saving will of God take place in themselves and for all their brothers.⁸

As can be seen in this quote, the Marian Principle derived from Our Lady, which is mostly characterized by her obedient faith and loving consent (as we will discuss in detail below), is considered as the most comprehensive principle of the Church, which embraces all others (the Petrine and the Johannine).⁹ The Petrine principle represents the 'male' official hierarchy of the church which succeeds the apostolic preaching and ministering of sacraments, and which has the Pope as its apex.¹⁰ The principle which combines the Marian principle (feminine/lay) and the Petrine (masculine/official) is the Johannine principle derived from St John (the Beloved Disciple), which is the principle of love. This structure is most symbolically represented by the scene at the foot of the Cross, where, as Balthasar explains, the Church is born. While Peter is absent, John represents the official side of the Church, and Christ hands over His Mother to his care. These three principles together

⁶ See Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness*, 200.

⁷ See for example, his essay "Who is the Church?" in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word*, trans. A.V. Littledale, Alexander Dru, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 143-191.

⁸ Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect*, trans. Brian McNeil, Kenneth Batinovich, John Saward, and Kelly Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 63.

⁹ To be accurate, Balthasar also mentions the Pauline principle, which is characterized by charismatic and visionary graces, but due to the fact that those who are gifted with such graces are limited, it does not enter into the description of the 'basic' structure of the Church. See Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness*, 200-201.

¹⁰ In other words, 'objective' holiness.

constitute the archetypes of Christian experiences, but the Marian principle is the most central of these three. Mary, as the immaculately conceived one, realizes in advance what the Church is supposed to be (*Ecclesia Immaculata*) in her own person. In Balthasar's words,

Mary is the womb and archetype of the Church, she is the fruitfulness of the Church herself, she is the internal form of the Church, since she is the Bride of Christ... Mary is the virginal-nuptial vessel of all obedience, out of which flows not only the Christian's obedience but Peter's demands as well.¹¹

There is probably nothing particularly wrong with such a typology and categorization itself, but the inherent problem starts to appear when Balthasar uses this typological ecclesiology to explain or simply justify the current structure of the Catholic Church. This point becomes most apparent when Balthasar denies the possibility of the ordination of women.¹² His typological ecclesiology attempts to explain that it is because of the comprehensive 'feminine' Marian principle that the complete 'maleness' of the priesthood can be justified without calling into question the equality between men and women. Balthasar stresses that the Marian or feminine principle precedes the Petrine or masculine principle. In contrast to the Apostles, who "begin as failures... and can never match the quality of the primordial Church, the 'perfect Bride,' the *Immaculata*,"¹³ the Virgin Mary is the first to believe in Christ and the one who gives perfect consent to the Incarnation, hence to God's salvific plan for the whole humanity. The Church existed in her even before any of the men were called to be an Apostle. Therefore, the Petrine office is "a partial share in the total flawlessness of the feminine, marian Church,"¹⁴ while Mary as "the Queen of Apostles" has a unique and all-encompassing role, even though it represents the lay position. Therefore, Balthasar argues that a woman who would aspire to be ordained is actually asking for something *less* than what they have now. Balthasar further says, "Because of her unique structure, the Catholic Church is perhaps humanity's last bulwark of genuine appreciation of the difference between

¹¹ Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions: on the Church in This Age*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 40.

¹² Balthasar, "Women Priests?" in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 187-198.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

the sexes.”¹⁵ However, as we will discuss later in the section of Evaluation, this kind of logic contains the danger of being utilized merely to silence the voices of women.

In relation to this point, we have to mention Balthasar’s reaction to Vatican II’s Mariology, for his attempt to link Mariology to the sexual differences is where Balthasar departs from the Council’s position.¹⁶ While Balthasar appreciates Vatican II’s acknowledgement that Mary is the archetype of the Church, he also finds the Council’s position deficient as it does not include a number of relevant issues, such as sexual difference, in its treatment of Mary. For Balthasar, Mary does not just happen to be a woman. She is *the Woman*, and she can represent the whole creation in front of God precisely because she is a woman. This is related to the fact that Balthasar applies the analogy of the man-woman difference to the Creator-creation relationship. For Balthasar, essentially, to be a man is to give and to be a woman is to receive. The following passage inserted in his discussion of the Marian principle is a good summary of his view of sexual difference. After affirming the fact that the woman is as active as the man in the act of generation, he declares as follows:

It is undeniable, however, that *the woman is the one who receives and that it is the man who gives*. Conclusion: to receive, to consent, to accept, to let things be is perhaps a no less active and creative attitude than that of giving, forming, imposing. And if in the Incarnation the part of man is taken by God, who is essentially the one who gives, indeed, who imposes, the part of the woman, who, as creature, accepts the divine gift, is far from being passive. Let us say, rather, that this acquiescence is the highest and most fruitful of human activities; in Pauline terms: faith is more fundamentally required than any works.¹⁷

Consequently, the Marian feminine principle is characterized by a receptive attitude to God, in other words, obedience, the notion which permeates Balthasar’s whole theology. As we discussed the notion of obedience in Balthasar’s Christology in Chapter 3, it does not mean something passive but rather ‘active’ in the sense that the Son *actively* agrees to suffer the Godforsakenness of the sinner in utter passivity.

¹⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹⁶ For Balthasar’s reaction to Vatican II, see Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory III: The Dramatis Personae: the Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 316-318. For a critical summary and analysis of Balthasar’s response to Vatican II’s treatment of Mary, for example, see Natalia M. Imperatori-Lee, “The Use of Marian Imagery in Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II” (PhD diss., The University of Notre Dame, 2007), 59-92.

¹⁷ Balthasar and von Speyr, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 50. Italics added.

Nevertheless, it is highly important to note that for Balthasar the ‘feminine’ basically means ‘receptive,’ ‘obedient,’ and ‘open.’ Unsurprisingly, such an essentialist kind of categorization has invited many critiques. (We will come back to this point later in the Evaluation.)

So far, we have summarized the significance of the Marian principle in Balthasar’s theology. Last but not least, we cannot overlook the influence of Adrienne von Speyr. Mariology is one of the areas where her influence on Balthasar is the strongest.¹⁸ This point alone might justify our inclusion of the Marian principle in our examination of his theology of Holy Saturday, which has von Speyr’s visions as its main inspirational source. Not only the presence of Our Lady shaped the spiritual and ecclesial relationship between them (along with St Ignatius of Loyola), but also von Speyr is the one that really drove home to Balthasar the significance of the role of Mary in the economy of salvation and in the Church.¹⁹ It has also been pointed out that many leit-motifs in Balthasar’s Mariology were already present in von Speyr’s major work on this topic, *Handmaid of the Lord*, in 1948.²⁰ As we will discuss later, von Speyr’s mystical visions of the paschal mystery were permeated by the presence of Mary. The following account of her vision in 1942 is symbolically a clear example of von Speyr’s understanding of Mary, which is also shared by Balthasar:

In the afternoon, a vision of the Mother of God, on a meadow near the stream [stream made of human sin]. She holds her child tightly. Then she comprehends what is demanded: she should let the Child go up to the stream. She is horrified. Then she says Yes. In infinite inner greatness and goodness. The Child stands before her at the bottom, and takes a few steps. The Mother follows him a little. He, meanwhile, has grown to manhood and stands by the stream. Mary has disappeared. Where is she? Praying somewhere, completely separated from Him.²¹

¹⁸ This fact may sound ironical, considering von Speyr’s Lutheran origin, but perhaps it was precisely because of her Lutheran past she undertood how the Church tends to be “inhuman” and “masculine” without the presence of Mary.

¹⁹ See Johann Roten, “The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 65-86.

²⁰ See Nichols, “Marian Co-redemption”: 252.

²¹ Adrienne von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, vol. 3 of *Die Nachlasserke* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1966), 49: “Nachmittag eine Vision der Mutter Gottes, auf einer Wiese in der Nähe des Stromes. Sie hält fest ihr Kind. Dann begreift sie, was gefordert wird: sie soll das Kind gehen lassen, bis zum Strom hin. Sie erschrickt. Dann sagt sie Ja. In unendlicher innerer Größe und Güte. Das Kind steht vor ihr auf dem Boden, macht einige Schritte. Die Mutter folgt ihm ein wenig. Er ist unterdessen zum Mann

Von Speyr sees Mary's entire life as being characterized by a perfect consent to the will of God,²² which is most notably seen in the Annunciation and at the foot of the Cross. Further, in this vision we can see von Speyr's (and eventually Balthasar's) view of the poignant relationship between Jesus and Mary; Mary participates in His salvific mission by consenting to be abandoned by Him in a similar way that He agrees to be abandoned by the Father (though on a much smaller scale). She follows him, but only *at a distance*. Exactly because she is the closest to the Son, she has to experience abandonment as a form of perfect love.

Now, let us see below how Balthasar and von Speyr actually present the figure of Mary as the role model of Christian faith. Through their portrayal of Mary, we can see their ideas on Christian discipleship as well as their approach to Christian suffering.

Mary's Fiat from the Annunciation to the Foot of the Cross

Mary's whole life is characterized by her consent to God's will. As the immaculately conceived one, her consent represents the perfect form of human consent to God's salvific plan for humankind. This is the basic stance of Balthasar's and von Speyr's Mariology. Aidan Nichols concisely summarizes it as follows:

Balthasar's Mariology has at its heart the question, What of the human consent to all God has done for us in the saving drama found in the Trinitarian revelation, and climaxing in the Paschal Triduum, with the victorious humiliation of the Death and Descent into Hell?²³

For Balthasar and von Speyr, the role model of the Christian's obedience to the will of God can be most clearly seen in Our Lady's *fiat* at the Annunciation: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary consented not only to the Incarnation but also to everything that subsequently happened, including the sorrow, the grief, and the state of

gewachsen und steht beim Strom. Maria ist verschwunden. Wo ist sie? Irgend wo betend, völlig von ihm getrennt."

²² She writes, "As a sheaf of grain is tied together in the middle and spreads out at either end, so Mary's life is bound together by her assent. From this assent her life receives its meaning and form and unfolds toward past and future." (*Handmaid of the Lord*, trans. E. A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 7)

²³ Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness*, 229.

Godforsakenness that she had to go through all because of her Son's salvific mission. Let us discuss below the series of her consents, as Christians are required to imitate the Marian consent at every occasion in their everyday lives. In Balthasar's own words,

If Christ, in Luke, commands us to carry our cross every day, he implies very precisely that this dull, ordinary cross consists in persevering at every moment in the Marian Yes, which transforms everyday mishaps as much as possible into situations that are fruitful in Christian terms.²⁴

First of all, at the Annunciation, Mary gave a full consent to the Incarnation. In many ways, Mary at the Annunciation is considered as the best representation of her whole life, which was lived in perfectly prayerful obedience to God (as the "Handmaid of the Lord"). Also, importantly for us, the whole setting where Mary uttered her full consent shows the way that divine and human freedom, in other words infinite and finite freedom, meet in perfect harmony. Balthasar says that Mary's freedom (as the immaculately conceived one) is unique in a different sense from Christ's, as "the figure of Mary exhibits an utterly exuberant form of creaturely freedom...the finite freedom that hands itself over and entrusts itself to the sphere of infinite freedom, which, through grace, stands wide open."²⁵ The perfect form of creaturely freedom is represented by Mary, as "no finite freedom can be freer from restrictions than when giving its consent to infinite freedom."²⁶ It is important to note here that God does not simply impose His Son on His creation. He waits for Mary's *response* (in other words, His creation's reply, as here Mary represents not only Israel but also the whole human race). Further, as *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II states (by following many of the patristic authors), Mary, by this consent, is "freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience."²⁷ (As Christ's obedience is the counterpart to Adam's disobedience in Eden, Mary's obedience is the counterpart to Eve's.²⁸) We can follow the perfect harmony between the infinite and finite freedom further by recognizing the nuptial image traditionally

²⁴ Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 58.

²⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* III, 299.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 300.

²⁷ Vatican Council (1964), *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964*, 56.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

²⁸ *Ibid.*

used and shared by Balthasar to describe the mystery of hypostatic union. For example, St Augustine says, “the nuptial union is effected between the Word and human flesh, and the place where the union is consummated is the Virgin’s womb,”²⁹ and St Thomas Aquinas writes that “a kind of spiritual marriage is taking place between the Son of God and human nature. The Virgin’s consent, then, which was petitioned during the course of the announcement stood for the consent of all men.”³⁰ We have to note here again that Balthasar develops the idea that Mary represents the whole human race in response to God the Creator to the notion that the whole creation is ‘feminine’ in terms of its ‘obedient,’ ‘receptive,’ and ‘open’ relationship to God. Since the Creator-creation relationship is in no way an equal one, to characterize the receptive and dependent attitude of creation as ‘feminine’ eventually leads to affirming the fixed notion that women are supposed to be receptive and dependent. No wonder, then, Balthasar has received more criticism on what he says about women than on any other area of his theology.³¹

Mary also consented to Christ’s public ministry, and her faithful attitude throughout His ministry (and eventually at the Cross) is regarded as the role model for Christian faith, for even though she did not fully comprehend the mystery surrounding her Son she never hesitated to believe and consent. Also, she was destined to suffer enormously as the Mother of God, as Simeon predicted to Mary herself, “a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35), but she was obedient and faithful to the end.

For example, the Gospel of Luke tells us the anecdote of Mary and Joseph searching for the twelve-year-old boy Jesus for three days. When they finally found Him in the temple, they did not understand the meaning of Jesus’s words, “I must be in my Father’s house”³² (Luke 2:49), but still the Mother “treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). Further, Balthasar’s interpretation of this small anecdote in

²⁹ St Augustine, “Exposition of Psalms 44,” §3, in *Expositions of the Psalms 33-50 III/16*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000), 282.

³⁰ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars edition, vol. 51, trans. Thomas R. Heath (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), III, q.30, a.1.

³¹ For example, Kilby says, “there is little in his thought that is such a flashpoint for controversy as what he has to say about women.” (*Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 123.)

³² Alternatively, this verse is translated as “I must be about my Father’s interests.”

Jesus's childhood is worth noting as he sees a typological relationship between this event and the paschal mystery.³³ He writes,

It is there, in the mystery of the Three Days, that he will have to be sought, just as his Mother and his foster father find him after three days of fruitless seeking. He will have to be sought where he is not: in sinners, in those alienated from God, in his solidarity with his enemies, with those who are lost, in those places where on the third day he makes himself known.³⁴

As Mary says to Jesus, “Why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety” (Luke 2:48), searching for Jesus for three days naturally caused Mary and Joseph much emotional pain. It is worth noting here the way Balthasar says that Jesus “cannot spare them this pain,”³⁵ because Balthasar often presents such an emotionally distressing experience of the absence of Jesus as one significant way of experiencing His presence or of sharing His suffering. Balthasar even writes, “the measure of inner fellowship with Jesus is the measure of our experience of absence.”³⁶ As we frequently noted in Part I, in Balthasar's theology those who are the closest to God are believed to be the ones that are most likely to experience the dark night of His absence.³⁷ As a natural outcome of this reasoning, His Mother is considered as the one that has experienced the darkest night ever (surpassed only by Jesus Himself).

It is certainly in the Catholic tradition to contemplate Mary's unique sorrow as the Mother of God,³⁸ but Balthasar's Mariology is quite radical in the sense that it

³³ Also, it should be noted that Pitstick too pays attention to this event in Jesus' childhood as a prefiguration of the paschal mystery and argues that this typological relationship shows that Christ's Descent into Hell was accomplished *gloriously* as “one of authority and wisdom recognized” as the boy Jesus was among the teachers in the temple and thus ‘going about the Father's business.’ (*Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 39.)

³⁴ Balthasar, *The Threefold Garland: the World's Salvation in Mary's Prayer*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 131.

³⁷ For example, in addition to Mary, the sisters of Lazarus (Mary and Martha) and Mary Magdalene are also presented as the ones who had to go through the painful absence of Jesus exactly because of their closeness with the Lord. See Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 130-134. Unsurprisingly, Balthasar's critics find this kind of interpretation problematic (as Jesus seems to ‘intentionally’ inflict such an emotional pain of separation on His closest ones). For example, see Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 117-119.

³⁸ For example, the devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary. Further, St John Paul II also says that Mary experienced “a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of night of faith,” as the one that “lived in intimacy with the mystery of her Son,” referring to the dark night of the soul of St John of the Cross. (St John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater: on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim*

characterizes her relationship with the Son by His distancing Himself from her, which increases in terms of scale and intensity, and culminates at the Cross.³⁹ Balthasar interprets the “sword” predicted by Simeon to pierce her heart as “a sword of separation.”⁴⁰ Three days of absence of Jesus in His childhood is extended into three years of absence due to His public ministry, during which He seems to reject her on several occasions; at the wedding in Cana, Jesus says to Mary, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (John 2:4); in the middle of Jesus’ public ministry, when Mary and His brothers visit Him, they are left standing at the door while He is saying to the crowds, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:48-50); when a woman acclaimed the womb that bore Him, Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!” (Luke 11:28); and finally, all these rejections and humiliations culminate at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus withdraws His sonship from Mary and gives her a new son, in other words, a ‘substitute’: “Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26). What is striking about Balthasar’s Mariology is that all these texts, which are commonly used to justify a low Mariology, are interpreted to present Mary as the most important suffering participant in the Son’s salvific mission, for as Balthasar explains it is precisely through all these rejections and humiliations of Mary by Christ that “the perfect union between the two is accomplished: just as the Father abandons his Son, the Son separates himself from his Mother.”⁴¹ As the Son’s abandonment by the Father is based on their perfect union by the Holy Spirit in love, the Mother’s abandonment by the Son is a sign of their loving union. In other words, Jesus is inviting His Mother to share His own suffering of Godforsakenness precisely because He loves her. In

Church, 1987, 17. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html

³⁹ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI echoes him on this point: “She must complete the Yes to God’s will that made her a mother by withdrawing into the background and letting Jesus enter upon his mission. Jesus’ rebuffs during his public life and her withdrawal are an important step that will reach its goal on the Cross with the words ‘behold, your son.’...To accept and to be available is the first step required of her; to let go and to release is the second. Only in this way does her motherhood become complete.” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary the Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 76.)

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 130.

⁴¹ Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 56. Also, see Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 130-131.

Balthasar's own words, here we see "the community of love and forsakenness that unites Jesus and his Mother."⁴²

Moreover, it is significant that Mary herself consented to participate in this horrible Godforsakenness, though this consent is done *in silence*.⁴³ This is her second major *fiat*, the first one having been uttered at the Annunciation. Like her first *fiat*, her second *fiat* also has a soteriological significance. Her consent to share in her Son's Godforsakenness makes both His death and her participation in it fruitful. The 'fruit' born at the foot of the Cross is the Church. Balthasar writes,

This form of union[the union accomplished by the Son being abandoned by the Father and the Mother being abandoned by the Son] was necessary so that Mary—who henceforth would have to form the center of the Church—might know from experience the mystery of the redemption and might be able to transmit it to her new children.⁴⁴

Mary's *fiat* at the foot of the Cross is the archetype of faith of the Church, which was born at this very scene of double abandonment, as well as of the individual Christian. It is relevant here to note the typological relationship between Mary and Abraham, the Father of Faith. In Mary's case, however, no angels intervene. She had to go through the sacrifice of her child to the end. In this sense, her faith was more complete than Abraham's. As Balthasar says, hers was "a faith that, in a certain sense, collaborates with the redemption and could well be called a co-redemptive faith,"⁴⁵ though Balthasar himself cautiously uses the word "co-redemption." (In Mary's case, as von Speyr points out, co-redemption is made possible by pre-redemption.⁴⁶)

It is exactly here at the foot of the Cross, where this double abandonment in union happened, that the Church, the Bride of Christ, was born. In Balthasar's words, "Mary begins by being the Mother, but at the Cross she ends by becoming the Bride,

⁴² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 501.

⁴³ How we should interpret this silence is itself a complex question. We will discuss this point in the Evaluation.

⁴⁴ Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁶ Von Speyr, *Mary in the Redemption*, trans. Helena M. Tomko (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 80: "She does not become the one who is pre-redeemed through the co-redemption, but rather she becomes Co-Redemption through the pre-redemption." Also, see *Handmaid of the Lord*, 116-117: "He had redeemed her also, by preserving her from sin. That gives her the capacity to suffer with him, vicariously for all, as an embodiment of the meaning of the redemption, in the perfect unity of human nature and divine grace."

the quintessence of the Church.”⁴⁷ The Church is born from the pierced wound of the obedient Son and the pierced heart of the obedient Mother. Therefore, the Church and the individual Christian are required to imitate this profound obedience shown by the Son and the Mother (now the Bride), and that is how they are supposed to participate in the redemption.

Mary on Holy Saturday: the Church Waiting in Silent Faith

Now, let us turn to Mary on Holy Saturday. Traditionally, Our Lady’s sorrow on this particular day has been most poignantly expressed in the image of the *Pietà*, the Mother grieving for her dead Son. Who would deny the heart-wrenching power of this image? Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, for example, once wrote of the importance of this image for Christianity as follows:

In her, God’s maternal affliction [*Leiden*] is open to view. In her we can behold it and touch it. She is the *compassio* of God, displayed in a human being who has let herself be drawn wholly into God’s mystery. It is because human life is at all times suffering that the image of the suffering Mother, the image of *rahmim* of God, is of such importance for Christianity. The *Pietà* completes the picture of the Cross, because Mary is the accepted Cross, the Cross communicating itself in love, the Cross that now allows us to experience in her compassion the compassion of God. In this way the Mother’s affliction is Easter affliction, which already inaugurates the transformation of death into the redemptive being-with of love.⁴⁸

The image of the *Pietà* is particularly relevant for our discussion because it is related to the question underlying this whole thesis: whether or not Balthasar’s and von Speyr’s interpretation of Holy Saturday radically departs from the traditional teachings. As we mentioned in the Introduction, what their innovative interpretation of Christ’s Descent into Hell has in fact sought to achieve was to reconcile this tradition of mourning, most poignantly expressed in the image of *Pietà*, on the one hand and the tradition of the image of Christ as victor over death on the other. They see the close connection between the image of the *Pietà* and the Church’s liturgical silence on Holy Saturday. In other words, on Holy Saturday, *we wait for Easter with*

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption*, 53.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger and Balthasar, *Mary: the Church at the Source*, 78-79.

*Mary at the tomb.*⁴⁹ This point also shows that examination of their interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell would not actually be complete without reflection on Mary's Holy Saturday (and consequently *our* Holy Saturday), because it is included in its scope from the beginning.

This point is further confirmed when we look at von Speyr's mystical visions of the paschal mystery, which are permeated with the presence of Our Lady, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Further, in terms of the theological relation between Mary and Holy Saturday, she often talks about the close connection between the Incarnation and the Descent into Hell. For von Speyr, Mary and Hell are the two poles which respectively mark the beginning and the end of the life of Jesus Christ. In her words, "The earthly life of the Lord is indeed in the middle between the Mother and Hell," in other words, from the womb of the Virgin to the womb of Hell, both of which were forever transformed because of His entrance.⁵⁰ Hence, there is clearly a parallel between the expectation in the Mother's womb and the waiting in Hell on Holy Saturday, hence between Christmas and Easter.⁵¹ To see a parallel between the Incarnation and the Descent into Hell, however, is not so original. This parallel can be traced back to the patristic authors.⁵² For example, St Ephrem the Syrian often compares the womb of the Virgin and the 'womb' of *Sheol*:

The womb and Sheol shouted with joy and cried out
about Your resurrection. The womb that was sealed,
conceived You. Sheol that was secured,
brought You forth. Against nature
the womb conceived and Sheol yielded.
Sealed was the grave which they entrusted
with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb
that no man knew. The virginal womb
and the sealed grave like trumpets
for a deaf people, shouted in its ear.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Balthasar "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle" in *Adrienne Von Speyr Und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten D. Röm. Symposiums, 27. - 29. September 1985* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1986), 142, 146.

⁵⁰ Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* II, vol. 4 of *Die Nachlasserke* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972), 107.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵² See John Saward, *The Mysteries of March*, 105-106.

⁵³ Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 10, 7-9, trans. Kathleen E. McVey (New York: Paulist, 1989), 129-130, quoted by José Granados in "Mary and the Truth about Life" in *Mary, God-bearer to a World in Need*, ed. Maura Hearnden and Virginia M. Kimball (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 31. See also Thomas Buchan, *Blessed is He who has Brought Adam from Sheol: Christ's*

This typology in itself has nothing to do with Mary on Holy Saturday but it is still worth noting as it helps to strengthen our claim that Balthasar's and von Speyr's emphasis on the 'passive' waiting of Christ in Hell (which is seemingly in contrast to the patristic image of Christ the 'active' conqueror of Hell) is not a radical departure from the tradition.

Now let us return to the grief and sorrow of Our Lady on Holy Saturday. There have been many prayers, meditations, and reflections on the Mother's suffering and faith on this day with the aim of nurturing piety,⁵⁴ but the theological questions we should ask in our study of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday are as follows: how does he describe Mary's participation in the Godforsakenness of the Son on Holy Saturday? And how different is that from his description of her abandonment at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday? These questions ultimately concern Christian discipleship too, for how can we participate in the mystery of Holy Saturday while we are living in this world?

One important thing to note concerning this point is that a naïve use of the word 'participation' fails on Holy Saturday, even if applied to Our Lady. Regarding the question of 'participation' in the mystery of Holy Saturday, Balthasar himself actually seems to leave it unresolved. For example, in *Mysterium Paschale*, he concludes the chapter on Holy Saturday as follows:

On Holy Saturday the Church is invited rather to follow *at a distance*... It remains to ask how such *an accompanying* is theologically possible—granted that the Redeemer placed himself, by substitution, in the supreme solitude—and how, moreover, that accompanying can be characterized if not by way of a genuine, that is, a Christianly imposed, sharing in such solitude: being dead with the dead God.⁵⁵

A few interpreters have tried to speculate further on the possibility of participation in Christ's Descent into Hell. John Saward, for example, suggests two practical answers

Descent to the Dead in the Theology of Saint Ephrem the Syrian (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 99-106.

⁵⁴ For example, see Cardinal Carlo Martini, *Our Lady of Holy Saturday: Awaiting the Resurrection with Mary and the Disciples*, trans. Andrew Tulluch (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 2001); Frederick William Faber, *At the Foot of the Cross; or, the Sorrows of Mary* (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1858), 397-444.

⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, the Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 181. Italics added.

(by referring to the meditations of St Thomas Aquinas).⁵⁶ First of all, we can regularly meditate on Hell, and Balthasar definitely follows the idea (especially when he uses the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius). Secondly, we can pray for the souls in Purgatory. Saward further suggests that Balthasar and von Speyr offer more than these practical answers. He writes,

They envisage the possibility of certain souls in this life being given the grace to taste something of the Lord's experience in Sheol, not as an end in itself, but in order, in and through Christ the Conqueror of Hades, to assist their brethren in the Church, to aid those who find themselves plunged into the black hole of depression, doubt, confusion, despair.⁵⁷

Von Speyr was apparently one of those "certain souls" who had the 'privilege' to share in the Lord's Descent into Hell to some extent along with many saints and mystics in history, who bore such a sharing in the spiritual night on behalf of others. However, as pointed out by Shelly Rambo, another interpreter who engages with this question, this point makes it extremely difficult to translate the Holy Saturday pattern of Christian witness more broadly into ordinary Christian life.⁵⁸

Perhaps we should rather respect the fact that we can follow the Lord only "at a distance" on Holy Saturday, as Balthasar says. After all, even Mary could not follow Him into Hell. In her visions, von Speyr often talked about how Mary was outside Hell.⁵⁹ Rather, her suffering on this day is characterized by not knowing what is happening behind the stone of the tomb or in Hell and not being able to participate in her Son's suffering and death. In this sense, Mary and the rest of the followers stand at the same place: at the tomb of the dead Lord. Though she does not know what is happening, she is not in despair. On the other hand, such a deep sorrow and grief as expressed in the image of the *Pietà* seems to reject a naïve use of the word 'hope.' In the end, "waiting in faith" seems to be the only expression we can use to describe Mary on Holy Saturday, if faith is understood as something to encompass a mixture of the aftermath of pain, sorrow, loneliness, obedience, vague hope, and loving trust in God, instead of bland optimism. Von Speyr writes as follows:

⁵⁶ Saward, *The Mysteries of March*, 126-129. Also see St Thomas Aquinas, *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries on the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Laurence Shapcote (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1937), 63-64.

⁵⁷ Saward, *The Mysteries of March*, 127.

⁵⁸ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 69-70.

⁵⁹ For example, Von Speyr, *Kreuz und Hölle* I, 135, 139.

From Good Friday on the Mother suffers in a new anticipation. The Son's suffering is at an end and she has gone with him to this end. She has tasted abandonment and loneliness. And yet, she knows that he is God and, as God, survives all destruction and death. She cannot imagine the Resurrection, nor does she picture the future to herself. She has only faith, which overcomes every death. And she also knows that, when the Child was given to her long ago, that had not been the beginning of her Son. The Child was not created at his conception. The eternal Son, who always was, came down into her womb. From this she understands that even death cannot end his life. He lived before she bore him; and so he still lives after he has disappeared.⁶⁰

If we locate ourselves in the place of Mary waiting at the tomb, Mary's obedient faith in the Lord can be a source of inspiration and motivation for small acts of charity and solidarity. Balthasar concludes his presentation of von Speyr's approach to Holy Saturday as follows:

What follows from all this for us? Let us leave it to the theologians to discuss the dogmatic aspects. *We, however, like Mary and most Christians, cannot follow Christ on this last way. We remain awake at the grave with the other holy women: What can we do? Many things. In our lives, revive the spirit of solidarity, this power to share the burden of another, to pray with fervor—and such prayer is unailing—so that our brothers and sisters would not be lost in the end... We simply attempt to put into action the small things that are possible for us.*⁶¹

We are not all given the mystical gift to share in the dark night on behalf of others, and such a horrible experience cannot be sought for its own sake. Nevertheless, there are many things we can do, such as praying for each other and sharing the burden of another (as expressed in the tradition of meditation on Hell mentioned above), as Balthasar proposes here.

Balthasar's View of Childlikeness

As we noted earlier, for Balthasar, the Marian attitude means 'feminine' receptivity. There is another important characteristic he attributes to this receptivity: 'childlikeness.' The topic of childlikeness has been largely ignored by Balthasar's critics, even though it runs through his theology. (Childlikeness is an interesting characteristic to examine, considering the adjectives often used by his critics to

⁶⁰ Von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord*, 133.

⁶¹ Balthasar, "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle," 146.

describe him and his writings: “oppressive,” “aristocratic,” “authoritarian,” “elitist,” “overarching,” “epical” and so forth.) Nevertheless, a few scholars have actually said that Balthasar himself possessed the heart of a child throughout his life. Saward is one of those few,⁶² and writes as follows:

I do not just mean that ‘despite’ or ‘in addition to’ the adult grandeur of his achievement he retained a childlike simplicity. That is true, but it is not the whole truth. *In Balthasar the child's heart shapes and orders the mind.* In the *Theological Aesthetic* it is young, uncluttered eyes which see the splendid form of revelation. In the *Theo-dramatic* a child is caught up into the drama of Christ’s self-giving love. In the *Theologic* a little one lets himself be led by the Holy Spirit into all the truth of the Father’s Word made flesh.⁶³

This statement from Saward echoes Peter Henrici’s words, “for all his greatness and towering knowledge, he was able to remain ‘uncomplicated,’ humble, indeed, childlike.”⁶⁴ This point seems to be symbolically suggested by the fact that his last book, which was lying on his desk on the day of his death and was meant to be a Christmas gift to his friends, was exactly on the spirit of childhood⁶⁵: *Unless You Become Like This Child*.⁶⁶

In this short work, Balthasar argues that when Jesus says “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15), He is inviting us to become exactly like *Him* (hence the emphasis, “this,” in the title). Balthasar points out the importance of Christ being not only the Son to the Father but also “the Child.” As Balthasar says, the Son has “never left the Father’s bosom”⁶⁷

⁶² As for other exceptions, see John R. Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 237-240; Peter Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David. L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 7-43; Rodney A. Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark: 2009), 127-128.

⁶³ John Saward “Youthful unto Death: the Spirit of Childhood,” in *The Beauty of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 140. Italics added. Also, see Saward, *The Way of the Lamb: the Spirit of Childhood and the End of the Age* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

⁶⁴ Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,” 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). The following exposition is mostly from this book, but as for other sources where Balthasar explores the theme of the spirit of childhood, see, for example, “The Eternal Child,” “Young Until Death” in *Explorations in Theology V: Man Is Created*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 205-224; “The Faith of the Simple Ones,” in *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 57-83; *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 322-40.

⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, 10.

even after He has grown up as a human being. According to Balthasar, it makes perfect sense for Jesus to encourage childlikeness precisely because He Himself shares this nature. Further, the childlikeness Jesus encourages in His followers is not supposed to be mere infantilism but rather a supreme form of *amazement*, *gratitude*, *humility*, and *maturity*. It would be relevant to discuss the spirit of childhood in this chapter on the Mother of God, for, first of all, childhood and motherhood are intrinsically interconnected, and secondly we detect in Balthasar's view of the childlike something problematic in a similar way to his view of the feminine.

For example, Balthasar explains how Christ continues to look up to the Father "with eternal childlike amazement."⁶⁸ Jesus's word, "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), (the word which Arius and his followers once quoted to prove the Son's inferiority to the Father), is interpreted in terms of the child's amazement and pride in his father. In Balthasar's own words, "the comparative is the linguistic form of amazement."⁶⁹ This amazement of the Son toward the Father is translated into His human existence, "beginning with the existence of his loving Mother, then passing on to his own existence, finally going from both to all the forms offered by the surrounding world, from the tiniest flower to the boundless skies."⁷⁰ Furthermore, this amazement is derived "from the much deeper amazement of the eternal Child who, in the absolute Spirit of Love, marvels at Love itself as it permeates and transcends all that is."⁷¹ Balthasar further describes how human erotic love and childlike amazement are connected; "eros can keep alive an awed amazement at one's partner's self-surrender within all the routine of the common life."⁷²

For Balthasar, another "childlike" attitude shown by the Son to the Father is that of thanksgiving. Balthasar states that thanksgiving is "the quintessence of Jesus' stance toward the Father."⁷³ Even when He gives *Himself* away (at the Last Supper), He gives thanks to the Father (Mark 14:23; Matthew 26:27; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24). To be a child means to be dependent on another and to receive from others. In the child, to plea and to give thanks can basically coincide. Jesus

⁶⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 47.

⁷³ Ibid.

says, “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” (Mark 11:24) The Christian as a child of God never outgrows the obligation to give thanks to God, for they receive everything from Him including their life and salvation.

Most importantly, Christ’s childlike attitude toward the Father can be most poignantly seen in His kenotic obedience during the paschal event. Balthasar writes,

Jesus, thus, suffers as the Son. In his own prayer, the child’s word “Abba!” (“Papa”) is first heard on the Mount of Olives (Mk 14:36). Even though the Father can now no longer respond, still *all Jesus’ suffering—even to the cry of abandonment on the Cross—is suffered in the spirit of childhood. And after the Son, like a lost child in an eerie forest, has been led through all the horrors of Holy Saturday, he can proclaim triumphantly on Easter Day: “I go up to my Father and your Father” (Jn 20:17).*⁷⁴

In short, for Balthasar, the spirit of childhood means “a repetition of the eternal Son’s loving readiness to obey the ‘command’ (*mandatum*) of the Father.”⁷⁵ Therefore, Christians too “must persevere, together with Christ, in fleeing to the Father, in entrusting ourselves to the Father, in imploring and thanking the Father.”⁷⁶ Since in Christ the perfect form of maturity and responsibility with regard to His mission is realized, we can say that “Christian childlikeness and Christian maturity are not in tension with one another” and also “the more we identify ourselves with the mission entrusted to us, in the manner of the eternal Son, the more thoroughly do we become sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father.”⁷⁷ Therefore, the notion of the spirit of childhood is the key to the manner in which every Christian is supposed to carry out their mission entrusted to them by God and to persevere in their suffering on the way. In short, Balthasar says that the Christian should carry out their mission and persevere in their suffering in childlike obedience like Christ.

Naturally, Our Lady again is believed to be the one that embodies this childlike obedience of the Christian in the most perfect form (as a creature). Her first consent at the Annunciation “presupposes a pure childlike attitude that entrusts everything to the Father,”⁷⁸ and she maintained this childlike attitude throughout her

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61. Italics added.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 40-41.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

life, including at the foot of the Cross, where, as we have seen, she consented to participate in the Son's separation from the Father. Balthasar stresses that "all forms of the following of Christ within the Marian Church by carrying Christ's Cross with him...are in the end ordered to this highest grace of *childhood*."⁷⁹ Balthasar sees such Christian childlikeness not only in Mary but also in basically all other saints.⁸⁰ In particular, here we can add another reason for Balthasar's appreciation of St Thérèse of Lisieux, who is also known as St Thérèse of the Child Jesus. From her childhood St Thérèse cultivated a personal relationship with the Child Jesus "in the crib." She also had the spirituality to keep on seeing the unchanging spirit of childhood in Jesus, even on the Cross. Balthasar writes,

The darkness over the Head that is wounded and bloody never grows too thick for Thérèse to see a glorious ray of eternal childhood streaming through the lowered eyelids [of Christ]...For in her every feeling and action, she aims at being a tiny mirror for the Child.⁸¹

Therefore, in Balthasar's appreciation of the spirit of childhood, we can see another influence of St Thérèse's "Little Way," (in addition to her "night of nothingness," which we discussed in Chapter 4).

In this section, we have discussed how Balthasar views childlikeness. This quality may seem to be a minor point, but still it is worth noting for a balanced view of his writings as a whole. In particular, we would like to point out the excessively romanticized way he speaks about children (the connection between childlikeness and eros, for example). How many people actually agree with his view of children as the ones that readily give thanks for everything they receive and obediently carry out their duties? Something similar can also be said concerning his view of the feminine. As we have mentioned, for Balthasar, Mary represents everything feminine. He writes that Mary "is woman, pure and simple, in whom everything feminine in salvation history is summed up."⁸² It is not that we have any objection to calling Our Lady "feminine" or "pure" or "simple." The problem is the way Balthasar seems to

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸⁰ Not only the saints. The spirit of childhood is one of the qualities he sees in those whom he admires, including Adrienne von Speyr and Georges Bernanos.

⁸¹ Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols, Anne Englund Nash, and Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 230.

⁸² Balthasar, "Our Lady in Monasticism," *Word and Spirit* 10 (1985): 52. Quoted by Lucy Gardner in "Balthasar and the Figure of Mary," 66.

lump together all women under the same adjectives. In our age, how many women actually want to be called “pure and simple”? Some may, but not all. Lucy Gardner, for example, critiques the essentialist and over-simplistic way in which Balthasar presents Mary as ‘Woman’ per se:

What are ‘enlightened’ intellects, of howsoever many schools of thought and shades of opinion, to make of this strange, even distasteful, deployment of a certain essentialization of ‘woman’ and ‘femininity’ in a hermeneutic which seems capable of eliding all women (in the Bible and beyond) with this one woman (Mary) merely on account of an apparently over-simplistic linkage between biological, social, psychological, and grammatical ‘gender’? Similarly, we may ask: what are readers of a critical or post-critical generation to make of Balthasar’s apparently naïvely literal, uncritical readings of the Gospel stories, combined as they are with an insistence on unrecorded psychological ‘facts’?⁸³

Therefore, we detect something similarly naïve and over-simplistic in the way Balthasar speaks about both children and women. It would be natural to anticipate that this tendency would also affect his engagement with the reality of human suffering, which we will discuss below.

Evaluation: The Problem with Balthasar’s View of Sexual Differentiation

In this chapter, we have been mainly discussing the Marian principle presented by Balthasar as the role model of Christian faith. It is basically characterized by obedient faith and loving consent in a feminine and childlike manner, and Our Lady embodied it to the fullest even at the culmination of her anguish of losing her Son. However, unsurprisingly Balthasar’s portrayal of the suffering obedience of Mary causes uneasiness among his critics. As we stated at the beginning, for Balthasar, Mariology is clearly located within both Christology and ecclesiology. It is no surprise, then, that the criticism raised against Balthasar’s portrayal of Mary is not particularly a critique of his Mariology in itself but rather reflects the criticism raised in other areas of his theology. We will discuss two issues below: the exegetical question and his view of the ‘feminine.’ Obviously, neither of them is an issue merely limited to his portrayal of Mary.

⁸³ Gardner, “Balthasar and the Figure of Mary,” 66-67.

Let us start with the less significant point: the exegetical question, particularly regarding John 19:26: “Woman, behold your son,” which is an important verse for Balthasar’s portrayal of Mary as participating in the abandonment experienced by Christ on the Cross. This interpretation is certainly a unique one, and some would quickly take issue with it and object to such a seemingly ‘cruel’ portrayal of Christ.⁸⁴ How could the loving Son of God abandon His own Mother? However, we also have to note that this portrayal of the community of love and forsakenness between the Son and the Mother is exactly rooted in his Christology, which is anchored in his Trinitarian theology. This drama of love and abandonment between the Son and the Mother would not make sense at all without the Trinitarian form of love and abandonment between the Father and the Son. Therefore, if we do not accept this Trinitarian form in the first place, we certainly could deny this double abandonment of the Son and the Mother, but if we accept the former, we could admit that Balthasar may be consistent about his logic of love and abandonment after all: if love is truly strong, it can afford to be abandoned. Mary is not forced to share in this night of separation. As Balthasar and von Speyr meditate on the unimaginable sorrow of Our Lady, she would certainly do anything to take her Son’s place if she could, but she must let it happen out of love and obedience.

It would also be helpful here to note that Balthasar is not the only one that emphasizes the forsakenness of Mary at the foot of the Cross and sees it as a parallel of the Son’s abandonment by the Father. For example, as pointed out by some,⁸⁵

⁸⁴ One straightforward line of interpretation from St Augustine to St Thomas Aquinas is that here Jesus is worried about His mother’s future so He is leaving her to the care of His closest friend. On the other hand, Raymond Brown, for example, does not support this view, because it seems “to reduce Johannine thought to the level of the flesh and to ignore the distancing from the concerns of natural family that took place at Cana 2:4.” (Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, volume. II, the Anchor Bible Reference Library (London: Doubleday, 1994), 1021.) Brown himself sees this verse (and the verse following) as the establishment of a new relationship which goes beyond the natural family. Also, he pointed out that these verses evoke the image of Lady Zion’s giving birth to a new people in the messianic age, and of Eve and her offspring. (See Brown, *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*, vol. 29A of *the Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 926.) For a survey of some Marian interpretations of this passage, see, for example, R. F. Collins, “Mary in the Fourth Gospel—a decade of Johannine Studies,” *Louvain Studies* 3 (1970): 130-142. Also, for a somewhat Balthasarian Mariological reflection on these verses as the third of the seven last words of Jesus, see Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 71-101. (Neuhaus too talks about Mary’s ‘kenosis’ mirroring Christ’s.)

⁸⁵ For example, see Máire O’Byrne, *Model of Incarnate Love: Mary Desolate in the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 2011), 46; Thomas Langan, *The Catholic Tradition* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 448f; Yves de Maeseneer, “Review

Chiara Lubich, the 20th-century Catholic activist and founder of the Focolare movement, emphasizes the abandonment of Mary by the Son in a strikingly similar way to Balthasar and von Speyr. No direct influence between them appears to have been confirmed, which makes the similarity all the more interesting. For Lubich and her Focolare movement, “Jesus Forsaken” and “Mary Desolate” are the main sources of inspiration. She too reads John 19:26 as depriving Mary of her maternity toward Jesus and thus her passion is fused with His.⁸⁶ It is relevant for our discussion to note that it has been testified that some of those who are going through their own dark night of faith in the Focolare movement actually find hope and consolation in the figure of Mary forsaken along with her Son.⁸⁷

Now, let us turn to the second issue: Balthasar’s view of the ‘feminine’ understood as ‘receptive’ and ‘obedient.’ This is the most problematic one and most critiques regarding his portrayal of Mary seem to be more or less related to this point. It is actually Balthasar himself who has laid the foundation for such criticism by incorporating his own outdated view of sexual differentiation into his Mariology. As we noted at the beginning, while Balthasar appreciates Vatican II’s acknowledgement that Mary is the archetype of the Church, he has also attempted to ‘correct’ it by bringing in the man-woman aspect to Mariology. Mary, for Balthasar, is ‘the Woman,’ and she can represent the whole of humanity at the Annunciation precisely because of her gender, for Balthasar analogically characterizes the Creator-creation relationship by using sexual differences. As we have mentioned above, he develops the idea that Mary represents the whole human race in response to God the

Symposium: Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction by Karen Kilby,” *Horizon* 40, no.1 (June 2013):104.

⁸⁶ Lubich writes, “In that moment Mary, in an abyss of suffering whose depths we cannot measure, experiences the trial of losing the fruit of her womb, Jesus, the one who she could say was her purpose and work. It seems Jesus is almost depriving Mary of her maternity toward him and transferring her motherhood to someone else, to John, in whom Jesus saw all of us. And Mary becomes mother to the whole of humanity, mother of the Church. She pays for this with her own darkest desolation. She is alone, without Jesus. She is the Desolate. Here she lives the so-called “night of the spirit,” because her heart echoes Jesus’ cry on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mt 27:46) Mariologists say that this was the moment the Virgin Mary reveals God’s plan for her. His plan blossoms in full. Here she associates herself with Christ and fuses her passion with his, for the redemption of the human race.” (*Mary: the Transparency of God*, trans. Eugene Selzer, Thomas Michael Hartmann, and Jerry Hearne (London: New City Press, 2003), 63-64.

⁸⁷ Lubich writes, “In those moments [of the ‘night of the spirit’], along with Jesus forsaken, it is the Desolate that can be of light to their soul. It is from her that they learn to ‘stand upright’ at the foot of the cross, while in deep agony of the soul, completely accepting God’s will just as Mary did.” (*Mary: the Transparency of God*, 64-65)

Creator to the notion that the whole creation is ‘feminine’ in terms of its ‘obedient,’ ‘receptive,’ and ‘open’ relationship to God. For him, to be a man is to give while to be a woman is to receive. What Balthasar actually aims to do with such a sexual differentiation is to argue how the man-woman relationship is “fruitful” exactly because of their different and complementary roles. Unsurprisingly, however, such an essentialist kind of categorization has invited much criticism.⁸⁸ In Balthasar’s theology of sexual differentiation, as pointed out by his critics, primacy is preserved for the man, and the woman is always secondary, in other words, an ‘answer’ to the man, even though he stresses that the man and the woman are equal. Also, as can be seen in the ecclesial structure composed of the Marian principle (representing the feminine/lay) and the Petrine principle (the masculine/office), although Balthasar himself tries to stress that the Marian principle embraces the Petrine principle (hence, the feminine principle is more comprehensive than the masculine), in reality, it has the effect of limiting the role of women (without even mentioning the question of the ordination of women). It has also been pointed out that Balthasar’s view of sexual differentiation will ultimately undermine one of the goals of Vatican II, namely, the integration and maturation of the laity.⁸⁹ After all, in this system, while the man can be both masculine and feminine, the woman is forever only feminine. To make matters worse for Balthasar, his tendency not to explain why he says what he says (the tendency most strongly criticized by Kilby) is most apparent in his way of sexual differentiation, as he never explains why the role of the woman is to receive in the first place.⁹⁰ Therefore, (rather to our disappointment), there is no way to defend Balthasar from the critique that he limits the role of women, whatever his actual intention is. His theology of sexual differences is probably the most criticized area and it is beyond our scope and interest to consider all the critiques raised against it, but let us mention some which seem to be relevant for our topic: Mary’s obedient consent and Christian suffering.

⁸⁸ Most notably from David Moss and Lucy Gardner, Corinne Crammer, Michelle A. Gonzalez, Tina Beattie, and Karen Kilby.

⁸⁹ See Imperatori-Lee, 92.

⁹⁰ See Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 142-146.

For example, Lucy Gardner and David Moss have pointed out that Mary's consent, which Balthasar's Mariology so emphasizes, is actually *not recorded*.⁹¹ This silence on her side is particularly conspicuous in her 'consent' at the foot of the Cross, which is supposed to be so crucial for his Mariology. Her silence certainly could mean many things including her complete obedience as Balthasar interprets, but it could also suggest other possibilities such as her voice being *silenced*. It has also been pointed out that his theology is not helpful for the cause of social justice, which includes improvement of gender equality. Corinne Crammer, for example, writes, "Whatever his intentions may have been, Balthasar's theology does not serve the cause of justice for women well but rather provides theological justification for social inequality."⁹² We agree that this kind of attitude, despite his opposite intentions, could be "hijacked to support an unjust *status quo*," as Gerard O'Hanlon strongly argues.⁹³ This is true of his presentation of the Marian and Petrine principles, for instance; to those who wish to simply make women shut up, Balthasar has given a convenient means, whether he notices or not. As O'Hanlon writes, Balthasar's naiveté "is illustrated in particular by his remarks on the Church and structural change."⁹⁴ If we return to the figure of Mary and consider how her 'obedient' suffering in 'silence' could be simply used to justify women's unjust suffering, we can share these moral concerns raised by his critics.

If we reject Balthasar's view of sexual differentiation, we might also have to anticipate a question to be raised against the validity of the project of this thesis: would it be possible to reject his view of sexual differentiation and still argue that his theology tells us something significant about human suffering? We anticipate this question because it has been pointed out by many that his entire theology is 'gendered' and his view of sexual difference permeates his theology. Because of this strongly 'gendered' characteristic, some even imply that his entire theology could be

⁹¹ Gardner and Moss, "Something like Time; Something like the Sexes—an Essay in Reception" in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, ed. Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, and Graham Ward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 136-137.

⁹² Corinne Crammer, "One sex or two? Balthasar's theology of the sexes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 107.

⁹³ Gerard O'Hanlon, "Theological Dramatics" in *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. B. McGregor and T. Norris (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 110.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

in danger of falling apart because of his flawed view of sexual differences. Gardner, for example, writes:

The fabric of Balthasar's theological argument is at once remarkably plastic and yet frighteningly fragile: able to encompass and account for literally everything it might encounter, and yet so tightly woven in ever greater intensities that one minor fault or imbalance might seem to threaten the whole edifice...it is tempting to wonder whether his theology must, as it were, stand or fall today by the accuracy or acceptability of its account of sexual difference in which woman appears to be always second, receptive, responsive, response, never first—always man's, never her own self, always eliding with difference.⁹⁵

However, at least we do not share this concern. Despite his indefensible view of women and the fact that his theology is strongly coloured by his view of sexual differences, we still argue that his theology of Holy Saturday has important implications for the issue of suffering. This is largely because we do not think that the conclusion we draw from Balthasar's theology concerning the issue of Christian suffering is necessarily affected by whether or not his view of sexual differentiation is problematic. We do not see any reason why our emphasis on the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday, or on the aspect of waiting, could be affected by his outdated view of women.

If we have to characterize the mystery of Holy Saturday with one word, that would be *waiting*. In silence, we could add. This silent waiting is what really distinguishes Holy Saturday from Good Friday and Easter Sunday, both of which are more or less characterized by 'cries' (the cry of dereliction on the one hand, and the cry of joy on the other.) That is what Christ was 'doing' in *Sheol* and what Mary was doing at the tomb, and this is what the Church liturgically does every year on Holy Saturday. The Roman Missal clearly says, "On Holy Saturday the Church *waits at the Lord's tomb* in prayer and fasting, meditating on his Passion and Death and on his Descent into Hell, and awaiting his Resurrection."⁹⁶ This emphasis on waiting could have important implications for the issue of suffering in Christian discipleship, which is the topic of our last chapter.

⁹⁵ Gardner, "Balthasar and the Figure of Mary," 77.

⁹⁶ *The Roman Missal*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (London: the Catholic Truth Society, 2010), 374.

Chapter 6.

Between Suffering and Victory: Holy Saturday and the ‘Tragic’ Christian

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we discussed the perfect obedience of Mary, the Mother of God and also the very first disciple, consistently held even in the midst of suffering and God-forsakenness. Mary is the perfect role model of Christian discipleship and shows the way to persevere obediently in our suffering. However, all other Christians are quite different from Mary, who is the immaculately conceived one (hence *Ecclesia Immaculata*). Balthasar emphasizes that in reality the Church is made up of sinners. He writes of “the irreducible dialectic peculiar to the Church’s existence and resting on her twofold reality” as follows:

The Church is *both eternal and temporal, infallible and fallible, immaculate in herself and yet sinful in her members*. In her first aspect, the Church requires the most childlike obedience and an open love for the truth entrusted to her, a truth she freely dispenses and simply is—in her deepest identity as Bride and Body of Christ, as communion of saints, and as “love.” In her second aspect, the Church requires open judgment, criticism, and even humiliation, things the Christian cannot spare the Church provided he lays claim to his part in the burden of guilt...Every apologetical approach that seeks to argue away the Church’s aspect of being sinful in her members in fact harms the Church more than it helps her.¹

The awareness of this twofold reality of the Church and its members permeates Balthasar’s writings, so he writes extensively on the Church as *Casta Meretrix* (“chaste whore”).² Christian life and discipleship is characterized by a paradoxical twofoldness in many ways. The Christian is a “justified sinner,” forgiven but not exempt from judgment, redeemed by Christ but still exposed to sin as long as they live in this world.

¹ Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 109-110. Italics added.

² Balthasar, “Casta Meretrix” in *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 193-288.

We would like to explore this paradoxical existence of the Christian on the basis of Balthasar's writings, specifically, by connecting his theology of Holy Saturday with the other innovative area of his theology, namely, his theological engagement with tragedy. His engagements with Holy Saturday and tragedy are both quite novel and exploratory in their nature, and Balthasar himself does not make the connection explicitly. However, we see a profound link between these two areas of his theology, and we believe that this way of reading him would eventually deepen our understanding of Christian suffering and discipleship. First of all, Balthasar sees something fundamentally 'tragic' in the in-between state of the Christian existence, which is torn between the truth of Christ and the law of this world. This in-between state has been caused by nothing other than the new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), which has been brought by His Death and Resurrection. Now, as we saw in Part I, for Balthasar, the starting point of the new creation is Christ's Descent into Hell. In other words, Hell is the turning point of the old and new aeon, and Christ Himself went through this transition in utter passivity.

Thus, Balthasar presents a significant connection between Christ's waiting for the Resurrection in Hell on Holy Saturday and the fundamentally 'tragic' state of the Christian torn between the old aeon and the new. As a paradoxical being in transition, the Christian believes that their victory is both already there and not there yet. In this sense, the Christian still lives in Holy Saturday. We believe that this notion deepens our understanding of suffering in the Christian life, because now we can translate the meaning of suffering into 'tragic waiting,' which avoids explaining away the subjective reality of suffering and at the same time maintains the hope of finding its salvific meaning by relating it to Christ's suffering. Our conclusion will be that this 'tragic waiting' in our lives, which is represented by Holy Saturday, now can be seen in a Christological light.

We believe such an exploration can make a contribution both to the scholarship on Christian discipleship and suffering and to the scholarship on Balthasar, first of all, because the issue of human suffering has always been an important topic for Christian theology, and also because not all Balthasarian scholars agree that he makes significant contributions to this issue. Some scholars read him

sympathetically,³ but his commentators are often critical of his treatment of human suffering. We could largely summarize the critiques into two points: first, Balthasar does not really engage with concrete social and historical contexts despite his seemingly deep concern, and secondly, he presents too positive a view of human suffering and tragedy. More often than not, these two criticisms seem to be made together.

We will carefully consider whether or not these critiques about his treatment of the question of human suffering and evil are legitimate and also examine whether or not the argument of this thesis can stand them. Concerning the first criticism, there is no point in arguing for the opposite. It is true that Balthasar did not spend much ink on *concretely* applying his theology to the social, political, or economic problems of his time. However, the fact that he explores such interests in art and literature rather than concrete social or historical contexts does not necessarily undermine the relevance of his theology to ‘the real world.’ The second point is more complex, but we will eventually present that Balthasar somehow maintains decent respect for the mystery of human suffering.

The section titles of this chapter are as follows: 1) Balthasar and the problem of theodicy, 2) Theological engagement with tragedy as a response to evil and human suffering, 3) Balthasar and tragedy—Jesus Christ as “the heir of all the tragedy of the world,” 4) “tragedy under grace”—the tragic state of the Christian existence, 5) the tragic nature of Christian life and Holy Saturday, and 6) evaluation: Balthasar and the concrete reality of suffering.

³ The most recent one is Les Oglesby, *C. G. Jung and Hans Urs von Balthasar: God and Evil - A Critical Comparison* (London: Routledge, 2013). This book tries to compare Balthasar’s and C.G. Jung’s ideas on the question of God’s involvement with evil. Also, see Philip Tallon, *The Poetics of Evil: toward an Aesthetic Theodicy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), which turns to Balthasar’s theological aesthetics as a good resource for theodicy. Also, as we made reference in Chapter 2, there is Jacob Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy: the Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Further, the following articles are also relevant: Matthew Lewis Sutton, “Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Holy Saturday” in *On Suffering: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Narrative and Suffering*, ed. Nate Hinerman and Matthew Lewis Sutton (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012), 171-183; Juan M. Sara, “Descensus ad Infernos, Dawn of Hope” in *Love Alone Is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as an Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, ed. David L. Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans., 2008), 209-240. We will make reference to these works below when it is deemed necessary and relevant for our discussion.

Balthasar and the Problem of Theodicy

We have repeatedly stated that this thesis attempts to examine Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday and present its implications for Christian suffering. Here let us clarify further why such connections are valid.

As we have pointed out several times, Balthasar himself does *not* try to construct a so-called theodicy. He even presents a critical attitude toward theodicy in general at various places.⁴ On the other hand, he refers to the problem of evil as a problem “that has acquired an urgency today quite different from the urgency it had in primitive Christian and medieval theology”⁵ and it is clear that his *Theo-drama* has the problem of evil and suffering within its scope.

First of all, the existence of God is not really a question for Balthasar, so he does not see the need to justify God in the face of evil. In other words, he does not engage with the Humean question: “Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”⁶ Concerning the origin of evil, Balthasar’s answer could be classified under the so-called free-will argument.⁷ Evil originates in human free will, and human beings are solely responsible for evil. On the other hand,

⁴ For example, Balthasar is critical of the Augustinian kind of harmonic theodicy as he thinks that it throws a “cloak over tragedy” and fails to discern the deep reality of suffering (Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 129.) Also see Tallon, *The Poetics of Evil*, 117, 124-125, 131-134). It has also been pointed out that he takes a critical attitude toward Hegelian kind of narrative theodicy as he believes it does not justice to the particularities of human suffering. However, this is a complex subject, as it also concerns the difficult question of how we view the relationship between Balthasar and Hegel. For an examination of Hegel’s theodicy and Balthasar’s challenge to it, for example, see Cyril O’Regan, “Hegel, Theodicy, and the Invisibility of Waste,” in *The Providence of God*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 75-108; O’Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: von Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity volume 1. Hegel* (Chestnut Ridge: the Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014), 244-250. In particular, O’Regan points out how the anti-Hegelian element in Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday can be underscored by Balthasar’s challenge to Hegel’s theodicy.

⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory I: Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 48. Also, see 48-50.

⁶ David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (London: 1779), 106. Accessed via Eighteenth Century Collection Online:

http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/ecco/infomark.do?type=search&tabID=T001&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28BN%2CNone%2C7%29T143297%24&sort=Author&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&version=1.0&userGroupName=ed_itw&prodId=ECCO

⁷ See Oglesby, *C. G. Jung and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 103-105. Also, for a summary of Balthasar’s understanding of evil, see 27-31, 103-108, and 118-126.

Balthasar shows some affinity with the so-called soul-making argument too, for he stresses that human freedom needs to explore all its possibilities including evil and that salvific ‘soul-making’ can become possible through such an exploration.⁸

As we have already seen in Chapter 2, Balthasar explains that it is God Himself that has given human beings the perfect freedom to say “No” to Him, to choose evil rather than good, and eventually, to choose Hell rather than Heaven. This gift of freedom itself is considered as an expression of God’s kenotic love for humankind, so Hell, which is the supreme consequence of perverted human freedom, belongs to God Himself. Therefore, within Balthasar’s unique Trinitarian framework, when the Father sends the Son to save the humanity, the Son descends into Hell, which is the final destination of the redemptive mission He has received from the Father.

As we pointed out in Chapter 2, this Trinitarian structure leads us to see the connection between Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday and theodicy. As concisely summarized by Aidan Nichols, “the Descent ‘solves’ the problem of theodicy, by showing us the conditions on which God accepted our foreknown abuse of freedom; namely, his own plan to take to himself our self-damnation in Hell.”⁹ God can assume the risk of giving His creation the freedom to reject Him and to become lost, because He is able to gather this lostness into Himself. It is exactly through the Son’s Descent into Hell that such gathering up of the lostness of humanity into God is revealed. In Balthasar’s words, God gathers the abyss of the lostness of humanity into “the abyss of absolute love.”¹⁰ If we dare present a clear-cut theoretical ‘answer’ to the problem of evil on the basis of Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday, this is it, more or less.

Further, if we try to provide an answer to the problem of suffering, Jacob H. Friesenhahn has already done so by concluding, “All human suffering and death, conformed by God’s grace to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, has ultimate meaning as

⁸ He more or less agrees with Irenaeus on this point. See, for example, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory II: The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 216.

⁹ Aidan Nichols, “Introduction,” in Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 7.

¹⁰ Balthasar, “Trinity and Future,” in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 52.

grounded in the Triune God through the Incarnate Son.”¹¹ Similarly, it has been further stated by Matthew Lewis Sutton that “to comfort, to redeem, to heal, the theology of Holy Saturday as the descent of God into Hell is the only compelling belief in God for us in this postmodern age,”¹² for “the God who suffered the worst of Hell can redeem the worst of human suffering.”¹³

We do not totally deny this kind of reasoning. As we detect a deep interest in the reality of evil and human suffering throughout Balthasar’s theological corpus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the question his entire theology really engages with is how God is involved with a world which is so obviously fraught with evil and suffering. After all, in his theology, the Cross, the Descent into Hell, and the Resurrection can be considered as the ultimate expression of God’s loving involvement with the world, and he discusses how the meaning of human suffering and death can be transformed by relating it to the events of the paschal mystery. Further, we could even say that he is not so much interested in the question concerning the cause of suffering as in a transformation of the meaning of suffering on the basis of the paschal mystery.¹⁴ For example, he writes,

In the end it is unimportant that, in this world as it is, we cannot make a clear-cut distinction between pain that comes from God and pain that is caused by the fault of creatures. What encompasses both and continues to give everything meaning is the unique Cross of the Son—his triune Cross, let us say—in whose purifying fire suffering and healing are one.¹⁵

However, while it is meaningful to bear in mind that Balthasar’s theology has the potential to give such an ‘answer’ to the problem of evil and suffering as presented by Friesenhahn and Sutton, we should not simply explain away Balthasar’s response to the problem as such. This kind of clear-cut conclusion would not do full justice to his theology. As we discussed in Chapter 2, such a simple answer that human suffering can find its meaning in Christ’s suffering (that is, the kind of answer that some advocates of divine suffering would give) would be in danger of being

¹¹ Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy*, 174.

¹² Sutton, “Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Holy Saturday,” 179.

¹³ Sutton, “Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Holy Saturday,” 172.

¹⁴ That is why Friesenhahn is actually forced to switch his agenda from the problem of evil to the transformation of the meaning of suffering, despite the title of his book.

¹⁵ Balthasar, “Fragments on Suffering and Healing,” in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 279.

what Karen Kilby calls “a cheap move.”¹⁶ Further, Balthasar himself is critical of systematic theodicy, which ends up neglecting or ignoring the particularities and contingencies of the reality of human suffering and evil. After all, we could even argue that his entire theological trilogy of aesthetics, dramatics, and logic is permeated with such concerns. Also, more importantly, if we would like to consider the significance of Holy Saturday regarding this matter, we have to consider an approach which makes full use of the unique in-betweenness of Holy Saturday, which is characterized by silent waiting for the victory, which, in fact, has already come. After all, the Cross itself is already an enormous suffering. In order to say that God has suffered the worst, we do not necessarily go further than the Cross.

In order to see the connection between this in-between state of Holy Saturday captured by Balthasar and its implications for the issue of suffering in Christian discipleship, we have to examine Balthasar’s ‘tragic’ view of Christianity. We will discuss Balthasar’s theological engagement with tragedy, but first let us see how the interaction between theology and tragedy has been effectively sought in recent scholarship. We will also present how this interaction is fundamentally connected with the essence of Holy Saturday, in other words, the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday. Thus, we will try to place our discussion of Balthasar’s theological engagement with tragedy in a broader context relevant for us.

Theological Engagement with Tragedy as a Response to Human Suffering

Recently, the genre of tragedy has been gaining recognition in theology as an adequate means to grapple with human existence fraught with evil and suffering without falling into the pitfalls of systematic theodicy.¹⁷ Balthasar is usually considered as a pioneer in this area, along with Donald MacKinnon (1913-1994), who himself is known to be a great admirer of Balthasar.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Chapter 2.

¹⁷ For example, see Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller, eds., *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: a Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990); Tallon, *The Poetics of Evil*.

¹⁸ See “Introduction,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 1-11. As a critical examination of Balthasar’s theological use of tragedy, see Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85-118; Quash, “Real Enactment: the Role of Drama

On the other hand, such an interaction between theology and tragedy has been found problematic by quite a few critics. First of all, there is a long-standing view that Christianity is fundamentally anti-tragic. For example, I. A. Richards clearly juxtaposes tragedy and Christianity when he writes, “Tragedy is only possible to the mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean.”¹⁹ This kind of juxtaposition has been shared by quite a few authors. George Steiner, for example, declares that tragedy is dead after Christianity, because hope is always present. In his words,

There has been no specifically Christian mode of tragic drama even in the noontime of the faith. *Christianity is an anti-tragic vision of the world*. . . Christianity offers to man an assurance of final certitude and repose in God. It leads the soul toward justice and resurrection. . . Being a threshold to the eternal, the death of a Christian hero can be an occasion for sorrow but not for tragedy. . . Real tragedy can occur only where the tormented soul believes there is no time left for God’s forgiveness. . . The Christian view knows only partial or episodic tragedy.²⁰

However, in classifying Christianity as “anti-tragic” or “untragic” lies a risk of reducing it to a naïve or bland optimism, which is exactly what the Christian theologians who engage with tragedy seek to avoid. For example, MacKinnon is an exemplary figure who turns to tragedy with keen sensitivity to the reality of human suffering and evil.²¹ In particular, it is because of the Holocaust that MacKinnon examines the tragic element in Christianity with utmost seriousness.²² It would be helpful to refer to him here, especially since he reads Balthasar as a theologian who shares the same kind of sensitivity as his own. MacKinnon believes that Balthasar

in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 13-32; Quash, “Christianity as Hyper-Tragic,” in *Facing Tragedies*, vol.2, ed. Christopher Hamilton, Otto Neumaier, Gottfried Schweiger, and Clemens Sedmak (Wien: LIT, 2009), 77-88; Kevin Taylor, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ the Tragic Hero,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory*, 133-148 and also see Kevin Taylor, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹⁹ I.A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 230.

²⁰ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), 331-332. Italics added.

²¹ For summaries of MacKinnon’s theological engagement with tragedy, see Giles Waller “Freedom, Fate and Sin in Donald MacKinnon’s Use of Tragedy,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 101-118; Christopher Devanny, “Truth, Tragedy and Compassion: Some Reflection on the Theology of Donald MacKinnon,” *New Blackfriars* 78, no. 911 (January 1997): 33-42; Joel Daniels, “The Costs of Victory,” *Anglican Theological Review* 95, no.1 (Winter 2013): 155-167. Also for an analysis of how Steiner and MacKinnon (a literary critic and a Christian theologian) have influenced each other regarding the question of tragedy through their friendship at the University of Cambridge, see Graham Ward, “Tragedy as Subclause: George Steiner’s Dialogue with Donald MacKinnon,” *The Heythrop Journal* 34, no.3 (1993): 274-287.

²² MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 130.

considers the horrors of Holocaust with utmost seriousness, even though Balthasar does not overtly express it in his writings. In MacKinnon’s own words,

In the pages of his work with which we are here concerned [*Theo-drama*] there is comparatively little that treats directly of these horrors [the Holocaust]; but the nervous tension of the whole argument bears witness to *the author’s passionate concern to present the engagement of God with his world in a way that refuses to turn aside from the overwhelming, pervasive reality of evil*. It is not that Balthasar indulges in any facile cult of pessimism; for one thing he is too well schooled in the great traditions of European literature for such triviality. It is rather that he insists on *a vision that can only be won through the most strenuous acknowledgement of the cost of human redemption*.²³

This “vision that can only be won through the most strenuous acknowledgement of the cost of human redemption” may be called ‘tragic’ vision, which is definitely one of the reasons for MacKinnon’s admiration of Balthasar. MacKinnon himself writes, “It is part of Balthasar’s genius as a theologian that he has recognised, in Christian history, an *ongoing tragic dialectic*.”²⁴ (We will discuss this “ongoing tragic dialectic” captured by Balthasar in the subsequent sections.)

As many commentators on MacKinnon note, his writings are not systematic or declarative but rather fragmentary and suggestive.²⁵ One commentator says, for example, “His work, which is probing, interrogative and somewhat fragmentary, has a tendency to eschew solution or synthesis in favour of ever more sharply articulated problems and paradoxes.”²⁶ This style seems to be related to his strong insistence that evil or suffering cannot be (or rather, should not be) theologically explained away. This principle is actually a “lesson” which we should learn from tragedy. In MacKinnon’s view, tragic literature, which is most characteristically represented by such classic authors as Sophocles and Shakespeare, captures “a presence to the reality of moral evil, to the ways in which its power is experienced as a destructive force which makes the writings of most philosophers and theologians seems

²³ Donald MacKinnon, “Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology with Special Reference to Theodramatik II/2 and III” in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Kenneth Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 165. Italics added.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 171. Italics added.

²⁵ See Waller, 104; Devanny: 33.

²⁶ Waller, 104.

somehow trivial.”²⁷ The following passage summarizes his position regarding this matter well:

It is a lesson to be learnt from tragedy that *there is no solution of the problem of evil*; it is a lesson which Christian faith abundantly confirms, even while it transforms the teaching by the indication of its central mystery. In the Cross the conflicting claims of truth and mercy are reconciled by deed and not by word. The manner of their reconciliation is something which lies beyond the frontier of our comprehension; we can only *describe and redescribe*.²⁸

Thus, MacKinnon argues that the only approach allowed for us to deal with the problem of evil and suffering is to “describe and redescribe” concrete particulars without trying to analyse or explain them presumptuously (as done in tragic literature). In another place, MacKinnon also declares that “it is sheer nonsense to speak of the Christian religion as offering a solution of the problem of evil.”²⁹

Lying at the core of this insistence is MacKinnon’s strong conviction that the story of Jesus Himself should be interpreted as a tragedy. He stresses the historical contingency of the event of the Cross. It was a particular event after all, which defies philosophical or theological rationalization. Even the glorious victory of the Resurrection should not be considered as negation of the horrible suffering of the Cross. We should never forget that “the one who is raised is the one who died, who passed through physical agony, and through mental and spiritual dereliction, into the nothingness of death.”³⁰ The fact that the Resurrected Jesus maintains the marks of the nails on His body vividly illustrates this point.

Moreover, even though the Resurrection is a victory, we always have to remember that it was a victory won at great costs. MacKinnon likes to quote a remark made by the great Duke of Wellington that “a victory is the most tragic thing in the world, only excepting a defeat,” which he applies to the victory of Christ as well.³¹ In particular, MacKinnon remains troubled by the fate of Judas Iscariot, and for him Judas is the proof that Jesus’ ministry was “a failure.” In his words, “It is in the figure of Judas Iscariot that the failure of Jesus is focused, and the tragic quality

²⁷ MacKinnon, “Atonement and Tragedy,” in *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 101.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 104. Italics added.

²⁹ MacKinnon, “Order and Evil in the Gospel,” in *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays*, 92.

³⁰ MacKinnon, “A Master in Israel: Hans Urs von Balthasar” (An Introductory Essay) in Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, trans. John Halliburton (London: SPCK, 1975), 8.

³¹ MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 126, 131.

of his mission becomes plain.”³² As Jesus Himself declares, “It would have been better for that one [Judas] not to have been born” (Matthew 26:24). Even in God’s great plan of salvation, even after the victory of the Resurrection, the question concerning the lostness of Judas remains unsolved. Therefore, for MacKinnon the problem of evil is exactly the problem of Judas Iscariot (largely influenced by Karl Barth on this point).³³ Thus, MacKinnon tries to remind us of the high cost of redemption in terms of the evil deeds done and the suffering of the innocent.

MacKinnon’s moral concerns are obvious, but his ‘tragic’ theology has not been free from critique. The most vehement critique comes from David Bentley Hart, who denounces ‘tragic theology’ as a whole (in which not only MacKinnon but also Balthasar is included). In Hart’s words, “Simply said, tragic theology lacks theological depth.”³⁴ As to MacKinnon, Hart suspects that he “has not so much read the story of the crucifixion in the light of Attic tragedy as read tragedy in Christian terms.”³⁵ Lying at the core of Hart’s critique of tragic theology in general is the concern that Christianity should never be reduced to mere tragedy.

The problem is basically caused by the different interpretations of the word “tragedy” or “tragic.”³⁶ So far, we have rather intentionally avoided defining the word, as it is exactly what we would like to explore in the following sections by examining Balthasar’s use of the word in a Christian sense. Eventually, we will see below that the word “tragedy” or “tragic” used in a Christian context is best interpreted as “tragedy under grace” (the expression Balthasar borrows from the German novelist Reinhold Schneider), which means something between the mere ‘tragic’ and the ‘untragic.’ Such “in-betweenness” detected in the use of the word “tragedy” or “tragic” in a Christian sense is well captured by Ben Quash’s statement that “Godly life, in Christian terms, is *hyper*-tragic, not *untragic*.”³⁷ What he means by the word “hyper-tragic” is explained as follows:

³² MacKinnon, “Theology and Tragedy,” in *Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (1967): 168.

³³ MacKinnon, “Philosophy and Christology,” in *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays*, 67.

³⁴ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: the Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 374.

³⁵ Hart, 383.

³⁶ For example, see Ben Quash, “Four Biblical Characters: in Search of a Tragedy,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 22.

³⁷ Quash, “Four Biblical Characters,” 31.

Rather than stopping short of tragedy, circumventing tragedy, or resting with tragedy, Christianity’s doctrine *embraces and heightens* tragedy, in order simultaneously to *acknowledge its full, unmitigated power to disrupt, disturb and destroy, and also to let it mean more than itself*.³⁸

Importantly, this statement of Quash’s is made on the basis of his critical appreciation of Balthasar’s and MacKinnon’s use of tragic drama. In short, the tragic sensibility in Christian theology usually seeks to find a middle ground *between* nihilistic pessimism and bland optimism, or between hopeless despair and naive hope.

Furthermore, as we have seen in MacKinnon’s tragic sensibility, lying at the centre of theological interaction with tragedy is the question of how we view the relationship between the Cross and the Resurrection. This point brings us to the very topic of this thesis, namely, the significance of Holy Saturday. We can see how the tragic sensibility in Christian theology is fundamentally connected with Holy Saturday.

First of all, if we take MacKinnon’s tragic theology as a warning against simple triumphalism, in other words, a warning against those who rush towards Easter joy too eagerly or hastily, we can see that a similar concern is lying at the core of an emphasis on Holy Saturday as the day of silent waiting and mourning. As a matter of fact, according to MacKinnon, it is from Balthasar that we can learn that we should not forget the lesson about the costs of victory, which MacKinnon likes to see as well-represented in the remark made by the Duke of Wellington.³⁹ Balthasar definitely has this concern in mind when he argues for the significance of the “passive” waiting on Holy Saturday in contrast to the way the victory of Easter is prematurely celebrated as an “active” event on Holy Saturday by the traditional teachings. In his words,

*We must, in the first place, guard against that theological busyness and religious impatience which insist on anticipating the moment of fruiting of the eternal redemption through the temporal passion—on dragging forward that moment from Easter to Holy Saturday.*⁴⁰

³⁸ Quash, “Christianity as Hyper-Tragic,” 77. Italics added.

³⁹ MacKinnon, “Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology,” 166.

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 179. Italics added.

Secondly, in the last analysis, human existence itself has something fundamentally close to the image of Holy Saturday as a day suspended between the suffering of Good Friday and the victory of Easter Sunday. This point has been suggested by Steiner in the following memorable passage:

Ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other. In the face of the torture of a child, of the death of love which is Friday, even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless. In the Utopia of the Sunday, the aesthetic will, presumably, no longer have logic or necessity. The apprehensions and figurations in the play of metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and of hope, of the flesh which is said to taste of ash and of the spirit which is said to have the savour of fire, are always Sabbatarian. They have risen out of an immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?⁴¹

What Steiner tells us here is that the attempts of Christian theology or tragic literature to grapple with the human reality of suffering, pain, despair, victory, joy and hope “are always Sabbatarian.” If we turn our attention to a perspective from the point of view of tragic literature, there is an idea that tragedy actually operates in the borderlands, somewhere ‘in-between.’⁴² Adrian Poole observes, for example, that tragedy is particularly concerned with imagining the point between here and “elsewhere,” or more specifically, between life and death.⁴³ “There is a world elsewhere”; this is what Shakespeare’s Coriolanus proclaims with contempt as he turns his back on ungrateful Rome.⁴⁴ Using this expression, Poole says that tragedy can be seen as the place where two “elsewheres” meet and yet are separated.⁴⁵ In this sense, tragedy can be seen both as a protest against the present conditions of human suffering and a yearning for a better future, in other words, located between suffering and victory or between sorrow and joy.⁴⁶

It would also be helpful here to note the view that one important characteristic of tragedy is that it embraces contraries in tension. For example, Helen

⁴¹ Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 232. Italics added. As a further theological reflection on this passage, see Nicholas Lash, “Friday, Saturday, Sunday,” *New Blackfriars* 71, no. 836 (1990): 109-119.

⁴² See “Introduction,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 8-9.

⁴³ Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 167.

⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* III. iii. 137. Quoted by Poole in *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example*, 166.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁶ See “Introduction,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 8-9.

Gardener, a renowned literary critic, writes, “tragedy includes, or reconciles, or preserves in tension, contraries.”⁴⁷ These “contraries” could refer to various things: two ideals incompatible with each other, contradictory aspects of human nature (like reason and passion), the contingencies of life and their meaningful coherence, protest and acceptance, despair and hope. We definitely could add to this list the tension between the Cross and the Resurrection, which we believe to be existent in the very centre of the Christian existence, as we will discuss later.

In this section, we have tried to show that there is inherently a deep connection linking the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday and Christian engagement with tragedy. With this broad framework in mind, let us proceed to examine Balthasar’s theological engagement with tragedy.

Balthasar and Tragedy

—Jesus Christ as “the Heir of All the Tragedy of the World”

Balthasar’s approach to tragedy has been critically examined by a few scholars such as Quash and (recently) Kevin Taylor.⁴⁸ However, in comparison to the amount of scholarly work produced on the topic of his aesthetics or dramatics as a whole, the significance of tragedy or the tragic in Balthasar’s theology seems to remain under-appreciated⁴⁹ (despite the fact that Balthasar is generally admitted to be a pioneer in the area of intellectual interaction between theology and tragedy, as we have mentioned above.) Below we will try to present how his interest in tragedy is closely related to his theology of Holy Saturday. In the last analysis, we would like to argue that the ‘tragic’ state of Christian existence, which is “torn between” the truth of Christ and the world, is deeply connected with the in-betweenness of Holy Saturday captured by Balthasar. First, we will see Balthasar’s use of tragedy or tragic

⁴⁷ Helen Gardner, “Religion and Tragedy,” in *Religion and Literature* (London: Farber and Farber, 1971), 24.

⁴⁸ See Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 85-118; “Real Enactment: the Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar”; “Christianity as Hyper-Tragic”; Kevin Taylor, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ the Tragic Hero.” Also see, Ed Block, Jr, “Balthasar’s Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 216-220.

⁴⁹ See Taylor, *Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 9-12.

drama in general, and then go on to discuss his reading of one specific modern tragic author, namely, Reinhold Schneider (as he has been largely neglected despite his relevance to this topic.)

The significance of tragedy in Balthasar’s theology has been concisely summarized by Taylor; Balthasar uses the concept of tragedy in multiple ways without explicitly distinguishing them in his writings—as ontic and historical experience, as a genre of literature, and as a philosophical concept; In particular, Balthasar believes that tragedy reveals the following three aspects of the nature of the world, namely, the dramatic nature of human existence, the existential truths, and the participative distance of humanity from God.⁵⁰

Balthasar covers a wide range of tragic literature, that is, from classic authors such as the great Greek playwrights (Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides),⁵¹ through Shakespeare,⁵² Racine and Corneille, to modern authors such as Dostoyevsky, Paul Claudel, Georges Bernanos, and Reinhold Schneider. It is far beyond the scope or interest of this chapter to engage thoroughly with Balthasar’s reading of all these tragic authors. Therefore, for our purpose, let us focus on two relevant aspects: the influence of Hegel on Balthasar’s approach to tragedy and Balthasar’s Christocentric reading of tragedy.

The significance of the influence of Hegel on Balthasar and its complex nature has been pointed out by many, but especially in his approach to tragedy, the importance of the Hegelian influence cannot be ignored. First of all, Hegel is admittedly the only author who matches Balthasar in the depth and richness of his theological engagement with tragedy. Balthasar himself praises Hegel on this point.⁵³ Like Balthasar, Hegel had a life-long interest in tragedy, which can be traced from

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-38.

⁵¹ For example, for Balthasar’s theological engagement with Greek tragedies, see Christopher D. Denny, “Greek Tragedies: from Myths to Sacraments?” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 9, no.3 (Summer 2006): 45-71.

⁵² Especially, as Taylor points out, while Balthasar’s love for the Attic tragedians is obvious, Shakespeare appears in his writings more consistently than any other literary author in the theological trilogy, because Balthasar sees in Shakespeare that the essence of tragedy innovated by the Greek authors is combined with a rich biblical awareness and Christian ethos.

⁵³ He writes, “no thinker before him [Hegel] more profoundly experienced and pondered Christian revelation in dramatic categories.” (*Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory I: Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 66.)

Early Theological Writings to Philosophy of Religion.⁵⁴ Balthasar’s high regard for drama itself is apparently influenced by Hegel’s aesthetics which values poetic drama as the queen of the arts.⁵⁵ Therefore, it is natural that, as it has been pointed out by Quash, “Hegel accompanies von Balthasar’s thought everywhere in his trilogy.”⁵⁶ However, as is usual with Balthasar’s use of Hegel, he borrows basic concepts from Hegel, but modifies them for his own usage, and eventually departs from him.⁵⁷

The categories of “epic,” “lyric,” and “dramatic” which Balthasar borrows from Hegel⁵⁸ are especially relevant for our interest, because it is on the basis of his use of this Hegelian distinction that scholars like Quash eventually critique Balthasar for his “epic tendency,” which, in Quash’s view, contradictorily exposes itself in his theology of Holy Saturday despite the fact that it is supposed to be the climax of the dramatic perspective.⁵⁹ (We will discuss this criticism in the evaluation section of this chapter.) The category of “epic” means a bird’s-eye view of history, in which all actions and events are seen as completed. It is the perspective to “smooth out the folds and say that Jesus’ suffering is past history.”⁶⁰ One example of using this perspective is to see Eucharist as a mere memorial. Balthasar also uses this “epic” category to criticize systematic theologies and creeds that speak of God in the third person. This point is clarified further if we consider the category of “lyric,” which is placed in opposition to the “epic” and is used to mean “the internal motion of the devout subject, his emotion and submission, the creative outpouring of himself in the face of the vivid re-presentation...of what is a past event.”⁶¹ In other words, the

⁵⁴ For Hegel’s conception of tragedy, for example, see Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 120-142.

⁵⁵ Hegel writes, “because drama has been developed into the most perfect totality of content and form, it must be regarded as the highest stage of poetry and art generally.” (*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* vol. II, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1158.)

⁵⁶ Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 12n21.

⁵⁷ See Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*. Further, for a very concise summary of the Hegelian influence on Balthasar’s approach to tragedy, see Taylor, *Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 34-38.

⁵⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* II, 55-57. For Hegel’s own distinction of these categories, see *Aesthetics* II, 1040-1237. For a summary of exactly how Balthasar adapts Hegel’s distinctions to his theological use, see Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 41-51.

⁵⁹ Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 195. He makes this particular criticism in various other places.

⁶⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-drama* II, 54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

“lyrical” perspective means to receive Eucharist as a personal participation in the death of Jesus and to build an I-Thou relationship with God (as best realized in Ignatian spirituality). To put it simply, the “epic” and the “lyric” are ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ perspectives respectively, or to put it even more simply, theology and spirituality. Further, for Balthasar it is the “dramatic” (in other words, his project of *Theo-drama*) that successfully unites both of the “epic” and the “lyric” in a somewhat Hegelian dialectical way. He writes,

We shall not get beyond the alternatives of “lyrical” and “epic,” spirituality (prayer and personal involvement) and theology (the objective discussion of facts), so long as we fail to include the dramatic dimension of revelation, in which alone they can discover their unity.⁶²

In short, in the dramatic perspective both the epic and lyrical perspectives are supposed to be maintained in perfectly balance without collapsing into each other. As Balthasar applies this dramatic perspective theologically, to be an apostolic witness for Christ means to have a dramatic existence, in which the epical and lyrical perspectives are not only unified but also heightened. To put it in a way relevant for our interest, the encounter between divine and human freedom should be explored by such a dramatic perspective, in which the sensitivity to particular individuals and events as well as the view of broad contexts in history can be maintained. As we have already discussed in Part I, for Balthasar, the climax of the encounter of divine and human freedom is Christ’s Descent into Hell on Holy Saturday. It is the most dramatic event of all, where “the epic” and “the lyric,” objectivity and subjectivity, and eventually theology and spirituality, are somehow united. Such a unity is best represented by the word “contemplative,” which is often used to characterize the Holy Saturday presented by Balthasar, in contrast to Hegel’s “speculative” Good Friday.⁶³ (However, some critics like Quash argue that Balthasar’s dramatics, including his interpretation of Holy Saturday as its climax, may not be so faithful to this dramatic perspective after all. We will discuss this point later in the evaluation section.)

⁶² Balthasar, *Theo-drama* II, 57.

⁶³ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 62-66, 172. Also see, Henri de Lubac “A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 284-285.

On the other hand, while for Hegel tragedy (and more broadly, art) becomes surpassed by Christianity and ultimately by philosophy, Balthasar departs from him by taking the position that Christianity sustains tragedy. This point is closely related to his Christocentric reading of tragedy which we will discuss next.

Balthasar’s Christocentric reading of tragedy is most clearly seen in the following statement: “Jesus Christ is the heir of *all the tragedy of the world*, that of the Greeks as well as that of the Jews, that of the so-called unbelievers as well as that of the so-called believers.”⁶⁴ In the last analysis, for Balthasar, all tragedies, both in literature and in history, are ultimately Christological. To put it more specifically, all tragedies or all human suffering both before and after Christ culminate in and are surpassed by the Cross and the Descent into Hell. As we can see from this statement, like MacKinnon, Balthasar reads the Christian gospel as a tragedy. However, in comparison to MacKinnon, Balthasar’s Christocentric emphasis is obvious, which allows him to escape the criticism presented by Hart against MacKinnon⁶⁵ (mentioned in the section above). (Of course, whether such a Christocentric reading does full justice to originally non-Christian tragedies would be another matter.)

The key concept that connects the classic tragic drama with the paschal mystery is what Balthasar calls “opaque guilt,” the best illustration of which is found in Sophocles’ *Oedipus*.⁶⁶ King Oedipus committed the most atrocious crimes imaginable: murdering his own father and marrying his own mother. The tragedy lies in the fact that he did all this without knowing it. Where does his guilt actually lie? Is he completely guilty? It was he himself that committed these crimes and yet it was done under the influence of an inherited curse. By the expression, “opaque guilt,” Balthasar means opaque causality in which the distinction between human freedom and determined fate is blurred. Human acts are strangely both free and determined, therefore an individual is both guilty and innocent. Balthasar observes that this ambiguous causation in tragedy is quite close to the Christian concept of original sin. In traditional Christian theology, each individual is considered as being under the

⁶⁴ Balthasar, “Tragedy and Christian Faith,” in *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 400. Italics added. For a critical examination of this statement, see Taylor, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ the Tragic Hero.”

⁶⁵ See Taylor, *Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 32.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, “Tragedy and Christian Faith,” 394-395.

influence of collective guilt and yet still morally responsible for their own deeds. Further, this closeness between opaque guilt and original sin allows Balthasar to see tragic figures in the Old Testament (most notably Job, Samson, Jeremiah, Hagar, and so forth) in parallel with characters in Greek tragedies (Hecuba, Hercules, Cassandra, Andromache, and so forth),⁶⁷ and eventually to reach Jesus Christ as “the heir of *all the tragedy of the world*, that of the Greeks as well as that of the Jews.”⁶⁸

Jesus Christ not only inherits all the tragedy of the world but also *surpasses* it. He does so by “simultaneously fulfilling them” by his own ‘tragedy,’ namely, the Cross and the Descent into Hell. Only Christ, the one who is completely sinless and thus completely innocent, can free this world from the tragically tangled knots of guilt and innocence. Only He is the true *deus ex machina theatri* (not in the sense of a cheap plot criticized by Aristotle.) Thus, even the most horrible tragedy of the *Trojan Women* is encompassed by the tragedy of Christ.

Now, it is not difficult to see that this idea has the potential to be a consoling answer to the problem of suffering,⁶⁹ because now we could believe that however deep in Hell we may feel we are, Christ has descended even deeper. There is no tragedy in this world that is not encompassed within the tragedy of Christ. In relation to this point, Balthasar likes to quote from Claudel, who writes, “the poor man...has no friend to rely on except one poorer than himself.”⁷⁰ Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 4, Balthasar likes to evoke the image of the lonely sinner in Hell with the even lonelier Saviour beside them. Christ is always the “poorer” and “even lonelier” man beside us. Hence, as we have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, some scholars try to explain away Balthasar’s ‘theodicy’ by simply concluding that now we can believe that even the worst suffering of Hell has been redeemed by Christ’s suffering. However, this simplification actually ends up being what we might call an ‘epic’ theodicy, which could not escape the criticism that Balthasar pays little respect to concrete and particular suffering in reality. It is true that Balthasar argues in this direction to some extent and he certainly presents the idea that we can find meaning

⁶⁷ Ibid., 398-400.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 400.

⁶⁹ See Taylor, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ the Tragic Hero,” 144-146; Taylor, *Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 186-190.

⁷⁰ Paul Claudel, “Mother of Perpetual Help.” Quoted by Balthasar in *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 312.

in our suffering by relating it to the paschal mystery, but we should also note that he is attentive to the concrete reality of human suffering in his own way. In order to argue for this point further, we need to explore the nature of Balthasar’s conception of post-Easter ‘tragedy.’ While tragedy or human suffering could be mitigated and minimized by reference to the paschal mystery, the status of tragedy itself is actually heightened after Christ. Similarly, human suffering is intensified in a way, and moreover, is given a positive meaning. In stark contrast to those who have declared that Christianity and tragedy are incompatible with each other (from Hegel to Steiner), for Balthasar, it is actually Christianity that will sustain tragedy.⁷¹ This position is exactly shared by MacKinnon, who writes, “Christianity, properly understood, might provide men with a faith through which they are enabled to hold steadfastly to the significance of the tragic.”⁷² In the last analysis, Balthasar believes that Christian existence is fundamentally tragic. We will discuss this point by examining his reading of the German Catholic novelist, Reinhold Schneider.

“Tragedy under Grace”—the Tragic State of the Christian Existence

Balthasar calls the fundamental situation of the Church “tragic,” because it is formed out of Jews and Gentiles in the first place, in other words, “*unification in the state of being torn.*”⁷³ He explores the ‘tragic’ dimension of Christian existence in various places. For example, he writes as follows:

The Cross has removed the wall of division, as the Letter to the Ephesians says, in the tortured flesh of Christ. And yet this wall seems to be set up higher and more unsurmountably than ever. The Cross is judgement and therefore division: one thief is on the left, and another is on the right. But it is wholly dialectical: Jesus openly makes a promise to the thief on his right and says nothing to the thief on his left. But in order that the thief on the right may win the promise, Jesus unites himself in secret with the thief on the left in the solidarity of being rejected. *The Christian is exposed to this situation of being torn; and what other name than tragic could one find for this, if one looks back to the Greek stage?*⁷⁴

⁷¹ For example, see Balthasar, *Theo-drama* II, 49-51.

⁷² MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, 135.

⁷³ Balthasar, “Tragedy and Christian Faith,” 405. He discusses this point further in “Church of Jews and Gentiles—Today” in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 60-74.

⁷⁴ Balthasar, “Tragedy and Christian Faith,” 406. Italics added.

This tragic state of “being torn” needs examining further. It would be helpful to turn to the German novelist, poet, and playwright, Reinhold Schneider (1903-1958), whose portrayal of the ‘tragic’ Christian existence in many of his works is much appreciated by Balthasar.⁷⁵ How he reads Schneider to explore the tragic dimension of Christian existence has hardly ever been investigated,⁷⁶ but it is relevant for our discussion. (For example, the image of the two thieves on the right and the left is pursued in his analysis of Schneider.⁷⁷) Eventually, examination of his reading of Schneider helps us to see how Balthasar views the relationship between tragedy and the Christian, or tragedy and grace. Schneider basically sees a paradoxical relationship between tragedy and grace, as does Balthasar. This point further helps us to see the implications his theology provides for the issue of Christian suffering.

First of all, it is intriguing to see how Schneider’s view of the tragic developed during the course of his life.⁷⁸ Schneider’s life can be divided into three stages depending on his view on the tragic: 1) the period of a tragic, nihilistic view of life (from his childhood to his conversion to Catholicism in 1933), 2) the period of an *anti-tragic* view of Christianity (from 1933 to around 1948), and 3) the period of a *tragic* view of Christianity (from around 1948 to his death). In Schneider’s own words, these three stages are described as follows:

At first, I overestimated the earthly power, because I had not yet seen the living reality of God. Then, I came to underestimate the earthly power, because the power of God devoured it. Finally, I understood that a human being must control it in front of God.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace: Reinhold Schneider on the Experience of the West*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997); Balthasar, “Reinhold Schneider and the Tragic Christian” in *Explorations in Theology* III, 471-493. Also see *Theo-drama* I, 119-123.

⁷⁶ Kevin Taylor briefly mentions Balthasar’s reading of Schneider, but only to criticize the aristocratic tendency in his reading. Also John R. Cihak gives a short summary of Balthasar’s use of Schneider as far as it is related to the topic of “anxiety” in *Balthasar and Anxiety* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 43-50.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace*, 132-157.

⁷⁸ See Kihachi Shimomura, *Ikirareta Kotoba: Rainhoruto Shunaida no Shogai to Sakuhin (The Words That Have Been Lived: the Life and Works of Reinhold Schneider)* (Tokyo: Choeisha, 2014), 195. For further reference on Schneider’s life and works, there seems to be no English secondary source available apart from Balthasar’s work on him. As to German sources, see, for example, Bruno Scherer, *Tragik vor dem Kreuz: Leben und Geisteswelt Reinhold Schneiders* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966).

⁷⁹ Schneider, (*Lebensbericht*) *Schulfunk* (22.9.1953), 3. Quoted by Scherer in *Tragik vor dem Kreuz*, 118, and by Shimomura in *Ikirareta Kotoba*, 195: “Erst überschätzte ich die irdische Macht, weil ich die lebendige Wirklichkeit Gottes noch nicht sah; dann unterschätzte ich sie, weil die Macht Gottes sie aufzehrte. Endlich verstand ich, daß der Mensch sie verwalten soll vor Gott.”

In his youth, Schneider was hugely influenced by both Miguel de Unamuno and Schopenhauer, both of whom led him to believe that “the tragic was the deepest essence of existence.”⁸⁰ After his conversion to Catholicism, however, this interest in tragedy lost its melancholic nature and somehow flowed into “an Augustinian idea of struggle, into a striving toward salvation on the part of the whole of history.”⁸¹ Now, for Schneider, Christ on the Cross “has taken tragedy on himself and thus withdrawn it from the world.”⁸² He even declared, “as soon as Christ appears, the whole tragic world perishes: the terrible confusion is no longer possible. As soon as the tragedian meets Christ, he loses his ability to write tragedy.”⁸³ Then both his earlier interest in tragedy and his Christian faith become somehow merged, and he declares, “Christianity has given a metaphysical answer to the tragic, but it has not abolished it. The tragic remains a basic phenomenon of our existence and history as a contradiction of life.”⁸⁴ Schneider also wrote to a friend in 1950, “For a long time I used to think that Christianity and tragedy were incompatible, but now I see that Christianity is something fundamentally tragic. The fate of the truth is death.”⁸⁵

It is worth noting that Schneider himself had an anti-tragic view of Christianity (more or less in accord with Steiner’s point of view) before he came to regard it as tragic, even though this period of the anti-tragic view of Christianity happened to coincide with the most difficult time of his life under the Nazi regime.⁸⁶ Schneider is surely well aware that the joy and hope based on the Christian good news should not be undermined. Rather, his use of the word “tragic” is actually intended for something between tragic and untragic, as we have already noted in the section above. This point is related to why Balthasar approves of Schneider’s tragic

⁸⁰ Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace*, 283.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸² Schneider, *Tagebücher 1930-1935* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1983), 610. Quoted by Balthasar in *Tragedy under Grace*, 283.

⁸³ Schneider, *Tagebücher 1930-1935*, 670. Quoted by Balthasar in *Tragedy under Grace*, 283.

⁸⁴ Schneider, *Der Christliche Protest* (Zurich: Arche, 1954), 75. Italics added: “Das Christentum hat eine metaphysische Antwort auf das Tragische gegeben, aber es hat das Tragische nicht aufgehoben. Es bleibt als Lebenswiderspruch ein Grundphänomen unseres Daseins und der Geschichte.”

⁸⁵ Schneider, in *Briefe an einen Freund (Otto Heuschele). Mit Erinnerungen von Otto Heuschele* (Köln und Olten: Hegner, 1961), 147. Quoted by Scherer in *Tragik vor dem Kreuz*, 71: “ich hielt lange Christentum und Tragik für unvereinbar; nun sehe ich, daß das Christliche das eigentlich Tragische ist. Das Schicksal der Wahrheit ist der Tod.”

⁸⁶ See Shimomura, *Ikirareta Kotoba*, 196.

vision. Now let us examine how Schneider exactly uses the word “tragic” in a Christian sense and how Balthasar appreciates it.

Balthasar approvingly quotes the following sentence of Schneider’s: “the Christian stands in a thoroughly dramatic, indeed, tragic relationship to the world: he must represent in the world something that is not of the world.”⁸⁷ In other words, the Christian is called “tragic” because they find themselves constantly torn between the truth, which is Christ, and the world, which has fallen away from God and now stands against Christ. Schneider further explains,

For the Christian, there is both *a tragedy under grace* and *a graceless tragedy*. Tragedy under grace is what is experienced by the man who wants to do the truth and is brought down because truth cannot be done in this world; graceless tragedy is the lot of the man who does not want the truth.⁸⁸

In short, the tragic state of “being torn” between Christ and the world within Christian life is called a “tragedy under grace” and it is definitely distinguished from a “graceless tragedy” of the non-Christian, let alone what Steiner calls “absolute or pure tragedy.”⁸⁹ In particular, for Schneider, this tragic state of the Christian is expressed symbolically by Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate.⁹⁰ The “fettered King,” who “will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement” (John 16:8), stands powerless and defenceless before the administration of secular power.

This reference to power is significant for Schneider, as most of his works focus on the tragedy inherent in the exercise of power by Christians, who have the duty and/or desire to bring the truth of the gospel into the world and yet fail to do so because of the tragic dilemma on earth where they find themselves. Schneider does not believe that power is evil per se, but still, as Balthasar points out,

The burning concrete question posed by Schneider is this: Concrete history applies force, but the gospel forbids the use of force—does not every Christian who intervenes actively in concrete history, therefore, become guilty in relation to the gospel?⁹¹

⁸⁷ Schneider, *Rechenschaft: Worte zur Jahrhundertmitte* (Johannes Verlag, 1951), 22. Quoted by Balthasar in *Tragedy under Grace*, 119.

⁸⁸ Schneider, *Rechenschaft*, 23. Quoted by Balthasar in *Theo-drama I*, 120. Italics added.

⁸⁹ Steiner, “Tragedy Reconsidered,” in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 29-44.

⁹⁰ Schneider, *Rechenschaft*, 23. See Balthasar in *Theo-drama I*, 120-122.

⁹¹ Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace*, 128.

Schneider explores such a Christian dilemma on a grand scale, for example, in the dramas surrounding three Popes in the past (Celestine V and Boniface VIII in *Der große Verzicht* (the great renunciation), and Innocent III in *Innozenz and Franziskus* (Innocent and Francis)).⁹² Using the real life story centred around Celestine V's abdication of the papacy in 1294 and the subsequent downfall of Boniface VIII after his manipulative acquisition of the office from Celestine V, Schneider attempts to "uncover the enormous tragedy of the existence of the one who bears office and to make visible the deep ecclesial guilt that consists in the mutual exclusion of action and contemplation."⁹³ On the other hand, with Innocent III, "the pope with Celestine's heart and Boniface's deeds,"⁹⁴ Schneider further portrays this tragic tension existent within the Church.

Schneider's dramatic portrayal of the tragic struggles of the popes in the past helps us to understand further what Balthasar means when he says the Church is, and eventually all individual Christians are, fundamentally tragic. He mentions the dramas of these three Popes as good examples of the innate tragedy within the Church itself, which seeks to exercise power in this world, though it has its origin in the powerlessness of the Cross.⁹⁵ Specifically, the "innate tragedy" refers to a disquieting possibility that "the Church becomes the true Oedipus" for the Church could end up exposing its own guilt in its eager attempts to re-establish order in society.⁹⁶ He writes, "Wherever the Church rejects the powerlessness of the Cross, which is offered her and imposed upon her, she reaches out to take hold of power, and the face of Satan glimmers in her."⁹⁷ Another such tragic example is found in the trial and execution of St Joan of Arc, who "was more innocent than Antigone...but her judges [those who held hierarchical office in the Church] were more guilty than Creon."⁹⁸ The tragedy of St Joan of Arc is portrayed not only in Schneider's work but also in the work of Georges Bernanos (another 20th century Catholic novelist

⁹² Balthasar says that these two dramas form "a kind of *summa* of Reinhold Schneider's view of the world." (*Tragedy under Grace*, 221.) Balthasar's summaries of the synopses of *Der große Verzicht* and *Innozenz III* are respectively in "Reinhold Schneider and the Tragic Christian," 476-482, 482-493; *Tragedy under Grace*, 220-228, 229-244.

⁹³ Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace*, 228.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁹⁵ Balthasar, "Tragedy and Christian Faith," 406-407.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 411.

⁹⁷ Balthasar, *Tragedy under Grace*, 212.

⁹⁸ Balthasar, "Tragedy and Christian Faith," 407.

admired by Balthasar). In his studies on Bernanos, Balthasar takes up the similar, disquieting thought that we may see “the face of Satan glimmer[ing]” in the Church;

But what if sin lives in the Church herself, if sin anchors itself most securely precisely where the Church is most vulnerable—in her hierarchical structure? What if the horror occurs that the face of Satan should begin to glimmer in the very heart of that Trinitarian image, which is the relationship of ecclesial obedience?⁹⁹

These innate tragedies within the Church can happen because the Church is tragic “in its innermost being,” to the extent that it believes itself “*to be redeemed once and for all*,” when, in truth, the Church is different from its archetype, Virgin Mary (*Ecclesia Immaculata*).¹⁰⁰ All of this points to the idea that the Church (and the individual Christian) remains exposed to sin as long as it is in this world. At the same time, the Church (and the individual Christian) is already redeemed and forgiven because of faith in Christ. Eventually, it is this paradoxical double existence of the Christian that both Schneider and Balthasar mean when they say Christianity (or the Church or the Christian) is fundamentally “tragic.”

This point brings us to what we would like to discuss further, namely, Balthasar’s deep concern for Christian life. We will argue that he takes the possibility of the Christian committing sin with utmost seriousness and that this point is an important aspect of his theology of Holy Saturday.

The Tragic Nature of Christian Life and Holy Saturday

In various places in Part I, we repeatedly referred to the concept of “distance” in Balthasar’s theology, but now we can see that it contains the most serious meaning. For example, now it makes perfect sense to read the following statement of Adrienne von Speyr (approvingly quoted by Balthasar) in the context of the tragic situation of the Christian: “*the greater a man’s intimacy with the Lord, the greater the danger that he will become estranged*.”¹⁰¹ Though this sentence reveals the kind of idea which is found problematic by Balthasar’s critics, including Kilby and

⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Bernanos*, 279.

¹⁰⁰ Balthasar, “Tragedy and Christian Faith,” 409.

¹⁰¹ Von Speyr, from *I Korinther*, 348. Quoted by Balthasar in *Theo-drama* V, 288. Italics added.

Pitstick,¹⁰² it would make perfect sense if we consider the tragic possibility that “the face of Satan glimmers” at the centre of the Church, or even in the life of the most pious Christian, as suggested by Balthasar. As a matter of fact, the Christian can be even more vulnerably exposed to sin than non-believers, exactly because only they can be tempted to believe that they are redeemed once and for all and to forget their paradoxical status as “*Simul iustus et peccator*” or a “justified sinner.”

Further, it is in this context of the tragic Christian existence that we should remember the emphasis made by Balthasar that there was no Heaven or Purgatory or Hell (as *Gehenna*) before Christ’s Descent into *Sheol*. As we have seen in Chapter 4, these three afterlife states are considered as its results, and therefore, “Christological concepts.” In other words, our free decision-making starts to have real consequences only after the event on Holy Saturday. Now our Yes and No have eternal effects, which could actually weigh the most heavily on Christians themselves. Also, in relation to this point, we have seen in Chapter 4 how the reverse side of Balthasar’s famous “hope” for universal salvation is the possibility of the Christian’s complete rejection of God. This possibility too, which Pitstick argues cannot exist,¹⁰³ will make sense if we think of such a tragic situation for the Christian.

On the other hand, we should never forget that the Christian can be called tragic only in the sense of “tragedy under grace.” Despite the fact that the Christian existence fundamentally has a tragic element of being torn between the truth of Christ and the power of the world, the Christian always has the privilege of relating their own tragedy to the tragedy of Jesus Christ. As we have mentioned above, the paschal mystery has shown the way for the Christian to have their own suffering mitigated by reference to Christ. Such a way of consolation has been made possible by nothing other than grace.

In order to pursue further this double status of the Christian expressed as “tragedy under grace,” let us turn to St Paul. After all, the kind of a tragic struggle of a Christian portrayed by Schneider and appreciated by Balthasar can be traced back to St Paul. In particular, 2 Corinthians is relevant for our discussion here, as St Paul

¹⁰² See Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 273-274. About Kilby’s critique, see Chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 4.

deals with the tragic tension existent in Christian life while referring to the Cross and the Resurrection.

The significant connection between tragedy and 2 Corinthians has been pointed out by David Ford, for example. He says this epistle shows “the tragic being taken into a transformation which sharpens rather than negates it, while yet rendering the category of the tragic inadequate by itself.”¹⁰⁴ As Ford points out, St Paul is acutely aware that (in a similar way to MacKinnon in this context) a simple triumphalist understanding of the Resurrection should be denied. In St Paul’s words, he is “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (2 Cor. 4:10). As Ford says, “the Resurrection message has sent him even more deeply into contingency, weakness and suffering.”¹⁰⁵ As Ford points out, the new contingency is the Gospel itself, which opens up the new possibility of tragedy. As St Paul writes, those who preach Christ can be “a fragrance from death to death” or “a fragrance from life to life” depending on those who listen (2 Cor. 2:16). In this context again, we can remind ourselves of Balthasar’s emphasis that Heaven, Hell (as *Gehenna*), and Purgatory are the results of Christ’s Descent into *Sheol*.

Further, we have to note the tension St Paul describes within the Christian themselves. He writes, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). This tension is caused exactly by the new creation in Christ (2 Cor.5:17), which has been brought by His Death and Resurrection. After all, as St Paul writes in various places, to live as a Christian means to participate in the Cross and Resurrection day by day. To be a Christian means to be “buried with him [Christ] by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness in life” (Romans 6:4). St Paul also declares, “I die every day!” (1 Cor. 15:31). What St Paul tries to describe through all these words is nothing other than the paradoxical double existence of the Christian.¹⁰⁶ Referring to these verses, Balthasar himself

¹⁰⁴ David F. Ford, “Tragedy and Atonement” in *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon*, ed. Kenneth Surin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 123.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ See Frances Young and David F Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987), 132.

writes that “Christian existence is one of transition and separation...of longing and sighing because the old man is in the process of disappearing, but the new man is still hidden from view.”¹⁰⁷ This language of “transition” brings us back to the image of Holy Saturday. Surely St Paul himself does not use the image of Holy Saturday but what he suggests in his epistles is unquestionably related to it. In the Christian existence, the glory of Easter is still “hidden.”¹⁰⁸ As it is written, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.” (Col. 3:3)

Furthermore, in the last analysis, such a paradoxical nature of Christian existence can be traced back to Jesus Himself and therefore there is hope that it can be redeemed and consecrated. We remember Jesus mysteriously declaring, “I *have conquered* the world!” (John 16:33)¹⁰⁹ even before He was handed over to be crucified. Further, in Chapter 4, in our analysis of the concept of “sin-in-itself” and Balthasar’s reading of St John of the Cross, we discussed the ‘in-between’ state of Jesus in Hell on Holy Saturday, which Balthasar fully appreciates by using the concepts of ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity.’ On Holy Saturday, Christ himself sinks into the silent abyss of Hell suffering in solidarity with sinful humanity while subjectively waiting for the victory, which, in objective reality, has already arrived. Does this passive waiting in silence for the subjectively hidden victory not represent the tragic tension within Christian existence very well? After all, the real strength of Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday is that it shows us that this ‘tragic’ waiting itself can be given Christological meaning. It is significant that he concludes his *Mysterium Paschale* with the image of the Christian stretched out on the Cross, which is “formed by the crisscrossing beams of the old aeon and the new.”¹¹⁰ He further writes that

the Church, and Christians, can occupy no determinate place within the *Mysterium Paschale*. Their place is neither in front of the Cross nor behind it, but on both its sides: without ever settling for the one vantage point or the other they look from now one, now the other, as ceaselessly directed. And yet *this see-saw* by no means lacks a support, because the Unique One is the

¹⁰⁷ Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 218-219.

¹⁰⁸ See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 354-368.

¹⁰⁹ Italics added.

¹¹⁰ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 264.

identity of Cross and Resurrection, and Christian and ecclesial existence is disappropriated into him¹¹¹

This state described as a “see-saw” is exactly what we have been calling the “tragic” state of the Christian existence. The Christian’s life is like a “see-saw” swaying between the Cross and the Resurrection, death and life, or the old aeon and the new, but this see-saw is always supported by Christ Himself who went through both. We can see that this is another way of expressing “tragedy under grace.”

What is further important is that, through all this exploration, the reality of the Christian existence itself, which is tragically torn between forgiveness and judgment, suffering and victory, and despair and joy, becomes clarified in the life of Christian faith. Our existence is represented by Holy Saturday. As best represented by Steiner’s famous passage we mentioned above, nothing can be said on Friday, the day of great suffering itself. We cannot even afford to try thinking about the meaning of such suffering. On Sunday, nothing needs to be said. Great joy overwhelms the memory of the suffering in the past. Therefore, any decent ‘theodicy’ project, or the earnest questioning of God and search for meaning in suffering, belongs fundamentally to Saturday. This is why we have been hesitant to accept in its totality the kind of ‘theodicy’ which simply claims that even the worst suffering of Hell can be redeemed by Christ’s Descent into Hell (as suggested by a few scholars regarding this subject). If we do not appreciate the waiting in silence, which is the real unique point of Holy Saturday, which is ‘tragic’ waiting in silence characterized by hidden but undoubtedly present victory, there may be no point in discussing the significance of Holy Saturday at all. We could simply stop at the foot of the Cross, the horror of which is itself great enough to encompass the worst human suffering.

The Christian is a paradoxical being. Christians believe that their victory is both already there and not there yet. Christians are forgiven their sin, but yet still exposed to sin, therefore not exempt from judgment. Christians can believe that their suffering is already redeemed by Christ in an objective sense, but still the pain of their suffering remains subjectively. This tension between the objective meaning of redemption and the subjective reality of sin and suffering is well captured by Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday without compromising it. It is for this reason

¹¹¹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 266. Italics added.

that we believe that it can provide one ideal approach to the issue of suffering in Christian discipleship.

Evaluation: Balthasar and the Concrete Reality of Suffering

Thus, in this chapter, we have attempted to present the connection between Balthasar’s interest in tragedy, with his emphasis on the tragic element in the Christian existence, and his deep concern for Christian life, the tragic state of which is considered as best represented by Holy Saturday. Now, in order to strengthen our argument further, let us turn to the response of his critics concerning his engagement with tragedy, or more broadly, his treatment of the reality of human suffering.

For example, commentators on Balthasar have been critical of the way he heightens the status of tragedy and seems to give too positive a meaning to tragedy and human suffering. This is especially so since Balthasar ultimately locates human suffering within the infinite distance between the Father and the Son within the Trinity. He is accused of divinizing and eternalizing suffering even though its ugliness and horror should never be affirmed. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, we discussed this kind of criticism as far as it is concerned with his Trinitarian theology and Christology, and argued that he could escape it with his subtle and nuanced approach.

Here let us discuss what his critics say about his attention to the concrete and the particular. MacKinnon praises Balthasar for his “remorseless emphasis on the concrete.”¹¹² However, as evidenced by Quash’s comment on MacKinnon’s appraisal, some critics have questioned exactly “how remorseless this emphasis on the concrete really is.”¹¹³ This point is related to the Hegelian categories Balthasar makes use of in his dramatics, namely, the distinction of the three categories: the “epic,” the “lyric,” and the “dramatic,” which we have mentioned above. Quash, while critically appraising Balthasar’s use of drama and tragedy in comparison with Hegel, points out that Balthasar himself still falls prey to the same “epic” tendency as Hegel, even though he apparently tries to resist it. In particular, Quash’s critique that

¹¹² MacKinnon, “Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology,” 167.

¹¹³ Quash, “Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *The Modern Theologians: an Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third edition, ed. David Ford (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 120.

is most relevant for our discussion is that it is exactly in his theology of Holy Saturday that Balthasar's "epic" tendency is most explicitly revealed. Quash writes,

Even in this most innovative area of his theology von Balthasar tries to control the dazzling darkness with strategies that mitigate the drama. The hell of von Balthasar's theology is *outside* and *beyond* our time. It is narrated in 'epic' time... The irony of von Balthasar's theology is that at the moment when it aims most concretely to concern itself with struggle, suffering and death, it also becomes most mythological.¹¹⁴

Quash further explains what he means by "mythological." He says, "Attention is diverted from the struggles and suffering that characterize the social and material aspects of human history, and the structural and political aspects of sin are not considered."¹¹⁵ This critique of Quash's echoes Gerard O'Hanlon's comment that "from one who is so conscious of the reality of evil there is a curious lack of engagement with the great modern structural evils."¹¹⁶

In the same direction as Quash and O'Hanlon, Taylor, who focuses his work on Balthasar's use of tragedy, points out the limitations of Balthasar's conception of tragedy and argues that despite his deep interest in tragedy and his desire to engage with the reality of the world, aristocratism and anti-modernism can be detected in his writings, marring his theological work.¹¹⁷ Even when he engages with modern authors such as Claudel, Bernanos, and Schneider (very 'anti-modern' authors), his aristocratic and anti-modern preference is obvious. Taylor argues that Balthasar's "dislike for the common" (most notably exposed in his underestimation of modern novels) leads to a failure to fully engage with the reality of creaturely freedom despite his seemingly opposite intentions. He also accuses Balthasar of ignoring the diversity of suffering in reality and failing to respect its mystery.

Why do such opposing views exist in interpreting Balthasar? Did someone like MacKinnon simply overlook this contradiction or read his own agenda into Balthasar?

¹¹⁴ Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 194-195. He makes this point at various other points.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹⁶ Gerard O' Hanlon, "Theological Dramatics" in *The Beauty of Christ: an Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. B. McGregor and T. Norris (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 109.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 183-216.

There is no point in denying that Balthasar fails to explicitly engage with “the social and material aspects of human history, and the structural and political aspects of sin.” That is simply something he does not do in his writings.¹¹⁸ Considering the nature of the activity of the secular institute (the Community of St John) that Balthasar established with von Speyr,¹¹⁹ he did not attempt to engage with the actual problems of his age in a practical way either. Even when he shows the concern that sin might reside in the Church itself (as we have seen above), he does not go on to criticize the hierarchical structure of the Church. Further, when we discussed his outdated view of sexual differentiation in Chapter 5, we pointed out the criticism that his theology is not really helpful for the cause of social justice, which includes gender equality, and it even has the potential danger of being “hijacked to support an unjust *status quo*.”¹²⁰

It is a serious issue for this thesis, for if such a criticism is valid, then what kind of implications would his theology have for the issue of Christian suffering? We still believe that Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday could offer a message of hope for those who are in the midst of suffering. Nevertheless, we also have to admit that he does not engage with the actual problems of his age in an explicit way. To put it more specifically, his primary interest apparently does not lie in offering ‘practical solutions’ to social, political, or economic problems. Considering his critical attitude toward political theology or feminism, we could even conclude that he believes that it should not be his job. Rather, his main interest seems to be how we can find meaning in the suffering that is already here and inescapable. This attitude can be found in many of his writings. Take a look, for example, at his essay, “Loneliness in the Church,” which is related to the topic of this thesis. The essay starts by describing

¹¹⁸ In relation to this, he actually makes critical comments on so-called political theology. “in no way can the whole theology of the New Testament—its theology of the Cross and Resurrection—be reduced to political theology...Political struggle is given as a charge to the Christian. But he must know that the kingdom of God is not established (in Marxist fashion) within the structures of the world.” (*A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 124-125.)

¹¹⁹ The purpose of this secular institute was to let its members live a life of holiness in the midst of the secular world while continuing with their ordinary vocations and occupations in society. For a report of the activities of this secular institute, see Balthasar, *Our Task: a Report and a Plan*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 118-179; Maximilian Greiner, “The Community of St John: A Conversation with Cornelia Capol and Martha Gisi,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 87-101.

¹²⁰ O’ Hanlon, “Theological Dramatics,” 110.

the problem of the Church in his day: “Many Christians today feel lonely in the Church. In fact, it would not be too much to say: they feel isolated *from* the Church.”¹²¹ He then goes on to explain why it should be the case. His answer is that the Church originates in loneliness and abandonment (of the Son, the Mother, and also John). Though it may be frustrating for some readers who seek a more practical means to deal with their loneliness and to be liberated from it in a concrete way, Balthasar says as follows:

Those who belong to the Church should be deep enough Christians to know that loneliness in the Church belongs to her essence. This means that the ecclesial loneliness the Christian feels is a part of his growth in Christ, and so he should have no reason to see his loneliness as an excuse for indulging in a false pathos against the Church as she currently exists or establishing a sectarian pseudo-or anti-church against the *Catholica*.¹²²

If Balthasar does not offer concrete solutions to the problems of his age (or our age), is there nothing at all that his theology could teach us about suffering? This would not necessarily be case, for there is another point to consider: are some sufferings in this world not inescapable after all? There certainly is suffering (physical, mental, or spiritual) to which there is no solution, probably, except prayer. The loss of our beloved one is one such case, and that is exactly what, for example, the grief and solitude of Our Lady on Holy Saturday represents. There is also another fundamental question: why should we suffer in the first place? In the case of the inescapable and inexplicable kind of suffering, the only approach we could take is to persevere in prayer. Is it to this kind of suffering, then, that Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday could offer something hopeful? We believe so. For some, such kinds of suffering which keep on haunting us after the actual event might be classified as “trauma.” Inspired by Balthasar’s and von Speyr’s theology of Holy Saturday as the day in between death and life, Shelly Rambo, for example, has proposed a theology of “remaining” as an approach to the experience of living in the aftermath of trauma.¹²³ Therefore, after we have done everything not to fall into futile resignation and thus to avoid surrendering to unjust suffering, and after we make sure that perseverance is

¹²¹ Balthasar, “Loneliness in the Church,” in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: 1995), 261.

¹²² Ibid. 283-284.

¹²³ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

really the only approach possible, that is where the significance of his approach to human suffering can be relevant.

Lastly, regarding the scope and diversity of actual human suffering Balthasar deals with, we would like to stress again how relevant the Hell Balthasar explores under the influence of von Speyr’s visions is for our contemporary mind, as we discussed in Chapter 4. The variety of negative feelings von Speyr experienced in her visions seems to include many of the so-called ‘modern’ phenomena: emptiness, loneliness, futility, despair, and so forth. Further, by referring to such mystics as St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux, we have explored the reality of Hell in terms of the dark night of the soul, which has an existential dimension in terms of the sinner’s personal and spiritual relationship with God. In other words, contrary to Quash’s claim that Balthasar’s Hell is “*outside and beyond* our time,” we have presented that the reality of the Hell explored in his theology of Holy Saturday is actually *inside* and *within* our time. No wonder quite a few scholars turn to Christ’s Descent into Hell as the theme most relevant for the postmodern age.¹²⁴

In sum, in this chapter, we have discussed how Holy Saturday represents the tragic and paradoxical state of Christian existence torn between the old and new aeons, between Christ and the world, and between suffering and victory. This point has huge implications for Christian discipleship and suffering. Let us clarify exactly what we mean in the conclusion to Part II.

¹²⁴ For example, see Sutton, “Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Holy Saturday,” 177. Also, we reflected on the relevance of Hell in our age in Chapter 4.

Conclusion of Part II: And Still We Wait...

Let us summarize and clarify below what we can learn about Christian discipleship and suffering from what we have discussed in Part II. In Chapter 5, we explored Mary's Holy Saturday on the basis of Balthasar's Mariology. While we discussed Mary's perfect obedience, maintained even in the midst of horrible suffering and God-forsakenness, as the role model of Christian discipleship, we pointed out Balthasar's problematic view of the woman and sexual differentiation. We saw that his theology has the potential danger of being used to bolster the unjust status quo in society, including gender inequality, if placed in the wrong hands. Despite this weakness, however, we stated that his theology of Holy Saturday, which captures well the transition from the Cross to the Resurrection, could still tell us something important about Christian discipleship and suffering. We explored this point further in Chapter 6, where we connected Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday with the other major innovative area of his theology, namely, his theological engagement with tragedy. We explored the Christian's Holy Saturday existence on the basis of his 'tragic' view of Christianity. We argued that Balthasar sees a paradoxical relationship between tragedy and grace, while discussing another concern raised against Balthasar by his critics, namely the fact that he does not engage with the concrete reality of human suffering despite his apparent interest in it. We agreed that his treatment of human suffering could be insufficient for those who seek practical solutions to their problems and his theology should definitely not be used to justify any unjust status quo or to encourage unnecessary resignation in the face of suffering. Nevertheless, we argued that his theology could convey a hopeful message to those who are forced to face inexplicable and inevitable suffering. In the last analysis, his theology of Holy Saturday helps our understanding of Christian discipleship and suffering because it clearly presents the fundamental framework of the paradoxical existence of the Christian, which helps us to locate our suffering and to find its positive meaning. Let us clarify this point further below.

First of all, the connection between Holy Saturday and Christian life drives home to us the fundamental twofoldness inherent in Christian existence. We often hear the paradoxical expression “already but not yet” as the characteristic of the victory hidden in the Christian existence, but this point becomes clearer if we relate it to Holy Saturday, the day between the Cross and the Resurrection, in other words, the day on which the transition from the old aeon to the new took place. The new creation has caused the ‘tragic’ twofold state of the Christian being torn between Christ and the world. In Balthasar’s own words, “we exist in a process of transition that Christ has carried out and (solely thereby) has made available to us: “Put off the old nature with its practices and put on the new nature (Col 3:9).”¹ As we repeatedly pointed out, it is in Hell on Holy Saturday that Christ carried out this transition: “The turning point [where the old has been changed into the new] lies in Christ, or, more exactly, in the drama of the Paschal transition from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.”²

This awareness of the double existence in transition permeates Balthasar’s writings, and he discusses Christian discipleship and suffering on the basis of such awareness.³ The Christian has been assigned a mission from God to accomplish in the world. Solidarity with the world is also what Balthasar encourages on the basis of this in-between state of the Christian. In his words,

It is precisely this Christian existence at the turning point of the Eons that is emphatically an existence for the world, a living in solidarity with the world beyond all active, apostolic activity.⁴

To put it differently, the Christian, as a being in transition who belongs to Christ but is also part of the created world, holds a unique responsibility to deal with the problems in the world. Balthasar writes, “it is because they are rooted in eternal life that the

¹ Balthasar, “The Logic and Ethics of the Forty Days” in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons throughout the Liturgical Year*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 107.

² Balthasar, “Eschatology in Outline,” in *Explorations in Theology IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 463.

³ For example, we can clearly see this awareness in the following places in his writings: “Eschatology in Outline,” 457-467 ; “Church and World” and “Joy and Cross” in *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 90-107, 152-169; *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 210-224; *Mysterium Paschale*, 262-266; “Living in the Interstices,” “The Logic and Ethics of the Forty Days,” “The Future Has Already Come,” “Waiting for God,” and “Jesus Christ and the Foundation of the Church” in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16-26, 104-114, 243-251, 251-257, 319-323.

⁴ Balthasar, “Eschatology in Outline,” 465.

Church and Christians acquire strength to carry out their mission in *this* world; they are otherworldly, but they are also this-worldly, addressing the world and its issues.”⁵

This status of transition further suggests that the Christian has no privileged place to boast about in God’s salvific plan for humankind. As we have already seen in Chapter 6,

the Church, and Christians, can occupy no determinate place within the *Mysterium Paschale*. Their place is neither in front of the Cross nor behind it, but on both its sides: without ever settling for the one vantage point or the other they look from now one, now the other, as ceaselessly directed.⁶

Rather, as St Paul writes, the only thing that the Christian can boast about is the Cross (Galatians 6:14). In relation to this point, as we have already discussed, the possibility of Hell, or separation from God, paradoxically weighs most heavily on Christians themselves. This point justifies the view that Christian existence is tragic.

If Christian discipleship is placed in this context of the transition from the old aeon to the new, so is Christian suffering. The awareness of life in transition enables us to translate the meaning of suffering into ‘tragic waiting,’ while facing the full reality of suffering and at the same time highlighting the victory hidden but already present. Today, we still have to wait for the victory, which has already come in an objective sense but remains hidden within our lives in this world. We can be patient because Christ has already done the waiting in the Hell of absolute loneliness.

This idea explains why the paradoxical coexistence of suffering and joy is possible in Christian life (the kind we have seen in the case of the dark night of the soul experienced by Mother Teresa in the conclusion to Part I). Balthasar writes,

Now, in the “Church between the times,” the paradox between Cross and joy reaches its full dimensions, because the Church can never see the Cross as something that lies behind it as an accomplished fact in past historical time, any more than it can regard its sinfulness as a closed issue in the past. It can never establish itself so completely in the Easter event—and hence in Easter joy—that it no longer needs to be continually accompanying Jesus on the way to the Cross. . . . It is due to this strange paradox that Christian joy has a uniquely burning and consuming quality.⁷

⁵ Balthasar, “Jesus Christ and the Foundation of the Church,” in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 323.

⁶ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 266.

⁷ Balthasar, “Joy and Cross,” in *Truth is Symphonic*, 168.

The paradoxical coexistence of suffering and joy in Christian life also explains why Christians have to suffer for the sake of this world. Balthasar reminds us that “the joy that Christians have is both a gift and *a responsibility*... Amid all the fear that characterizes our time, we Christians are summoned to live in joy and to communicate joy—joy in spite of fear, joy in the midst of fear.”⁸ After all, as Jesus Himself has declared, the Christian is essentially “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). As Balthasar reminds us, all that Christians possess is intended for those who do not have it, and Christians are those who bring “Easter joy in the midst of the passion of humanity.”⁹ Therefore, the Christian who has the privilege of finding positive meaning in their suffering by relating it to the paschal mystery can (and should) assume the responsibility to deal with the suffering in the world by communicating love and joy, which is inexhaustible as it is rooted in God Himself. This way of finding positive meaning in suffering has nothing to do with masochism or distortion of the good news of Christianity. It is not blurring the distinction between suffering and joy. Rather, this paradoxical coexistence of suffering and joy can only be possible if the suffering really *is* suffering.

In sum, despite his lack of engagement with the ‘concrete’ problems in reality, Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday presents us with the framework to clarify the in-between state of the Christian existence, which helps our understanding of Christian discipleship and the role of suffering in it. The Christian’s Holy Saturday, which is characterized by ‘tragic’ waiting, can be endured because Christ Himself has already endured the waiting on Holy Saturday in Hell. This gives the Christian both a privilege and a responsibility as the one who has to follow Christ while living and acting in solidarity with this world.

⁸ Balthasar, “Joy in the Midst of Anxiety,” in *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons throughout the Liturgical Year*, 31. Italics added.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

As the conclusion of the whole thesis, let us summarize how we maintained the approach and scope stated in the Introduction as well as how we have answered the research questions.

We stated that our focus is on Holy Saturday rather than Christ's Descent into Hell, in contrast to the previous studies on Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday. As we clarified then, we have explored the significance of Holy Saturday by dividing it into three kinds: Christ's Descent into Hell, Mary's waiting at the tomb, and the Christian's 'tragic' existence. We have also stated that we would pay full respect to the genre within which Balthasar is working. Since his style is a contemplative combination of theology and spirituality, we have selected the sources we deal with accordingly. As a result, we have valued the writings of Adrienne von Speyr, St John of the Cross, and St Thérèse of Lisieux in this thesis.

We also stated the following specific question as our research question: How does Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday help us to understand the role of suffering in Christian discipleship and help Christians to deal with their suffering? As a response to this question, in Part I, we have pointed out how the dark night of the soul is one distinctive example of Christian suffering. There has been shown a way to persevere in the seeming absence of God or loss of faith for the sake of brethren.

In Part II, we attempted to answer the research question by connecting Balthasar's interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell with his 'tragic' view of Christianity. We argued that Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday presents us with the framework to clarify the in-between state of Christian existence. The Christian's Holy Saturday, which is characterized by 'tragic' waiting in transition from the old aeon to the new, can be endured because of Christ's waiting in Hell on Holy Saturday. This gives the Christian both a privilege and a responsibility as the one who has to follow Christ while living and acting in solidarity with this world.

Also, we stated we would explore how his theology of Holy Saturday helps us to reflect on the issue of Hell in our age. We undertook this in Chapter 4. We stated that Balthasar's and von Speyr's contributions to this topic continue to be immense because they have shown the importance of discussing the concept of Hell (and Heaven) in terms of our relationship with Christ in our age where the topic is no longer popular, though still relevant in the life of faith.

On the other hand, we also discussed some serious issues and concerns raised against Balthasar. In Part I, we dealt with the three main concerns about his treatment of the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology: first, that he has the tendency to bring a rupture into the eternally blissful unity within the Trinity and eventually ends up elevating and divinizing suffering; secondly, that he confuses the divinity and humanity of Christ; and thirdly, his theology inevitably leads to admitting universal salvation in a systematic sense. Regarding these three concerns, we stated our position that in general he takes a subtle and nuanced approach and he is apparently aware of these issues himself. (Basically, even his critics can only criticize his *tendency*.) We further argued that he is rather consistent with his logic of kenotic love and also that he is sensitive to the paradoxical mystery of love and faith. On the other hand, in Part II, we dealt with other concerns raised against his theology. We criticized his view of sexual differentiation which is interlinked with his Mariology. In relation to this point we even admitted that Balthasar's theology potentially has the danger of being used to justify the unjust status quo if placed in the wrong hands. We also admitted that he does not engage with the concrete reality of human suffering in an explicit way so it could seem to be insufficient to those who want practical solutions to their problems.

In sum, after critically examining and evaluating the several relevant aspects of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, we have reached the conclusion that it does have important implications for the Christian, a 'tragic' being in transition, to find consolation in their suffering and to clarify the meaning of their discipleship. Thus, in this thesis we have argued for the significance of Holy Saturday as the day between the Cross and the Resurrection in terms of its implications for Christian suffering and discipleship on the basis of Balthasar's theology. Let us conclude this thesis by suggesting a few potential directions of research which might be helpful for

developing a theology of Holy Saturday further based on the research and arguments we have presented.

First of all, concerning the influence of Adrienne von Speyr, we have only made reference to her writings when relevant. It would be helpful to examine her own theology of Holy Saturday independently from Balthasar in her own context. Such an examination would be meaningful for the scholarship on Balthasar too. Further, we have been exploratory and experimental in Part II. Mary is not so common a subject when discussing Holy Saturday, and the connection between Holy Saturday and tragedy or the 'tragic' Christian needs to be further explored. It would be helpful to discuss the relevance of Holy Saturday further in these two aspects (Mary and the Christian in general) both within and without the Balthasarian scholarship. In particular, since Balthasar's theology lacks an actual engagement with the concrete reality of human suffering, as we have argued, it would be meaningful to present how we could actually apply the in-between framework presented by Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday to a concrete engagement with the reality of suffering. Such a specific exploration would eventually make it easier for lay Christians to see the significance of Holy Saturday in their life of faith.

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