Grasping the Form

A PROPOSAL FOR CONTEMPLATIVE AND SYNTHETIC SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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The State of Academic Theology

In a speech to the *Goethestiftung* the year before his death, Hans Urs von Balthasar thanked Goethe for a key insight: that intellectual work should strive for "seeing, evaluating, and interpreting a *figure*" (or *Gestalt*) in a "synthetic look."[1] This Goethe-inspired synthetic contemplation was, he said, so attractive because it counteracted his experience of theological learning under neo-Scholastic manuals. The manual divided up the mystery of God into separate treatises; Christology was presented as "a particularly thorny hedge," a mass of heresies to avoid. It was, he said, "a quantity of materials, but it was not possible to discover any form" to the theological construction.[2]

While manuals have long fallen from favor, Balthasar's complaint of disciplinary formlessness is as contemporary as ever. The past obsession with heresy-criticism has given way to other trends, but then, as now, a positive vision of the *form of theology* is missing. Within the academy, this problem is not confined to theology. As Alasdair MacIntyre has observed, the modern university is better called a "multiversity," each

1. From his speech on the occasion of receiving the Mozart Prize given by the *Goethestiftung*, on May 22, 1987, "Quel che devo a Goethe: Discorso per il conferimento del premio Mozart" ("What I Owe to Goethe"), reprinted in Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1991), 395–406, at 396, translation mine. Reprinted in the original German in Elio Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Eine Monographie* (Einsiedeln, CH: Johannes, 1993, 419–24.

2. Balthasar, "Quel che devo a Goethe," 398.

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department laboring away, disconnected from other disciplines.[3] The scholarly field resembles a pocked terrain of academic moles who burrow narrowly but deeply into their particular topic, or perhaps a field of oil wells that drill far down but never laterally. Although writing styles are now usually far removed from the manualist tradition, the neglect of the synthetic form of theology remains quite the same.

A common solution to this problem is interdisciplinary study. Working across disciplines has many advantages and is well-nigh obligatory for the theologian, who must know at least the rudiments of philosophy and history in order to do his job competently. But simply enfolding more disciplines into one's narrow drilling down does not ensure that a thinker grasps the larger form but merely that the drill bore makes a slightly wider hole.

The problem is not specialization per se; it is rather a specialization that refuses to look up and take in the wider vista. If an epidemiologist cannot see the larger reality of the human person, she will reduce all human problems and solutions to disease prevention. If a liturgist cannot see the larger reality of God, he will reduce life in Christ to liturgical norms and participation (whether of a traditional or progressive stripe). Specialized knowledge is needed but always as integrated within its broader context. Without that integration, it fails even as specialized because it misunderstands the role the part plays within the whole.

Yet, even granting this, is such over-specialization the whole problem? The *Gestalt* of which Balthasar speaks must, for Christian theology, be nothing less than that of Christ himself. The demands that this *Gestalt* makes upon the thinker are significant: they reorient the theoretical work of theology toward an obedience of faith and of reason against which the ordinary postlapsarian person chafes.

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3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 174, citing Clark Kerr.

In this essay, I argue that a renewal of theology requires an obedient and adoring contemplation of the *Gestalt* of Christ, prepared for by a more synthetic, *Gestalt*-oriented pursuit of all creaturely truth. This contemplation is not limited by its theological subject matter but rather universalized through it. It is this kind of vision that enables theology to be the "queen of the sciences" or, as Bonaventure had it, the foundational study in which all sciences find their measure. Further, because it is ruled by the one form of the Word made flesh, such theological contemplation avoids eclecticism in favor of a genuine unity, held together in the Spirit by the Christ-*Gestalt*.

While *Gestalt* is primarily an aesthetic term, developed in the first part of Balthasar's trilogy (the *Glory of the Lord*), here my focus is on the pursuit of theological truth, which is the subject matter of the third part of the trilogy, the *Theo-logic*. The different parts interpenetrate, of course, because the transcendentals themselves do so. Each transcendental expresses a distinct aspect of the unitary mystery of being and is coextensive with being as a whole. In Balthasar's presentation, beauty and truth each emphasize the "depth dimension of being, thanks to which being remains a mystery even, indeed, precisely in its unveiling."[4] While beauty's movement from depth to expression is its *splendor*, truth's movement of the same is a matter of *unveiling* (and simultaneous veiling) of *logos*, meaning. Beauty is primarily contemplated, while truth is an invitation to thought—but both interpenetrate.[5] Further, the unveiling of this depth dimension is a matter of loving service on the part of the contemplative thinker. It is fair

4. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic,* vol. 1, *Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 16. Hereafter, *Theo-Logic* is cited as *TL*.

5. See my treatment of Balthasar's aesthetics, relying heavily on *TL* 1 as well as the volumes from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (hereafter, *GL*), in "Deleuze, Balthasar, and John Paul II on the Aesthetics of the Body," *Theological Studies* 81, no. 3 (December 2020): 649–70.

to say, therefore, that Balthasar's epistemology is an aesthetic and dramatic one, as I will present it here.

Thinking that Reads the *Gestalt*

In speaking of John Paul II's intellectual vision, Joseph Ratzinger wrote:

> The metaphysical, the mystical, the phenomenological, and the aesthetic—the interplay of all these aspects opened his eyes to the many levels of reality and finally became a single comprehensive perception [*Wahrnehmung*] that confronts everything that appears and manages to understand it through the fact that the perception goes beyond it.[6]

This "single comprehensive perception" summarizes Balthasar's aim in proposing a theological method. In *Theo-Logic* 1, he memorably calls it a "*Gestalt*-reading thinking" (*gestaltenlesendes Denken*).[7] As with John Paul II, this thinking remains thinking; it is neither irrational nor a-rational but demands instead a more capacious rationality. Abstracting a universal essence is part of this thinking but not the whole of it.

This claim might appear as a typically Balthasarian poeticizing, not especially precise and maybe about as useful for a theologian as an inspirational poster might be for a salesman. Yet I argue that Balthasar is recovering a less rationalistic epistemology from the tradition, in particular the Thomistic tradition.

Form (whether *morphe*, *eidos*, or *idea*) in the Greek philosophical traditions makes possible the knowledge of universals. For Thomas Aquinas, the abstraction of this form

6. Joseph Ratzinger, "John Paul II: Twenty Years in History," in *The Legacy of John Paul II: Images and Memories*, trans. Michael J. Miller and Nicoletta V. MacKenzie (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 9–33, at 16.

7. *TL* 1:240.

from sensible specificity lights up the intellect, which, without this intellectual species, remains non-actualized (the "possible intellect"). For scientific knowing, more work is required beyond the initial abstraction, such as forming propositions.[8] The achievement of such scientific knowledge should not be minimized, for it is by no means automatic. Indeed, many people have not attained an understanding of their own essence as a "rational animal"—that is, as both spiritual and material.

But the abstraction from the sensible species is not the end of the story for the intellect. On the one hand, the *conversio ad phantasmata* entails a "return" to the concrete thing known, its essence affirmed or denied in an act of judgment.[9] As part of this *conversio*, and despite rumors to the contrary, Thomas has a subtle and careful account of how we "cognize" particulars—that is, how we utilize our rational powers (especially the cogitative sense) to know singulars in a way that is not only abstractive. As Daniel De Haan summarizes, "Even though Aquinas denies that the human intellect has singular cognition, he unequivocally does ascribe to the cogitative power or particular reason the ability to perceive individual intentions, to cognize individuals, and to form propositions about singulars."[10] Thomas surely knew that he knew Albert as a particular person, not merely as an anonymous sample of a general category "human being." His epistemology reflects this fact.

8. See the summary in Therese Scarpelli Cory, "The Nature of Cognition and Knowledge," *The New Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas Joseph White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 153–83, at 166–75.

9. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 89, a. 5 for *conversio ad phantasmata* and *Commentary on the "De Trinitate" of Boethius* 6.2 for judgment.

10. Daniel De Haan, "Aquinas on Sensing, Perceiving, Thinking, Understanding, and Cognizing Individuals," in *Medieval Perceptual Puzzles: Theories of Sense-Perception in the 13th and 14th Centuries*, ed. Elena Baltuta (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 238–68, at 261.

On the other hand, thinking entails more than knowing singulars and universals; it also knows multiplicities. Yet, for Thomas, is not the intellect capable of knowing only one concept at a time? Certainly, the intellect can be actualized in abstraction by only one intellectual species at a time. Nevertheless, the human intellect can work with multiplicities, such as comparisons, propositions, or states of affairs. As Therese Scarpelli Cory puts it, "When I attend to this whole primarily as the object of cognition, I necessarily grasp each of the multiple component parts in virtue of their following upon that whole." She calls attention to a few texts, such as *Quodlibet* 7:

> Many are understood as one by the unity of that which is understood, for the whole itself is primarily understood and the many are understood by following upon the whole. For instance, when the intellect understands a line, it simultaneously understands the parts of the line as is said in III *De anima*; and likewise when it understands a proposition it simultaneously understands the subject and predicate; and when it understands the similarity or difference of various things, it simultaneously understands those things that are similar and different.[11]

Cory emphasizes that "even though the intellect is not considering the many parts in their own right (as 'primary' objects of attention), it *actually understands* them in attending to the whole."[12] Here, the parts are truly known, as they must be for the whole to be understood, but they are understood as parts of the whole, not for their own sake. Cory gives the aesthetic example that Balthasar gives elsewhere, albeit in a different

11. Translated by Cory in Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138. See also *Summa contra Gentiles* I, q. 55, and *Summa theologiae* I, q. 85, a. 4, ad 4.

12. Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*, 139.

context, as we will see: "In 'looking out at the mountains' from a vantage point, I am necessarily 'seeing' the waterfalls, cliffs, trees, birds, etc., within that chosen visual whole. Each of these parts is actually included in my visual experience, but I am not looking at any one of them in particular, which would require focusing my attention on one so as to exclude the others."[13]

The work of Thomistic ressourcement accomplished by De Haan and Cory resembles the epistemological ressourcement Balthasar presents in his first volume of the *Theo-Logic*.[14] The "General Introduction" to the whole theo-logical part of the trilogy argues that this part intends to stand within the "great tradition" of thinking about truth, using Thomas Aquinas as the "guarantor" of this attempt. In particular, Balthasar's *gestaltenlesendes Denken*, in its concreteness and synthetic power, resembles Thomas's knowledge of particulars and of multiplicities.[15]

Let us return to Balthasar's understanding of *Gestalt*, which is related to but not identical with the species received by the sense or the intellect. As we have seen, he learns of *Gestalt* from Goethe, for whom *Gestalt* expresses the unified meaning of the singular entity as it changes in history. Thus, Goethe's *Metamorphosis of Plants* emphasized "dynamic change" within the plant as "an individual identity that in the course of time adopts different conformations in accordance with an innate principle."[16] The "late-Aristotelian" Goethe

13. Cory, 139–40.

14. Originally published in 1947 as *Wahrheit der Welt*, *TL* 1 was intended to be the first volume of a two-volume work. The second volume was to treat the truth of God as does the later *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, *The Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004). *Wahrheit der Welt* was republished unchanged as *TL* 1. It is not clear whether, had his advanced age permitted it, Balthasar would have altered some of the content.

15. *TL* 1:11. I do not mean to argue that all of what Balthasar presents as *gestaltenlesendes Denken* is derived straight from Thomas but rather that the two perspectives are not alien to each other.

16. Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. 1, *The Poetry of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 596.

valued, Balthasar said, "the indissoluble unique, organic, developing form."[17]

Gestaltenlesendes Denken is genuine thinking that aims to grasp singular forms *qua* singular.[18] Yet, as a kind of aesthetic knowing, it knows a truth that is just as cognitive as conceptual truth.[19] Indeed, the intellect that reads the *Gestalt* of the individual flower or human face utilizes conceptual knowledge but also outstrips it. I cannot understand the *Gestalt* of a friend if I do not know her to be human, yet such conceptual knowledge is the beginning, not the end, of my knowledge of my friend.[20] A further intelligence is required, an intelligence only possible to a rational person but not reducible to conceptual knowledge.[21]

Gestaltenlesendes Denken is particularly appropriate to theological work, which concerns the revelation of God's action in history. No concept could deduce the gracious

17. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 41.

18. According to Adrienne von Speyr, this is how God knows us: "For God does not view the person as a sum of characteristics, which others may also happen to have. . . . He encounters each individual in just as personal a manner as he foresaw, affirmed and created him" (*Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation*, trans. D.C. Schindler [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004], 111). Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 79–80.

19. "It must be stressed, of course, that truth is no less 'rational' when it appears in a form determined by freedom, by personality and situation, than it is when it occurs in the form of abstract nature. To speak of the *individuum ineffabile* is to assert only that the individual can never be transposed without remainder into universal terms, not at all to claim that it therefore cannot be known in its own way" (*TL* 1:181–82).

20. See *TL* 1:140. In the concrete subject, both *gestaltenlesendes Denken* and the application of universals to individuals through judgment can and most often do occur simultaneously. On the side of the object, the two are mutually related. No matter how unique, the particular person remains a "man" while the universal nature can only appear as irreducibly unique singular men (see *TL* 1:153).

21. See D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 167–75, for a summary of Balthasar's *Gestalt*.

choosing of Israel or the Incarnation of the Son. These events are not irrational, but neither are they reducible to universal concepts; the most ill-considered samples of Enlightenment religious thinking attempt just that reduction.[22] In fact, for Balthasar, "theology in the strict sense of the word cannot do any abstracting at all." It must, of course, make use of "general truths, propositions and methods." But this activity "always subserves the contemplation and interpretation of the unique," which can be *theologically* understood in light of the fact that "God wills to maintain his relation to the world only with Jesus Christ as the center of that relationship."[23]

Whether theological or ordinary human knowing, *gestaltenlesendes Denken* uncovers a truth that Balthasar terms "concrete universality." He uses the language of "situation" to explain this. He gives the example of viewing a landscape: "For example, every eye could, theoretically speaking, enjoy the view from the summit of a mountain that is difficult to climb: only there are certain practical obstacles to reaching this vista."[24] The very concreteness of historical situations make it impossible for them to be known by everyone, but there is no intrinsic barrier to their universal knowability.[25] Further, because of the

22. E.g., Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

23. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 22.

24. *TL* 1:182.

25. Of course, the same mountain can be known through conceptual knowledge as well, according to the laws of geology or perspective or metaphysics. The idea of any existing thing "shares simultaneously in the realms of 'nature' and of 'history'" (*TL* 1:182). In *Theology of History*, Balthasar explicitly eschews situation ethics in favor of ethical situations "finding their norm and governing principle in that particular Christ-situation which is their source and their context" (Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 72–73). Because of Christ, historical particularity is always tied to objective truth. Christophe Potworowski rightly emphasizes the connection between objectivity and the unique in Balthasar ("An Exploration of the Notion of Objectivity in Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Glory, Grace, and Culture: The Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Ed Block Jr. [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005], 69–87).

interior freedom of each knower and the unrepeatability of the object's self-revelation at any given moment, the meeting of the two creates a unique moment. Thus, the knowing subject must be receptive to the object as it presents itself in order to take the object into her spiritual interior. Balthasar speaks of this interaction between unique subject and unique object as the "administration of truth," whereby the subject must be attentive to the object before her as well as the "totality" of the truth as far as she can know it. Only the ministering, knowing subject can find the place within the whole in which the object can be situated; the object cannot do this on its own.[26]

The situation, therefore, brings together the objectivity and subjectivity of humanly achieved truth. The subjectivity of each knower places a particular stamp on her achievement of truth. Every truth is "always mine, thine, and his."[27] This particular achievement of truth is not a matter of supplementing essential content that would contradict what another knower could attain since the receptivity to the object required in knowledge forbids any subjectivism. Yet the truth of the object is incomplete without a subject who can know that truth. The subject, therefore, is necessary for truth, which cannot simply reside within the object but must also be truly *known* to be truth. "Truth resides primarily in the intellect," Thomas writes, "and secondarily in things according as they are related to the intellect as their principle."[28] The intellect that backstops all truth through measuring all things into existence is the divine intellect, and the finite intellect participates analogously in this measuring power. Hence, truth entails the achievement of truth *within a subject*, an *achievement* (as opposed to a mere content) that is, strictly speaking, as incommunicable as the subject's very being.[29] No one can think for someone else. The

26. *TL* 1:128–29.
27. *TL* 1:179.
28. *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 1.
29. *TL* 1:89.

content is communicable but not the achievement itself, as teachers know all too well.

From this perspective, the responsibility to "think for oneself" is not a rebellion against tradition; it is simply the responsibility to achieve the truth in oneself, to bring the object into the subjective spiritual realm that is I myself. Only I can do this service for the object, and the fact that, thankfully, this service might be rendered by many other thinking subjects does not negate *my* responsibility toward it.[30] Indeed, to view the world in this way is a service that the intellectual subject renders to it. "In reality, the objects of this world need the subject's space in order to be themselves." A tree "needs the sensorium as a space in which to unfurl itself," and the spiritual accomplishment of truth in the human person is an elevation of the object to a higher plane. The subject "offers the object the chance to complete itself in a superior world."[31] And yet the subject is expanded as well, by being united to its object; it becomes, in a sense, tree-like. The intellect is potentially all things.[32] Thus, the act of knowing is the mystery "in which subject and object expand within each other, thus helping each other in a common discovery of truth."[33]

Indeed, as we have seen Thomas argue, truth is only partly in the object; it is even more within the subject. As Balthasar puts it, "The [object's] *objective* truth lies partly in itself and partly in the space of the subject whose activity helps it become what it is meant to be."[34] The subject's supplementation of the object is not a completion of a partial truth; the "partly" in the previous sentence does not set up a fractional equation. Instead, the one truth internal to the object can only be

30. Of course, the finite rational person cannot give every object her subjective attention. This responsibility is not infinite, but it is, as finite, a call nevertheless, one that requires careful discernment within the limits imposed by time and space.

31. *TL* 1:63.

32. See Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.5.430a10–25.

33. *TL* 1:65.

34. *TL* 1:64.

unfolded, or expressed, in multiple ways within the subjective sphere.[35] Recognizing this is the task of the subject, to make "itself available, in an attitude of service, for the completion of the object."[36] This service is a work of justice, of giving the object its due in the spiritual sphere.[37] It is also a work of love, because in it, the subject offers his "most personal center" for the spiritual elevation of the object.[38] The *Gestalt* of anything can only be truly seen in love, which must (through the will) direct the intellect toward its specific objects to begin with.[39] Only in love and service of the truth will the partial truths of sectarianism give way to a *gestaltenlesendes Denken*.[40]

Conversely, this knowing of the object is a perfection, a *Bildung*, of the subject. "Without the world it remains an unformed ego. . . . It becomes formed in the measure that it takes the world in and helps it take shape."[41] This insight was already expressed in the traditional language of the possible and agent intellects. Outside of its information by the intellectual species, the intellect is in unformed potency, awaiting the work of the abstracted species to form and perfect it. Only in this way is the intellect potentially all things. Indeed, for Thomas, we cannot attain self-awareness outside of this intellectual act.[42] The act of knowing is what makes the intellect

35. See *TL* 1:65: "The appearance of the object [in the subject] is not a pale duplicate of its self-quiescent essence but the necessary unfolding in which its inward plenitude becomes manifest for the first time."

36. *TL* 1:67.

37. *TL* 1:76.

38. *TL* 1:76, 78.

39. *TL* 1:111–15.

40. *TL* 1:129. See also Erich Przywara on the role of service (*Dienst*, both as assistance rendered and as a quasi-liturgical act) in the analogy of being and the thinking that flows from it, in *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 229 and 235; and Brian P. Dunkle, "Service in the *Analogia Entis* and Spiritual Works of Erich Przywara," *Theological Studies* 73, no. 2 (May 2012): 339–62.

41. *TL* 1:67.

42. As Cory carefully unpacks in *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*.

itself knowable to itself in self-consciousness, because that act provides a form for the intellect. The form actualizes the intellect and makes it knowable to itself. "Things, then, have always already decided the subject's fate," Balthasar writes. "It begins totally expropriated by the world, and only by performing the work of the subject does it get its recompense for its labor, which is its character as a well-rounded, formed, and masterful self."[43]

This whole *Gestalt* that one sees ultimately enfolds a providential sense of things, by which the subject comes to see "the truth of things as given and disposed by God . . . as they are before God, for God, and in God."[44] Not a kind of totalizing ambition, as though a finite subject is capable of grasping any one object exhaustively, with no remainder. The totality that is grasped in *gestaltenlesendes Denken* is a totality of perspective on the side of the subject, not a totality of content on the side of the object.[45] The knower must strive to see both analytically and synthetically, drilling deeply into the object by defining and distinguishing while also capturing its situatedness in relation to other objects and to God's creative plan.[46] The subject must strive to know both more deeply and more widely, all the while recognizing his insurmountable limits as a finite knower.

The rational subject thereby participates "in the creative vision by which God the Creator contemplates things and which contains their measure in itself."[47] This is not a straightforward co-creation because the finite subject is dependent

43. *TL* 1:68.

44. *TL* 1:60.

45. See, e.g., *TL* 1:261. The "malice" of the devil presents truth as some limited thing, "generally accessible and at hand, which is withheld from a certain man only for some unnatural reason" (*TL* 1:262). This attitude grasps for knowledge, to be "like God" rather than to receive truth from him. "The serpent thus develops a sort of anthropocentric theory of knowledge, whereas only a theocentric epistemology can make sense of the truth of worldly knowledge" (*TL* 1:262).

46. *TL* 1:245–47.

47. *TL* 1:60.

upon the infinite truth of God, which measures creatures into being. The subject must allow "itself to be measured by God's idea of the object" in order to engage in its creative intellectual act and "to look at the world, as it were, through God's eyes."[48] This kind of knowing is not only a service to the object, as I have explored, but also a "deeper service" to God.[49]

Reading the Form of Christ

All thinking is meant to have this objective-subjective profile of service to the *Gestalt* and to its Creator. The task of theological thinking, in particular, is to see everything from the perspective of and in service to the *Gestalt* of Christ. In this service, the structures and attitudes of worldly knowing are deepened and perfected. "Logic is concerned with truth," Balthasar writes; "in theo-logic, truth consists in the interpretation of God given by the incarnate Logos: 'I am the truth' (John 14:6)."[50] Because of its infinite and transcendent object, theology must go beyond the natural service of the truth and be always situated between the poles of worship and obedience. These two should not only be the orientation for all theology but also the measure of its success.[51]

The analogy of being is crucial to this task in order to prevent either a collapse of all worldly being into God's being (what Balthasar criticizes as a "philosophy of identity") or a removal of God from the world (as with rationalism). All non-analogous thinking results in a practical univocity, in which only one type

48. *TL* 1:61. See John Paul II's account of "original nakedness" in Genesis for a similar presentation of a participation in God's loving and creative vision, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), 13:1, 177.

49. *TL* 1:256; see the entire section at 254–67.

50. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic,* vol. 3, *Spirit of Truth,* trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 69.

51. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Place of Theology," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 149–60, at 150–52.

of being truly counts.[52] But this move seeds secularity with its own destruction because such an elevation of the world beyond its true stature can only lead to a fatal misunderstanding of the world.[53] The centering of theology around the form of Christ cannot mean, therefore, that worldly *Gestalten* are swallowed up by it. Theology demands an analogous visioning of both, seeing worldly being as a variegated image of its divine source. Christ himself, as human and divine, is the concrete *analogia entis*, embracing and perfecting the world's forms, so theology centered on him should do likewise.[54] Still, the priority and greater dissimilarity of the divine source remains, as we have seen *in Theo-Logic* 1's treatment of the providential order of things

With that proviso, let us turn to the form of Christ that is properly grasped in theo-logic. The centrality of the incarnate Son is due, first, to his Trinitarian profile as Word of the Father who co-spirates the Spirit. "All things" were made through the Word (John 1:3), so our knowing and loving encounter with the things of the world provides a preparation for knowing and loving the incarnate Word. According to Bonaventure, who draws on a tradition going back to Paul, the Word is the One in whom all things were made. But the Son is more than

52. Secular equivocity, in removing God from the equation, does so in order to ensure the primacy of the world to the exclusion of God, resulting in a practical univocity of worldly being. See Angela Franks, "What Secularization Did to the Self," Church Life Journal, January 17, 2022, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-secularization-did-to-the-self/.

53. See *TL* 1:15, on the necessity of analogy for an integration of philosophy and theology, in particular the need to "deal more comprehensively with the way in which worldly being as a whole images God." See Angela Franks, "Trinitarian *Analogia entis* in Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 533–59; Angela Franks, *The Epiphany of Being: Trinitarian* Analogia Entis *and the Transcendentals in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (PhD diss., Boston College, 2006).

54. On Christ as the concrete *analogia entis*, see Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 69–70; *Theo-Drama*, vol. 2: Dramatis Personae: *Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 267–68, 405–7, *passim*.

the divine archetype; he is also the hypostatic expression of the Father.[55] As subsisting "in the middle" between the Father and the Holy Spirit, he is the perfect Image of the Father. He exists "from" the Father and "toward" the Holy Spirit, eternal "vectors" that will be translated into the economy in his mission, or being sent, from the Father.[56] Thus, the expressive power of all worldly things—out of the ground of their essence toward being known by spirit—is derived from the divine Image of the Father. Their truth-structure of depth and expression is a distant participation in the Son's expressive being from his origin and toward the Spirit.[57] The Son as truth is the hypostatic expression of "the Father's generative act, which, considered from the standpoint of the hypostasis of the Logos, is groundless love. . . . Being grounded in the self-donating Father, it transcends itself, together with him, into the Holy Spirit."[58]

The "middle" that the second person of the Trinity *is* extends into the economy, where Christ is the "middle" or mediator between the Father and creatures, in the power of the Spirit. This personal and divine subsistence is stretched into the world as the Son's mission into the flesh, and the same is true of the Spirit's mission into the Church and the world.

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55. Summarized in *TL* 2:154 and expanded in 166–69, and *GL* 2: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984), 260–362.

56. "Vector" is my word for it; see Angela Franks, "Liquidity: Man, the Triune God, and the Eucharistic Christ," *Communio* 46, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2019): 585–619.

57. See *GL* 2:290–91, relying especially on the *Hexameron*. The Word "gives expression to the Father who is the archetype, and himself becomes an expressive archetype in relation to the world, precisely in so far as he gives perfect expression to the paternal archetype" (298). See also Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1989), for more on Christ as the *medium*. *TL* 1 unpacks the aesthetic and dramatic "movement" from ground to expression in worldly truth, especially at 131–79; cf. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*.

58. *TL* 2:155.

The Son is the expositor—literally, the *exēgēsis* of the Father (John 1:18). The Logos, "although he is God, does not exposit himself in his humanity. Rather, he exposits the Father in the Holy Spirit. . . . And this exposition he calls 'the truth.'"[59]

The Son is truth not only as the expositor of divine content—that is, of the Father—but also as the very act of exposition. The Son does not pass along neutral content, indifferently related to his Incarnation. Rather, the fullness of "grace and truth" (John 1:14) *is* the Son; revelation is "not only what is revealed, the love of the Father who sends the Son, but also the Son's act of revealing it."[60] In the economy, the Son's act of paternal revelation utilizes the structures of worldly knowing in which (as we have seen) images are distinct from yet fully express the essences hidden in them. This structure of the truth of the object is met by the knowing subject, who receives into himself these sensible images; only thus is the truth of the material world possible. The Son's revelation inserts itself within these created structures and perfects them. "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. . . . I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it" (I John 1:1, 2:21). Precisely as flesh that can be touched, the Son exegetes the Father and is the truth. In so doing, he images and expresses the hidden divine origin, the Father. Theo-logic reveals the proper entelechy of the created structures of depth and expression to be *witness*, *martyrion*, to the truth. This martyr-witness is paradigmatically expressed in Jesus's cruciform testimony to the Father's truth in his words and works and the Spirit's testimony to the truth of Jesus.

In this revealing action, Christ is both the subject and object of truth. Just as we saw the necessity of the subject for the existence of worldly truth, so we can see here the necessity of the divine subject for the existence of theo-logic, a

59. *TL* 2:312.
60. *TL* 2:17.

subject who not only "is" truth but himself "truths"—as the co-extensiveness of the transcendentals with being indicates. God's truth, like everything divine, triply subsists. The Father subsists as the speaker of the Word and therefore as the origin of truth. The Son subsists as the spoken expression of the Father. The Holy Spirit subsists as the loving act of the Father giving himself completely over to the Son and the Son's returning self-gift, and he also subsists as the spirated fruit of both.[61]

The Spirit is, therefore, both the unitive act of the Father and the Son and "goal" or "endpoint" of the Trinitarian processions. In the economy, the Spirit unites the incarnate Son to the Father and also is the "goal" of the Son's coming and going: "For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). The Spirit takes the *Gestalt* of Christ and universalizes it in the *Gestalten* of the Church—"institution, Scripture, tradition, sacrament, and office."[62] Through these ecclesial forms and by the power of the Spirit, we are led into an understanding of God's truth as well as the power to live it out.[63] According to both Paul and John, this happens through the Church and the sacraments, in particular Baptism and Eucharist, the water and blood that witness to God's truth (1 John 5:6, 8).[64] The Eucharist is the supreme example of how the Spirit universalizes the incarnate Son, who becomes a "life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45) while

61. For the Spirit's immanent reality, see *TL* 3:161–62 and developed through *TL* 3 as the Spirit's "subjective" (unitive act) and "objective" (fruit) aspects (especially 317–411). The Spirit is this unitive act, and not the Son, despite the Son's subsistence in the "middle" of the order of persons, as the second person. The Father gives the whole divine essence that he *is* to the Son, who returns it to the Father in mirroring love. The Spirit *is* the unitive to-and-fro of the loving divine kenosis of Father and Son. But he can be this only by being third (logically, not temporally), as the Spirit proceeding from both, because both are presupposed in his unitive act.

62. *TL* 2:156 and developed in *TL* 3:319–368.

63. *TL* 3:86.

64. *TL* 3:77.

remaining fully bodily.[65] Through the Spirit, *caro cardo salutis* is made possible. The Son's crucified and risen flesh remains the principle of our salvation, accessed within the Church: "The Spirit's testimony is always incarnational."[66]

As much as he is the object of theology, the Spirit is even more so the divine *subject* of theology.[67] "The illuminating Spirit (*lux beatissima*) takes complete possession of the theologizing human subject (*cordis intima*)."[68] He serves as both guide to and interpreter of the Son (who exegetes the Father), thereby expressing economically his joint inner-Trinitarian role as both loving unity and fruit of the Father-Son relation.[69] The Spirit-inspired "knowing that which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19) is an introduction, experientially as well as intellectually, into the expositing relationship of the incarnate Son with the Father who is true (John 7:28). Therefore, "an authentic theology, however simple or learned it professes to be, can only be developed *in* the Holy Spirit."[70] In this theology, the theologian participates in the Trinitarian mystery she exposits. The Spirit "takes the objective unity effected by him and enfleshes it in the subject: 'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3)."[71] The dialogue with God is itself the Spirit, who is personally this dialogue between Father and Son. Thus, the dialogue with God that is theology, rooted in prayer dialogue, is participation in the Spirit.[72]

65. *TL* 3:199. See Jonathan Martin Ciraulo, *The Eucharistic Form of God: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Sacramental Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

66. *TL* 3:246.

67. *TL* 3:27, quoting Jean Yves Lacoste, "Zur Theologie des Geistes," *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 15, no. 1 (1986): 1–7.

68. *TL* 3:30, quoting the ancient hymns to the Holy Spirit.

69. For "guide and interpreter," see *TL* 3:85, summarizing previous pages.

70. *TL* 3:31.

71. *TL* 3:365.

72. *TL* 3:371.

Like grace, theology is meant to elevate and perfect all human knowing. Because of the comprehensiveness of the Christ-form, all sciences find their fullest truth in theology, as Bonaventure's *reductio* demonstrates. The point is not to annul the sciences but to "inwardly preserve and retrieve them" by ordering them "within a more encompassing space."[73] Christ as Mediator is also the *medium* of the sciences, the middle in which they find their true meaning and the measure of their truths.[74] Thus, theology can and must make use of human logic in its disputation. But it cannot fall into a disputational attitude toward the Word himself, saying, "Your testimony is not true." That would be a theology symbolized in those who stoned Stephen: a theology of anti-*diakonia*, anti-service, of words in opposition to the Word. It would be "a theology which, while it takes up stones, goes on speaking."[75]

The Task of the Theologian

Let us bring these reflections back to the role of the theologian. She, too, has a responsibility to "think for herself," if we interpret this once more to refer to the achievement of truth within the subject. The theologian not only owes to Christ the revelation of the content of the faith; she also owes to him the revelatory act itself, in which she must participate. Both poles are necessary: the divine as well as the human persons. Recall the mutual expansion of object in the subject and subject in the object that marks all knowing. In theology, with its divine object, the subject encounters God in an inconceivable kenosis, by which he allows himself to be taken into the finite knower. This knowing is indeed a kind of "expansion" of the divine object, in that God allows himself to be brought into the unique spiritual space of each person in a way in which he

73. *TL* 2:197.

74. See *TL* 2:197–200, drawing on Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, *Breviloquium*, and *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*.

75. Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 153; see also 154–55 on the "requirement" to utilize the "laws of human thinking" while probing theo-logic.

was not present before.[76] In cognizing the truth of Christ and expressing it, the theologian does him, who is the truth, the service of sheltering his truth within her and birthing it into a new situation. In this way, Mary is the Queen of theologians.[77]

Here also, analogy determines the possibilities and limits of the theologian's work. We theologians should speak with circumspection; is there anything worse than a glib theologian? The speech of theo-logic should only arise after our arrogance wrestles with the angel who wounds us with an overwhelming sense of God's unspeakable humility in letting the truth that he himself *is* be measured and sheltered by finite minds such as ours.[78] God's infinite truth cannot be comprehensively measured by man; rather, that truth is the measure of man.

The ambiguous figure of Jacob is a proper figure for the danger and promise endemic in the theologian's role. Jacob wrestles all night with a mysterious figure.

> Then [the man or angel] said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless

76. "God is said to be in a thing in two ways; in one way after the manner of an efficient cause; and thus He is in all things created by Him; in another way he is in things as the object of operation is in the operator; and this is proper to the operations of the soul, according as the thing known is in the one who knows; and the thing desired in the one desiring. In this second way God is especially in the rational creature which knows and loves Him actually or habitually. And because the rational creature possesses this prerogative by grace, as will be shown later. He is said to be thus in the saints by grace" (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 3).

77. "The creation of space for God through the total surrender of all that is one's own, Ignatius of Loyola's *sume et suscipe* [take and receive], is ultimately the supreme affirmation of God's self-giving love in the super-word of his Son, which man attempts to answer with a super-word he receives as gift. Here 'negative theology' finally becomes the locus of perfect encounter, not in a dialogical equality of dignity, but in the transformation of the whole creature into an *ecce ancilla* [behold the handmaid] for the all-filling mystery of the ungraspable love of the self-emptying God" (*TL* 2:122).

78. See Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 153.

> you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. (Gen 32:26–29)

Jacob's wrestling and wounding happened the night before he was to meet his twin, Esau, who might be expected to mirror his brother's prideful antagonism, given how Jacob had clutched after Esau's rightful possessions. Accordingly, Jacob expects the worst. "But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen 33:4). This surprisingly merciful reaction foreshadows another response to another younger son who clutches for an inheritance not rightly his: "But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Jacob is encompassed by mercy, the only context within which his striving can be moderated toward a good end. As he says to Esau, "Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor" (Gen 33:10).

The theologian grapples with the truth of God. This grappling might be a way of measuring God arrogantly: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me!" "Tell me your name!" Foucault recognizes that the will to knowledge can be one variety of the will to power, a *libido cognoscendi*.[79] Yet Jacob *is* blessed, and Esau *is* merciful. God *does* reveal his name. Jacob wonders, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"

79. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1994). Bonaventure refers to this debased intellectual pursuit as a kind of intellectual fornication with prostitutes, at *In Hexamaron* 2.7, quoted in *GL* 2:278–79.

(Gen 32:31). Because of this mercy, he is rendered able to see the face of God in Esau a few hours later.

This gracious reality prompts Balthasar to argue that negative theology's place is most properly philosophical or non-Christian mysticism, in which man's religious seeking never finds an end. Somewhat surprisingly, Balthasar opposes it strongly: "This primary negative theology is the strongest bastion against Christianity."[80] In the second volume of the *Theo-Logic*, Christian theology is shown to be primarily a kataphatic theology. This positive, superabundant orientation should not derive from man's *libido cognoscendi* but from God's graciousness, which makes human language and being and then uses these to exegete himself in Christ. "The Incarnate Word comes into 'his own property' (John 1:11)." He travels into a far country, yet one "whose language he knows . . . the ontological language of creatureliness of such."[81] In this country, into the hearts of those who seek him, he speaks in multifarious ways, including in his whole human existence. "The larger framework [of Christian negative theology] is the Christian certainty of always already having been found by the God of revelation."[82]

Thus, the theologian's wrestling with God must be primarily a receptivity to the divine object who reveals himself. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11:27). "What does this *logion* mean if not the primacy of revelation as the condition for the success of any knowledge of God and thus any movement to seek him?"[83]

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80. *TL* 2:95.

81. *TL* 2:84.

82. *TL* 2:103; see also Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Characteristics of Christianity," in *Explorations in Theology* 1:161–80, esp. 175: "God's action in revealing himself makes an end of the mainly negative theology. . . . God is primarily a known God, a God who has disclosed himself." See also Cyril O'Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*, vol. 1, *Hegel* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroads, 2014), 133–46, 443–44, 446–47.

83. *TL* 2:104–5.

This revelation is marked not by the unveiling of the greatest that can be grasped—as the goal of human striving would be—but by the "Johannine comparative": "You will see greater things than this" (John 1:50). "Everything that does not yield to this comparative belongs to the world's superlatives, which it transcends; it opens into the unattainably greater."[84] This analogical logic defeats and transcends the worldly path of dialectic in favor of the divine *ever-greater* (*je-mehr*).[85]

Thus, "whereas negative philosophical theology ends in silence, because concepts and words, like darts, fall to the ground before finding their mark, a different silence stands at the end of Christian theology: that of adoration."[86] This adoration overflows (as in the liturgy) into the "super-word," the supereminent word, that of *holy, holy, holy*, not the "un-word" of simple negation.[87] The truth is simultaneously revealed and hidden in Christ, to be sure, as the hidden events of his life express. There will always be a place for human silence: "What speech can grasp of him as Word remains an insignificant portion of the super-word through which God expresses himself."[88] But speech can, and must, try to express a fragment of that Word.

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84. *TL* 2:105. Balthasar derives this sense of comparative polarity from Przywara and from Ignatius of Loyola, the latter of whom sees the "glowing fire of the person *majus*, 'still more'—the rhythm common to Ignatius and John" (*My Work*, 21).

85. For Hegel's dialectic and its limits, see *TL* 2:46–49, and more generally, O'Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering*.

86. *TL* 2:106–7.

87. See *TL* 2:107–22. God's "super-form" (*Obergestalt* in Balthasar's terms) can indeed be contemplated, even if never exhaustively by the finite person, whether human or angelic (*GL* 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989], 432; *GL* 7: *Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989], 17). See the related points by Thomas, who notes that God is form (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 2) and that our language expresses God supereminently, speaking truly of God—e.g., that he is good—while our mode of signifying falls short of the divine goodness (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 13).

88. *TL* 2:118. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Word and Silence," *Explorations* 1, 127–46.

The reason human speech and existence remain good goes back to the Trinity: only within Christianity is worldly otherness vis-à-vis God a participation in the primordial and wholly positive divine Otherness between the persons of the Trinity.[89] Balthasar opposes a dialectical approach to theology—giving Luther as the paradigmatic example—because it enfolds the negative "no" of sin within the Godhead.[90] Instead, the "not" in the Godhead is completely positive: "the 'not' ('the Son is *not* the Father,' and so forth) possesses an infinitely positive sense."[91] Thus, he praises the "most fundamental axiom . . . enunciated both by Bonaventure and by Thomas, that (derived, worldly) otherness vis-à-vis God presupposes an (original, Trinitarian) otherness in God, an otherness that, as such, is supreme positivity."[92] In pursuing the truth of God, the theologian must respect the goodness of the otherness of God from oneself, rooted in the Trinitarian positivity.

The goodness of creaturely otherness means also, therefore, that the recapitulation of all things in Christ opens up vistas of creaturely truth—and precisely *as* creaturely—rather than closing them. In this way, Bonaventure's *reductio* avoids supernaturalist reductionism. "The task of theological wisdom is to reconcile all the differences and tensions of the cosmos in Jesus Christ," but only by "recapitulating in itself

89. *TL* 2:107. Christopher M. Hadley gives an overview in *A Symphony of Distances: Patristic, Modern, and Gendered Dimensions of Balthasar's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

90. *TL* 2:335–45.

91. *TL* 2:261. See also *TL* 2:179–86.

92. *TL* 2:107. He continues: "We can immediately infer from this basic axiom that anyone who reckons the world's otherness as purely negative in comparison with the sheer divine One will ipso facto take a path radically divergent from that of Christianity." See also *TL* 2:315: What remains "within the Christological analogy is the original, always infinite, distance between God and creature" that "endures only within the recapitulation of the creation in Christ and, therefore, is not nullified; rather, it is *transfigured* into the infinite distance between the divine Persons in the identity of the divine nature."

all the remaining sciences."[93] The goodness of the world and its worldly truth is retained and fulfilled in this recapitulation. Following Karol Wojtyła, we can call this recapitulation a matter of integration and transcendence.[94]

Integration will recapitulate without destroying the human sciences, while also allowing for necessary specialization. "A man can write on theology without being obliged to deal with the whole of it." Yet specialization must happen within a prior commitment to *gestaltenlesendes Denken* and the totality of theology: "He must always preserve the totality, the catholicity of truth in every detail of his thought," even when he is not explicitly presenting that catholicity.[95] Thus, as pursuing a human science, the thinker must be receptive to the whole of the truth of the world. As pursuing the theological science, he must be receptive to the Christ-form, who recapitulates worldly truth and raises it to its divine source and goal. In this thinking, the theologian must depend upon the Spirit, who unifies the totality of the truth of Christ's exegesis of the Father.[96] The Spirit of truth leads us into "all the truth" (John 16:13), which does not mean many disconnected propositions but rather the whole, unified breadth of the one truth of the Son's exegesis of the Father.[97] "It is the Spirit who gives believers eyes to discern God's revelation as an integral, organically differentiated form [*Gestalt*] . . . by being drawn into the form itself."[98] This integration will involve working with tradition as a living principle, while also reading where the Spirit is blowing at the present. This discernment means not the consultation of opinion polls but rather attentiveness to the lives of the saints and to their

93. *TL* 2:200.

94. Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, in *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 93–416, at 207–373.

95. Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 157.

96. *TL* 3:21.

97. *TL* 3:74.

98. *TL* 3:203.

missions to the body of Christ and to the world, which concretize and live out doctrine in a particular age.[99]

Transcendence refers to the opening to the infinite that must accompany all theological thinking, proportionate to its divine object. Thus, even in integrating the tradition, the theologian must not treat it as "a pillow for future thought to rest on. Definitions are not so much an end as a beginning."[100] The divine *je-mehr* pulls the theologian forward past the limits of his mind and age to a wider horizon. Wojtyła puts this in terms of two poles: the in-formation of man's mind by its object, and the duty of service to that object that stretches him beyond himself. "All cognition, so to speak, interiorizes extra-personal reality in the person. . . . Duty, however, acts in the opposite direction: it leads man out into reality; it makes him the subject of a specific drama (*dramatis persona*) belonging to this reality." He concludes on a typical note by remarking how man is made for living out this polar tension: "Outside of this drama, man does not fulfill himself as a person."[101] Knowing brings the object into our interiority, but the movement beyond oneself in the *conversio ad phantasmata* and in service completes the action of knowing as well as fulfilling the knower.

Integration and transcendence therefore are not merely an academic method but, more importantly, fulfill the human person. Here, theology shades into holiness. In Balthasar's well-known essay "Theology and Sanctity," he emphasizes the "unity of knowledge and life" found in the great saint-theologians of the first millennium of the Church, an integration to which all theologians are called.[102] Allowing one's limited thought to transcend itself in the direction of the divine not only serves the sanctity of the person; it also serves human thought itself, whose receptive and open-ended nature I have

99. Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 157–59.

100. Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 157.

101. Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 270.

102. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Explorations in Theology* 1:181–209; the quote is on 182.

already explored in the section dedicated to *Theo-Logic* 1.[103] This transcendence must be not only objective—intellectual openness to the transcendent divine object—but also subjective—personal openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of unity between content and thinker, between knowledge and life. "Man thinks that he has grasped the point, but what matters is, not that he grasps, but that he lets himself be grasped: 'Capit, si capitur' [he grasps if he is grasped]."[104]

The Spirit who searches the "unsearchable" "depths of God" (Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 2:10) calls us to a continued journey into these depths, which are the inner-Trinitarian relations of truth and love.[105] "This searching on the part of the divine Spirit in the abyss of the Father's love can (and must) also be *our* searching, in virtue of the Spirit of Christ that has been given to us."[106] This searching may be done in a scholarly key or it may not, but the call inward into the mystery remains for all Christians. In particular, however, the theological charism (Rom 12:7, Eph 4:11) remains a distinctive mission. Even Balthasar, who could be so critical of theologians, concurs: "We need individuals who devote their lives to the glory of theology, that fierce fire burning in the dark night of adoration and obedience, whose abysses it illuminates."[107] Even God "needs" these individuals if he is to dwell in a new way within the spiritual space of the human knower. This service given by the knower is repaid, "a manifold more [*pollaplasíona*] in the age to come" (Luke 18:30), in the eternal contemplation of the *Gestalt* of the triune God in heaven.

103. See also John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, encyclical letter, September 14, 1998, in particular §§16–23.

104. *TL* 2:239, quoting Augustine, *In Joh., tract.* 42.1 (PL 35, 1700).

105. *TL* 3:443.

106. *TL* 3:444.

107. Balthasar, "Place of Theology," 160.