

# Glory, Kenosis, and Distance in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Glory of the Lord*, Volume VII: The New Covenant

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Boston College

Glory, Kenosis, and Distance  
in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII: The New Covenant*

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in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND SYNOPSIS OF *GL7*

#### *1. Metaphysical unity and the self-emptying center of New Testament glory*

The theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume VII: Theology: The New Covenant (GL7)*<sup>1</sup> places his readers face to face with the eventfulness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as reflected in the New Testament. It is the person of Christ himself who harmonizes the entire canonical NT around him, with all its historical memories and "free poetical-pneumatic creations of the early Church" (156):

...Jesus Christ remains 'the' Word (Jn 1.1; Heb 1.3), which precisely as Word-flesh remains a word that is superior even to all the inspired speech that concerns him. Therefore all the New Testament theologies, as though gathered around him in a circle, look up to him as their common centre that gives meaning, yet a centre that wills to exist only in the pouring out of itself towards the entire periphery. (157)

For Balthasar, this center of NT glory that pours itself out towards those who perceive it makes a demand on Christian believers, a demand that cannot be adequately addressed by a rationalism that invokes pure doctrinal concepts with no regard for their historical

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, tr. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989). Citations are given parenthetically throughout the body of the essay, with references to the title given as *GL7* in accordance with a prevalent custom for abbreviating citations of Balthasar's works.

grounding in liturgical practice and an inherited sacramental worldview.<sup>2</sup> It is God who provides God's own method of discourse by addressing the world in the Incarnation of God's Word and Son, and who gives the interpretation of this Word through the Holy Spirit. This God is constantly drawing the theologian and the thought of the Church towards the center of a glory that disarms, criticizes, and renews in a covenantal relationship between divine and human persons.

If in the corpus of Balthasar's work it is the "rich kenoticism of the *Theo-Drama*" that marks the later development of his sense for "the dynamic, radically decentered foundation of Christian ethical life, shaped by the Cross,"<sup>3</sup> then *GL7* is located on the boundary between his Thomist-Heideggerian metaphysics in the earlier volumes of the *Theological Aesthetics (GL)* series<sup>4</sup> and this later development that is apparently more in line with trends of postmodern thought.<sup>5</sup> Agreeing with Lucy Gardner and David Moss's general assessment that Balthasar is neither modern nor strictly postmodern,<sup>6</sup> my thesis

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 54-5; in his assessment of Neo-Scholasticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Balthasar actually went beyond claiming that it was merely inadequate. In its a priori deductions from seemingly static relations among isolated doctrinal concepts, Balthasar believed Neo-Scholasticism was a variety of Gnosticism, and a fatally uncritical crypto-modernism.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Davies, "The Theological Aesthetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, eds. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 141.

<sup>4</sup> See Mongrain in *Systematic Thought*, 3-5 for Balthasar's positive appropriation of this approach from Henri de Lubac.

<sup>5</sup> The working definition of "postmodern" that I take here is well expressed by Rowan Williams in his "Afterword: Making Differences" in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1999), 173: "That portion of the intellectual world that can be called 'postmodernist' is in systematic revolt against the dominance of identity and the erosion of the reality of what is not said in any act of saying. Put more prosaically, the postmodern consciousness rejects the possibility of a representation of the world that harmonizes and includes any and every act, phenomenon or dictum, a representation that does not have to acknowledge its own locatedness and thus its own 'failure.'"

<sup>6</sup> See Cyril O'Regan's summary in his review of *Balthasar at the Ends of Modernity* in *Modern Theology* 16, no. 4 (October 2000), 568: "...Gardner and Moss issue a neither-nor to Ward's judgment that Balthasar's theological discourse is essentially 'outside' the discourse of modernity and Quash's judgment that Balthasar's discourse remains firmly 'inside' its domain." I read Gardner and Moss as claiming in addition that he is neither a strict postmodernist nor a premodernist: "It is our contention that Balthasar, in a remarkable binding together of 'something like time' with 'something like the sexes' in God, offers not a

behind the task of understanding that I engage in this essay is that *GL7* provides a source for a systematic theology that is inclusive of the philosophical patrimony of the Church, grounded in the NT, and responsive to the critical concerns of postmodernity with regard to all systems of totalizing thought.

According to Oliver Davies, Balthasar inhabits a metaphysical tradition that incorporates this radical kenotic thinking but does not center itself in it.<sup>7</sup> However, in *GL7* Balthasar locates the center of God's glory in "the Word that is not a word," even as it lies hidden in the self-emptying act of the crucified Christ (77-88). It is in this way that glory reveals itself as hidden in kenosis, taking up its place as the central organizing concept of all Christian theology:

If the momentum of the glory of the divine love is experienced in the reciprocity of Christ and the Church, and if this experience is reflected upon as theology, then the *kabod* (in its definitive New Testament understanding) moves methodologically also into the midpoint of theology. (113)

Balthasar insists that this center is empty of all human a priori determination and is filled only with the mysterious glory of God, but the metaphysical language of being, essence, and form still abounds in *GL7*. In John's Gospel the breathing out of the Spirit enables the perceptibility of the mutual love between Father and Son, so that the "super-form" of the essence of the Godhead (16), which is otherwise incomprehensible, is made manifest in the world: "This absolute freedom of the love within the Godhead is poured out over the entire form of revelation, gives it its being and structure, and is present in it" (17).

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God beyond metaphysics but rather a God freed from any ancient binary creaturely marking which would seek to marshal the multiple differences of creation against an absolute oppositional limit... beyond modernity's 'philosophy of subjectivity', and also as no antique retrieval, he offers theology 'a retraining into the lost primordial articulations of human thought'. (H III.1/2, 568; GL 5, 222)"; "Something like Time, Something like the Sexes – an Essay in Reception," *Balthasar at the Ends of Modernity*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, "Theological Aesthetics" in *Cambridge Companion*, 141.

Some background for the metaphysical dimensions of *GL7* in the very beginning of the *Theological Aesthetics* in *GLI: Seeing the Form*<sup>8</sup> can be helpful here. Balthasar reflects on the fundamentally existential dimension of theology in a way that echoes some of the key concerns of Heidegger:

...whenever the spirit attains to real Being it necessarily touches God, the source and ground of all Being ... The spirit's horizon is not confined to worldly being (*ens univocum*), but extends to absolute Being (*ens analogum*), and only in this light can it think, will, and love; only in this light of Being does it possess language as the power to know and name existents. (*GLI*, 158)<sup>9</sup>

To return to the radiance of triune glory in *GL7*, the ability of spirit to “attain to real Being” and touch God is facilitated (by the Spirit) from the distant horizon of triune being-in-love, in the revelation of an aesthetic form (17). Seeing this form bestows a new form on creation, and as Aidan Nichols notes: “Balthasar affirms that being a form is, *par excellence*, what a Christian is.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet the form of God's revelation, through which we perceive the light of absolute divine being, has a mysterious center that is qualified by a radical self-emptying: it is the kenosis of the Son of all the glory of Godhead in order to receive it as pure gift from the Father (291). This center of the form of revelation radically criticizes any other center of absolutizing systematic thought and initially disappoints all messianic expectations in the Old Testament. In Balthasar's reading of the New Testament, Jesus places himself at the point of a collision between the force of God's grandeur and the selfish hatred of the

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<sup>8</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, ed. John E. Riches, tr. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Davies in “Theological Aesthetics,” *Cambridge Companion*, 138; the context is a discussion of Balthasar's acknowledgement of Heidegger's perception of the key issue in philosophy, namely how to think “the unveiled-ness of what is.” Balthasar seeks to go beyond what he considers to be Heidegger's weakness regarding the authentic foundations of selfhood, which is a self that is simply overwhelmed and negated, without being loved, by the terrible grandeur of Being.

<sup>10</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 4. Italics in the original.



world.<sup>11</sup> The divine weight that drives the momentum of this force is most fully revealed in the Cross, as Nichols observes by noting the etymology of *kabod* that is at work in Balthasar's thinking:

Nowhere is the root of the Hebrew word for glory – *kbd*, 'weight' – more in evidence than in Balthasar's theological aesthetics of the cross. The *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which makes us shudder on Good Friday is the 'momentum of the collision of the entire burden of sin with the total powerlessness of the kenotic existence' [208-9]. With the latter, the 'abyss of the unfathomable love' (the Father's in sending the Son, the Son's in consenting to be sent) has entered the sphere of the former ('the abyss of meaningless hatred') and there concealed itself [210].<sup>12</sup>

Rather than set himself up as the irenic embodiment of a correspondence between "the form of the promise and the form of the fulfilment" (83), Jesus empties himself in a way that shatters all of the expectations of Israel and reconstitutes them around himself as their silent center:

Only through the formlessness of the disaster which overtakes Jesus are the images of the Old Testament freed to reconfigure themselves in relation to this strange climax – itself an extraordinary testimony to the 'power of the *triduum mortis* to bestow form' [84].<sup>13</sup>

Jesus is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God," but he is also God in the form of a servant. The Church shows forth God's glory insofar as its form corresponds the form of servant that Jesus assumed in his kenosis (Phil 2:7).

Balthasar never ceases to emphasize how unexpected this form of God was in Jesus' time and how it still has the power to disrupt and decenter expectations and thought systems. God has the absolute freedom to do this, and yet there is indeed a "logical" correspondence that governs this action (211). We follow Aidan Nichols in quoting Balthasar on God's prerogative in "the philanthropy of redemption [that] is

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

totally gratuitous” and yet in perfect correspondence with what Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov calls the selflessness of the Persons according to the divine nature:

...if the mystery of the divine love is once disclosed in Jesus Christ, then we may argue that God could do what he did in reality do, and that this self-abasement and self-emptying were no contradiction of his own essence, but correspond precisely to this essence in a way that could never have been thought of. (215)<sup>14</sup>

This use of the metaphysical language of essence demonstrates that such scholars as Oliver Davies are reasonable in locating Balthasar within a Thomistic-metaphysical tradition.<sup>15</sup> Yet the paradoxical center of Balthasar’s metaphysical aesthetics in *GL7* is an act of kenosis that is only perceptible via difference and rupture.

In the Cross, it is only God who can give a representation of himself in the Son that truly “acknowledges its own locatedness and thus its own ‘failure’” to borrow a phrase from Rowan Williams.<sup>16</sup> The locatedness of God’s representation in Jesus is in places like Nazareth, from where nothing good can come (John 1:46); it is outside the gate (Heb 13:12), hanging on a tree as the One cursed by the law (Gal 3:13). Jesus’ failure was as the One who apparently did *not* redeem Israel from all her oppressors (Luke 24:19-21). But in his Resurrection and Ascension to the Father and in their sending of the Spirit, what seemed like failure becomes the new center of the life-giving form of the new covenant between God and the world. But again, this triune love of God is excessively mysterious, making itself perceptible only as hidden at the other end of an

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 230.

<sup>15</sup> See also Davies on Balthasar’s creative reprioritization of the classical transcendentals starting with the Beautiful in the *The Glory of the Lord*, the Good in the *Theo-Drama*, and the True in the *Theologic*; “Theological Eesthetics,” *Cambridge Companion*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, “Afterword,” 173.

incomprehensible distance. Only God can cross this distance in the Incarnate Person of the Son to include us within the sphere of the divine love:

Only God himself can go right to the end of the abandonment by God. Only he has the freedom to do this. The Father shows that this is so, when he raises the Son and elevates him to be the *Kyrios* over all; but one who receives the dignity that belongs to God must already have possessed this (Jn 17.5), and only renounced the enjoyment of it (Phil 2.6; Heb 12.2). Precisely by disclaiming any word of its own, God's Word demonstrates that it is the 'word of power' of the Father, the 'effulgence of his majesty and the expression of his being' (Heb 1.3). (211)

Additionally, only God in the Person of the Spirit can hold us in communion across the distance of the Son's apparent absence from us in his Ascension to the Father.

Gardner and Moss quote Balthasar in *Creator Spirit (ExT3)* on the nature of this communion that is brought about by grace across distance:

The basis of the biblical religion is the *diastasis*, the distance, between God and the creature that is the elementary presupposition that makes it possible for man to understand and appreciate the unity that grace brings about out.<sup>17</sup>

In *ExT3*, written two years before *GL7*, Balthasar uses this sense of *diastasis* to understand the nature of the Spirit's gift of grace in Paul's letters and John's Gospel and letters (*ExT3*, 173-6). These are the same texts understood in terms of distance in *GL7* as well. In this essay that seeks to clarify the roles of glory, kenosis, and distance in *GL7*, the significance of distance is fourfold: 1) it preserves the essential mystery of God in God's personal, intentional otherness vis-à-vis the Christian; 2) in a parallel fashion, it serves as a marker of the complete otherness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from each other;<sup>18</sup> 3) distance also serves as a measurement of the fullness of the love that God

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<sup>17</sup> Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume III: Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 173; quoted in Gardner and Moss, "Something like Time," 70.

<sup>18</sup> This is more thoroughly developed in the *Theo-Drama*, but the roots of this thinking are planted firmly in *GL7*'s treatment of kenosis, as will be shown in Chapter II.

expresses for creation in the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus; 4) finally on account of the fullness of God's love, distance plumbs the depths and measures the glorious dimensions of God's unity.

A synopsis of *GL7* follows to provide the structure of Balthasar's project in the book. With this general framework in place, Chapter II of the thesis consists of two major sections: a series of exegeses of key passages on glory in *GL7*, followed by a series of passages on kenosis. Chapter III will treat of how Balthasar locates the idea of distance in a reciprocally interpretive relationship with kenosis at the very center of this theology of New Testament glory. The significance of this to the relationship of theology to philosophy will be considered by way of a conclusion, with the thought of Jean-Luc Marion serving as the prime example.

## ***2. The form of the book, Preface, and Balthasar's Introduction***

Balthasar allows himself to be guided by a theological form that he perceives with "the eyes of faith" (18) in the apostolic Church's response to God's revelation in the event of Jesus Christ in the NT. Because this form is illuminated by the glory of God's beauty that radiates from Christ through the Church and out to the world (21), it is an "aesthetic" form (18-9). But this beauty-as-glory cannot be judged beautiful by any criteria other than the "absolute trinitarian love of God, which discloses itself and offers itself in Jesus Christ, which disarms by its humility and simplicity every 'stronghold' of would-be mastering thought that 'rises up' (2 Cor 10.5)" (15). God freely shows forth God's own glory, and not by any inexorable unfolding of a Hegelian phenomenon in an absolute system that is becoming more and more accessible in history to the human mind.

As will be discussed in Ch.II, glory is supremely and definitively made known through kenosis, the self-emptying of the Son out of obedience to the Father and out of love for sinners (251). The identification of Jesus' obedience with his trinitarian love for the Father, the identification of the Son's loving response with the Father's personal love in begetting him, and the unity of the Father and Son in the Godhead are all made manifest by the Spirit after the Resurrection. But as we shall see in Ch.III these trinitarian and christological identities are only apparent across the distance from the Father that the Son traveled to his death on the Cross in solidarity with alienated creation. This distance then becomes the very condition for perceiving the glory of God's trinitarian, world-reconciling love in Jesus' kenosis (249-50).<sup>19</sup>

If this excessively brilliant glory is perceptible in Jesus' self-emptying on the Cross out of love for the Father and for the world, for Balthasar it is certainly not comprehensible in terms of any philosophy or OT prophecy (10). Jesus descends to the utmost depths of "the contradiction of the glory of God" through the three days of his Passover in order to show God's sovereignty to reconcile the world in a new "imperishable and indivisible form which joins God and the world in a new covenant" (14). At this breaking point signaled by this contradiction of former expectations of glory, Balthasar's own synthesis of NT theology inserts a "pause for contemplation" with a critical function vis-à-vis any methodological absolutisms that would take precedence over the sheer eventfulness of Christ (27). In this contemplation, Jesus is not only "the perfect image of the glory of the Father," but also "the archetype of all creaturely participation in the glory of God" (21, quoting Barth).

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<sup>19</sup> The pages cited here place kenosis in the very center of Balthasar's thought in *GL7*, where it functions as his "doctrine of divine representation" according to Graham Ward in "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection" in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, 20.

*GL7* is Balthasar's way of reading the NT as an act of contemplation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, and his theology is his own attempt at "creaturely participation in the glory of God."<sup>20</sup> Rather than "analyzing the concept of glory" (10), he receives the NT in light of Johannine theology, the "last" NT theology.<sup>21</sup> Johannine theology thus functions as a vanishing point by laying out the horizon to which all other theologies point: "we pursue it, without fancying to ourselves that we have grasped it wholly (Phil 3.12f)" (ibid.).<sup>22</sup> By facing this horizon, Balthasar seeks to integrate all cognates and synonyms of biblical glory in the NT canon under one cipher.

The structure of the main body of *GL7* rests upon a triad of 1) the revelation of, 2) reception of, and 3) response to the glory of the Trinity that Balthasar perceives in the NT.<sup>23</sup> Part I focuses on Jesus Christ, "the word made flesh" (John 1:14) as the central event of and bearer of the "name" of glory; Part II deals with how this name is applied to Christ according to its own inner criteria by those who proclaim, "we have seen his glory" (John 1:14); and Part III treats of how the world responds to God's glory "in praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12).<sup>24</sup>

### **3. Part I, VERBUM CARO FACTUM**

The subject of Part I is Jesus Christ as the union of the two pillars of the old covenant, namely, the Word of God and the perfect form of Israel's fidelity to this Word.

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<sup>20</sup> Lucy Gardner and David Moss see "the nature of Balthasar's theology as precisely a logic and performance of reception" in "Something like Time," 69.

<sup>21</sup> Johannine theology is last for Balthasar both because of its two placements in the canon (Fourth Gospel, Book of Revelation) and even perhaps because of its dating among the other NT literatures; see Nichols, *Word*, 211.

<sup>22</sup> Balthasar will often use Paul to illustrate his reading of John, and vice versa.

<sup>23</sup> Nichols, *Word*, 214.

<sup>24</sup> These are translations of the Latin headings of the three major parts of the book: Part I, VERBUM CARO FACTUM; Part II, VIDIMUS GLORIAM EIUS; and Part III, IN LAUDEM GLORIAE. The English is from Nichols, *Word*: 214, 232, 243.

In the strict scriptural terms of the OT, this union is “unthinkable, because it appears to take away the fundamental principle on which everything is built, namely the infinite qualitative difference between God and creature” (36). It is only trinitarian theology, flowing from and pointing back to the revelation of Christ as the union of these two poles in the NT, that will preserve the correct understanding of the distance between God and the world (*ibid.*).

Because he is the *Incarnate* Word, Jesus manifests faithful obedience to God in such a way that all sinners who have broken the old covenant can see his solidarity with them in his willingness to accept baptism from John (56). In order to become “the Israel who has been made ready” for the Lord’s coming, the people must confess their guilt and repent. However, in his own baptism:

Jesus’ initiative attains immediately to its fulfillment, for he ‘rises up’ out of the waters, and his act of ‘coming up from beneath’ is answered by the ‘coming down from above’ of the ‘Spirit (of God)’: here we see that the incarnation is the encounter, to the point of identification, of the Israel who has been made ready and the God of the covenant who descends to Israel. (*Ibid.*)

This identification of the God of the covenant with Israel in Jesus is seen as well in the nature of his temptations in the wilderness after the baptism. The devil opposes Jesus as God’s Son and becomes the tester of God in the place of the sinful Israel that followed Moses; but out of his own depths of self, where the distance between the mediator of the Word and the Word itself is destroyed, Jesus refutes his adversary’s proof-texted biblical arguments with the justice of the fulfilled covenant (73-4).

In Luke, Jesus’ public ministry begins with his demonstration of how the Isaiah passage is fulfilled in the Nazareth synagogue when “He sets himself against them in solidarity with the prophetic fates of Elijah and Elisha” (77). When the people drive him

out of the synagogue in order to execute him, it is “as if Jerusalem suddenly stood, geographically and theologically, in the place of Nazareth” (78). This public performance in the synagogue places him above the prophets not only in his understanding of the Scriptures, but in his very identity as

the one who appointed himself as the standard gauge of the law by raising himself above the law and above Moses—as Jesus indubitably repeatedly did.... He paid for such effrontery in advance, by consciously taking death upon himself, .... (80)

This acceptance of his own death as part of his mission is utterly new, “unconceivable” [sic], “unconstructable,” and “unimaginable,” coming from beyond human understanding and from beyond any internally justified synthesis of images from the old covenant. Jesus’ acceptance of death is “on the level of an invisible collision of the absolute weight of God with what is other” (83). But it is this event that gives coherence and unity to all of the images of the OT so that

their act of becoming form in the presence of the *triduum mortis* shows the incomprehensible power of the *triduum mortis* to bestow form, a power which precisely on the philosophical level cannot be grasped. (84)

The Scriptures as the word of God cannot be heard or forced in any way to tell the truth of God in the death of Jesus, but in Jesus’ person the Scriptures are gathered together into something no longer audible, but visible:

And if the real ‘place’ of the Christian event at first lets man hear no word, since the place lies in man’s death, yet it more importantly makes visible an event of God (in the most literal sense of the word: ‘they look on him whom they have pierced’). (86)

The act of contemplating the form of this event, namely, its dimensions and depths, is what yields theological and biblical truth.



God anticipates the perfect response of all creation to this truth in Mary, giving her grace through her Son to respond:

Somewhere, in the name of all mankind, a *fiat* with no internal boundaries must exist in response to the final word of God that continually transcends all understanding, ...in the meditative attempt to understand (Lk 2.19, 51). (94)

With the grace that comes in anticipation of the redemptive incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son, Mary unites all of Israel within herself (as well as the Church that is to come) and becomes the one human representative who receives the revelation. The Church in its response maintains its unity as both the bride and the Body of Christ “around the incomprehensible presence of the event of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ as the self-attestation of the trinitarian love of God,” especially as it celebrates the Eucharist (100-1).

As Balthasar reads it, the dogmatic theology of the Councils that incorporated the philosophical language of being sought thereby to guarantee that

the distance (recognised only with the help of the Bible) between the living God and his creature can be decisively ... ensured, and can be recognised ... as the indispensable presupposition for the unifying work of absolute love.... (106)

God’s transcendence implies a kind of distance, and biblical theology constantly points to the “threefold transcendence which opens out from the biblical-historical event... upon Christ as the presence of the triune God in the world, upon the receiving subject Israel-Church-myself(-cosmos), and upon the consummation of Christ in his total body or kingdom” (109). The threefold conceptual arch of *GL7* mentioned above<sup>25</sup> corresponds to this threefold transcendence:

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<sup>25</sup> On p.13 above in section 2 of this chapter.

Theology takes place, therefore, centrally in the making-over of this momentum of God's love to the Church, as this gives itself expression and the Church tries to respond to God in her existence and in the reply of her understanding. (114)

In *GL7*, Balthasar is modeling theology as one aspect of the Church's existence-as-response to the loving God. He cautions against any "historical Jesus" studies that would lose sight of the true significance of the impact that Jesus had on his community:

The right approach does not consist in asking what Jesus said and did, and what he did not say and do, or which 'titles of sovereignty' he applied to himself and which not; it consists in asking what was the necessary presupposition of the act whereby his community formed his words, deeds and titles in the way it did. (116)

Jesus' earthly life carries a certain momentum that allows the weight (*kabod*) of God's glory to be sensed, "whether he utters the *eigó eimi* explicitly or not" (*ibid.*).<sup>26</sup>

The momentum of Jesus' life comes with his claim to the authority to judge the entire law in all of its details, as well as the particular stances of the people vis-à-vis the law in their life circumstances and the attitudes of their hearts (118-9). This claim is made in the context of Jesus' life as the union of the divine Word with its perfect mediator, and it demands a response:

...now that his word and example have been among us, active human love—individual and social, personal and acting through structures—cannot be postponed. ...[T]herefore Jesus' claim can ring out with the sound of the Creator's voice, summoning man precisely to what is most human in himself. (129)

His authority is accompanied by an attitude of poverty and dependence on God, which puts him in solidarity with Israel in its historic relationship to God and with the poor who must depend on God (130). Jesus "can appear as the simple claim of the Word made

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<sup>26</sup> Balthasar often uses Greek fonts for Greek words in his text, but not consistently. For convenience, I will be romanizing them in all citations and quotations.

flesh [because] he is the one who goes ahead on the way (*archegós*, Heb 12.2), the one who completely accomplishes the requirement” (133).

Jesus’ authority and poverty are accompanied by his self-abandonment to God and to the future of God’s glory (144). He hands himself over entirely to the disposal of the divine Word

like an alphabet or a keyboard, for the act of formulation in words...; birth and death, speaking and silence, waking and sleeping, success and failure, and everything else that belongs to the substance of human existence. ...It is from [the flesh] that everything must be drawn forth. (143)

As a human being he allows himself to be interpreted by God (144), submits in “readiness for the ‘hour’ that is known only to God (Mk 13.32),” and creates an open space for the momentum of the radiance of God’s glory (145-6). In the words of the Philippians hymn (2.7), the pre-Incarnate Son empties himself out or “makes vain (*kénōsis*)” his own participation in the form of God, refusing to appropriate it for himself. This is also expressed in John, where Jesus “does not look for *dóxa* before men (Jn 5.41)” but submits himself like a slave to “the form that his lord imposes on him” (146). This form is the very fullness of the Godhead, albeit hidden in the form of a servant that Jesus takes on himself.

It is the work of the Spirit to take what belongs to the Son, which is actually “everything that the Father has (Jn 15.16),” and bestow it upon the Church in “whatever form he [the Spirit] desires” (152). The Spirit freely participates in the formation of the Church as Christ’s body, supremely manifested in the celebration of Eucharist. The Eucharist is Jesus’ own “liquefying of the goods of the Father, now to be actively formed by the Spirit as the definitive utterance concerning the love of Father and Son” (*ibid.*). Out of this experience of Eucharist, “the christology lived by Jesus becomes the

christology taught by the Church, ...its content [being] the person of Jesus in its authority, poverty and self-abandonment” (153).

In “the momentum of time” (Pt.I, ch.4), the NT chronology of Jesus’ *triduum mortis* has a certain form that the Church lives out historically in its own way and under its own conditions. But Balthasar also notes how John “writes ... from the standpoint of the Lord, who is at once the one who comes and the one who goes, the one on the Cross and the one exalted to the Father” (173). This somewhat confusing juxtaposition of times in John’s Last Supper discourse and passion-resurrection narrative is the “radicalisation of the time of Christ as the all-determinative form of the time of the Church” (174) and the bestowal of the momentum of the time of Christ to that of the Church (175). The form of Jesus’ time on earth has a double horizon in that he both faced his death and turned his life toward the eschaton of God. The Church must do the same by facing the same two events in its own conformity to Christ’s passion, death, and Resurrection (175-6). “The unity of this double certainty is given to the Church through the Holy Spirit” (177), because the time of the Church lies within the temporal distance between the two events of Cross and eschaton.

Focusing back on the Cross, Balthasar views it as the locus of “the collision of the entire burden of sin with the total powerlessness of the kenotic existence” (208-9). He favors Sergei Bulgakov’s thinking of “the ‘selflessness’ of the divine persons, as of pure relations in the love within the Godhead, as the basis of everything” (213-4). It is particularly the basis of two forms of kenosis: 1) God’s allowance for human freedom in creation; and 2) the “second and truest kenosis, that of the Cross, in which [the creator] makes good the uttermost [evil] consequences of creation’s freedom, and goes beyond

them” in the Incarnation. But this second kenosis is also the Son’s act of love for the Father “in the form of creaturely obedience” (214). Bulgakov thus provides Balthasar a key for seeing how the whole Trinity is involved in the Cross via the Son’s kenosis: “the Father by sending out the Son and abandoning him on the Cross, and the Spirit by uniting them now only in the expressive form of the separation” (214).

There is an indispensable element of God’s wrath over sin in the weight (*kabod*) of God’s glory in the Cross. However,

The only right approach to the mystery is to see the whole momentum of ‘God’s wrath’ in the Old Testament over the broken covenant as taken up into the far greater momentum of the love of God in the New Testament.... (205)

The obedience of the Son to the Father’s will is his own sharing in the Father’s love for the world, in that the Father

allows God the Son to go into the absolute obedience of poverty and self-abandonment where he can be nothing else than the total object that receives the divine ‘wrath’, and as the love of God the Son, who identifies himself out of love with us sinners (Heb 2.13), and thereby fulfils the will of the Father in free obedience (Heb 10.7). (207)

Jesus’ kenosis thereby includes sinners within the sphere of God’s love. The Son is here most fully revealed to be God, the One who can bear the unbearable burden of sin: “Only God himself can go right to the end of the abandonment by God. Only he has the freedom to do this” (211). Hell as the second day of the *triduum mortis* achieves its “christological” significance within this trinitarian understanding. Out of God’s love for the world, it is the Father’s determination within the Trinity to abandon Jesus to Hell. In doing this the Father allows the Son to freely incorporate Hell’s “full seriousness” as the sinful, unfinished part of creation into God’s plan, so that Jesus may become the

eschatological judge of all creation (233). In the utter passivity of death in Hell, Jesus makes himself most supremely available to the Father's will.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4. Part II, *VIDIMUS GLORIAM EIUS***

In Part II Balthasar begins to discuss glory as possessing “a meaning that must be nothing else than the self-interpretation of this momentum [shown in God's act in Jesus]” (241). It is God's prerogative to make glory shine in various places and ways, both in the hiddenness of the Cross and in the triumph of the Resurrection (242), and this is the foundation for Balthasar's hermeneutic for reading the NT.<sup>28</sup> Glory is a “transcendental” of divine revelation that is analogous to beauty as a philosophical transcendental of being (242-3). This means that God's goodness, love, strength, power, and righteousness are all glorious and interchangeable with God's being. But what is most decisive for Balthasar is that the norm for what is glorious is perceived first and foremost in Jesus Christ:

What God's glory in its good truth is, was to be revealed in Jesus Christ, and ultimately in his absolute obedience of Cross and Hell. The unique ray of the divine majesty of love is to become visible from the unique momentum of this event, establishing the norm for everything that can lay claim to the predicate of ‘glorious’, at whatever distance and periphery it may be. (243)

For Balthasar, absolutely all dogma and theology is referred to this standard of glory: “Therefore too all dogmas are only aspects of the one, indivisible, good and beautiful truth of God” (ibid.).

Jesus' request for glorification from the Father in John 17 is made in the context of this truth of God. His whole life of obedience to the Father's will has been a constant

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<sup>27</sup> Nichols, *Word*, 232.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 214.

glorification of the majesty of the Father (246), but the Cross will show beyond this that God's glory encompasses his own unity with the Father in a common decision:

The uttermost end that the Son enters is the revelation of a beginning that could not otherwise have been made known; that is, it reveals that the whole obedience upon earth of the Son has its source, not in a spontaneous decision of his human ego to offer himself for a commission that comes from outside himself, but in a decision made absolutely in advance, which is the basis of his entire earthly existence. (247)

This decision is seen in only light of the Resurrection and the descent of the Spirit, and it bears witness to a unity that embraces both the end of the "deepest descent" of the Cross and Hell and its beginning in the "highest majesty" of the Son's coming forth from the Father (248). The momentous force that this glory attains across this distance "proves for John the identity of obedience and love in the Son, and likewise the substantial identity of the personal love of the Son and the personal love of the Father" (248-9).

Manifesting this identity to the world is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is more than just an impersonal gift of Jesus to his disciples, but is rather a Person. The Spirit takes what is Jesus', which is the entirety of the Father's love and all that he has, and declares it to the disciples (251). This is how Jesus is glorified by the Spirit (John 16:13-4), who "gives the interpretation of Christ (and in him, the Father) through the Church to 'the world'" (253). In doing this, the Spirit convicts the world of its sin in the Cross of Jesus, but also nourishes the Church in its witness to God's love to the world (254-5).

Thus nourished by the Spirit, as well as by the Eucharist, the members of the Christian community must live, act, and give of themselves in a "fruitful transcendence of [their mutual love] out beyond into the world" (259). The perceptible beauty of this love poured out to the world through the Church is God's glory, which reveals both the

christocentricity of the Church in its conformity to Christ's obedience and its theocentricity in its conformity to trinitarian love (261-2).

The glory of trinitarian love seen in Christ and the Church is given a succinct one-sentence definition in the chapter entitled "The Substance of Glory": "*Dóxa* is the divinity of God as it is freely made known" (265). The mode of how this revelation is given prescribes to the Church the mode in which it is to be received:

If Jesus himself is the praying Word, then the narrative about him must also be received in the prayer (of the community) and understood, mediated, and made one's own in the attitude of prayer. (266, n.3)

This attitude of prayer in Jesus is united with his self-abandonment on the Cross, by which we perceive the Son's kenosis in the Trinity. But because of this attitude seen and known in Jesus, what is seen filling the Son's emptiness as he makes space is a glory that can only be the love of the Father for him (291). Through the synergy of these mutually loving acts of offering and receiving between Father and Son, the Father manifests love for the world through the transparency of the Son, by "seizing" those who look upon the Son and drawing them to himself. The Son's making space for the Father's love and glory is his own free act of concurring with the Father's love for the world (*ibid.*). In turn, those who freely allow themselves to be seized by God in looking at the Son are also being conformed to the Son's image. They become corresponding images of the very Christ who made space for God's glory, in such a way that "the perfect sovereignty of God in creation is established, and his right(ness) and righteousness come into force in the whole realm of his lordship" (296). Believers "do not make any further 'contribution' to God's act but merely accord it its own space and give it the right that it already has" (304). "This is act of acceptance of God's action is called faith, which allows one's life



to take on its christological dimensions and become part of God's proof of God's lordship in the world (305, 308-9).

These christological measurements conform the Church and its members to the trinitarian differences within the Godhead via the transcendental quality of glory. There is a paradox here, in that the indeterminability of the trinitarian "measurements" becomes the very criterion for the wholeness, beauty, and appropriateness of the Church's form of life (314-5). But once again, it is the dimensions of Jesus' kenosis that reveal the indeterminability, the incomprehensibility of God's love. The experience of this excess is the experience of Jesus' sovereignty, the very sovereignty of God lying hidden in Jesus' refusal to promote himself. The disciples were reflecting on the effect of this selflessness on them "when they began their interpretation from the starting point of the event of the Cross and Resurrection, in order to make this sovereignty perceptible" in the writings that eventually became the NT canon (321).

God's glory becomes objectively visible in the gospel of Jesus and through the justifying grace by which the believer allows him or herself to be touched (359). And yet, as Balthasar demonstrates in a brief exegesis of 2 Cor 3-4, it is here that the element of hiddenness in the manifestation of God's glory becomes most obvious. This is because it shines through the weakness not only of Christ on the Cross but also of the "earthen vessels," the servants of Christ's gospel who have no eloquence or power of their own (360). The Church and the Christian must rely on God's own sovereign power, manifested in the Spirit who is "the concrete accessibility of the divine sphere of eternal life and the powerful communication of this life to our mortal life" (362).

### 5. *Part III, IN LAUDEM GLORIAM*

The final part of *GL7* repeats many of the key themes of Part II, but this time in the context of pneumatology:<sup>29</sup> “since the Spirit himself is the glorification of the love between Father and Son, wherein God’s true glory disclosed itself to us, it is likewise only he who can bring about glorification in the world” (389). But because the Spirit involves us so intimately in this “glorification of the glory of God,” it is also an ecclesiology and an ascetical theology:

New Testament *doxázein* means therefore, first of all, ... [that] we must praise him through our existence, inasmuch as this is an existence that is in him and therefore what it truly ought to be: an existence in the love that hands itself over. (397)

Far from claiming that this existence is already perfected in the Church, Balthasar is setting forth the dimensions of ecclesial existence according to the super-form of the trinitarian life as he reads it in the New Testament (393). The discipline of Christian life therefore begins by appropriating the gift of revelation by allowing ourselves to be expropriated, or taken over, by the Lord and then handed over to others in love. This is Balthasar’s paraphrase of the greatest commandments of loving God and neighbor; for him there is no other way to know God, “because God is personified handing-over” (400). Knowledge of God must be “performed” in a way, by allowing oneself to be conformed to God in a kenosis of all selfishness, just as the Son receives the fullness of divine life from the Father in his kenosis rather than grasp it for himself (Phil 2:5-11).

Human freedom is necessary to undergo this expropriation: “This willingness is called *faith*, and in its kernel it means allowing love to have its way” (401). Insofar as we allow this expropriation by the Spirit who draws us into the sphere of its own divine rule,

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<sup>29</sup> Nichols, *Word*, 243.

we are set free from “sealed-up egoism, [from] our addiction to the desires (*epithumiai*) that seek to draw everything to ourselves,” so that we can serve others out of love for them (403). Celebrating the Eucharist is radical participation in God’s own selflessness, in gratitude for his gifts and in a selfless offering of the fruit of these gifts back in sacrifice (418-9). This liturgical practice of God’s perfect self-giving becomes more and more the reality of the whole life of the expropriated Christian. Only Christ fully possesses “the riches of selflessness in the triune divine nature, shown forth in the world in the kenosis of the Incarnation” (429). But as Balthasar shows in the example that Paul himself holds up in the Macedonians who contribute out of their own poverty for the life of their sister church in Jerusalem, Christians are empowered by the Spirit to imitate and participate in the Lord’s “divine overflowing” of generosity and self-abandonment (428).

The doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation therefore become the framework and foundation for all moral choices, and indeed for all relationships of Christians with other human beings. The possibility of encountering God in one’s brother or sister is conditioned by Jesus’ identification with all human beings in the way he died, which is the consequence of the Incarnation in this dark world:

...each individual who can be addressed humanly as a ‘Thou’ is raised to the status of a ‘Thou’ for God, because God’s true ‘Thou’, his ‘chosen’ and ‘beloved’ ‘only Son’ has borne the guilt of this human ‘Thou’ and has died for him, and therefore can identify himself with every individual at the last judgment. (439)

Because God is Trinity and because the Incarnate Son is both God and man, every I-Thou relationship among human beings has the potential to become a “We” with christological and trinitarian dimensions (441). Even the distances among human beings become

potential paths of nearness in the joining of these two commandments “without mixture of confusion”.<sup>30</sup>

...when Jesus crosses over to sinners on the Cross, the unity between the love of God and the love of neighbor is established: it is instituted by God himself, who surrenders his ‘Beloved’ for the world, and this is an institution that remains unthinkable and ineffective in the merely horizontal sphere .... This institution of God bestows in Christ on every ‘neighbor’—even on the one who is ‘furthest away’—the importance of one who is individually loved by God and is brought near to God. (444)

In Balthasar’s struggle against all forms of Gnosticism, and in an apparent contrast with Hegel’s idea of “Absolute Knowledge” becoming concrete in history,<sup>31</sup> he insists:

Christian faith is in no sense primarily a self-understanding of Christians, or even of the Church as a fellowship; it is rather obedience, acknowledgement that one is expropriated by being made over to Christ who has expropriated himself for all in his dying and rising. (452-3)

The individual Christian now belongs to Christ and only to him. Therefore living and dying for others and welcoming the weak is this proper focus of Christian life, in light of which each person will be accountable to God’s judgment. This concern supercedes any right to pass judgment on the moral status of others before God because only God has this authority (452).

These concrete relationships among human beings are the proof of God’s glory because “the law of love that belongs to the origin [in the Trinity] then becomes in [the Christian] the law that controls everything” (457); and “Behind [the brother for whom Christ died] there stands—indeed, in him there dwells—the same momentum of the eternal love that Paul saw in his fellow man” (458), which is the momentum of the

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<sup>30</sup> The allusion to Chalcedon here is mine and not Balthasar’s (explicitly, at least).

<sup>31</sup> Balthasar does not explicitly mention Hegel or the *Phenomenology* here, but Nichols notes the passage on the same page where Balthasar says “love ... is made superior to all knowledge, even the most absolute!” and sees in it a “mockery” of Idealism; *Word*, 248 and n.156.

Father's handing over of the Son for the life of the world. In the language of Paul in 2 Cor 3-4, seeing the glory of the Incarnate God in one's fellow humans and then responding to it in love is to possess the freedom of the Spirit (472). It is also the place where solidarity becomes a kind of nuptiality that is modeled on the trinitarian relations and Christ's relationship to the Church (482-3). This in turn gives the Church its sacramental and missionary status vis-à-vis the world:

...it is clear from the whole New Testament that the Church of Christ, his body and bride, comes to the world from the activity of God, making proclamation, giving example and proffering invitation—in a position over against the world that is absolutely required, in order for her to be able to address the world—without a moment abandoning solidarity with that aim of her mission, viz. the world she is addressing. (495)

The Church becomes incarnate in the world after the model of and by virtue of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit, and proclaims to the world the mutual love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. This loving communion of three Persons is the name of the one true God whose glory envelops even sinners within the greatness of self-giving, kenotic love. The Church glorifies the love of God by actively seeking to include the world within this trinitarian circuit, just as the Church has been included within it (526).

In closing, one of the most significant thrusts of *GL7* has been to show how even the most bitterly sinful aspects of the world's alienation from God can be redeemed by being included within the distance that the Son travels to meet us out of God's love for the world. Within these trinitarian dimensions of God's superabundant love for "the different," the Church can accompany the world by giving expression to its deepest inchoate hopes for what impossible by its own means:

What do the world, man, and the Spirit sigh for? For ‘the glory that is to come’.... [E]verything from Sinai to Christ and to the gospel... had precisely the right amount of glory in order to kindle in us an unquenchable hope for the future, for something that has absolute superiority ([Rom 8.18], *cf.* 2 Cor 4.17) to everything past and present, yet remains fully indeterminable in its superabundant contents. (512-3)

This superabundant glory is the horizon against which all obedience, love, theology, and any self-understanding of the Church and of Christians and of the world itself comes to light; and it is guaranteed “by the entire direction of the christological event, into which we are caught up,” and by virtue of which we hope for the freedom of eternal life even in our solidarity with all that is passing away into death (513). This is Christian solidarity with the world in its hope for the impossible made possible. The very heart of God, even the Father himself, has expressed this painful, compassionate solidarity with the sinful, dying world “by abandoning his much-loved only Son to the darkness, in order to have the joy that ‘whosoever believes in him should not perish, but should have eternal life’ (Jn 3.16)” (533).

## CHAPTER II

### GLORY AND KENOSIS IN *GL7*

#### *Introduction: overview of GL7 on glory and kenosis*

This chapter consists of a series of exegeses of passages in *GL7* on the topics of glory and kenosis. The passages below were chosen for the programmatic way in which they illuminate Balthasar's goals in the book. He develops definitions of glory and kenosis that evolve as one moves chronologically through *GL7*, the contents of each term becoming more and more mutually implicated as the text deepens its focus on the glory of God in the New Testament. Balthasar is quite explicit about how glory functions methodologically in the beginning of this theology of the New Testament. He is less explicit about how kenosis fits into his methodology, but this chapter will attempt to clarify the methodological centrality of kenosis for Balthasar as well. The passages on glory will be treated first, moving chronologically through the text as they occur. This will be done in such a way that the centrality of kenosis in Balthasar's thinking of NT glory will become clear by the end of the first section on glory.

Before beginning the chapter section on the passages relating to glory, it is necessary to examine Balthasar's own layout of his program in the Preface in more detail than was given in the synopsis in the previous chapter. In what appears to be a self-deprecating excuse for his own lack of "methodology," Balthasar challenges the idea that

a scientific methodology for a comprehensive NT theology even exists. He claims to be offering neither a complete theology of the NT (9) nor an analysis of the concept of glory (10). This volume “opens up only an approach-road to such a theology, passing through the gateway of ‘glory’;” in doing so Balthasar seeks to clarify what is the essential matter of the NT. He claims that making an exhaustive scholarly synthesis of the many theologies contained within the NT is beyond the scope of his project, but it also seems to be quite beside the point of his project. Treating glory as a “gateway” to such a “complete theology of the NT” requires, paradoxically, a demonstration of how utterly incomprehensible the full content of NT glory is:

But it is not our concern to get a secure place to stand, but rather to get sight of what cannot be securely grasped, and this must remain the event of Jesus Christ . . . . If this event is truly what the church believes, then it can be mastered through no methodology; the manner which this book speaks can be excused only by this axiom. (10)

And yet, Balthasar *does* claim to be making a “synthesis” of glory in the NT, but it is by way of integrating “a cipher for the whole into this totality” (ibid.) of the event of Christ. At the beginning of a centrally located chapter entitled “The Request for Glorification” at the beginning of Part II (“We Have Seen His Glory”) Balthasar quotes H. Schlier on glory as a statement about God that is “‘more than a concept [G. “*Begriff*”]; it is an original cipher’ [G. “*Chiffre*”], ‘because the *doxa* transcends all speech and every word’” (242).<sup>32</sup> A cipher is symbol that is a code for something else, and in *GL7* glory encompasses such concepts as beauty, righteousness, power, wisdom, and love but is not

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<sup>32</sup> *Herrlichkeit* Band III.2/2 Teil (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1969), 223-4.



resolvable into any of one of them. It cannot be analyzed as a concept, because it is never “securely grasped” and the Christian can only “stand daily speechless” before it (10).<sup>33</sup>

In another of Balthasar’s central chapters in *GL7* on “The Substance of Glory,” “*Dóxa* is the divinity of God as it is freely made known” (265). God’s glory is made known by the Son who empties himself in transparency to the Father. The Father himself is invisible and ineffable, but in the Son’s act of self-emptying on the Cross the love of the Father is seen to fill him completely (291). Balthasar’s reading of the glory of the new covenant is thus centered on the kenosis of Jesus in Phil 2:5-11 as its main interpretive key. In Balthasar’s theory of divine representation,<sup>34</sup> there is no thinking of glory that does not center itself on the self-emptying of Jesus Christ as seen in the Cross, and thus there is no thinking of the Holy Trinity that is not conditioned by the event of the self-emptying of the divine Persons to each other. Glory and Trinity, which both mark the very “Godness” of God, are perceptible and thinkable only through the person of Jesus who empties himself and allows himself to be sent by the Father into the world (John 3:16). The glory that takes its ultimate biblical form in the person of Christ makes certain demands on the practice of theology that Balthasar feels cannot be ignored: “this [biblical] theology can and must dare to offer itself to dogmatic systematics as its inner form” (109).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nichols notes some criticisms of Balthasar’s aesthetics as being too “quietist... [treating] the Christian disciple as a passive contemplator of a Christ reduced to an icon”; *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 3. Nichols goes on to show how the *TD* volumes give the foundation for a vigorous theology of active discipleship. I believe a similar foundation is laid in *GL7*, and along with Nichols I read this statement about “standing speechless” as “a salutary warning against excessive cataphaticism”; *Word*, 211.

<sup>34</sup> As was noted at the beginning of the synopsis of *GL7*, kenosis is for Balthasar a “doctrine of divine representation”; Ward, “Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection,” 20.

<sup>35</sup> See W. T. Dickens for a clear elucidation of how Balthasar sees the difference and relation between revelation as event and its biblical mediation: “...Balthasar distinguished between the form of God’s self-revelation and the form of its biblical mediation while nevertheless maintaining that God’s own

## 1. GLORY

### *1.a Glory as the methodological midpoint of theology*

Balthasar announces the centrality of glory to all theology at the end of the second chapter in Pt.I:

If the momentum of the glory of the divine love is experienced in the reciprocity of Christ and the Church, and if this experience is reflected upon as theology, then the *kabod* (in its definitive New Testament understanding) moves methodologically also into the midpoint of theology. (113)

*GL7* is not a book about method in theology, but it does claim to be about what is of crucial significance in the revelation of God regardless of any particular focus. Because Balthasar maintains here that all theological thought must refer its focus to Christ in the context of life in the Church, it is necessary first to examine the relationship between Christ and the Church. Then we can better understand what Balthasar means by “the momentum of the glory of the divine love,” which is experienced and given its one-and-only methodological context within this relationship.

The reciprocity between Christ and his pilgrim Church is established in the biblical-historical event of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this relationship also has the essential quality of being “our future and the future of the world, as the grace which is never graspable, but precisely in this, makes a challenge that presses ever anew onwards, determining the history of the Church and the world” (109). The theologian as a member of the Church is therefore in a relationship the full meaning of which has yet to be revealed, but which is nonetheless a “circulation of love between bridegroom [Christ] and

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vision of the former is adequately rendered by the latter”; in *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 75.

bride [Church], between head and body” (110). Recalling Balthasar’s methodological reflections in the Introduction to *GL7*, this circulation is grounded in trinitarian love and disclosed in Jesus Christ, which “raises [God] above all bracketing-together with the world, but gives the world its right to existence by taking it up into the eternally flowing dialogue of love” (16-7). This trinitarian dialogue is simultaneously “poured out over the entire form of revelation, gives it its being and structure, and is present in it” (17). “Theology” has no signification whatsoever for Balthasar outside the context of this experience of reciprocal love with Christ, which from the Church’s standpoint involves its own active participation in the form given to it by the trinitarian God.<sup>36</sup>

The stance of Christ and the Church facing each other in mutual love is the condition under which the Church experiences “the momentum of the glory of divine love” (113), from the quotation at the beginning of this section. We have just considered how this reciprocity is itself grounded in trinitarian difference, which for Balthasar is what gives glory its initial momentum. The German word that the English *momentum* translates in the passage we are considering is *Wucht* (“force,” “energy”).<sup>37</sup> The glory experienced is manifested in the Cross of Jesus; but there is an incomprehensibility in this event that is of its very essence, without which it cannot be an experience of God. Back in the Introduction, Balthasar quoted the Augustinian dictum as a programmatic statement (16): *Si comprehendis, non est Deus*.<sup>38</sup> The divine “weight” that drives this momentum is most fully revealed in the Cross, as Aidan Nichols observes regarding the etymology of *kabod* in a passage quoted once before above in Ch.I:

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<sup>36</sup> The form of revelation as described here and the form of the Church made in the image of Christ the servant are distinct yet related.

<sup>37</sup> *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Incidentally, this is also the title of the final chapter of *Theo-Drama V*.

Nowhere is the root of the Hebrew word for glory – *kbd*, ‘weight’ – more in evidence than in Balthasar’s theological aesthetics of the cross. The *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which makes us shudder on Good Friday is the ‘momentum of the collision of the entire burden of sin with the total powerlessness of the kenotic existence’ [208-9]. With the latter, the ‘abyss of the unfathomable love’ (the Father’s in sending the Son, the Son’s in consenting to be sent) has entered the sphere of the former (‘the abyss of meaningless hatred’) and there concealed itself [*GL7*, 210].<sup>39</sup>

The “powerlessness of the kenotic existence” collides with the world’s sin and is felt by the Church in its worship and prayer, in the trembling-inducing aspect of the Cross contemplated in the Good Friday liturgy and in the chorus from an African American spiritual hymn: “Sometimes it causes me to tremble.” Here God’s glory is hidden from the world, as St. Ignatius notes in *SpEx* [196]: “Consider how his divinity hides itself;... and how he allows his holy humanity to suffer most cruelly.”<sup>40</sup> God’s glory lies hidden in “the abyss of meaningless hatred” that is “the world.” But then, “on the basis of the resurrection,” the “momentum of God’s act in Jesus, ... is experienced and explained in the Church definitively as the *kabod* of the eternal love that is present and radiant in the Christ event” (113). This summarizes *kabod*-glory “in its definitive New Testament understanding” as a beautifully perceptible light: it still retains its gravitas, but now this weight is taken up in the glory that “shines” as *dóxa*.

Balthasar thus completes his explanation of theology as centered always on the Christ event in the mutual love between Christ and the Church:

Theology takes place, therefore, centrally in the making-over of this momentum of God’s love to the Church, as this gives itself expression and the Church tries to respond to God in her existence and in the reply of her understanding. (114)

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<sup>39</sup> Nichols, *Word*, 230.

<sup>40</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. and comm. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 82.

The momentum signifies a loving promise to the Church that comes from beyond itself, arising from a difference within the very life of God, but including the world in its scope. The fundamental difference between God and the world makes Balthasar's theology more than a mere epistemology of glory as experienced in the Church, but it also makes it more than a strict objectivism with regard to divine realities. Balthasar's take on the metaphysical dimensions of theology will be considered next.

***1.b Glory as a transcendental of being: metaphysics, unity, and personhood***

The passages examined in this section have occur in the chapter entitled “The Request for Glorification,” being the first chapter of Part II, “We Have Seen His Glory.” As pointed out in the synopsis in the previous chapter of this essay, glory is a theological transcendental analogous to beauty as a philosophical transcendental (242) and we will expand on this notion in the present section. By virtue of the philosophical interchangeability of each transcendental (Beautiful, Good, True, etc.) with the others and with the “oneness” of their referent, glory also functions as a representation of God's unity. Furthermore it represents God's personhood, even if not yet in terms of trinitarian relations, but here rather with regard to “the absolute and unique ‘I’ of God in his free manifestation in the world”:

Every living being, and above all the free person, achieves for itself a sphere of power in its own environment, so that in this it may exercise control, may make itself known and appear; this powerfulness or importance (*gravitas*) merges in the physical-moral sphere in to esteem, acknowledgment and praise, and, this radiance is always both intellectual and perceptible to the senses. (241)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In his *Communio* article “On the concept of person” Balthasar points out, interestingly, how this designation of personhood according to dignity and not necessarily with regard to trinitarian relations is also the most proper sense that Aquinas accords to God's personhood in *Summa Theologiae* 1, q.29 a.3 ad

It is the personality and oneness of God that is perceived in glory as God's free communication with the world.

The word "glory" (*dóxa*) itself, however, has an "astonishingly broad diffusion... through all the writings and layers of the New Testament" (239-40). "Glory" occurs 116 times and "glorifying" 60 times in the NT. The diversity of contexts in which the term appears both hides the fullness of God and yet discloses his self-revelation in particular ways. That which, or who, is revealed under the cipher of glory transcends all these distinct references. As a theological transcendental of being,

...[*dóxa*] necessarily has something in common with the philosophical *transcendentalia* of being (the one, the true, the good, the beautiful): namely, that it exists in an indissoluble perichoresis with these, such that everything that is theologically true is also good and glorious, and everything that is glorious is so to the extent that it is also good and true; for God himself is the original One, and all his self-manifestations bear the seal of this unity. (243)

Balthasar's use of the word "perichoresis" here is analogical, because he is talking about the interrelations of theological concepts unified in their one referent, God; but the suggestion of trinitarian theology is perhaps directly intended, for trinitarian doctrine and the theologoumenon of the perichoresis of the Persons flow from and lead back to God's Oneness. "Trinity" is the Church's doctrine of the Oneness of God as revealed in the glory of the New Testament, and it is to this Oneness that all dogma and all theology must refer: "Therefore all dogmas are only aspects of the one, indivisible, good and beautiful truth of God" (243).

By focusing on the meaning of glory as centered on the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, Balthasar reads the NT in order to receive the meaning that glory discloses for

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3; *Communio* 13, no.1 (1986): 21. Balthasar goes on in this article to develop the relational and kenotic understanding of personhood with its trinitarian dimensions.

itself “out of the momentum of God’s act in Jesus, a meaning that must be nothing else than the self-interpretation of this momentum” (240-1). What Balthasar means by momentum is the active, dynamic element of the radiance that comes from the event of the Cross and that sheds light on all other events and images that circle around it. He reminds the reader of his methodology, discussed in the first section of this chapter on the “midpoint” of theology (113):

Our path goes from the centre out to the periphery: if one takes the path in the opposite direction, establishing statistically everything in the New Testament that receives the title ‘glory’, one will never find the true centre, and the individual traits will never unite to form a face. (241)<sup>42</sup>

This “face” is the very personhood of the loving God, seen in the sovereign freedom that “achieves for itself a sphere of power in its own environment, so that in this it may exercise control, may make itself known and appear” (ibid., also quoted above). The perceptibility of God’s glory has elements of both weight and light, but not in a mode that is subject to the laws of physics. It is a spiritual perception that occurs only by the presence of the Spirit, who is nonetheless also the presence of the self-revealing God:

It is only when the Spirit is understood personally that a meaning can be found in the statement that, in the revelation of the love between the Father and Son, he will ‘not speak from himself, but whatever he hears he will speak ... he will take what is mine and declare it to you’ (16.13-14 [in John]).” (252)

The Spirit’s personality is in its mission to *speak*, in a significant parallel with the Son’s mission in John’s Gospel: “So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then

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<sup>42</sup> Dickens raises a relevant caution with regard to this approach: “[Balthasar] ranges widely over the whole of the New Testament in order to summarize its understanding(s) of a given topic—say, the hiddenness of God’s self-revelation in Christ, or the atonement, or faith—asking always, of course, how that bears on the question of God’s glory and glorification. That procedure leaves him vulnerable to the charge of proof-texting, a concern of modern biblical scholarship he never adequately addressed...”; *Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetics*, 91. Having offered this criticism, Dickens then immediately singles out Balthasar’s treatment of time in the NT as a particularly successful instance of his methodological approach. Keeping Dickens’ critique in mind, in this essay I will only attempt to show how Balthasar is successful in relating kenosis and distance to their common center in NT glory.

you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me” (John 8:28).<sup>43</sup> In its personal mission from the Father and Son that goes beyond its “natural” fruitfulness, the Spirit “gives the interpretation of Christ (and in him, the Father) through the Church to ‘the world’” (253). Returning to the passage from *GL7*, 243 on the commonality that *dóxa* has with the philosophical transcendentals of being, if it is true that “everything that is theologically true is also good and glorious, and everything that is glorious is so to the extent that it is also good and true,” then everything that is glorious, good, and true bears witness to its own wholeness and unity. However, at this point in our reflection on the transcendental unity of God in *GL7*, there is only a link with the aesthetic perception of glory with the personhood of its one divine referent. This is not to treat the divine unity as logically “prior” to the threeness of God, as this is something Balthasar would not do. The source of trinitarian life and being, for him, lies clearly in the Father, even ultimately regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit in his own interpretation of the *filioque* (251).

We have seen that Jesus as a person manifests the glory of God in his obedience on the Cross to the Father, who is a person. In addition, the Spirit has a personal mission to give an interpretation of the love between the Father and the Son to the Church and to the world. What is needed is to see more clearly how the manifestation of this glory is connected to the personal distinctions within the Godhead. This can be achieved by examining a group of passages from the same chapter in *GL7* that we have just been considering, now under the conceptual topic of trinitarian love.

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<sup>43</sup> This insight does not come immediately from the present context of *GL7* but from a parallelism in John pointed out by Stanley Marrow, S.J. in a class lecture in a course that I took from him on the Gospel of John at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Fall 2006.



***1.c Glory as the radiance of trinitarian love: freedom, obedience, and the inner law***

The free act of glorifying the other constitutes one of the prime elements of trinitarian love. As we have seen above, it is a free person who elicits the esteem, honor, and acknowledgement of majesty within his or her sphere of influence (241). In addition to this, there is “a trinitarian mutuality in giving honour, in bringing recognition, in ‘glorifying’” which grounds Jesus’ confidence that his request of the Father will be granted (246). This confidence is thereby also grounded in Jesus’ understanding that his obedience is his own glorification of the Father, as quoted in John above (17:4). In the Cross, “the ‘majesty’ and ‘ruling authority’ of the Father takes effect in the ‘lowliness’ of the obedient and serving Son” (246). As we shall see more fully in the sections below on kenosis and on distance in the next chapter, the glory of this majesty has its momentum ultimately in the infinite love that the Father has for the Son, which the Son returns in full, and which the Spirit manifests to the world in the union of the Father and Son across a seemingly impossible distance (247).

The Spirit institutes the truth of God in the Church by empowering it to participate in this love-as-obedience in the image of the Son:

The ‘radiance’ of the trinitarian love, which has disclosed itself in the New Testament as the truth of the *kabod* of God, is a radiance that has its source only in the momentum of the obedience of the Cross. Therefore the only way for the crucified Christ to be ‘glorified’ in the Church (17.10 [Jn]) is for the *eternity* of glory to be instituted in the Church by the Spirit of Father and Son.... (256)

There is a tight “nexus” (246) among the Father, the Son, and the Church that Balthasar sees rooted in the trinitarian mutuality of giving glory. The love that the Son has shown for the Father in this obedience is “nothing but the act of making space for the eternal love of the Father for the Son” (251). The Father demonstrates this love by glorifying the

obedience of the Son in its very fruitfulness in the Church and in the world (250). It is worth quoting a passage from the Last Supper Discourses to illustrate this nexus, where the connections among glory, love, and fruit are explicit:

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (John 15:8-10)<sup>44</sup>

But in making the Church fruitful in this way, the Spirit institutes the very *eternity* of this love in the Church (256), the love that the Son had in the Father's presence "before the world existed" (John 17:5).

The "momentum of the obedience of the Cross" (256) thus has its source in the eternal trinitarian love, to which this obedience is shown to be identical in the Spirit:

...the obedient making way of the Son for the Father is always the expression of the eternal love of the Son, who makes way for no one other than the eternally loving Father. The uttermost distance<sup>45</sup> [between the highest majesty of the Father and the deepest descent of the Son (248)] ... proves for John the identity of obedience and love in the Son, and likewise the substantial identity of the personal love of the Son and the personal love of the Father. (248-9)

This is why, Balthasar points out, the commandment that Jesus enjoins on his disciples in John is that they *love* one another as he has loved them. By loving them, he is instilling in them the freedom and confidence to obey the commandment that is parallel to the eternal freedom by which he accepted his own commission from the Father:

Because the commission of the Father was accepted by the Son in freedom (before the world existed), because this freedom is identical with sonship of the one whose food is to do the Father's will (4.34), Jesus expects from the disciples, in the power of the Holy Spirit that will be bestowed on

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<sup>44</sup> All Bible quotations given outside the body of a Balthasar quotation are from the *NRSV*.

<sup>45</sup> The next chapter of the thesis, which is on distance, focuses on this passage. The idea of distance (*Diastase* in the German text here: *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 230) facilitates Balthasar's understanding of the identity between obedience and trinitarian love.

them, that they cross over from the compulsion of slavery into the freedom of sonship (8.33f.) by accepting his obedience.... (256)

The Spirit sent by the Father and Son to dwell with the disciples simultaneously creates, bestows, and calls forth the freedom of the disciples on earth to obey this commandment.

The “law of logic within the Godhead” (248) to which this new commandment corresponds lays out the contours of what is glorious and beautiful, the very “radiance” of the trinitarian love (256). The Son freely shares this love with the world in his “free separation ...from the Father, in his ‘descent’ into the world and his making known what he has ‘seen’ in the presence of God (3.11f).” The radiance of this beauty is given is set in motion and given its momentum by a free person who takes this law of trinitarian love upon himself, out of love both for the Father and for others:

We have to do here with an obedience out of love for love, with an ‘ought’ and a ‘must’ that lie beyond the natural ‘ought’ and ‘must’ and that are formulated in the Johannine law as a divine necessity.... (256)

Paradoxically, there is only one way to manifest the glory of God, a glory that absolutely must come forth; but it can only be carried out by someone who is free, “so that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). It is the obedience of the Son “who emptied himself and took the form of a slave” in the eternity of the Trinity, in the decision for the Incarnation (Phil 2:6-7), the decision that gives divine love the momentum that will peak in the Cross. He gives this very momentum over to the Church out of love for his disciples, calling on them to love each other as he has loved them:

...[T]he momentum of the Church’s love has its origin in the momentum of the *entolé* given to the Son by the Father, and has its goal and end in the analogous momentum of ‘laying down one’s life’ for the brethren. How far this ‘laying down’ must go, is shown symbolically in the washing of the feet, and in the reality of the Cross. (256-7)

This is Balthasar's reading of John's reading of "the greatest commandment" and "the second, which is like it": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:36-40). The Church glorifies the God who gives this law by freely obeying it out of love for God and for others, which carries the momentum of God's glory out into the world. For Balthasar, the glory of the love of the Holy Trinity is manifest in its human mode through the Church's self-giving love in conformity to the Cross of Jesus.

#### ***1.d Glory as a transcendental of divine revelation***

To say that glory is "a 'transcendental' of the divine revelation, present in all phases and layers" (261) is a statement about the perceptibility of glory, just as its status as a transcendental for God's being is a metaphysical statement about the oneness, truth, and goodness of God. In following the basic plan of this chapter, we continue to consider glory in *GL7* without yet having taken a full look at kenosis. As will become clearer in the next section of the chapter, glory transcends all the "phases and layers" in the Bible precisely because it is founded on kenosis. For now, it must be noted that without the kenosis of Jesus that Paul describes in the Philippians hymn, the glory of God according to the New Testament does not achieve its proper gravity, or *momentum*. This is most evident in Balthasar's text under the chapter and subheading "The Substance of Glory: Appearing and Image," where he treats of the Son's act of "making space" for the love of the Father and how this is seen by the eyes of faith (287-95). But Balthasar has already drawn attention to a profound identity between the kenotic obedience of the Son and the

eternal trinitarian love in the section of text we have just examined, Pt.II, ch.1, “The Request for Glorification” (248-55). These pages of Balthasar’s text will be considered once more in the kenosis section of below and one final time in the next chapter of the thesis on distance.

At present there is more that can be said regarding glory at the end of *GL7*, Pt.II, ch.1 where we see Balthasar reflecting on the transcendental nature of NT glory as the love of the Holy Trinity coming into the world:<sup>46</sup>

*Dóxa* signifies, not various realities, but one single reality in different aspects. This single reality is disclosed, in the final interpretation by John, as the eternal trinitarian love that has come into the world. (260)

To elaborate on what he means, Balthasar interprets the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 in his request for glorification by the Father:

It is true that one passage speaks of the eternal glory of the Son with the Father before the world was made, when the Son asks the Father that he may receive this once again (17.5); but the context of John’s Gospel as a whole shows that this is no mere restoration of an original state, but rather the integration of the obedient love, lived out in the separation undertaken for the sake of bringing salvation, into the original intimacy and ‘perfect joy’ of the dwelling with one another of Father and Son. (Ibid.)

The “separation undertaken for the sake of bringing salvation” is the Son’s act of kenosis in his willingness to be sent by the Father, which is also his response to being saturated by the Father’s love from all eternity (ibid.).<sup>47</sup> If we allow ourselves to be saturated by the Son’s love for us, this eternal glory of the Trinity “can be recognised by the eyes of faith in a genuine objective perception (*aísthēsis*)” in its various aspects, namely, the

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<sup>46</sup> Meant here, of course, in the sense of philosophical-transcendentals of being.

<sup>47</sup> I find the English translation of Balthasar here, “consumed by the love of the Father,” slightly ambiguous, slightly too suggestive of being “consumed by love *for* the Father” in the choice of the verb. That is clearly not the sense of the passage, which is about the Father’s love as the source of all love. The German phrase is “von der Liebe des Vaters durchglühen,” (*Herrlichkeit* Bd III.2/2, 241), the word *durchglühten* meaning “saturated” or “radiated through.” This is Balthasar’s reading of the John passage (17:24) that speaks of the Father’s eternal love *for the Son* before the foundation of the world.

Son's obedience to the Father, the Church's obedience to the Son, the mutual love that the disciples have for each other, etc. These are the various "individual aspects [that] shade off from ... this ultimacy [that] shines already through the earthly existence of Jesus...: 'We have seen his glory' (1.14)...." (260). The complete verse from John that Balthasar quotes above naturally develops his point: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

The glory of God is visible in Jesus in spite of its lowliness and hiddenness, even by means of the very lowliness of Jesus. The full splendor of divine glory is eschatological, and the contrast with the lowliness of Jesus that becomes so paradoxically and powerfully evident accounts for the variety of "phases and layers" of glory as a transcendental of divine revelation:

At the beginning of this chapter we pointed to the various gradations to be found within one fundamental meaning, from lordliness in power (in the creation) through sublimity (in the work of reconciliation) to glory (in the definitive breaking-through of redemption), and similarly to the gradation ... between momentum ('power') and radiance ('light'). (261)

This latter point has already been illustrated by Balthasar in a section from Part I entitled "Centre of the Word in what is not a word"; namely, the death of Jesus on the Cross from which the light of glory shines forth. The prophecies of the OT, which carried the "weight" of God's *kabod*, become silent and take on a new "visible" form in the death of Jesus who is himself the Word: "It is only from what is permanently incomprehensible that so much light can spread forth" (84), drawing the gaze of faith upon Jesus:

Where the word falls silent, the true message is proclaimed loudly: the message of the heart of God, broken open. And if the real 'place' of the Christian event at first lets man hear no word, since the place lies in man's death, yet it more importantly makes visible an event of God (in the most

literal sense of the word: ‘they look on him whom they have pierced’).  
(86)

What the faithful see in this gaze, as Balthasar has attempted to show in his reading of John, is the eternal, mutual love of the Father and the Son shining forth as glory and proclaimed by the Spirit in the heart of the Church. It is clear *that* the glory of God is visible in the Cross. When we have considered the Son’s kenosis, *how* it is visible and *why* Christ’s death is glorious will become clear, and not before. Understanding this depends entirely upon seeing how the Cross manifests the love of God (John 3:16), not only for the entire world but even for the Son who is sent into it.

***1.e Glory as the divinity of God made known***

Going deeper into the examination of the content of glory, Balthasar offers a definition of *dóxa* as “the divinity of God freely made known” (265). It is God’s freedom that determines how God reveals God’s self, appearing under many different aspects of the cipher *dóxa* in the OT and NT coming together around Christ as the center of the event of salvation (264). The divinity of God “bursts through every form” of these images and cannot be contained by any one of them. This divinity conceals its personal depths but one can still enter into a relationship with it. Just as human persons are mysterious and yet fundamentally relational, unable to be abstracted or distilled by ideas and concepts, much less so can the divinity of God be contained in a “word”:

The paradox of Biblical revelation is that the ineffable *as such* has placed itself in the word: this proclaims its sublime freedom and power, but also the terrifying danger that the word, where it ceases to be a word of prayer, may forget the ineffability of God and absolutise itself as a human *logos* in philosophical logic or philology. (265-6)

There is a footnote to this passage in which Balthasar explains “the *cultic* character of the verbal form of the entire New Testament” (266, n.3). Here, prayer is a communicative response of one person to another to what that Other has uttered first. As will be discussed more thoroughly below in the context of kenosis, to receive this word from God is to be comprehended by it, to allow oneself to be seized by the Father and drawn in through the Word (291), rather than the other way around. To allow this to happen is a kenotic act that can only be performed by a free person.

Rather than comprehending the divinity of God via intellectual concepts, the person of the believer is now included within a dialogue of Persons among the Father, Word, and Spirit in the life of God. The glory of God as “seen” in the Bible actually conceals the essence of God, which cannot be directly “spoken” by any of the “words” that are in the Bible:

The Bible is wholly a word from God, a word that is determined, that encounters and challenges; yet the Bible is a word from the ineffable, a word that endlessly revolves around its subject in periphrases. (266)

Just as Jesus speaks the definitive word about who God is when he “utters what matters most to him” (*ibid.*), so does the Bible actively revolve around the divinity of God in what it says; never penetrating the mystery, never encapsulating it in human speech, but always pointing to it. In this context Balthasar briefly cites a passage in John’s Last Supper discourses that is worth quoting at length. Jesus is telling the disciples what the Spirit will tell them without directly saying what it is:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is



mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15)

This passage gives the outlines of what it is that the Spirit will “freely make known” to the disciples: in short, it is the divinity of God in a relationship of Persons. What the Father has in himself is *divinity*, “absolute being,” and this he shares completely with the Son and the Spirit, the latter of whom will declare it to the disciples as they can bear it:

[absolute being’s] free self-expression and self-giving is able to reveal itself and bestow itself, but always in such a manner that the coastlines of what is shown and expressed remains untouched—the inalienability of freedom, and thereby the inexhaustibility of the personal mystery. (266)

God’s glory thereby functions as the guardian of God’s innermost *hidden* self, and yet it shines out to creatures and reveals God as hidden. Eucharistic Prayer IV of the Roman Rite proclaims that the Father dwells forever in “unapproachable light” as the “one God, living and true,” and yet all creatures are drawn into the “joyful vision” of this light. This light of glory has the fundamental characteristic of God’s gift of self, a gift which produces hope in the believer and in the Church.

### ***1.f God’s glory as gift of self; the hope that glory gives***

The interpersonal dialogue of love that is the Holy Trinity penetrates all of the mysteries under the cipher of glory in the NT. Hope functions as a horizon against which all other words and thoughts about God are judged:

We have been introduced proleptically—in a hope that does not see—into the inner depths of a God whose glory ... consists of the pure gift of self, accompanying us, ‘existing for the other’ (8.31)... The mutual gifts of the Trinity are the creature’s place and home: in God’s ‘foreknowledge’, the creature is ‘predestined’ to be there (v.29). (516)

This passage at the end of the book puts the glory of God vis-à-vis humankind in its most proper perspective: it is an object of hope, of yearning, of longing, but also the object of a promise that has been given. The Trinity is revealed as creation's "home" towards which it is being led, but also paradoxically in which creation already dwells in a future that has been made mysteriously real by the indwelling of the Trinity with us. Balthasar sees the trinitarian mutuality as creation's redemption in terms of Romans 8: "The world looks with longing to man, so that he may find the word that redeems it; but man looks to God, and does not find the word that redeems both himself and the world with him" (515). This does not mean that the person who prays in this desperate search for God does not find God; rather, the believer sees the glory of God, but no concept, no "word" is given:

Rather, the Spirit 'intercedes for us with wordless sighs': this is how far God has gone in making the pains of his creation his own. Not only has he 'not spared his own Son, but rather given him up for us all' (v.32), he has also 'poured out' (5.5) his own (8.11) and his Son's (v.9) Spirit, so that we might be able 'to make our boast in the hope of the glory of the God' (5.2), .... (515)

This experience of already being included in the trinitarian life, even if only in part, gives spiritual insight into the contrast between our eternal goal and the temporal suffering in which we are presently submerged:

The sighing of the Spirit is no mere appearance, just as the Cross and the cry of the Son were no mere appearance; the spirit [sic]<sup>48</sup> does not only give a justification of the hopelessness that lies within the existence of the world and of the Christian, but also experiences it together with us and gives it a place—*as such*—within the dialogue of prayer in the Trinity.... (515)

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<sup>48</sup> This is obviously meant to be a capital S, referring to the Holy Spirit in fidelity to the sense of the whole passage. The German text has a pronoun here whose antecedent in the preceding clause is clearly the Spirit; *Herrlichkeit* Bd III.2/2, 484.

“Hopelessness” thus placed turns into hope, because it is a hopelessness that even God has chosen to share with us in a certain way. The German word for “mere appearance” in the passage above is *Schein*, which in Hegel’s *Logic* refers to a superficial, *prima facie* impression of temporal existence without real knowledge of it. Compare Balthasar’s passage above with Merold Westphal’s commentary on the Preface of Hegel’s

*Philosophy of Right*:

Finally, if philosophy sees the rose in the cross of the present, this can only be because it sees the cross, the pain which cries out for some kind of reconciliation. This means that philosophy not only apprehends “the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present” in “the show [*Schein*] of the temporal and transient,” but also the degree to which the substance remains transcendent and the eternal absent.<sup>49</sup>

The point of comparing these two passages is not to compare Balthasar’s theology with political philosophy, although he does make extensive use of Hegelian terms and discourse in his own theology. My point in the comparison is rather to illustrate that Balthasar sees “the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present,” which is the life of the Holy Trinity, in the crying out of the Son on earth and the sighing of the Spirit in our hearts. These are not “mere appearances,” and yet the life of the Trinity also remains transcendent and absent, living behind the iconic experience of prayer under the shadow of the Cross.

Although we do not see its fullness yet, the hope of being included within the very life of the Trinity in God’s kingdom has an aesthetic dimension that is accessible now. The glory of God, which will only be fully revealed in the eschaton, gives time a wholeness which we see only in part but is nonetheless infused with beauty and “a meaning only between the alpha [of predetermination] and the omega [of glorification]

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<sup>49</sup> Merold Westphal, *Hegel, Modernity, and Freedom* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 89.

which God joins together into an identity” (516-7). This identity corresponds to the unity of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit, and the glory of this unity bestows unity, meaning, and goodness upon everything else in the creation.

It is now time to consider the kenosis of the Son, which is seen in how he goes to his Cross and theologically rooted in the self-giving life of the eternal Trinity. To borrow an observation from *Theo-Drama IV* in advance, there is a kind of pathway back to God that is laid out by the Cross, back to the Trinity’s interpersonal kenoses:

Accordingly, there is only one way to approach the trinitarian life in God: on the basis of what is manifest in God’s kenosis in the theology of the covenant—and thence in the theology of the Cross—we must feel our way back into the mystery of the absolute, employing a negative theology that excludes from God all intramundane experience and suffering, while at the same time presupposing that the possibility of such experience and suffering—up to and including its christological and trinitarian implications—is grounded in God. (*TD4*, 324)<sup>50</sup>

The trinitarian life in God is beyond all comprehension, but as we briefly anticipated at the beginning of the chapter, kenosis serves as the key to Balthasar’s theory of divine representation: there is no thinking of glory that does not center itself on the self-emptying of Jesus Christ as seen in the Cross; and thus there is no thinking of the Holy Trinity that is not conditioned by the event of the self-emptying of the divine Persons to each other. It is to the concept of kenosis in *GL7* that we must turn in the second part of the chapter.

## 2. KENOSIS

### *2.a Selflessness, freedom, and inner law in the self-translation of God*

Balthasar approvingly cites Sergei Bulgakov on “the ‘selflessness’ of the divine

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<sup>50</sup> *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume IV: The Action*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

persons, as of pure relations in the love within the Godhead” which serve “as the basis of everything” (213-4). Bulgakov’s insight on kenosis as selflessness is therefore of central importance to the argument of *GL7*, and the passages to be exegeted in this section will be related to other key ideas throughout the volume that bear out their ramifications. In order to illustrate the germ of thought that occurs here in *GL7*, there will also be a brief exploration of how Balthasar develops Bulgakov’s thinking of trinitarian selflessness along the same lines in the idea of *Urkenosis* in *Theo-Drama IV*.

The second section of the last chapter in *GL7*, Pt.I is entitled “*Kenosis*.” When Balthasar speaks of “the first form of kenosis” in creation, he does not specify any one divine Person in the Trinity, but the second kenosis of the Cross is clearly that of the Son. Following Bulgakov, the selflessness of God is active as well in the creation of human beings who are free,

for the creator here gives up a part of his freedom to the creature, in the act of creating; but this he can dare to do only in virtue of his foreseeing and taking into account the second and truest kenosis, that of the Cross, in which he makes good the uttermost consequences of creation’s freedom, and goes beyond them.... (214)

The divine act of creation itself is a form of kenosis by virtue of the Cross, and the Cross itself is an act of “the whole Trinity”: of the Father by virtue of his sending and abandoning the Son on the Cross to the freedom of the world that rejects him; of the Son “who translates his being begotten by the Father ... into the expressive form of creaturely obedience”; and of the Spirit who unites the Father and the Son “now only in the expressive form of the separation” (ibid.). The Cross thus reveals something of “the law of the immanent Trinity” (215). And yet, he immediately calls upon Karl Barth in order

to emphasize God's "Lordship" in "the momentum of the Cross," that the Lord is always sovereign and free in all he does:

In all this [kenosis, self-emptying], there is 'no paradox, no antinomy, no division' in God; by 'doing such a thing, he proves to us that he *can* do it, that it is absolutely in his *nature* to do such a thing. (215, quotations from Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/1)

God's freedom to create and redeem the world is rooted in a triune love that not only does not contradict the Son's act of obedience, but even allows for its possibility and saturates it with profound meaning, which is its "momentum" (215).

The Cross reveals this trinitarian law of love, but from the theological perspective the kenosis of the Son has its foundation in what Balthasar will call the *Urkenosis* of the Father in *Theo-Drama IV* (*TD4*, 326: "the primal kenosis of the Father). These thoughts on kenosis in *TD4* come in the context of commenting on Bulgakov, just as in *GL7*. Using this latter text from *TD4* to further illustrate Balthasar's thought in *GL7* is permissible and useful in this case, but it is best done via a methodological observation made by Lucy Gardner and Benjamin Moss on Balthasar's general theological project, specifically on how God "translates" and "expresses" God's self. In Balthasar's thought, according to Gardner and Moss, God is a dynamic event of *Urkenosis* of the Father into the Son and Spirit; God's self-revelation is God's unfolding, self-revealing, self-definition as "Ever Greater":

This *Urkenosis* is God's definition of God; but this is not a limiting definition, nor a limiting in any sense. It is the form in which God grants God form. It is the un-finishing of God, rather than the limiting of God; it is the *explicatio*—the unfolding, the explaining, the self-expressing, the interpretation—the translation of God. And so it is the opening up of God; the always, ever 'more' of God, to which our limitations and their limited fruitfulness are analogous.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gardner and Moss, "Something like Time," 125.

Balthasar develops the idea in the following passage in *TD4*:

The action whereby the Father utters and bestows his whole Godhead, an action he both “does” and “is”, generates the Son. This Son is infinitely Other, but he is also the infinitely Other, *of the Father*. ... God the Father can give his divinity away in such a manner that it is not merely “lent” to the Son: the Son’s possession of it is “equally substantial”. This implies such an incomprehensible and unique “separation” of God from himself that it *includes* and grounds every other separation—be it never so stark and bitter. (*TD4*, 324-5; italics in the English translation.)

The passage in *TD4* where the word *Urkenosis* (“primal kenosis” in English) is used in the German text occurs on a subsequent page. Balthasar explains that the *Urkenosis* of the Father is seen only through the response that the Son gives to his generation:

[The Son’s] thanksgiving is the eternal Yes to the gift of consubstantial divinity (that is, a divinity that is equally absolute). It is a Yes to the primal kenosis of the Father (*Ur-Kenosis des Vaters*)<sup>52</sup> in the unity of omnipotence and powerlessness: omnipotence, since he can give all; powerlessness, since nothing is as truly powerful as the gift. (*TD4*, 326)

In the context of this passage, the world is created only by the generation of the Son, which is the unleashing of a great power. But the Father nevertheless allows for difference within the substance of the Godhead, which ultimately must face the freedom that creation has to reject the Son who is sent, and which is a certain powerlessness on the Father’s part. This idea as expressed by *Urkenosis* in *TD4* is active in *GL7* in a slightly less developed form, but one that explicitly incorporates “expressive form” of the Son’s obedience in the Philippians hymn and in John’s Gospel as “creaturely”:

In this, kenosis—as the surrender of the ‘form of God’—becomes the decisive act of love of the Son, who *translates his being begotten by the Father ... into the expressive form of creaturely obedience....* (214, emphasis added)

In terms of what Gardner and Moss note regarding the *Urkenosis* of the Father within the Trinity in *TD4*, it is clear in *GL7* that the creaturely obedience of the Son reveals “God’s

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<sup>52</sup> *Theodramatik* Bd III (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978), 303.

definition of God” for us, the begetting of the Son. The Son’s obedience shows forth “the form in which God grants God form... the unfolding, the explaining, the self-expressing, the interpretation—*the translation of God*” (emphasis added).<sup>53</sup> The Son must have the freedom to make his own translation of his begetting from the Father, and the Father’s begetting is the granting of this very freedom to the Son. In our opening passage from p.214 at the beginning of this section, if the whole Trinity is selfless in the kenosis that is creation, which allows creation to stand over and against God in freedom to accept or reject, then the Father’s begetting of the Son who is Other and yet in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19) is a kind of kenosis into the freedom of the Son to exist *as* the Son. Again, from *TD4* on kenosis in the thought of Bulgakov:

It is possible to say, with Bulgakov, that the Father’s self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial “kenosis” within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he “imparts” to the Son all that is his. ... The Father must not be thought to exist “prior” to this self-surrender (in an Arian sense): he *is* this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back. (*TD4*, 323)

This kenosis of the Father establishes a freedom of the Son to exercise his fidelity to the nature of his own “being” as the Only-Begotten, as is suggested in “The Substance of Glory” in *GL7*:

Nothing can be more free than the Logos of God, since God is his own freely ruling norm both in himself and in his self-revelation. But likewise, no logic can be more necessary than the absolute Logos, since every logic has its origin in him. (316)

It is important to note along with Gardner and Moss,

This opening up of God, which only occurs within God, also only ‘occurs’ in one ‘direction’: *from* Father *to* Son, whilst yet neither the Father nor the Son is ever without or apart from this giving and receiving.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Gardner and Moss, “Something like Time,” 125.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



Even as Balthasar will go on to insist in the text upon the mutual love between the Father and the Son who is the Word “that prays to the Father” (265),<sup>55</sup> there is a hierarchical direction of the self-opening of God from Father to Son to Spirit. Balthasar’s trinitarian theology always begins with the person of the Father, even though the trinitarian love must first be perceived in the revelation of the Son. The Church receives this self-opening of the Father to the Son in the Spirit. Glory is ascribed to the Father not only by the person of the Son and the followers of the Son, but also by the Bible, the word *about* the Word (267-8). This biblical glory is not “the crown of speculations that stand around the divine essence,” but rather the “written-down” form of God’s power to express the inexpressible validly in Jesus the Word (271-2). As we will see next, the kenosis of the Son within the Godhead in his consent to become the Incarnate Word is essentially also his consent to be handed over for the sin of the world. But in line with what has been said about God’s self-translation, even this consent to suffering for others is an essential element of Balthasar’s theory of divine representation.

### ***2.b Kenosis as consent to be handed over for sin, and as divine representation***

Returning to the consideration of the Son’s kenosis to the will of the Father in the chapter entitled “The Momentum of the Cross,” this kenosis is also be seen as his consent to being “handed over” as a ransom for the people who have no way of justifying themselves before God, who also are unable to bear the immense responsibility for their own sin (224). Balthasar attempts to face what he reads in the OT directly, in order to

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<sup>55</sup> Balthasar has in mind here the priestly prayer of John 17, which we will treat more thoroughly below. Jesus’ earthly supplication as the Incarnate Son is an element of his complete transparency to the Father’s majesty, and thus also a crucial element of the “translation” of his eternal begotten-ness into earthly obedience (214).

include it with the total sphere of God's love: "From the old covenant, the real one who abandons is God, and is abandoning (above all, of Israel) is 'in each case an act of judgment, or an act of divine wrath' (ibid., quoting Wiard Popkes)."

For Balthasar, this apparently contrasts with what happens in the NT, where the handing over of Jesus to the enemy seems to be an act of God's "powerlessness" as opposed to wrath. But then he claims that there is a relationship between these two handings-over: "First and foremost, Jesus is the one abandoned by God, and then by all men, acting as instruments within God's act..." (224-5). This may seem to pit God and the world against Jesus as the scapegoat of all, or as some divine currency for payment for sin. Even Paul has Jesus given up by the Father "because of (*diá*) our sins and raised because of (*diá*) our justification' (Rom 4.25)" (225). But then Balthasar points out that in the Gospels, Jesus abandons *himself* and gives himself up as a deed of love. For Balthasar, in John, this deed of love originates within the Trinity but also includes within its sphere the judgment upon the world's sin:

But this is a 'deed' only in that it is the consent to being handed over. The whole idea can be contained within the trinitarian context, so that the entire act of judgment remains contained within the love of the Father who gives up (Jn 3.16) and the love of the Son who places himself at his disposal: within the brackets of this love lies the whole momentum of the curse of the sin of the world, which crashes against the one who bears it (Gal 3.13). (225)

The Father abandons Jesus into the hands of sinners, who subject him to a dizzying labyrinth that represents their own hateful, cowardly shifting of blame to others, ultimately resulting in the death of the innocent. This deserves God's wrath, but it is Jesus himself who willingly suffers wrath when God allows sinners to load it upon him (224-5). In this way Balthasar seeks to convey the expansiveness of the world that God

recapitulates in Jesus, even in its freedom to reject God. The momentum of this very hatred has freedom as its founding element in God's creation of human beings; so this free rejection of God not only begins within God's loving act of creation, but it ends when it collides against the Son who comes to meet it out of the very same love of God for the world, which he shares with the Father.

While the language of divine punishment being heaped upon Jesus sometimes obscures Balthasar's conclusion, it is nevertheless as follows: whereas in prophetic OT theology and in the Torah, God would abandon Israel to their own destructive ways as an act of judgment, the Father now allows the Incarnate Son, the fulfillment of the Torah (36), to abandon himself to their ways out of love for them. The Son shares this love of the Father for all of creation, so he hands himself over. God does not change or become "different" from OT to NT in this scheme, as in some Marcion-esque (not strictly "Marcionist") transformation from a wrathful God into a loving God. Balthasar is saying rather that in the revelation of Christ the possibilities for theology are now different. This too may sound somewhat supercessionist. If space allowed it in this essay, it would be worthwhile to explore such a criticism. For now, what we have seen in *TD4* and in Jesus' consent to being handed over expands the notion of God's kenosis in creation noted above (214). It also conditions the full magnitude of the significance of God's self-revelation in Jesus.

The momentum of the world's hatred is powerful, and it results in an act of destruction, an act that silences the Word: "The momentum of the collision lies beyond the sound-barrier: just as the love of God in creation and election is unfathomable, so is sin, the hate of the world (Jn 15.25)" (210). In the death of Jesus on the Cross, he stops

speaking and has to allow the Spirit to be his sole interpreter: in order to be *most fully* transparent to the Father, he has to cease being even the Word, or at least, he has to speak now on the Cross “in a way without precedent” (211). What he speaks is the Father; what he reveals is the Father. But he must rely on the Spirit to convey this utterance when he goes down into the silence of death. All this leads up to one of the keys to Balthasar’s trinitarian theology: “Only God himself can go right to the end of the abandonment by God. Only he has the freedom to do this” (ibid.), because there is a profound sense in which the world neither knows nor understands what it is doing in its rejection of the Word. Not only is God the only one who can go to the end of the abandonment by God, but God in the Spirit is also the only one who can give the interpretation of this event that leads to insight, in the Church and in the New Testament. This is how kenosis serves as the key to Balthasar’s theory of divine representation: the Father opens Himself to the world in the Son, who opens Himself up to the interpretation given by the Spirit, who knows the Father and the Son from the very depths of their shared Being and shares it with the world.

### ***2.c Kenosis as the foundation of Jesus’ form of existence***

From what we have just seen, kenosis is the foundation for Jesus’ form of existence, by which Balthasar will also show how death and hell are implicated:

If the kenosis, and the form of Jesus’ existence in claim, poverty, and self-abandonment that is based upon the kenosis, made possible the bearing of the sin of the world, this act of bearing can be accomplished only in solidarity with the death that is the lot of all. (229)

In the context of this chapter on “The Momentum of the Cross,” the claim, the poverty, and the self-abandonment referred to above are the characteristics of Jesus’ existence

previously considered in the text of *GL7* under their respective subheadings in the third chapter of Part I, “Word—Flesh.” Jesus’ claim to the authority to judge men and women and the Torah itself is rooted in his obedience and transparency to the Father’s will for the life of the world. Jesus is completely devoid of self-interest and wants only what the Father wants, and this roots his own authority entirely and directly in that of the Father. Poverty also characterizes Jesus’ attitude of complete transparency to and dependence on the Father for everything that he has and is. Self-abandonment is the active, dynamic character of Jesus’ choices, as the Word of the Father of course, but also in his humanity’s availability to the divine Word even to the point of leaving the interpretation of this Word completely to the Spirit, who hands this meaning on to the Church (152).

In the quotation above, the bearing of the world’s sin that is made possible by this kenosis is fulfilled not merely in the visible event of Jesus’ death but also in his solidarity with those who experience hell, the proper sense of which includes both the realm of the dead and the state of the damned. In bearing others’ sin he is acting in fidelity with the form of his own being and time:

...the whole structure of his being and his time is built upon the foundation of the free act of obedience that is his kenosis. In this deeper sense (not in a psychological sense), he is *inter mortuos liber*, ‘free among the dead’ (Ps 87.6 LXX). He is bound, in powerlessness: but this is due to his own free obedience, the only obedience that deserves to be called ‘the obedience of a corpse’ in the theological sense.<sup>56</sup> (231)

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<sup>56</sup> This bears a striking resemblance with a passage on the Jesuit vow of obedience in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Pt. VI, [547], which reads: “We ought to act on the principle that everyone who lives under obedience should let himself be carried and directed by Divine Providence through the agency of the superior as if he were a lifeless body, which allows itself to be carried to any place and treated in any way... and he ought to hold it certain that by doing so he conforms himself with the divine will more than by anything else he could do while following his own will and different judgment”; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, gen. ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 222. I have seen no commentary in the secondary literature yet on whether or not this is an explicit reference to the Ignatian sense of obedience, but Balthasar would have surely known this passage from the *Constitutions* from his time in the Society.

Balthasar is not explicit here about what he means by Jesus' time, but given the context of "The Momentum of the Cross" it can only mean the "hour" of his glorification in John (12:23) when he goes to his final Passover in Jerusalem. The shocking reality of Jesus' descent among the dead is the "full seriousness of what Sheol must be" (233), complete and utter powerlessness. Jesus gives himself up and gives away his very ability to possess any of the "spiritual lights of faith, hope and love" in solidarity with all of those who have lost these things to death and sin and who experience the utmost separation from God (232). There is a helpful parallel to this in Paul, which Balthasar does not actually mention in this context. Paul himself wishes that he could give away the same hopes of consolation, light, and life if it would be for the salvation of Israel: "For 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" (Rom 9:3).

But it is only Jesus who can give himself up to this extent by his own free act of obedience, because the dimensions of this task to be done have been determined from all eternity within the Trinity, "inasmuch as in this *visio (secundae) mortis* the whole fruit of the redeeming Cross was seen together" (233). To quote again Balthasar's monotheistic principle of salvation: "Only God himself can go right to the end of the abandonment by God. Only he has the freedom to do this" (211). This trinitarian understanding of the Son's mission echoes a contemplative practice that is central to Jesuit and Ignatian spirituality, as can be seen in the contemplation of the Incarnation near the beginning of the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

*The First Prelude* is to survey the history of the matter... how the three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people; and how, seeing that they were all going down into hell, they

decide in their eternity that the Second Person should become a human being, in order to save the human race. [102]<sup>57</sup>

These expressions of the trinitarian life and missions from St. Ignatius have sometimes been criticized as naïvely tritheist. But if Ignatius' insight regarding the decision of the Trinity is taken as central, this proposal for contemplation is not so inconsistent with how Balthasar sees the theological roots of Jesus' christological existence in the life of the one God. In this contemplation on the Incarnation, Ignatius also provides insight into how the mission of the Son from the Trinity lays out the very dimensions of hell in the task to be accomplished. The full dimensions of this task can only be determined from the standpoint of the loving gaze of God out over the whole of creation across time:

...sin in its 'pure state' separated from man, 'sin in itself' in the whole formless, chaotic momentum of its reality, was seen by Jesus; and with it, the 'remainder' that could not be absorbed into the Father's work of creation, because he had left man freedom to decide for or against God—the unfinished part of the creation, that it was left to the incarnate Son to finish; and the Son, obedient to his mission, is led by the Father now into the state of existence of this sin that 'remains'. (233)

Jesus sees this aspect of creation that is dying, and thus "Hell" attains the status of a "christological concept" (ibid.). But because Jesus sees it from within the loving gaze of the Trinity, his own christological mission to the lost part of creation is a trinitarian concept. Balthasar does not explicitly refer to the Second and Third Weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises* in this part of *GL7*, but their influence on him can be surmised by virtue of his own grasp of Ignatian spirituality as he has previously explained it in *GL7*: Christian discipleship is the placement of oneself at the disposal of Christ even to the point of suffering in imitation of him (198-9), and hell as the full consequence of the Incarnation itself has its dimensions plumbed by the gaze of the Trinity (229). This is

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<sup>57</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 56.

how Balthasar orients and frames his theological practice within contemplative practice throughout the entire volume.

#### ***2.d Kenosis as revealing the Father and critiquing the human aesthetics of glory***

With this trinitarian insight into the foundations of Jesus' decision to go to the Cross and descend to hell, his death can be seen as the final "making way" for the glory of the Father to shine: "At the uttermost point where the Son makes way, the majesty of the Father is to be brought into effect ('For this reason I have come to this hour: Father, glorify your name', 12.27f.)" (248). The definitive sign of the glory of God, to which all other signs in John's Gospel have pointed,

...is the opened heart (19.34f.), the end of the momentum of the Father's commission and the of the Son's making way, the end of the distance between the highest majesty and the deepest descent (3.13, 31; 6.38), but thereby also proof that the space opened up by the utterly obedient Son *suffices* to make known the whole 'name' of the Father and to make completely efficacious his sovereign power. (Ibid.)

The epistemological phenomenon of seeing the sign of Christ on the Cross is to have a path opened up all the way back to the excessive brilliance of the God to whom one cannot help but ascribe the most glorious name. The sign of blood and water suffices in John's Gospel: "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (19:35). Balthasar does not make the connection here with the Synoptic accounts of the death of Jesus on the Cross, but they resonate with his central point that Jesus is revealed as the Son of the Father on the Cross and an "innocent man," even to Gentiles who would not have any other reason to surmise this on their own. In the Synoptics the death of Jesus is accompanied by



tremendous apocalyptic signs rather than blood and water, but the result is that the Gentile centurion perceives the glory of God in Jesus:

Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!' (Matt 27:54)

In Mark, the veil in the Temple sanctuary is torn in two while the sun is eclipsed, but the exclamation of the centurion is the same (15:33-39), while in Luke the sanctuary veil's opening and the eclipse of the sun that occurs lead the centurion to proclaim Jesus' innocence (23:44-7).

In Jesus' death he is manifested as what the world could never understand to be "God" in his utter failure, humiliation, and silence. In the Introduction to *GL7* Balthasar spoke of the "absolute contradiction of the glory of the Lord" in the Cross and hell, a contradiction which is also the manifestation of God's "absolute freedom" and the subjection of all metaphysical laws of being to criticism (14). What this means for Balthasar is that Jesus' death is both a contradiction of any transcendental aesthetic that dictates of how a form appears to human perception, and the "superabundant fulfillment" of all metaphysical laws, because there is no One who is more utterly "transparent for the light of absolute being" than Jesus Christ. However this fulfillment is beyond all prediction, beyond all merely human powers of perception:

...beyond everything that man can see as form, [Jesus abandoned on the Cross and in the formless chaos of Hell] may be and establish the imperishable and indivisible form which joins God and the world in the new and eternal covenant. (Ibid.)

This radical emptying of form in kenosis makes space for that which God intends to reveal in Jesus: the glory of the trinitarian love, poured out for the life of the world. This is what is seen in Jesus.

**2.e Kenosis as making space to be filled with glory: seeing and being drawn in**

Jesus empties himself of all glory that he might claim or grasp for himself, in the words of the Philippians hymn, by taking on the form of a slave who submits himself to the form that his master imposes upon him (146). But as we have seen, this very self-emptying makes space for the glory of the Father, which is “the divinity of God as it is freely made known” (265). This glory is seen under the aspect of love, both the Father’s love for Jesus and his love for the Father:

In the one who makes space, in his whole conduct, one can *see* what fills him: the love of the Father. And the act of making space can itself be seen as love for the Father. These flow into each other in such a way that one ultimately sees that here it is not two independent persons who get together to form a working fellowship: rather, both exist, from their uttermost origin, in a substantial fellowship of love. (291)

The German text has *Raumgebenden* for “the one who makes space” and *Raumgeben* for “making space.”<sup>58</sup> The context is “The Substance of Glory,” the second chapter in Part II, “We Have Seen His Glory.” The glory that is seen is “the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), and the “substantial fellowship of love” recalls traditional metaphysical language for expressing the unity of the divine nature. What the Father fills the Son with is love; the Son loves the Father by allowing himself to be filled.

The revelation of God in the event of Christ the Son has the effect of drawing the seer to the Father. “‘Seeing’ therefore means, taken as a whole, the ability to interpret a person and a destiny as the epiphany of absolute love” (291), but it is God’s intentionality that is primary in the event of seeing:

This love, however, is not an object that one could contemplate (thereby ‘objectivising’ it) from an impartial stance; it is seen to be what it is, only

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<sup>58</sup> *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 271.

when one is oneself seized by it. ...[I]t is only absolute love itself that can empower one to see absolute love. In the Son who offers himself to our gaze, the Father ‘draws’ those who believe in him—who perceive the love in him—to the Son (Jn 6.44). (291)

A human person must be able to say yes or no to being seized by God, “since it is a question of the power to love, and love can only be given in a free decision” (ibid.). To believe that Jesus comes from God is the decision of faith, which is also an act of love: “The decision to accept what is brought about by the divine love that meets one in Jesus is identical with the seeing of this love through the love that answers in faith” (292).<sup>59</sup>

Like the Son’s allowing himself to be filled with love, the faithful’s act of making space is “the acceptance of God’s action” in the event of Christ and the giving of glory back to God (Rom 4:20). Allowing space for God within one’s self is to be simultaneously included within the “space” between the Father and Son, within their circuit of love that is the domain of the Spirit; and this is the very act of faith (304). Faith gives rise to John’s multiple “formulae of the indwelling” in the Gospel and Letters (309; notes 2, 3, 4). The believer’s remaining and dwelling “in God” and vice versa is the believer’s way of corresponding to the Trinity, because these “formulae of indwelling”

presuppose the trinitarian revelation of the inmost depth of God for the believer who makes space in himself: more precisely, they presuppose the identity of the love between the Father and Son both in the separation (which allows the obedience of faith to be conformed to the obedience of Christ) and in the abolition of this separation. (308-9)

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<sup>59</sup> In a parallel illustration of the point that Balthasar makes here in *GL7*, Peter Casarella draws upon *GLI* where Balthasar reflects on faith as generative of its own religious experience; see “Experience as a theological category: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Christian encounter with God’s Image,” *Communio* 20 (1993), pp.118-9. For Balthasar faith is a surrender of “the whole person to God—intellectually, volitionally, and emotionally” (p.120). In *GLI*, “the grace of the Holy Spirit creates the faculty to apprehend this form [of revelation],” to relish it, find joy in it, and understand it (247).

“Separation” in the passage above is the translation of the German *Diastase*,<sup>60</sup> which necessarily corresponds to the distance between the Father’s highest majesty and the depths of the Son’s descent because this too is a manifestation of the Son’s obedience-as-love (248).<sup>61</sup> “Abolition” in the quotation above translates *Aufhebung*,<sup>62</sup> which in its philosophical sense also includes the idea of sublating something partial or smaller into a new whole.<sup>63</sup> By conforming themselves to the Son in the form of a servant, which is to acknowledge the supreme glory of the Father, the members of the Church are empowered “through the indwelling of his own working to an activity that lies beyond any capacity of their own for working” (311). Balthasar develops this relationship between cruciformity and the life-giving fruitfulness of the Church in Pt.III of *GL7*, its proper context in the book, to which we now turn to conclude this chapter on how God’s glory is conditioned by kenosis in Balthasar’s New Testament theology.

### ***2.f Kenosis as expropriation, cruciformity, and fruitfulness in the Church***

This concluding section explores a collection of passages from Part III of *GL7*, “In Praise of His Glory” (*In Laudem Gloriam*) that relate the idea of kenosis to the Church’s reception of and response to divine revelation. Expropriation, cruciformity, and fruitfulness are all moments in the kenotic process of the trinitarian love coming to dwell in the Church. The first chapter in Part III is titled “Glorification as Assimilation and Return of the Gift,” and it is a pneumatology, an ecclesiology, and a missiology. It is

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<sup>60</sup> *Herrlichkeit* Bd III.2/2, 287.

<sup>61</sup> The word for the English “distance” on *GL7*, 248 is also *Diastase*; see *Herrlichkeit* Bd III.2/2, 229. This passage is of central concern to the next chapter.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>63</sup> I found the definition of *Aufhebung* at <http://dict.leo.org>.

Balthasar's understanding of how the whole Trinity accomplishes the work of the Father when it is lived out in the Church.

In Christ the human being “there lies an act of the total self-expropriation of the love of God, the deepest aim of which is to give man the gift of the same love” (402). The Church lives in response to him, and to be “expropriated” by him is to allow oneself to be taken, to be “handed over.” God works in the Incarnation for the sake of Christ's fellow human beings, who are given the chance to respond freely to the work of a fellow human being. Appropriation is an act of taking something and making it one's own. In seeing how Christ lets himself be expropriated by the Father in the depths of his kenotic being and by his fellow human beings in his human weakness, the human person is invited to make an act of faith in response.

For Balthasar, this human response is both the glorification of God in the world, which is ordained in what was initiated by the Father's begetting of the Son and the Spirit's breathing forth as their mutual love:

...this perfect accomplishment of work undertaken by the Father must at the same time display the accomplishment of the Son's work: in perfect 'relinquishing' (a condition lying out beyond 'authority' and 'poverty'), the Son breathes out his Spirit, the Spirit of love that has gone 'to the end', and simultaneously the Father ordains something new and different for the *Pneuma*.... (402-3)

What the Father ordains for the Spirit to do is to raise Christ with a “spiritual body,” establishing the new relationship that the human Christ now has with all people. This same Spirit, in whom Christ was raised in power (*dúnamis*), expropriates us from our alienated “private space” for communion with others in the same way that Christ now has communion with us in the Resurrection (403).

The act of faith is therefore consent to being expropriated, just as Jesus' consents to being handed over:

Being carried out of oneself—which is faith, and is brought about by the love of Christ—is nothing else than a clearing of space in oneself for this love, a determination of one's own existence, which allows itself to be conformed to the existence of the crucified... (407)

With the accomplishment of Christ's bestowal of "cruciformity" upon the obedient Church whom he loves and who loves him, it is God's prerogative through Christ and in the Spirit to give the Church its own power to give form to the world through its sacramental ministry. The power to give form is how the Church manifests the very fruitfulness of God in its own life, and this fruitfulness has its analog in all areas of human life. Again we note Graham Ward's commentary on Philippians 2:5-11, frequently noted throughout this essay:

Kenosis is a doctrine of divine representation. ... Furthermore, if Christology grounds a theological anthropology, the God who becomes form grounds the human capacity to make forms. Being *homo symbolicus* is integral to being made 'in the image of God'.<sup>64</sup>

Ward is talking about language and representation, but his insight into Balthasar here can be applied to what the Church actually *does* in the world: the Church has a liturgy to celebrate in the world, to do its work to conform the world to Christ as it has been and is being conformed to Christ in its expropriation, the allowing of self to be "seized" by God (489). Conforming here means transmitting the Church's form as the servant of Christ to the world, this form being analogous to the form of Christ itself, which in turn is analogous to the form of the Trinity.

The idea of self-gift, self-emptying, and thanksgiving is developed sacramentally in *GL7*. In Eucharist, everything that we give back is that which has been given to us,

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<sup>64</sup> Ward, "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection," 20.

and we give it back by making space to receive it. We will not fail to become fruitful, if the gifts of God are received in earnest thanksgiving:

To bring fruit is to give thanks for the fruitfulness that has been received, *eucharistia*. But this also means that the thanksgiving that we owe God for his work of creation and of grace consists essentially of bringing fruit. (418)

This fruit is not merely “cultic” but also “ethical” fruit, which is borne in the active love of neighbor. But in receiving our existence from God as fruitfulness, it also becomes our prerogative and responsibility to bring fruit back to God in the form of what we have done out of love for others. The steward in Matthew who feared God’s strictness and gave back his talent without interest gave back nothing of himself: he did not really let himself be expropriated by God in the first place when he received the talent (419).

The idea of fruitfulness as self-emptying for the love of God is also developed with the idea of the source of living waters, the “subterranean streams [that] nourish the spring” (424). What gives of itself is always giving from what is beyond itself. This conforms the life of the believer and of the Church not just to the “crucified” in a christological mode, but also to the life of the Trinity:

...here we have also the mysterious power to regenerate oneself anew at every instant in the act of giving, or conversely the power to produce incessantly such a fullness in oneself that it can retain its own identity only through the giving away the overflow. What has being—and ultimately the triune Being itself, as the source of all—is always more than itself. (Ibid)

This passage recalls Bulgakov’s “selflessness of the divine Persons” as the foundation of all fruitfulness. It also recalls the hierarchical *Urkenosis* of the Father to the Son as the God who is Ever-Greater.<sup>65</sup> This fruitfulness is not exhausted in a merely biological metaphor, because the freedom of personhood in giving and receiving, in bestowing

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<sup>65</sup> Gardner and Moss, “Something like Time,” 125; noted above.

honor and receiving it in gratitude, in glorifying the other and pouring out one's life for one's friends are the absolute criteria for the perception of divine fruitfulness.

The superabundance of the divine life that is beyond all comprehension, which can only be manifested in its very hiddenness in the Son who gave his life as a ransom for many, is also an absolute criterion for what is glorious and beautiful. This superabundance is only glimpsed by faith, in an act of hope, across the distance between the Creator and the creation, a distance that Christ has traveled in his own kenosis and the Spirit holds open for those who would make the journey of faith. How Balthasar uses distance in his theology of glory, which is also a theology of kenosis, is the subject of the next chapter.



### CHAPTER III

#### DISTANCE IN *GL7*

***Introduction: A brief summary of distance in Balthasar with an overview of GL7***

This chapter will examine key texts in *GL7* on the idea of distance in Balthasar's New Testament theology and trinitarian theology. Balthasar employs distance in *GL7* as a kind of cipher for many NT concepts and images that helps us "feel our way back into the mystery of the absolute" in his own brand of negative theology with a twist on the analogy of being (*TD4*, 324). After this Introduction, the relevant points of Balthasar's thinking on distance in an older text, *Presence and Thought*, will be explored as a groundwork for how the idea is developed in *GL7*. The second and third sections will consist of exegeses of key passages on distance in two major areas of the text. The second section focuses on the way distance functions in Johannine theology and how Balthasar identifies it with kenosis in Phil 2:5-11. The third focuses on the way this distance is perceived and what happens in the event of perceiving it. A fourth and final section of the chapter considers how the trajectory of NT-theological distance is given explicit trinitarian development in some passages from *TD4*, much in the same manner as was done with kenosis in the previous chapter but somewhat more briefly.

There are at least two basic kinds of distance in Balthasar's theology. The most fundamental form of distance from the standpoint of human thought and created

existence is that between God as creator and the world God has created. The other, which is given its foundation in NT theology in *GL7* and then further developed in the *Theo-Drama* and other works, is the distance between the unseen Father and the Incarnate Son in the divine economy, which represents their Personal distinction from each other in the Trinity. However, Robyn Horner sees four varieties of distance in the development of Balthasar's thought, two of the "created" and human kind and two of the "divine" kind.<sup>66</sup> She quotes Balthasar from *Creator Spirit (ExT3)* on the most fundamental kind of "natural" distance in the order of thought and experience:

The basis of the biblical religion is the *diastasis*, the distance between God and the creature, that is the elementary presupposition that makes it possible for man to understand and appreciate the unity that grace brings about. (*ExT3*, 173)<sup>67</sup>

This distance is also the precondition for a loving communion between "others" in their difference, not necessarily including the idea of "separation" (*G. Abstand*) but carrying a kind of ambiguity regarding separation that Balthasar often plays up.<sup>68</sup> The second kind of Balthasarian distance that Horner lists is a human-caused distance that is the result of sin, which Christ overcomes in the Cross and Resurrection. The last two kinds of distance in Balthasar are considered "from the divine side," the third being "an eternal intra-trinitarian distance of the Son from the Father, which actually forms the condition of possibility for the divine-human *diastasis*," and the fourth being "a distance between the

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<sup>66</sup> Robyn Horner, "A Theology of Distance," Ch.5 in *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). She begins this chapter by outlining Balthasar's influence on Marion with a neat, concise summary of Balthasar on distance.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 52. In Chapter I of this thesis I noted how Gardner and Moss also quote this same passage from *ExT3* on distance; "Something Like Time," 70.

<sup>68</sup> Horner refers to Marion's note on this point in *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 307, n.30; Horner, "Theology of Distance," 52.

Son and the Father which is a result of Christ's taking on human sinfulness, and which leads to the *hiatus* of the Cross and to the descent into Hell."<sup>69</sup>

Given all these senses of the English word "distance" in the translations of Balthasar's works, the word functions as a cipher for all of these varied references, much in the same way that Balthasar himself says that glory is a cipher in the NT in *GL7*. I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that this generalization under one blanket English term is at least justified by how a general sense of "distance" that includes all of the ideas that Balthasar expresses emerges from his text. In those instances in preceding chapters where the idea of distance has made brief appearances, I have largely used the one English word without referring to Balthasar's German text of *GL7*. Of the four kinds of distance in Balthasar's thought that Horner lists, the first, second, and fourth kinds are clearly seen in *GL7*. The third kind, that of the pre-existent "distance" in the Trinity, is more explicitly developed in *TD4*. The differences among these senses of distance are not entirely unrelated to Balthasar's word choice in the original texts of *Presence and Thought*, *GL7*, and *TD4*, and I will always attempt to point out where the original word in the German (or French) text is signaling a distinct sense of distance. For example, when *diastasis* occurs in the English translations it most frequently refers directly to the same transliterated Greek word in the German texts and generally signifies the most basic sense of the difference between God and creation. *Diastase* in *GL7* most often signifies the distance between the Father and the Son in the economy of salvation. *Distanz* represents the eternal distance between the Father and the Son in the Trinity in the one reference to *TD4* examined below.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in *GL7* the Father, the loving God, is represented by the Son who loves his own to the end (John 13:1) by going to the farthest reaches of the sinful, human-caused alienation from God. It is God and only God who can cross this kind of distance-as-alienation (211). This representation is verified, interpreted, and given to us by the Spirit who is the fruit of the love of Father and Son in the Trinity, and who manifests the love and glory of God that spans the entirety of this distance (253, 389). While Balthasar does not speak of eternal distance between the Father and Son in the Trinity in *GL7*, the book does pivot in its very center on the description of a salvific process involving the trinitarian relations in terms of distance.<sup>70</sup> In this salvific process, the distance which at first sight might seem *only* to represent the Son's *alienation* from the Father on the Cross and our alienation from God as sinners, is integrated into the total sphere of God's glory. This glory, as we have seen in Chapter II, is the event of God's trinitarian love spanning through creation and including the Church by allowing it to become part of the manifestation of God's glory on earth.

The process by which we are included in God's glory clearly emerges as well from Balthasar's description of the event of *seeing* God's glory by which we are drawn into it (292-4). In such experiences, the distance of the human person vis-à-vis God becomes the means of a deeper communion with God and with the religious community of the Church. In the logic of the NT, this is possible only through the historical mediation of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As Balthasar says in the last section of *GL7*, it is in conforming to Christ that the Church and the Christian person become more open to the world out of love for it, even in all its darkness and sin. Before

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<sup>70</sup> Balthasar may perhaps be addressing some of the concerns of "process theology" in *GL7*, especially regarding God's loving responsiveness to the world. But he does not spend much ink in *GL7* addressing process theology as something to be refuted.

we explore the kind of distance that Balthasar emphasizes and the links between the human/created and divine varieties that he develops in *GL7*, we will examine the foundational *diastasis* from *Presence and Thought* that Balthasar always presumes when he thinks about distance.

### **1. *Distance in Presence and Thought as a prelude to distance in GL7***

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how one early form of distance in Balthasar’s thought forms the consistent foundation of his subsequent thinking, especially in his development of the kinds of distance that emerges in the much-later text of *GL7*. In Balthasar’s work on Gregory of Nyssa published in 1942, *Presence and Thought (PT)*, in a chapter entitled “The Concept of Spacing,” he gives a definition of distance:

In taking its referential bearings entirely from [God], the creature distinguishes itself from him by this self-same referential relationship: “It is precisely through its comparison and union with the Creator that it is other than him.” This abyss that separates the two forms of being is the fact of creation, which in and of itself surrounds that which is created with a magic circle, which it will never escape. There is no stratagem by which the creature will ever understand its own origins. . . . There is, in effect, in a created being a fundamental character that at one and the same time reveals to it and hides from it its origins. This is the *diástēma*, or the *diástasis*, which is to say, spacing. (*PT*, 27-28)<sup>71</sup>

In this passage *diástasis* marks not only an essential metaphysical dimension of created being vis-à-vis God but also the cognitive condition under which human beings perceive transcendence: the reality of the Creator is both revealed in a union-in-relationship across *diástasis* and hidden by that very *diástasis*. For Gregory there is no scientific

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<sup>71</sup> Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Marc Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); the quotation in Balthasar’s text from Gregory’s *C. Eunom.* 1 and there is also a citation of *In. Cant.* 10. The book was originally written in French in 1939 and published in 1942. “Spacing” is how the translator renders Balthasar’s French *espacement*. I continue here to romanize the Greek words in Balthasar’s text and put them in italics, as has been my practice. Once he has introduced them in Greek fonts, the translator of *PT* “Englishes” [sic] these Greek words and allows them stand in plain type.

methodology that will ever be able to comprehend the origins of created being, due to the profundity of the abyss that is *diástasis*. This insight from Gregory will remain with Balthasar throughout his writings, of which we have already seen some evidence in *GL7*.

However, there is a sense of hope even in the kind of religious experience in which this *diástasis* between God and creation becomes apparent. The Liddell & Scott *Lexicon* gives a range of classical definitions for *diástasis* from “standing aloof” to “difference” to “divorce,”<sup>72</sup> but the common sense is that of separation between to entities in a kind of relationship. *Diástēma*, from the passage above, more generally means “interval” and Balthasar’s translator in *Presence and Thought* points out that he seems to use this term most frequently in the book (*PT*, 28, n.16). However, it is considered to be interchangeable with all the other terms for distance in *PT* and the transliteration *diástasis* occurs frequently in *GL7* and *TD4* when referring to the primary sense of distance between God and creation. According to Gregory, *diástasis* is a “character” in all created reality, comprised of “the categories of time and space, considered, not as qualities added in some way to finite being, but as the intimate substance of its being.” Balthasar quotes Gregory going even further, “to be more precise”: “spacing (*diástēma*) is nothing other than creation” (*PT*, 28). In such a statement, the eventful and “verbal” senses of both *diástasis* and creation emerge. However, in *PT* and in Gregory of Nyssa’s thought, this is to be fundamentally contrasted with God:

In God all diastasis is excluded, be it in the distinction between his Persons or in his nature as such. It is necessary, therefore, that this diastasis be linked to the idea of creation itself. (Ibid.; includes citations from several of Gregory’s texts.)

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<sup>72</sup> *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. “*diástasis*.”

This does not present a contradiction with some of Balthasar's later thought on distance if one distinguishes the related senses that emerge from those works. *Diástasis* is linked to the idea of creation, but in *GL7* it is also linked to the *event* of creation and therefore also to trinitarian life. As we shall see, in Balthasar's reading of the NT God incorporates this created *diástasis* into the triune life by grace, by means of the kenosis and Incarnation described in Phil 2:6-11. Recalling Balthasar's reference to Sergei Bulgakov, there is a free selflessness in the Trinity that serves as the condition for the event of creation (213), as we noted in Chapter II on kenosis in *GL7*:

...for the creator here gives up a part of his freedom to the creature, in the act of creating; but this he can dare to do only in virtue of his foreseeing and taking into account the second and truest kenosis, that of the Cross, in which he makes good the uttermost consequences of creation's freedom, and goes beyond them.... (214)

Again, as we saw in Chapter II, the Son actively and freely translates his own eternal begetting by the Father into the act of his free kenosis into Incarnation and obedience unto death on earth:

In this, kenosis—as the surrender of the 'form of God'—becomes the decisive act of love of the Son, who translates his being begotten by the Father ... into the expressive form of creaturely obedience.... (214)

In *TD4*, this begetting of the Son by the Father was seen as the Father's *Urkenosis* (*TD4*, 326), which expands upon Balthasar's citation of Bulgakov in *GL7* on the "the 'selflessness' of the divine persons, as of pure relations in the love within the Godhead" which serve "as the basis of everything" (213-4).

As we shall see below in *TD4*, the divine Personal selflessness in the trinitarian kenosis is the conditions for the possibility for the four kinds of distance in Balthasar's thought. In *GL7* distance that expresses the love of God for the whole world is allowed

by the loving unity of the Persons in the Trinity (249). The glory of the Lord in Christ is the recapitulation of all creation in its *diástasis* from God into a union with God in a new and beautiful form that corresponds to the divine Trinity itself. Beauty necessarily involves form, which in turn involves limits. Indeed, Balthasar notes in *PT*:

It is important, if we are to go farther, to consider that the limits of a finite being are at the same time its contours, its form, its beauty. It is in fact Divine Wisdom that “has circumscribed each being within its own proper dimensions, by giving it a suitable rhythm as a limit, so to speak, so that it may be included in the rightful harmony of the universe”. (*PT*, 29; quotation from *C. Eunom.* 1.)

Balthasar’s reading of Gregory here implies a reference to the Book of Wisdom, particularly with regard to Wisdom’s power to give order to created being in 7:22-8:1 and 11:20-26. At the conclusion of *GL7*, the third and last Part of which is a pneumatology and an ecclesiology, the wisdom of God that Paul proclaims in 1 Cor 2:6-16 does indeed bestow a new glorious form on the believers in the Church:

Here, the eschaton is no longer God’s own glory which holds sway in the world and has become manifest, nor even our glorification of this divine glory, but explicitly ‘our glory’. God goes with us to the extent of clothing us in the mantle of his divinity which is reserved to himself alone, and we are permitted to penetrate into God to such an extent that we become wholly radiant in divine light. (524)

There is no explicit mention of any variety of distance by any explicit names in this passage, but the kind of distance that marks out the Son’s path to us in the economic Trinity and by which we are led back to God in is implied via phrases such as God’s “going with us” and our “penetrating into” the life of God.<sup>73</sup> God makes creation beautiful by including it entirely, even its very distance from God, within the distance

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<sup>73</sup> It must always be remembered that such “access” to the life of God is an entirely mediated access, given by the grace of the Spirit and through the Incarnate Son. Neither Gregory nor Balthasar would ever posit that such access allows created being to see or participate in the life of the immanent Trinity—they would consider such a thought unbiblical inconsistent with the fundamental presupposition of God’s utter difference from the world.



traveled by the Son to redeem all of creation. Therefore, in consistency with what Balthasar says in *PT*, distance is not (yet) a fundamental characteristic of the immanent Trinity in *GL7*, but it is a fundamental characteristic of the economic Trinity. We will proceed with an examination of the central passage on distance in *GL7* and then observe its ramifications in other subsequent passages in the book.

## ***2. Distance as the full range of divine love in John and as kenosis in Philippians***

The chapter entitled “The Request for Glorification” is the context for the essential passages on distance in *GL7*. It comes at the center of the volume at the beginning of the middle Part, “We Have Seen His Glory,” on the perceptibility of God’s glory. Keeping in mind the fundamental sense of *diastasis* between God and creation that Balthasar always presumes, we now focus on a passage and a footnote on pages 248-9 in which he offers the definition of the kind of distance prevalent in *GL7*.

As a reminder of some background for this passage from the Introduction in *GL7*, in order for the Son to manifest the full scope of God’s glory, he must “go down into the absolute contradiction of the Lord’s glory,” which entails the Cross, death, and “the formless chaos of Hell” (14). The glory of the Lord is then allowed to shine across what was an unbridgeable distance but which now shows the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, as well as the real way in which the world is joined to God “in the new and eternal covenant” (*ibid.*):

The uttermost distance—the dimensions of which go to the extreme on both sides—proves for John the identity of the obedience and love in the Son, and likewise the substantial identity of the personal love of the Son and the personal love of the Father. (248-9)

As was noted in Chapter II, the “extremes on both sides” of this distance are the “highest majesty” of the trinitarian love in the Godhead and the “deepest descent” of the Son into death and Hell (248). In addition to the identity of obedience with love and that of the two “personal loves” of the Father and Son that Balthasar sees proven in this uttermost distance, he points out another crucial identity in the footnote to the word “distance”:

We choose this word [distance] to express the process described by John, which is indeed materially identical with the ‘kenosis’ mentioned in the Philippians hymn, but presupposes an explicit trinitarian thinking and therefore merits a terminology that makes this distinction plain. (n.5, 249)

The word that Balthasar uses in the German text of this section of *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2 is *Diastase*.<sup>74</sup> By means of *Diastase* Balthasar expresses a dynamic act, a “process” that has an eternal dimension in the Trinity, an earthly dimension in the Cross of Jesus, and another earthly dimension in the fruitfulness that is borne out in the lives of the followers of Jesus (250). Balthasar sums up what he means by this “process in John” in a pneumatological context that is part of the “trinitarian thinking”:

In this whole process lies that which Jesus calls his glorification through the Spirit (16.14), which is nothing other than the bringing to light of the love that lies in obedience, of the identity with the loving Father that lies in the distance [*Diastase*].<sup>75</sup> (252)

For Balthasar, the Persons of the Trinity thus have an identity with each other in John’s Gospel that includes the idea of *Diastase*. In order to better understand the material identity that Balthasar claims this process has with the kenosis of Phil 2:5-11, the details of the process in John must be explained.

Balthasar sees this process described by John in the priestly prayer of Jesus for his disciples at the end of the Last Supper Discourses in John 17. The description begins

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<sup>74</sup> *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 230.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

with Jesus' request for glorification in John 17:1, in which the Son honors the Father's sovereign freedom: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you..." (John 17:1). The description ends with Jesus resting in the infallibility of the Father's love, praying that his loved ones may join him there:

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:22-4)

Because of the immensity of the process of separation from the Father that the Son will experience in his kenosis on the Cross (Phil 2:7), which will include the recapitulation of all of the lost into the glorious unity of the New Covenant, the dimensions of this trinitarian love can only be marked out by a kind of "economic" distance between the Father and Son. But this distance also corresponds to a perceived distance (*Diastase*)<sup>76</sup> between the Son's obedience on earth, which is his visible kenosis, and eternal trinitarian love (251).

The distance of the descent from the majesty of the Father to the Cross is thus the condition under which the Son reveals an utterly transcendent state of reality, namely, trinitarian difference-in-unity. Jesus' obedient action is dynamic, and yet it shows forth an integration of an eternally determined event into his human life:

The uttermost end that the Son enters is the revelation of a beginning that could not otherwise have been made known; that is, it reveals that the whole obedience upon earth of the Son has its source, not in a spontaneous decision of his human ego to offer himself for a commission that comes from outside himself, but in a decision made absolutely in advance, which is the basis of his earthly existence. (247)

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 232.

Then, “like a law of the logic within the Godhead” (248) that can only be expressed “in the intratrinitarian dialogic form of a request” for the glorification that only the Father can give him, the Father does glorify him. It is important to note that the “inner trinitarian law” and the prayerful request that Jesus makes are conceptually distinct from each other, but only because the former must be mediated to us by the latter. The confidence of the request manifests both the identity of love and obedience in the Son and the “substantial identity of the personal love of the Son and the personal love of the Father” (248-9). There is a perceptible analogue between the christological act of the Son in love-as-obedience and the trinitarian life as a communion in love. *Diastase* as a mode of separation from God in its *sinful* sense is redeemed and transformed by the Son and the Spirit into a new means of perceiving the identity of obedience and love:

...the distance [*Diastase*]<sup>77</sup> between the glory of love and the obedience unto death came into existence because of the world’s darkness: and the identity that persisted in this distance must be exhibited to the world, so that ‘the world may believe’ (17.21), ‘so that the world may recognise’ (17.23). (251)

This same process of seeing and responding was described in Chapter II as a form of self-kenosis that Balthasar calls “expropriation.” But even this act of recognition is not something that the world can achieve unaided, as if human beings could see the identity of the Son’s obedience and the Father’s love in the Godhead as a purely objectifiable external phenomenon.

Because the works of the Father and the Son are both “exhausted” in the mutual love that has its double aspect of glory and obedience, it is the work of the Spirit to manifest the identity of these aspects in the world (251). The Spirit, who is “at the sovereign disposal of Father and Son [and] also sovereignly of itself” (252) comes into

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

the world after the Ascension to declare the union that the Son has with the Father (John 16:14): “He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The procession of the Son from the Father is the kenosis of the Son of the *morphē theoū* (Phil 2:6), but their communion within the Trinity is maintained even across the distance from the height of divine majesty to the abasement of the Cross:

Therefore Jesus can indeed link the salvific coming of the Spirit to his own departure (16.7), but at the same time promise that he will return to the believers (in the coming of the Spirit, 14.18), together with his Father (14.23), because *the distance* [Diastase] *has now been taken up into the identity and dissolved* [aufgehoben]:<sup>78</sup> ‘Then you will grasp that I am in my Father’ (14.20). (253, emphasis added.)

The same particular relationship between these two German words in this passage was noted in a similar context above in Chapter II, §2.e., where the *Diastase* also had the clear Hegelian dialectical sense of being *aufgehoben*, “dissolved” but also “taken up into the identity” (308-9; there in noun form, *Aufhebung*). In that context as well as here there is a *Diastase* between the Father and the Son, and the *Aufhebung* takes place in the Ascension. The Spirit interprets for the world the Son’s “identity with the loving Father that lies in the distance” for the world without proclaiming itself to be “the self-glorifying absolute love of God” (252). In this way, the Spirit itself remains completely transparent to the glory that the Father shares with the Son.

The mutual loves of the Father and Son for each other have a common identity as one love (250), and the Spirit is the fruit of this love who in its Personhood “speaks,” “declares,” and “glorifies” that love in the Church and in the world (252). Accordingly, Gardner and Moss see Balthasar’s conception of Godhead as something beyond a single,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 234.

resolvable, static “identity.” Rather, the unity of the Godhead is an event that involves three different “identities” that are mutually constituted in their relations:

For Balthasar, all difference and all distance (including the difference of creation from God, and ultimately the distance of the sinner from God) can only occur within the infinite difference of the Son from the Father. ...[A]s John Milbank has eloquently argued, this (‘original’) difference between the Father and the Son itself also only occurs within the Spirit’s (a ‘second’) difference from them both. ... This ‘trinitarian differencing’, by virtue of which each of the three Persons (including the Father) receives its identity as a Person and as God, and also its non-identity with the other two Persons, is the ‘event’ of God. It is the ‘event’ of the identity of the Triune God, for this differencing also *is* God.<sup>79</sup>

The Spirit makes the “event” of the love of the Father and the Son available to the Church, offering it the chance to be included within it by establishing a new form across a newly redeemed distance:

*Here new distance [Diastase]<sup>80</sup> in identity opens up: between the vine and its branches, between Christ and his Church; and as the Father is glorified in the Son, so is Christ through the working of the Spirit in his Church. (253, emphasis added.)*

This is, in effect, a new creation that establishes a new *diastasis* analogous to the first kind in *PT*, the *diastasis* that *is* the very event and fact of creation (*PT*, 28).

The Son underwent a separation from the Father within the Trinity in his kenosis so that we might have a new identity with him across our distance from him in the economy. The Spirit witnesses to the union of the Father and Son across this distance, which is the Son’s glorification by the Spirit. The Church also glorifies the Son, but they can only do it by the power of the Spirit, who bridges the distance between Christ and the Church and bears witness to the identity of obedience unto death on the Cross with the exalting love of the Father (because this already shares an identity with the Personal love

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<sup>79</sup> Gardner and Moss, “Something like Time,” 116-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 234.

of the Son; 249-50). The Spirit actively speaks to the disciples, exhorting them, reminding them of what Jesus said and thus manifesting its own Personhood in the life of the Church (251).

Balthasar quotes John 17:21 when he discusses the union of the Son's obedience and the Father's love across their distance from each other and how the Spirit exhibits it to the world "so that the world may recognise" it (251). But this passage in John is in the context of Jesus' priestly prayer for the union of his disciples with him and with each other, "as we [the Father and Son] are one" (17:22), "so that the world may recognise" that the Father loves them just as the Father loves the Son. The world will recognize this union of the Church and Christ by perceiving its form, not in spite of but even because of the distance between the two poles of tension in the form, which is what gives it beauty as it is included in the perceptible glory of God. What David Schindler says about Balthasar's dramatic conception of truth as *Gestalt* ("form") can be transposed to the tension in the form that includes the two poles of Christ and Church:

...polarities can remain polarities only within Gestalts of various sorts. The moment we see that every Gestalt itself represents a certain polarity, the nature of the problem becomes different. The question, in this case, is the following: Is there a way that the irreducibly different tensions that make up any "relative" whole—that is, transcendence and immanence, infinity and finitude, sensibility and supersensibility, and so forth—can converge in a single paradigmatic whole, such that their difference can be preserved without the danger of fragmentation?<sup>81</sup>

This difference-in-unity can only be preserved by the glory of the New Covenant, when the Church acknowledges Christ as LORD from the depths of its own existence and the world is invited to take on the beauty of its form as the servant of Christ, who himself came in the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). If the Church "has this mind" (2:5) among its

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<sup>81</sup> D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 255-6.

members in a communion of love with each other, the world will see this form, which is both a christocentric and ultimately a trinitarian form.

If this is the case, from the side of creation, the revelation of the Trinity unfolds in a fundamentally existential mode of perceiving: the revelation of Christ makes a demand on one's life if one is truly to give it its due. The believers must love each other and love others, if the world is to see the form of their union with each other and with God. In *GL7*, the distance between the eternally loving decision in the heart of God and Jesus' earthly act of obedience on the Cross becomes the condition for seeing a form, the form of God's glory as it shines out from its excess. As was noted also in the context of Gregory of Nyssa's thought above, here knowing oneself as a creature is part of the intellectual appropriation of the revelation of God, because it defines one in one's proper form and manifests the beauty of creation and the love of the Creator (*PT*, 28-9).

In Balthasar's conclusion to the chapter we have been considering, "The Request for Glorification," it is the range of the glory spread out to its proper dimensions that constitutes what is theologically beautiful and worthy of contemplation:

The centre and proper object of a doctrine concerning what is theologically beautiful would then lie in this equilibrium, brought about through creative obedience, between God and the world and thereby between the (Old Testament) archetype (God) and the creaturely image and likeness (man); .... (262)

But if this "doctrine of the theologically beautiful" were "merely" christocentric, consisting only in this equilibrium over distance between God and the world centered on a merely human Messiah, it would not account for how profoundly empty Christ is of any claim to control "the relationship between his obedience to the Father and his own glory." Rather, Jesus relies entirely on the Father to send the Spirit to manifest this glory:



This transparency realises itself both in his claim and in his authority, which are the authorised representation of the Father, and in his whole poverty and self-abandonment, which free the whole space for the Father to act in him. ... The glory of the Father can make itself ‘substantially’ present ... in the incarnate Son. *In this way theological aesthetics is transposed from christocentrism into a final (trinitarian) theocentrism*, in which of course *the Holy Spirit too receives a central place as the one who effects the mutual indwelling in love between Christ and the Father*: the Holy Spirit is the personal identity of the personal distinction in the Godhead. (262-3, emphasis added.)

The Spirit makes visible the dimensions of the space for God’s glory across the distance between the height of God’s majesty in eternity and the abasement of the Son on the Cross, between the superabundance of the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s totally kenotic love in his obedience to the Father. Balthasar thus shows how distance is the fundamental mode under which we perceive the unity of trinitarian glory in its proper form. In the next section we will examine another passage that delves deeper into the phenomenon of *seeing* in *GL7*. It concerns not only the phenomenon of seeing, but the seeing of a phenomenon who is a Person who beckons and draws us into its depths.

### **3. *Distance: seeing, being seen, and being formed***

There are two passages to be considered on the relationship between distance and seeing in the next chapter of Pt.II, “The Substance of Glory.” The first is a commentary on the use of language in John’s Gospel:

Every symbolic word that transcends a mere subject-object schema (of the one who sees and the one who is seen) is pressed into service: light, life fullness, grace, truth, glory (1.14, 16), way to the Father (14.6), resurrection from death to the life of God (11.25); that which is seen, Jesus, is not only the perfect dynamic transparency to the Father, but, beyond this, the perfect immanence of what has been shown, so that his departure to the Father—which removes the *diastasis* [*Diastase*]<sup>82</sup> between the one who obeys and the one who is ‘greater’ (14.28) and who

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<sup>82</sup> *Herrlichkeit* III.2/2, 272.

commands him—becomes his perfect coming and indwelling together with the Father (14.23). (292)

Note how in this passage the translator renders the original German *Diastase* as the transliterated Greek *diastasis*. This is somewhat confusing in translation, as the sense of distance meant in this context is clearly the exaltation and Ascension as it was for other occurrences of the word *Diastase*. More specifically, the present context is on the mysterious “perceptibility,” in faith and in the Spirit, of the trinitarian mutual indwelling that comes after the withdrawal of Jesus to the Father. The next passage on distance and seeing makes this very connection:

The *kenosis* and *diastasis* [also *Diastase*]<sup>83</sup> of Christ cannot be imitated, but a possible configuration to them lies in making oneself empty of oneself (cf. Matt 5.8) in order to be filled by the active ‘image’ of the love of God in Christ which imprints itself on one.

As a whole, seeing [in] the New Testament<sup>84</sup> remains originally and definitively based in the perception of the form of God’s appearing in Christ, and it is this basis that lets it remain open for every form of deeper and more total grasping of the one who lets himself be seen. (294)

These two passages are programmatic statements regarding the fundamental religious experience to which the New Testament bears witness: to be drawn into a love that both recedes from beyond the realm of our own subjective control, and yet imprints itself upon us. It is a love that cannot be seen except in a fundamental personal hiddenness that perpetually defies all categorization when we press words into service to describe it.

In Balthasar’s thinking with regard to withdrawal and absence in the first passage above, Jesus’ “departure to the Father [that] becomes his perfect coming and indwelling together with the Father” and then becomes in turn the necessary condition for the disciples to receive the Spirit who *interprets* the departure (289). Balthasar does not

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>84</sup> This is a slight revision of the English translation, which reads “seeing the New Testament.” The original German reads “neutestamentliches Sehen,” or “New Testament seeing” (ibid., 274).

quote John's own scriptural witness to this, but it is a useful illustration that is consistent with everything that Balthasar has thus said about the Spirit as the interpreter of the Son's life and mission after he has exhausted himself in obedience to the Father:

But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, 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 16:5-7)

After the disciples' paschal experience with Jesus, the Son's perfect indwelling with the Father is shared with the Church by the Spirit. This happens in the experience of Jesus' withdrawal, both in the Ascension and also other ways witnessed in the Gospels.

One relevant example (which Balthasar himself does not mention in this context) is the experience of the disciples in Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). They see Jesus in the breaking of bread but are able to interpret their experience of Jesus' presence among them only after he has withdrawn from them, when they are filled with joy and hope.<sup>85</sup> There is something parallel to these foundational experiences of the risen Jesus in all subsequent religious experiences that are expressly Christian:

...the foundation of all later perception of the Church—a perception that goes deeper in faith and recognition!—is the fact, in its historicity, that the eyewitness 'saw, heard, and touched'. (289)

But Balthasar goes on to insist that even this original experience of seeing was a "total experience of faith" and not merely a function of physiological sight. The disciples

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<sup>85</sup> In Jean-Luc Marion's exegesis of this passage ("They Recognized Him; and He Became Invisible to Them," *Modern Theology* 18:2, April 2002), Jesus becomes known to the disciples before he withdraws; but by signifying his presence *symbolically* to them in the breaking of the bread (150), he allows an excessive and incomprehensible glory to make itself visible at what could be called a certain *conceptual* "distance": "because such a phenomenon, pre-eminently saturated, cannot be touched (John 20:17), nor even contemplated in this world which, in this time, does not 'have the space' to contain the significations that would have to be 'written' (John 21:25)" (151-2).

certainly saw something, but it was an experience that always pointed “beyond itself (Jn 1.50f) to the interpretation and the understanding of the one who is seen, ...” (ibid.).

Returning to the second passage quoted at the beginning of this section, it is true that the “*kenosis* and *diastasis* [*Diastase*] of Christ [himself] cannot be imitated” (294), but there is a way in which the very spiritual perception of this *kenosis* and *Diastase* conforms the seer to what is being seen, if one allows it to happen. One must be open to these experiences in a way that corresponds to (without being able to imitate) Jesus’ absolute openness and transparency to the Father’s love, will, and glory. We allow ourselves to be “expropriated” by God’s intentionality towards us in the religious experience of seeing (partially) as we are seen, in hopes of a fullness that is promised in God’s future: “‘But then I will grasp fully, just as I have been fully grasped’ (1 Cor 13.12)” (295).

In another exegesis of Philipians, Balthasar explains that Jesus’ withdrawal not only reveals the unseen God but also seizes, shapes, and determines the new form of those who look upon the Son. This newly given form that we attain in being seized by the Father in our yearning for the return of the Son will be made complete only in the eschaton:

At Phil 3.21 Paul speaks of the yearning for the Lord who will return and ‘will transform (*metaschematisei*) the body of our lowliness into the configuration (*súmmorphon*) of the body of his glory, in accordance with (form-giving) power (*enérgeia*) with which he is able to submit all things to himself’. (293)

The Christian and the Church therefore have an open-ended existence, conditioned by the incomprehensible glory of Christ, the glory that is to be revealed in the world when we are set free from bondage to decay (Rom 8:18-21). This is the form of the Church, the

full scope of which is incomprehensible as God is incomprehensible, because Jesus Christ includes himself in it with us as the Spirit bestows it upon us. All theology must remain open to a future in which the glory of this form becomes fully manifest, as to the vanishing point that Balthasar indicates in the Preface: “we pursue it, without fancying to ourselves that we have grasped it wholly (Phil 3.12f)” (10).

#### **4. How the NT distance in *GL7* is developed in Theo-Drama IV**

What remains to be done is briefly to examine how NT-theological distance in *GL7* bears fruit for Balthasar as he “feels [his] way back into the mystery of the absolute,” into the eternal trinitarian relations in *TD4* (324). Based strictly on “what is manifest in God’s kenosis in the theology of the covenant—and thence in the theology of the Cross” in *GL7*, and to borrow a framework from Gardner and Moss, we can say that there is “something like” distance in the Trinity, but that distance is “more like” whatever is in the Trinity than the trinitarian distinctions are like distance.<sup>86</sup> Just as Gregory of Nyssa refuses to speak of trinitarian difference in God as diastasis (*PT*, 28), neither does Balthasar explicitly refer to the eternal, immanent trinitarian difference within God as “distance” in *GL7*.

This changes somewhat in the *Theo-Drama*. There is at least one passage in *TD4* that refers to the “eternal” distance that exists between the Father and the Son “in the Spirit” as the condition for God’s dramatic action in the economy of salvation:<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> At the end of their very masterful chapter in which they attempt a retrieval of Balthasar in light of contemporary criticisms of his thinking on the nature of sexual difference, under their heading of “*Under the direction of kenotic difference*,” Gardner and Moss note that “the secret of analogy is that time is *more like* ‘something like time’ [in God] than ‘something like time’ is ‘like’ time; that sexual difference is *more like* ‘something like the sexes’ [in God] than that something is ‘like’ sexual difference, or the sexes. ... It is creation which is the image, not God”; “Something like Time,” 125.

<sup>87</sup> Citations of Balthasar on distance are from Horner, “A Theology of Distance,” 52.

This dramatic aspect does not entangle the immanent Trinity in the world's fate, as occurs in mythology, but it *does* lift the latter's fate to the level of the economic Trinity, which always presupposes the immanent. This is because *the Son's eternal, holy distance from the Father, in the Spirit*, forms the basis on which the unholy distance of the world's sin can be transposed into it, can be transcended and overcome by it. (*TD4*, 362; emphasis added.)

The German word that “distance” translates in this passage is *Distanz*.<sup>88</sup> In the context of soteriology, the “unholy *Distanz*” above corresponds to the sinful distance that Christ overcomes, which Horner identifies as Balthasar's second type.<sup>89</sup> The “eternal, holy *Distanz*” between the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit is Balthasar's third type, which was not explicitly developed. Yet, as Horner points out, in Balthasar's thought it is this distance which forms the conditions for all other kinds of distance, whether it be created distance, the sinful distance of humanity's rejection of the holy, or the salvific, reconciling distance of the divine economy.

The passage above from *TD4* serves as an example of the direction Balthasar goes in his trinitarian theology based on the work that he has done in the New Testament theology of *GL7*, but it also implies another passage in *TD4* that we have already cited in Chapter II at the end of the section on glory by way of introducing kenosis:

Accordingly, there is only one way to approach the trinitarian life in God: *on the basis of what is manifest in God's kenosis in the theology of the covenant—and thence in the theology of the Cross*—we must feel our way back into the mystery of the absolute, employing a negative theology that excludes from God all intramundane experience and suffering, while at the same time presupposing that the possibility of such experience and suffering—up to and including is christological and trinitarian implications—is grounded in God. (*TD4*, 324; emphasis added.)

To borrow the useful analogical framework from Gardner and Moss yet again, there is “something like” experience and suffering in God. Metaphysically speaking, this could

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<sup>88</sup> *Theodramatik* Bd III, 337.

<sup>89</sup> Horner, “A Theology of Distance,” 52

be a way that Balthasar imperfectly paraphrases Aquinas from Question 13 from the *Summa* on whether some of the words we say about God are applied literally or are all entirely metaphorical: distance, the suffering of abandonment, joy, and mutual love are words and images that

In regard to what they express ... apply literally to God, and indeed more properly to him than to creatures, and so primarily to him. But as regards their manner of expressing it, they don't apply literally to God; for their manner of expression is appropriate only to creatures. (*ST* I.q.13, art.3)<sup>90</sup>

There is very probably a more apt comparison to make between Balthasar and Aquinas on analogical language. My point in this chapter has been that distance functions in *GL7* as a cipher for a variety of NT images and experiences of grandeur, beauty, and contrasts between hope and suffering that all speak of the mysteriously excessive glory of God. This glory comes to us in a love that takes us completely by surprise and makes the way that we relate to the world completely new. But because distance functions like a cipher in Balthasar's thought in a way analogous to how he sees glory function in the NT, it only points to and circles around the God who is its referent, never giving a definitive word and always being subject to being emptied of all prior meanings when an experience of the holy encounters us and then withdraws, leaving us yet again to allow for new interpretations as we ponder it in our hearts.

In the attempt at a better understanding of Balthasar on glory, kenosis, and distance that I have undertaken in this essay, I have focused mostly on the internal coherence of Balthasar's thinking in *GL7*. Therefore any sense that emerges here of how successful Balthasar has been in rigorously staying within the boundaries of his own "negative theology," which he makes so programmatic in *PT*, *GL7*, and *TD4* depends

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<sup>90</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 220.

entirely on how clear this essay has been, as I have not directly addressed many criticisms of Balthasar in the secondary literature. One of the most significant criticisms of him, which is combined with an admiring retrieval of some of his most powerful insights, is from Gardner and Moss in “Something like Time – Something like the Sexes.” Their main criticism of him comes in the form of questioning whether Balthasar slips into a kind of essentialism in the area of sexual difference that he would otherwise eschew.

A similar question might be posed here with regard to the “eternal trinitarian *Distanz*” in *TD4*: is Balthasar being too cataphatic when he starts speaking of the *Urkenosis* of the Father, when *GL7* points out how eloquently Paul has already written on the kenosis of the Son and John on the glory of the Father? Are not Paul and John enough, regarding this topic? We have said nothing yet of how the Persons of the Trinity “surprise” each other in *TD5*, which requires quite an elaborate speculation on top of what are supposed to be “apophatic” principles and methods in all valid trinitarian theology (*TD4*, 324). No serious theologian in the history of the Christian Church has ever been able to entirely avoid the connection between deep reflection and speculation on the trinitarian relations with giving an account for the hope that is in them (Peter 3:15). In this essay I have begun this task by focusing on a coherence, even if mostly internal, among Balthasar’s ideas of glory, kenosis, distance, and Trinity in his reading of John and Paul in the New Testament.

In an attempt to indicate some of the wider concerns of Balthasar’s coherence as a theologian and a thinker, some of the philosophical and theological directions that are indicated by what Balthasar has said about glory, kenosis, and distance in *GL7* will receive a brief glance in the concluding chapter that follows. Balthasar’s theology of



distance puts him in dialogue with some modern and postmodern philosophies of religious experience, and most directly with current streams of French phenomenology. The trajectory of Balthasar's influence on Jean-Luc Marion will briefly be explored and new directions for research suggested.

## CONCLUSION

In the attempt to understand how glory and kenosis in Balthasar's New Testament theology are linked with his trinitarian theology of distance, I have maintained that there exists a general idea in *GL7* and other texts, expressed by "distance," that functions as a cipher. I likened it to the cipher of glory in *GL7*, but the analogy is limited. While Balthasar himself indicates that the 116 occurrences of "glory" and the 60 occurrences of "to glorify" in the NT cover a vast array of images, events, and divine qualities (239-40), I have conveniently followed Robyn Horner in enumerating only four kinds of distance in Balthasar, showing how one appears in *PT*, three in *GL7*, and one in *TD4*. However, since this four-part framework of my so-called "cipher" of distance comes from a scholarly introduction to Jean-Luc Marion, it is worth reflecting briefly on how Balthasar has also laid the foundations for some theological connections with current trends in phenomenology and the philosophy of religion. By such connections theology can avail itself of a language both true to itself and also coherent across religious borders or the borders between theology and other academic disciplines. This chapter functions only as a groundwork for such efforts in the future, or even rather as the suggestion for such a groundwork.

We have not focused at all on *Theo-Drama V* in this essay, but in it Balthasar makes a claim that builds upon what we have seen in *PT*, *GL7*, and *TD4*. In Pt.I, “The World is from God,” in the first chapter, “The World is from the Trinity,” he writes:

If God’s idea of the world is to bring heaven and earth together in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time, ... it follows that this incorporation of all created beings into the Begotten is, in trinitarian terms, the most intimate manner of union with God. For it implies that the creaturely “other-than-God” is plunged into the uncreated “Other-in-God” *while maintaining* that fundamental “distance” which alone makes love possible. (*TD5*, 105; emphasis in English translation.)<sup>91</sup>

The distance that is “maintained” by grace now and in the eschaton refers to that fundamental *diastasis* between God and creation that Balthasar names in *PT* and presumes as the basis of all theological thought. By sharing in the trinitarian life by grace, this distance is renewed by God by virtue of the *Diastase* between Father and Son in the divine economy, which allows *diastasis* between God and creation to become a the very conditions for a new loving relationship in mutuality. There is a footnote at the end of this passage in which Balthasar both quotes Adrienne von Speyr (“Distance now signifies fullness”) and advises the reader to “Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *L’Idole et la distance*,” but without giving any page citations or a reason why one should consult it. But it shows that there is at least something in Marion’s work on distance that Balthasar finds noteworthy, and as Robyn Horner notes, “the principle origin of the concept of distance in Marion’s thought is probably Hans Urs von Balthasar.”<sup>92</sup> We will soon see how Marion makes his debt to Balthasar on both distance and kenosis quite explicit.

Marion’s concerns in *The Idol and Distance* are Being, metaphysics, and conceptual idolatry. In this context he draws insight from Balthasar:

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<sup>91</sup> *Theo-Drama, Vol. V: The Last Act*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

<sup>92</sup> Horner, “A Theology of Distance,” *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction*, 51-2.

In ... the breakthrough signaled by H. Urs von Balthasar, it becomes possible not, to be sure, to liken the gift where Being is sheltered to the gift where the Father (for-)gives us in the Son, but to sense that between them there plays a sort of redoubling of distance: distance places the gift of Being at a distance from itself, as its icon. And there also, there especially, “without change or confusion, without division or separation.”<sup>93</sup>

The “gift where Being is sheltered” is the “anonymous donation” in Heidegger<sup>94</sup> in which a phenomenon arises to view, but in such a way that its origins in Being remain utterly inaccessible. It *arrives* from “somewhere” with a mysterious intentionality, but that somewhere is “nowhere” for all intents and purposes. By comparison in John, no one is supposed to know where the Messiah is from, so the scribes reject Jesus because of his Galilean origins (7:27), namely, from God. But Jesus turns this very argument into evidence that he *is* the Messiah, *because* the scribes do *not* know where he is from in the one sense of his reality that should really matter to them (7:27-8). In the salvific *Diastase* of *GL7* which the Son traverses from the Father, the primordial *diastasis* of Gregory in *PT* is “redoubled,” by which the Father “places” the Son as a gift and icon of himself at a distance from himself that corresponds exactly to the *diastasis* that is our fundamental condition. What formerly signaled (“signified”—A. von Speyr) *only* difference from God in *diastasis* (*PT*) is now enveloped in a *new* distance, the salvific NT *Diastase* (*GL7*) that establishes the conditions for Jesus’ union both with us and with God, “without change or confusion, without division or separation.”

Again, Marion’s point in drawing on Balthasar here is not concerning the “what” or the “who” on either end of the gift-giver pole, but rather what happens with the *distance* that is between them. In his own programmatic phenomenological work, *Being*

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<sup>93</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), xxxvi.

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

*Given*, Marion considers the phenomenon in terms of a gift in its sheer givenness, “the gift according to givenness ends up, in principle, at the equivalence of what gives *itself* and what shows *itself*.”<sup>95</sup> In trinitarian theology by contrast, the Son does not “give himself”<sup>96</sup> but allows the Father to give him, and the Father and the Son together give the Spirit who is distinct from both of them. For Marion the giver is not present and not visible in the phenomenological gift, seen strictly according to the immanence of its givenness, and there is no a priori conditioning of this phenomenon by the givee, à la Kant. But because of Balthasar’s “breakthrough” and with a kind of Balthasarian insight, Marion uses the language of phenomenology and borrows the language of Chalcedon on the two natures of Christ to talk about how the phenomenological gift comes to the receiver across a *distance* with the full intentionality of the “really real” mysteriously behind it. The phenomenological gift is the icon of “Being,” distinct from absolute Being and yet united with it as the symbolic image that mediates its mysterious, hidden excess. The *diastasis* that already exists as an abyss between the receiving subject and absolute mystery is now “redoubled” by in the gift and marks the gift’s status as a true phenomenon. This is Marion’s proper focus in philosophy, based on what he receives from Balthasar’s theology regarding the *distance* from himself at which the Father places the gift of the Son in the Incarnation, both God and man, “without change or confusion, without division or separation.” In the quotation from Marion above, the mysterious quality of the gift can then emerge in thought, so that we can see that it is *more* than what

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<sup>95</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: SUP, 2002), 115.

<sup>96</sup> Although, interestingly enough, Jesus *does* give himself in Eucharist. This is a related but different consideration that deserves more space than can be given here.

is seen, in a kind of union with the depths behind it that is perceptible even if not graspable.

There is a related parallel with Marion in Balthasar in how God's intentionality is primary in the event of perceiving divine glory, as we noted in Ch.II, §2.e on kenosis:

This [absolute trinitarian] love, however, is not an object that one could contemplate (thereby 'objectivising' it) from an impartial stance; it is seen to be what it is, only when one is oneself seized by it. ...[I]t is only absolute love itself that can empower one to see absolute love. In the Son who offers himself to our gaze, the Father 'draws' those who believe in him—who perceive the love in him—to the Son (Jn 6.44). (291)

This resonates with what Marion says about "Icon of the Invisible" and "The Face [that] Envisages" in *God Without Being*:<sup>97</sup>

The icon regards us—it *concerns* us, in that it allows the intention of the invisible to occur visibly.... The icon opens in a face, where man's sight envisages nothing, but goes back infinitely from the visible to the invisible by the grace of the visible itself: ... the icon opens in a face that gazes at our gazes in order to summon them to its depth.<sup>98</sup>

"Depth" here alludes to the themes of distance and excess that are so central for Marion, including the idea of God's "withdrawal" from what is seen at face value. The invisible summons while it withdraws into its depths.

On the topic of withdrawal, Marion writes in *The Idol and Distance*:

The one who would like an evidence of God other than this manifest withdrawal undoubtedly does not know what he asks for. Unless he asks that God himself be made *Bild, eikōn*, and therefore that he there still remain in withdrawal so that his own image might be born. And withdrawal is established then at the very heart of God: kenosis.<sup>99</sup>

In this passage Marion explicitly acknowledges the basis of this thinking on distance and withdrawal in Balthasar's chapter on "Kenosis" in *GL7*, Pt.I. In the case of human

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<sup>97</sup> Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 17-18.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>99</sup> Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 89.

perception, the icon of God can only become visible *as* an icon if the God whom the icon represents withdraws and allows the icon to be other-than-God. There is no other way to “see” it. To return briefly to *GL7*, Pt.III:

[The Spirit’s] work unfolds as a consequence of the bringing about of a ‘distance’ between the Father and the Son in the kenosis and the ‘abolition’ of this in the return of the Son to the Father, and hence lies out beyond the ‘form’ which Jesus made visible to us and the subsequent replacement of this by invisibility... (389).

The invisibility that is left when the focus of the religious experience recedes becomes part of the experience itself, by way of reflection, thought, and being drawn deeper into the mystery that has been glimpsed but never grasped.

The very theological connections that I have made between Balthasar and Marion in this conclusion have served almost more to illustrate the theological ramifications of Marion’s work than to suggest how Balthasar’s theological distance has influenced Marion’s philosophy. In order to properly do the latter task, which would also entail what Balthasar’s distance could mean for philosophy as a field, a much more extensive study of distance is needed. This is particularly the case with the *Theo-Drama* where it is developed so extensively in volumes IV and V. In focusing on the NT roots of Balthasar’s particular way of thinking theological distance in *Glory of the Lord VII*, in its interplay with kenosis and glory, my hope is that I have been able to point out some criteria by which such further research could be judged successful. If I have succeeded here in one thing, I hope it is in showing how fruitful such a field of research on theological distance in Balthasar could be.

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