

# The Understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* in Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar

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The purpose of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of the understanding of Saint Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* in two great theologians who influenced the period after Vatican Council II in the twentieth century, Karl Rahner (1904–1984) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). This analysis aims to identify the image of God as it appears in their respective theological projects, that employing the inductive method, in Rahner's theological anthropology, and that employing the deductive method, in Balthasar's theological aesthetics, and to identify how such images of God are involved in contemplative practice according to their respective theological understandings, both trying to adapt the Ignatian experience to the contemporary person, each theologian in his own way. Therefore, this study intends to analyze how the author's understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* is presented within each theological project and then to identify the similarities and differences between them. Such analysis intends to recognize how these two theologians of great scope understood spirituality first as a part of human existence and, in this context, how they understood the knowledge of God as the revelation of meaning and the source of new understanding in the search for an authentic life, even given their distinct accents both existential and on the Christian mystical tradition.

## Introduction

The proposal of the present article<sup>1</sup> is to analyze how two of the greatest theologians who influenced post-conciliar theology tried to translate Ignatian spirituality for the contemporary individual in the twentieth century. The initial hypothesis regards the

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understanding of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola<sup>2</sup> as elaborated by Karl Rahner (1904–1984) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) as a strategy for a dialogue with culture, seeing spirituality first as part of human existence, rather than as an institutionalized religious matter.

The research on this topic has encountered the problem of not finding any previously published work presenting a comparative analysis of the understandings of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola of these two theologians. Previous authors' comparative analyses have addressed other topics present in both author's theological projects, such as Conway's work<sup>3</sup> analyzing Balthasar's critique of Rahner's "anonymous Christianity", a question that can highlight the accent which Balthasar's perspective gives to Catholic identity, as well as Rahner's accent on otherness and on those who no longer give credence to the Christian faith. Cordovilla Pérez seeks to ground the reading of creation in a Christological key, recognizing a "grammar of the Mystery of Christ" in Rahner and a "dialectic of love" in Balthasar, through which each, in his own way, develops a Christ-centered theological project.<sup>4</sup> Holzer proposes an analysis of the Trinitarian theology in both authors, emphasizing Balthasar's descending theological logic as a kenosis of the absolute and Rahner's ascending theological logic as the transcendence of existence called forth by God's self-communication.<sup>5</sup> Chun investigates their eschatology and the role which the binomial Cross-Resurrection has in each theological project, seeing in Balthasar the glory of love and in Rahner the freedom of grace allowing one to conform oneself to the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Römelt proposes an analysis of how the two theological projects focus on the matter of moral theology, one emphasizing sacrifice and the other emphasizing freedom, as in certain respects one or the other may be appropriate for a responsible Christian conscience.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there are two projects which gather contributions from researchers about one or the other author, such as Scriptural interpretation, dialogue with philosophy, and patristic interpretation, seeing in Balthasar's project an insistence on the search for truth and in Rahner's project the search for a Church in diaspora, recognizing agreement in both projects on the common Ignatian origin of the theology of both authors and which projects both attempt to bring together the contribution of each of the theologians, overcoming a polemical analysis.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From here on, *SE*.

<sup>3</sup> CONWAY, E., "The anonymous Christian – A relativized Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticisms of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian". *Seris XXIII Theology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> PÉREZ, Á. C., *Gramática de la Encarnación: La creación en Cristo en la teología de K. Rahner y Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Serie I: Estudios. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2004, pp. 423–464.

<sup>5</sup> HOLZER, V., *Le Dieu Trinité dans l'Histoire: Le différend théologique Balthasar-Rahner*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995, pp. 55–149.

<sup>6</sup> CHUN, J. M., *Transformazione della Morte: Libertà di grazia in K. Rahner, gloria d'amore in H.U. von Balthasar*. Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2013, pp. 259–309.

<sup>7</sup> RÖMELT, J., *Personales Gottesverständnis in heutiger Moraltheologie: auf dem Hintergrund der Theologie von K. Rhaner und H. U. v. Balthasar*. Innsbrucker theologische Studien. Band 21, 1988, pp. 89–109.

<sup>8</sup> HOLZER, V.; GAGEY, H. J. (eds.), *Balthasar, Rahner: Deux pensées en contraste*. Collection "Theolo-

In order to analyze the understanding of the Ignatian *Exercises* of each of the two authors, we tried to select the relevant texts of both: for Balthasar the work organized by Jaques Servis in 2009 entitled *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*<sup>9</sup> was used, and for Rahner the 1965 *Betrachtungen zum Ignatianischen Exerzitiën buch*<sup>10</sup> and another text taken from the notes of retreats he led, published in 1970 and entitled *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*.<sup>11</sup> The investigation procedure consisted in situating the theological projects' general lines of enquiry or, more precisely, the Rahnerian theological anthropology and the Balthasarian theological aesthetic, and, in a second moment, mapping out how the Ignatian themes and structures of thought were presented in both, with their distinct nuances. Finally, there follows an analysis of the convergences and divergences.

## 1. The *Spiritual Exercises* in Karl Rahner

Saint Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* [SE] had a fundamental influence on the theology of the Jesuit Karl Rahner. In his theological anthropology, the *metaphysics of knowledge* is related with the *logic of existential knowledge*. Rahner sees in Ignatius of Loyola a "radical 'existentialist' Christian" [*Radikaler christlicher "existentialist"*]<sup>12</sup> prototypical of a change of epoch.<sup>13</sup> Among the existential influences with which Rahner dialogues, he clearly mentions the need for a "logotherapy" [*Logotherapie*]<sup>14</sup> that would act as a *preambula fidei* for a "mystagogy" and would help the person to become aware of the "transcendence experience" in the "concrete world". In this sense, it could be said that the *Exercises*, from the standpoint of the German Jesuit, can be understood as provoking a sense of God in the human search for meaning, that is, the search for the meaning of life, and can be understood as the experience that would offer the "conditions of possibility" for a metaphysical knowledge. This Rahnerian perspective assimilates the Kantian criticism concerning the excessive abstraction of the Second Scholasticism, instead aiming to overcome the perception of mysticism as mere "piety" or "devotion", in favor of an "existential spirituality" or even the capacity to live existentially "now" in the situation which the eschatological new times will "still" introduce. Thus, such spirituality must be marked by a relationship with the living God who acts in the

gia". Paris: Bayard, 2005; S. Zucal. "Rahner e Balthasar", In *Humanitas – Rivista Bimestrale di Cultura*, Anno LX, n. 6. Brescia: Editrice Morciana, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> BALTHASAR, H. U. v., *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*. Selección e introducción por Jacques Servais. Col. Manresa. Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero/Santander: Ediciones Sal Terrae, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> RAHNER, K., *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitiën buch*. München: Kösel Verlag, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*. Freiburg im Breisgau. Verlag Herder KG, 1970.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Rede des Ignatius von Loyola an einen Jesuiten von heute* In *Sämtliche Werke*. Band 25. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2008, pp. 10–38.

<sup>14</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*. Freiburg-Basel: Herder, 1984, p. 68.

most intimate reality of history, in the heart of the human being created by Him, without falling into a merely existential “horizontal humanism”. It must be a spirituality that receives from God Himself, in the very concreteness of life, the acceptance of life as a complete absence of guarantee. The absence expressed in the death of Jesus, within the mysterious abyss of God and the confidence of Jesus in Him, results in a kind of “personal norm”, a “principle of internal structuring” on the path of faith, hope, and love which leads to infinite “truth” and “freedom” as a result of “God’s Salvation”. Therefore, the Christian existence is marked by a spirituality that integrates intimacy and reality as the most concrete dimensions of life, *pathos* and *praxis*.<sup>15</sup>

The *SE* as a logic of existential knowledge aim for a new consciousness of one’s own history and for a Christian way of offering the conditions for a more authentic life. It is a logophatic process of knowledge with the ability to move the affections (*SE* n. 363) [*pathos*] toward what gives meaning to human life [*logos*], becoming concretized in a life project [*praxis*] as the [re]invention of one’s own existence [*poiesis*] caused by the dynamism of the action of grace, both affective and effective.<sup>16</sup> The analysis of the question of God in Rahner is best classified as the analysis of the “structure of human knowledge”, and therefore he focuses not so much on the metaphysics of Being as an Absolute that coincides with God, but rather on a metaphysics of knowledge of human reality in such a way that this meaning is given through knowing the human reality, and so the knowledge of one’s self in God can unveil another possibility of history. The theoretical and objective word cannot answer for the subject, and, when it tries, it does so in a fragmented way, as such a personal response requires knowledge of oneself, from the very depths, requiring an encounter with the most truthful and fearful aspects of oneself. Therefore, it is an experience which attracts and repels, which enchants and frightens, which arouses and puts to flight, and to which no voice can clearly respond on its own, except the experience itself. Self-knowledge is confronted with the mystery of the human and his untransferable duty of authentically inventing his own existence as, in fact, his own.

### 1.1. *The Principle and Foundation in Rahner*

Rahner sees in the Principle and Foundation [PF] a “formal structure”<sup>17</sup> acting as a “guiding line” which gains “concrete forms” [*konkrete Gestalt*] of existence from each meditation and which corresponds to the fundamental idea, as “essential universal propositions, which express the structure of the human.” Attention should be paid to this concreteness of the structured contents within the existential logic of the *SE* since, for the German theologian, the “Christian intelligence of God” is “essentially practical”<sup>18</sup>, and so, to the extent that experience of the objective content gains a subjective form in

<sup>15</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, op. cit, pp. 368–380.

<sup>16</sup> *Das Dynamische in der Kirche*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder KG, 1958, pp. 77–79.

<sup>17</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Idem.



one's existence, while receiving/welcoming grace, such reception occurs in the form of a decision in favor of or against the cause of the affective impressions, restoring the Christian *Know thyself*.<sup>19</sup>

Rahner places the PF as an "introduction to the Mystery" in a sort of theological maieutic, insofar as one draws from one's own experience an image of God which allows one to understand the image not only as an objective datum but, above all, as a "peculiar feeling" and "originating" experience [*Ursprung*], it being in this original experience that one finds the place where the dogmatic formulation was coined. Here it is not enough to know that it is possible to call God "Father", but rather to discover, effectively because affectively, the feeling toward God of *Abba* and the sense of how He makes Himself the presence of love in history. The "conceptual relationship" and the "thematic" of God are preceded by the "originating", "athematic and transcendental" relationship in which the dogmatic theme emerges, which theme becomes meaningful as an objective secondary conceptual relation because it carries a given identity which is revived in the subjective relationship to the Mystery. From this significant and original relationship emerges the existential sense of theological meaning, and so one begins to "capture" God in the "roots of existence", that is, in the desire for meaning present in the relationship, awakening to the "spiritual existence" which is the "mysticism" of having a "look at God" as a new perception that enables one to experience God's presence which radiates love (*agape*) and changes the "*pathos*" of human sensibility, such that it wants to love and not only to be loved.

It is then, when the desire is mobilized, that the "language about God" acquires meaning that causes one to think of life from this new awareness of the need to love. Having completed such an experience of meaning, one begins to see dogma as the bearer of meaning.

From the relationship with the "*pati Dei*" (author's emphasis), such human *pathos* is radically reoriented, *from loving [in order] to be loved, to [that] being loved [which frees one] to love*: the affective mystery of a God such that human life affects Him and He "opens Himself to us," thus revealing His will to love, which unveils to the human being another possibility of the being of his being as being to love.<sup>20</sup>

Grace, as God's free self-communication, causes one to love and serve in all things and constitutes an "essential structure" known as Ignatian "indifference", which is a victory over "radical and profound selfishness" and which shows oneself to be affectively available, open to receiving the inspirations of love in countless circumstances. This freedom of attitude is preceded by an affective freedom that reveals itself as capable of being free from any attachment to or dependence on affection and, particularly, from dependence on those realities that provoke certain affections. The pursuit of this free-

<sup>19</sup> SCANNONE, J. C., "Die Logik des Existentiellen und Geschichtlichen nach Karl Rahner" In VORGRIMLER, Herbert (dir.), *Wagnis Theologie: Erfahrungen mit der Theologie Karl Rahners*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1979, pp. 83–98.

<sup>20</sup> RAHNER, K. *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, op. cit., pp. 17–32.

dom is a Christian life “odyssey” that is lived in this spiritual practice always in some new circumstances which are to be encountered in a “new and distinctive way”. This indifference, as an overcoming of attachment, allows the affective organization of the willingness to accept the direction chosen and understood as the inspiration and orientation of the “will for the better means, for the right way” in which one might “love God more”.

Thus, the *more* [*magis*] one loves God, the *more* one experiences the distancing of oneself from dependence on things, whether [the impulse be] to choose them or not. One becomes more free to say a clear “yes” to what leads to God and His immense love in the concrete reality of things. Rahner calls [the key polarities] the instinct of vitality (health–sickness), the instinct of possession (poverty–wealth), the instinct of esteem (honor–dishonor), and one’s own instinct of being (life–death). Otherwise, the freedom of Ignatian indifference should “leave all things”<sup>21</sup> in order to find them in God, as a means of approaching this Mystery and as a refusal of what would lead to such selfishness and self-sufficiency as would go to the point of taking from the other to give to oneself. The dynamic of the PF realizes itself as a progressive freedom to choose to be in the presence of that Mystery which generates love and inaugurates the Kingdom of God in one’s own existence and which allows one to discover what it can be to live outside the dynamic of structuring selfishness.

### 1.2. *The First Week in Rahner*

The First Week of the *Exercises* aims to illuminate the condition of one’s graced limitation along with the condition of one’s being marked by the desire (gift and task) to liberate one’s freedom. [This is a process of] welcoming one’s inner movements which lead to real freedom, such as the freedom to place oneself before one’s own conditioning, which situates the self as part of a contradiction.

The mystery of sin is linked to its “pathogenic” nature as something that involves the awareness of being affected by a reality while finding oneself without the structure of freedom necessary in order not to give in to the attachment it provokes. An issue to be considered is not only that human beings suffer because they sin, but that they sin because they suffer. Not being able to leave behind what makes them suffer is a mark of their existence that affects their own way of being, that is, as “ontically sinful”. Therein is the “nature of sin”, insofar as the human being is a free being and is able to refuse the offer of love because he is also marked by suffering and thus he refuses to educate the self for that freedom which is the exercise of a continual renunciation of selfishness.<sup>22</sup>

The exercises of the First Week aim to illuminate the human condition in its vulnerable affective structure which constitutes the root of the nature of what is called sin, resulting in an inability to react. In this condition of not being able to react, the human being sees the impediment, tending to exonerate himself from his responsibility, from

<sup>21</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitenbuch*, pp. 27–31.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 29–44; 64.

his own guilt. Here is the source of his “existential anguish” because, instead of recognizing the reality, in the pain of his anguish he “represses” it.

He also tends to confuse guilt with a “tragic fate” and thus blames God, seeing in his fate a form of punishment, or he might even “absolutize himself” such that he “neither believes in nor wants the forgiveness of guilt”. He goes on to create an “exalted fantasy” in which the human allows the possibility of contradiction, thus creating the “absurdity” that, while being of equal condition, yet sees himself as superior to others.

Consequently, in his inability to react to the events that destabilize him, he tends to deny his guilt, for to assimilate it without the conditions of hope would lead to an existence of “despair”. However, the knowledge of the cause of guilt remains “repressed”, and so the individual remains unknown to himself. This entails an “attempt against the meaning” of human freedom which prevents him from daring to “take the leap” of radically relativizing what is limited and overcoming his dependence and thus stops him “before the abyss,” before the depth of his own being, from which anguish emerges as a plea for recognition.

Hence, the cognitive dynamic of the First Week is to “taste” affectively the “sinful structure,” the “desert” of existence, and the “inner bestiality” in order to give taste, smell, palpability, voice, and visibility to anguish. The refusal of this movement of grace happens exactly as a flight from anguish. Here, grace emerges exactly from the awareness of anguish illuminated by grace and recognizes how God is present as a *second cause* which provokes a dialectical tension between one’s conditioning and one’s willingness to find the meaning of life, in order to protect the person from extreme absurdity.

The existential knowledge of sin is a grace. In a moment of perception, “a sudden leap from darkness to a light...allows evaluating” the “concrete situation” in which the exercitant finds himself, inasmuch as, with a cry of anguish, he also encounters the presence of God who remains the same and who loves the same even when the meaning of life fades. Dogmatic thematization, therefore, is not reduced to thematic “conceptualization”, but arises as a sign that allows “an original self-knowledge”. In regard to sin, it concerns the existential dynamic of becoming aware of the capacity to construct one’s own story by making vital choices to reconstruct that history, for freedom is not found in being dispensed from one’s conditioning but in choosing the best way, given those conditions.<sup>23</sup>

A “no” said to oneself and to one’s own deeper will is also a “no” to God. This is not done by a rejection of one’s own life and of the conquest of free choices in the daily act of existence, as God is exactly this movement of freeing the will, since freedom in its “original essence” is linked directly to the capacity for “original realization of existence” in a “permanent threat that the free subject represents for himself”, not for a time, but as a “permanent existential” that accompanies the entire subjective, individual history.

In this way, even those who do not confess the theme of God can somehow respond to the call of conscience in the search for the good and for a more authentic meaning for

<sup>23</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*. Freiburg-Basel: Herder, 1984, p. 29; pp. 120–124.

life, and can thus respond with an “athematic yes” to God as the guide to the “whither of transcendence”. His thematic refusal is rooted in a “childish and distorted” image of God. The theme of “anonymous Christianity” does not dispense with the need for thematization, since this is, for Rahner, a mystagogical itinerary. Rather, it seeks to relate more clearly the Mystery of God with freedom, as a mystery of freedom in which God Himself is not thematically accepted but remains moving within human freedom as “the freedom of the subject with respect to himself”, for the solid construction of his own history as a story worthy of being lived.

Dogmatic formulation is not dismissed but is invited to transpose its language so that human freedom can invoke this Mystery of God that already acts within history itself. Faith is thereby born from the recognition of action, not from an *a priori* thematic existence. It allows the subject to find in the theme a language adequate for experience, where the *conversio ad phantasmata* becomes a *conversio ad historiam*, a “concrete truth that appears plastically in history.” The First Week seeks a more genuine image of God who “could have abandoned us to our doom” and did not do so.<sup>24</sup>

The “existential meaning of the dogma of Original Sin” reveals the “sign of contradiction” within human freedom, and therefore Original Sin must not be seen as something committed by someone [Adam] and which has been biologically transmitted, nor as something natural to the human being, in the sense of being of God’s *creation*. Instead, it is something proper to the human condition as an “original existential constituent” of the first living man. As such, it should be meditated on as “our sin, as the peculiar situation of each of us.” This is at once the responsible recognition of one’s “weakness” and the discovery of a “remarkable force of freedom”.<sup>25</sup>

### **1.3. The Second Week: The Christology of the SE and the Unveiling of the Magis**

The Second Week, within the Rahnerian perspective, is directed to creating in the exercitant the necessary conditions of an “elective posture” and “readiness of mind”, that is, an embracing of the thoughts and feelings aroused by the contemplation of the person of Jesus Christ as a cipher of the enigma of life, in which the exercitant discovers himself deciphering a Christological Mystery through a growing dialogue with Jesus Christ, culminating in friendship with Him. The Christological cipher of the enigma of life allows the recognition of a soteriological presence in the existential dynamics of the lived experiences, and thus one comes to an understanding of oneself, allowing one to understand “one’s past in starting from the events of one’s present.” In the Rahnerian anthropology this “elective posture” or “readiness of mind” constitutes the “human being as a hearer of the Word” and constitutes a way of receiving the revelation as God’s *self-communication* which gathers from the individual’s own history a thematic elucidation in which the individual begins to understand the dogmatic theme because he un-

<sup>24</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, p. 136.



derstands himself in light of it and so deciphers the enigma of his own existence. This is something radically different from an imposition of dogmatisms.<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, the semantic revelation and process of self-communication of God is an event that has an impact on the total existence of the human being. It is given in “correspondence to the nature of the human being, whose being consists in being present to himself and in having personal responsibility for himself in relation to the other in consciousness and freedom”. This manifestation appears as a co-response, in that one comes to the encounter of prayer as a movement of searching for meaning and discovers, from the poetic theological *cipher*, the person of Jesus Christ. The exercitant’s search is not, then, lost in a monologue, but is, rather, a dialogue with this One toward whom the theme of the Second Week indicates a journey of learning. The exercitant knows God as a response to his search, but also as a new question planted in the seeker, and thus prayer as a search co-respondent, as one responds to the other in his own questions.

The *divine self-communication* as grace is a *permanent existential* in the human being, meaning that Revelation is not a mere conceptual doctrine, but a “transcendental experience” from a reinterpretation of subjective history that notes a guiding thread conveying meaning, as a sign of the non-abandonment of oneself to God caused by guilt. Revelation thus asserts itself as a new “original subjectivity” from which the subject becomes sensitive to another logic of knowledge, the theological, that is, while discovering a correspondence of “absolute proximity” in the question of the meaning of God (*Theós logós*) in the search for human meaning.

The discovery of the divine self-communication which allows for the thematic confirmation of Revelation is given in the retrieval of freedom for the choice of this more (*magis*). Moreover, “salvation not realized in freedom cannot be salvation,” and thus the “history of salvation is also the history of the freedom of the human being.” In the *Exercises*, such salvation operates as an imaginative process composed of the themes of Tradition, the exercitant’s subjective history, and his imagination of his time, as “there is no concept without imagination, and even the most abstract of metaphysical languages operates with images, analogies, and representations as *conversio ad phantasmata*, as Thomas Aquinas would have said.”<sup>27</sup>

*Revelation as God’s self-communication* takes place as an *existential reception* of a meaning-producing experience. It has, in the person of Jesus Christ, its “original form” (*Urform*)<sup>28</sup> as “receptor” and “climax” and cannot be known only by “dogmatic theory imposed on the human being from the outside.” Thus, Jesus Christ is the “abbreviated Word of God,” a “cipher of God Himself” and of the human itself for all eternity, given the density of meaning (*excessus*) in his *teândric* reality. As a result, “all theology continues to be anthropology for all eternity”, the unity of the “question which arises historically (which is the human being) and of the answer (which is God).” Thus “Christology

<sup>26</sup> *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>27</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, pp. 146–224.

<sup>28</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitiën buch*, p. 100.

constitutes the beginning and the end of anthropology, and this anthropology, in its most radical realization, is, for all eternity, theology.” So, then, it is known in a “transcendental experience,” or, in other words, in a “transcendental Christology” through “grace”, in the ontological sense, that is, by “ontic participation in the divine intimacy” that unfolds in the affective disposition for the “imitation” of Him as a “concrete assimilation of Christ participating in life,” penetrating directly into the world. The knowledge of Christ is given as an existential identification with the person of Jesus Christ as a “change-in-the-other”<sup>29</sup> that, by “affecting” individuals, calls forth our freedom for following Him as a path of “existential realization.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the Gospel causes not a mere “reflection”, but a dynamism that operates to “conform and drive what is produced deep in the soul” so that the reception of grace unfolds within the “prolongation” of the Mystery of Christ. Such a structure is composed of an “existence in reference to otherness” with the desire of the disposition to live by “accepting, affirming, and purely loving the otherness”, as it is so for Christ. Moreover, in such an extension of Christ’s life in one’s own existence, one must wish to find it in each “new situation” of life, seeking the “*potentia* of the divine Pneuma” in which one seeks “self-decision” and “self-responsibility”. It is an existential decision to imitate Christ concretely in order to “hear the individual imperative of God”, that is, to assimilate from Jesus Christ the willingness to do God’s will.. Here lies the greatness of Christian existence, in remaining in God’s will, namely, in the “service of God’s Kingdom”, knowing how to read and welcome the divine calls that move the thoughts and feelings toward the decision to be taken concretely, seeking and welcoming the serenity and joy of Christian existence in the service of others.

Transcendental Christology is situated in the *communicatio idiomatum*, the participation in Christ’s life as a participation in the Trinitarian life and its inexhaustible seduction to go further, a course that always involves a novelty of perspective because it is recognized as an access to a new depth, in which it unfolds in a new consciousness of the very same history, as a correspondence that appeals to, and is attributed to, the divine *Pneuma* that presents infinite forms of the unique Mystery known as “agape in person” [*Die Agape in Person*]. The follow-up, then, is not mere repetition of abstract ideas or established customs, but an “acceptance” of a dynamism of grace which reveals the meaning of Jesus’ life and which coincides with the deepest yearning to exist.<sup>31</sup>

The contemplation of the Gospel scenes aims to provoke a *transubstantiation* of one’s life itself, as one rediscovers oneself before the text, but also welcomes the inner movements inspired by Jesus’ life:

What happens, in the strictest sacramental sense, in the Sacrifice of the Mass also happens truly in the remembrance [zikaron] of the believer in the contemplation of the other mysteries of the life of Jesus; contemplation is not reduced to a mere speculative inhabiting of

<sup>29</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, pp. 266–270.

<sup>30</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitenbuch*, p. 116-117.

<sup>31</sup> *Grundkurs des Glaubens*, p. 128.

the story of Jesus, but what is there in a certain mystery reveals itself and offers the grace contained within it.<sup>32</sup>

The life of Jesus is the place of the manifestation of the “Christocentrism of all reality,” the way in which God assumes all reality and our human history and in which, in Jesus’ life, grace is manifested in this humanity. The Christian life is thus understood as a *transubstantiation*, as a “Eucharist” of everyday life making itself available so that God might be served by us for a “profound reconnection to the brothers and sisters.”<sup>33</sup>

#### **1.4. The Third Week: The Theological Anthropology of the Cross**

The Mysteries of the *Third Week* should be seen as purifying the theodicy of seeing in God the first cause of suffering or of positing the need for a *Cur Deus Homo* as a way of repaying a debt, instead starting from the theandric reality of Jesus Christ which is derived from an inductive theology which must, therefore, find the presence of the Mystery in human life and, in a special way, the sense of this presence in human suffering which remains a mystery, but no greater than the Mystery of the love of God which itself encompasses the mystery of freedom, both lived kenotically by Christ, and thus is the epifanic center of the revelation of meaning.

Rahner presents a “Logos of the Cross” in which the Crucified manifests Himself as a sign of the “meaning of one’s life”, a sign containing not only the *dynamis* of God, in which His powerlessness manifests His strength, but containing also the guarantee that, in the way in which He reveals Himself and in which He labors in powerlessness, one may come to know His *sophia*.<sup>34</sup> The Cross as the *meaning of the life of Christ* is a “sign of salvation” that produces a theology of death in which it is necessary to distinguish the difference between suffering and the Cross. There is suffering which is the fruit of the “monstrous blindness of sin” which is revealed by the Cross as a “manifest absurdity”, given the prophetic tradition that God does not abandon the just,<sup>35</sup> for the “abysmal misery” of the human being when he responds incredulously to his anguish may provoke “infernal possibilities” for the lives of others and an “immense obfuscation of the mystery.” The human being incurs the risk of assuming his status as a sinner by not believing in the “immense love of God” in its excess of meaning in the face of all absurdity, and thus arises the temptation of adopting an “anti-Christ attitude” in which one does not recognize the other as a brother and one also stops seeking what is just.

The Cross reveals that which is “most profound in the human being” and that of which he is capable and, at the same time, it reveals that the “meaning of the world is the need for love.” The Crucified One reveals His experience of abandonment, wherein Jesus is confronted with the “catastrophe of His existence, the failure of His mission,

<sup>32</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204; *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, pp. 203–207.

<sup>34</sup> *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, pp. 227–229.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 233–234; *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, p. 223; 213.

the abandonment of His friends, the repudiation of His nation”, and the “betrayal of the Apostles”, and with the “sin of the world” and its inability of [self-]redemption is made manifest. Also exactly here, in the Crucified One, is made known a “supernatural passion” in which the face of the One who suffers is the “same face of God” and is made known in a profound proximity to the “irruption” that “manifests its power”, since no condition of sin can overcome the “unconditional love of God” from which emerges a “vital act”, not only to endure the suffering, but to assume the consequences of that for which He dedicated His existence. This is where the Cross is a suffering as an act of fidelity to that which gives meaning to His life, and He finds in God the strength to sustain Him, despite the consequences, in His fundamental decision to maintain as His life project the Kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup>

In the Spiritual Exercises the scenes of Christ’s life are contemplated to transpose them under a *ratio personae*, such that the life of Christ becomes the existential logic of the very life in which the exercitant’s personality is constructed. Especially the Third Week must provoke an “availability for the Passion, a readiness “to accept the Cross in one’s life” not as a settled resignation, but as a way of not despairing or abandoning the meaning of life before the fateful. There is in Rahner’s Third Week an anthropology of the Cross manifested in life not as subservience, but with the “sobriety of a realistic human being”, accepting the death of the human being in Christ as the death of the capacity to be opposed to Christ. There the exercitant has to ask himself, “What does the Cross of Christ mean in my life?”, and he must then confront what can be a cause of the loss of what gives life its meaning. The meaning of life for Christianity passes through the confrontation with what is absurd and meaningless and which occupies one’s own existence. The Cross is the death of the absurd as the determinant of freedom and is, rather, the salvific movement into freedom that can trust God to maintain its horizon of meaning. Each manifestation of the daily Cross purifies one’s freedom to assume his life project in a more faithful and convinced way, for it manifests itself as something through which one gives one’s life.

### **1.5. The Fourth Week: Paschal Logic in Rahner’s Eschatology**

Given that Rahner sees in Ignatius an “authentic modern existentialist”, the *Fourth Week*, within the logic of existential knowledge, focuses on understanding the meaning of life regarding the *Logos* of glory and resurrection present in the life of Jesus Christ. The exercitant considers Christ in his resurrected condition or, more, in how He entered into His Father’s life, not as a static contemplation but in order to perceive the *Resurrection* as an “event” in a “personalized” movement of the history of salvation. The exercitant seeks not only to understand but to penetrate the scene of the Mystery, in order to apprehend the “effects of the Resurrection” and to encounter the *joy* typical of the Risen One.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, pp. 177–236.



This *Resurrection*, which impacts on existence, is not a naive *hope* that all things will always be well because of the mystical experience, nor will it end the possibility of sadness and distress or even be the mere announcement of something that “one day we will participate in.” Instead, it falls within the eschatological nature of the question of that “*not yet realized in its fullness*” which has as its goal “infinity in God”,<sup>37</sup> as long as one can perceive and experience one’s “own history” *already* being “transcended in God” as the bearer of a “following” of the Risen One, not as “magical”, as if the experience of transcendence were a “remedy to convert the world into a paradise”, but as the “internal structure of our existence in grace” that provides a “full integration” of the factors of existence. It is, therefore, not something that magically avoids the fateful, but which contemplates in the Resurrected One the existential possibility of being “triumphant on the Cross”. The scenes of the Fourth Week are presented as a “*signum prognosticum*”, as a “sign that surpasses and transcends our time”, and it is precisely by this overcoming that it is the source of hope which makes it possible to make a “leap” to believing that “everything that happens in the world is settled in the triumph of Christ” because the “resurrected condition” comes from the condition of being the “Son of the Cross” and must have an impact on existence, as the human condition of vanquishing the Cross without losing the meaning of one’s life.

Such a sign, insofar as it both manifests and hides the Mystery, points to the *Risen One* as the “living center” and “heart of the world” while “penetrating with death” the center of reality marked by contradiction, suffering, and closure in itself, and there it “mobilizes all the forces of the world”, manifesting to human freedom a *Telos* of life with His Life which illuminates and inflames the reality of the human being in grace. Hence, the person of Jesus Christ is a “pedagogue”<sup>38</sup> for the Resurrection that is existentially illuminated in the “meaning of the glorification of the Son” as a disposition for the “infusion of the Spirit” as life in the “transfiguring Spirit.” That allows real relations with the three divine Persons through the way each affects existence and thus grasps the “theology of eternity” in its anthropological reading as a “theology of the proximity of God.”<sup>39</sup>

This *Signum Prognosticum* must be experienced as an “internal conviction which derives from the Words of Christ,”<sup>40</sup> in which it is concretized as an opening of the affective and intellectual perception of the Spirit’s promise, which moves from conviction to experience that the Spirit of Christ “is stronger in us than is the ancient anguish.”<sup>41</sup> The fruits or effects of this penetration into the Mystery behind the scene is a “higher degree of peace.” The resurrected condition happens as life in the Spirit which welcomes the “Fruits of the Spirit” as effects that structure the affections and dispose the will for greater freedom in deciding on what is best. It goes “beyond all finitude”

<sup>37</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, pp. 236–243.

<sup>38</sup> *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, pp. 235–260.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 240–241.

<sup>40</sup> *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, p. 240.

<sup>41</sup> *Einübung priesterlicher Existenz*, p. 239.

and extends human values to be compatible with the values of the Kingdom, so as to reach the immensity of the heart of Jesus. This occurs in a “continuous acting” of the Spirit until the “love of the Lord will know no more defeat”, resulting in that anticipated joy of the Resurrection which leads love to its “maturity.” This mature and conscious love, that remaining in God which leads the heart, is that which constitutes the *Sentire cum Ecclesia* because it is a grace that unites the hearts and by which the Spirit of “Pentecost” unites itself to the hearts of others.<sup>42</sup>

### **16. The *Contemplatio Ad Amorem*: Rahner’s Theology of Praxis**

The *Contemplation to Attain Love* is an “existential theology” which, at the end of the Exercises, connects with the *Principle and Foundation* to conclude a journey of love in the *Ignatian Odyssey*, for the Christian pilgrimage begins in the love of God as the foundation of Christian existence and goes back to Him as our home and choice and as the “essential structure” which awakens in the consciousness the possibility of cooperating with the Spirit’s action in ordering the affections to “seek God in all things” in order to love and serve Him in every situation. Thus, “love is able to manifest itself as prayer, gratitude, and an instrument of service” which impels us toward what is *more* human. It is this “love that truly saves us” and that makes the “world transparent” so as to contemplate the presence of this infinite love in everything, because God, as *Agape*, is the one who comes out of Himself to descend to the creatures and there is made known as a “love that goes out on a mission of service to the world.” Such a disposition seeks to *contemplate* God as “God gives Himself”, as “God dwells in” the world, as “God labors”, as “God descends”, manifesting His characteristics of justice, kindness, and mercy as “rays”, all indicating the Source, the “sun” by which we might “see” all things in “an authentic and profound way,” in order to open ourselves to an “always greater love of God” and to that “deepest root of the human being” known as “freedom”. So we might fall in love with His Kingdom project: “God leads us to fall in love with the concrete things of the world always according to the sovereign will of God.”<sup>43</sup>

## **2. The *Spiritual Exercises* in Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Theological Aesthetics**

Ignatian contemplation receives in Balthasar the mediation of his theological aesthetics, in which the theological discourse fulfills the function of preparing for experience as an affirmation of the human, such as the kenotic movement that is unveiled by the aesthetics or the doctrine of perception of the form of God which reveals itself (and

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, pp. 235–268; *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch*, pp. 236–256.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, pp. 247–276; Ibidem, p. 263.

constitutes his fundamental theology). In this dynamic, the possibility of an act of faith is understood as the ability to “see [such beauty] well,” more than as a “precision of the conceptual scope” which “lacks the erotic dynamic” of the Mystery present in dogmatic formalism.<sup>44</sup>

The *Theological Aesthetics* of the Swiss theologian is not a research about the aesthetic ornaments in theology, which would result in an aesthetic theology, but a study of the presence of an aesthetic element in theological intelligence as a manifestation of the harmony between immanence and transcendence that has its apex in the Incarnation of Christ. The theological aesthetics aims to make visible the beauty of Christ’s presence in the world and has at its center an awakening to the mystical experience.<sup>45</sup> The Balthasarian project consists of two parts: fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. His fundamental theology focuses on the theory of perception, that is, on how the *aesthetics* or the *doctrine of the perception of the form of God as He reveals Himself* opens up the question regarding which conditions of possibility are required to “see well” or, in other words, to perceive the beauty of Christ in the world through the conception of *Gestalt* in Goethe’s manner.<sup>46</sup>

Balthasar refers to what he calls Anselm of Canterbury’s “ecclesiological-existential form” to formulate an “aesthetic reason” as a “Christian contemplative reason” whose object is the “true reality” within a Platonic conception of the ideal. It is above all Plotinus, according to the Swiss author, with whom the Canterbury theologian would have made a perfect synthesis. In formulating an Anselmian *pulchritudo rationis*, Balthasar identifies three points: 1) a life founded on truth and available to the truth, and by this eliminating the lethal “insensitivity”, distancing everything that prevents the spirit from capturing what is just; 2) the conceptual effort to achieve the *intellectus*, the capture of the thing from within; and 3) pure delight and happiness (*delectatio, beatitudo*) discovered in the truth, which comes both by grace and by merit.

In the Balthasarian reading of Anselm, the Christian faith has the function of seeking the truth of things in order to attain their original beauty, and this coincides with the biblical images. It is up to theology to offer a reason that presents the deep beauty of these images, and especially the most beautiful, which is that of Christ, as the perfect image of God which is made known. This task, called metaphysics or, as the Swiss author prefers, theological aesthetics, aims at the perception of divine manifestations. The Swiss ex-Jesuit refers to the notion of *Gestalt* or figure which takes on the *species* or *form* and the *light* or *splendor* of theology, behaving in the figure as *integritas, proportio*, and *claritas*. The figure is a manifestation of the beauty by which it configures (*Gestalt*)

<sup>44</sup> BALTHASAR, H. U. v., *Gloria: Una Estética Teológica*. Vol. 1: La Percepción de la Forma. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 1985, pp. 125–126.

<sup>45</sup> PALUMBO, C. A., “La experiencia mística como corazón de la Estética Teológica de Hans Urs von Balthasar”. *Teoliterária – Revista Brasileira de Literaturas e Teologias*, v. 3, n.6, (2013), pp. 10–23.

<sup>46</sup> BALTHASAR, H. U. v., *Gloria: Una Estética Teológica*. Vol. 1-6: Metafísica: Edad Moderna. Madrid: Encuentro, 1986-2006; CONWAY, E., *The anonymous Christian*, op. cit, p. 36.

the existence of being. In the Balthasarian phenomenology, the figure appearing [*Erscheinende Gestalt*] is beautiful only because there is a compliance [*Wohlgefallen*] not only with that which it allows itself to show [*Sich-Zeigen*], but also with that which it gives of itself [*Sich-Schenken*] in that manifestation. The beauty of the figure is given in the depth of the truth and goodness of reality that manifests itself as something inexhaustibly precious and fascinating.

What distances the vision from the perception of the “eyes of the faith” is founded on metaphysical alienation and on an individual rationality that reduces the Truth to a personal opinion, to a truth of the ego. Therefore, in order for the figure to be received as a manifestation of divine beauty, we must have a theological understanding of the figure, through a fair interpretation which is based on a double evidence: 1) that objective, in which God is evident among men, so that there is enough light that one is prompted to believe; and 2) that subjective, by the capacity of consciousness that recognizes, in its appearance, the very appearance of God. It is in subjectivity that faith has eyes to perceive what has been brought into the light, such that the notion of the figure multiplies and diversifies as a spiritual figure, a figure of life, of beauty, of truth, and of goodness.

Such a figure always refers to the archetypal figure of Christ, as the sacraments, following the Augustinian tradition, are the figure of Christ, the outward form that manifests itself and which corresponds to the content of an inner depth,<sup>47</sup> in the Heideggerian style, in the unhiding (*Aletheia*) as an “openness to being”. Doctrine is the way to educate the eyes of faith so that one grasps for oneself the visibility of God, so that Balthasar’s dogmatic theology presents itself as a doctrine of rapture and ecstasy, the radiant character of the form being an opening to the truth.<sup>48</sup>

However, Balthasar understands that theology must turn to itself, to its starting point, namely, the Incarnation, for there is found the historical and unrepeatably manifestation of the will of God, becoming a “historical norm” because it is “from the individual existence of Christ” that the bestowal of meaning on all other existences is derived. Balthasarian Christology understands “existence” as theological “reception”, as an opening to the bestowal of being in “time”, that is, in history, or even as “openness to the will of the Father”. For this reason, Christ, as the supreme prototype of the human being, is made an archetype and a kind of aesthetic canon that forms history,<sup>49</sup> maintaining His presence by means of His spouse, the Church, through its “participation in the personality of Christ”, and thus makes Himself present in its “expansion” and “communication”.<sup>50</sup> Existence is the reception of grace, which is a Christological form of existence, a figure of Christ, and every authentic figure of individual life or history must converge into this Christological configuration which has its full expression in Baptism, in the Eucharist and, although imperfectly, in the Church. The Christ figure does not reveal

<sup>47</sup> *Gloria: Una Estética Teológica*. Vol. 1, p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> *Teologia da História*. São Paulo: Novo Século/Fonte Editorial, 2005, p. 93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 27–29; 34.

<sup>50</sup> *Ensayos teológicos II*. Sponsa Verbi. 2.ed. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, Cristiandad, 2001, p. 148.



itself in its comprehensibility, for, as Augustine says, *se comprehendis non est Deus*, but rather in its credibility, for the more one understands something of the Christly aesthetic as a work of art, the more shines forth its “incomprehensible genius.”<sup>51</sup> Such a recompilation of the theological tradition Balthasar sees also in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, not only as “traditional” but as something that can be seen as within the “great tradition of European thought.”<sup>52</sup>

### 2.1. *The Principle and Foundation in von Balthasar*

Balthasar sees the *Principle and Foundation* as presenting “all human and Christian truth” and as serving as an “ABC” for those who “are in search of access to Christianity.” However, access to Christianity is also a “quest to reach oneself” as “the human essentially needs God”, similar to Michelangelo’s “Adam” who “helplessly extends his finger” to the infinite which, however, “it cannot reach if the Horizon does not come to meet him.” There Balthasar unites two maxims of Western thought, that of Protagoras, that “man is the measure of all things”, and that of Thomas Aquinas, that “God is indispensable” for the human being to find its end, and that, in the end, it is also a personal end.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, the *PF* works as a “kind of *philosophical prelude*” to the four Weeks of the *Exercises* [emphasis added], in which it is affirmed from the ancient philosophy that “the human being comes from the divine world and that all his endeavor focuses on returning to it.” In this Greek assumption, the Patristic-Medieval *Imago Dei* and the category *Homoiousios* are in a dialogue in which the Christ appears as an “archetype” which recreates the human “image” by introducing the “true knowledge, renewing the human being in the image of the Creator (Col 3.10)”, recreating the “old man” as a “new man”. This knowledge of Christ indicates the “meaning of the human”, a “for what”, which is a way of life in “covenant with God”.<sup>54</sup>

All the dynamics of the *PF* are presented in this life in *covenant with God* and are present in the previously existing Hebrew wisdom as witnessed by its Scriptures, especially in the Psalms as praise (Pss 94, 145), reverence (Ps 89:12), and service (Ps 119). Yet, the “Old Testament miracle rises in Jesus Christ to become a mystery that consolidates that which is achieved in the Old Testament and at the same time illuminates the areas that remained dark.”<sup>55</sup> Balthasar is also critical of the Greek “ascension” schemes which start from the “anticipation of the Absolute” and result in the “relativization of the the limited and ephemeral (until reaching the radicalisms of the *Stoa* and of *Buddhism*),” unfolding in “solitary schemes” and “individualisms”, even though they may be seen as a

<sup>51</sup> *Gloria: Una Estética Teológica*. Vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>53</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 131–133.

kind of “mass ecstasy”, as “illusory exaltations of the individual”, something like the Protinian “*monos pro monon*”. Thus the praise, reverence, and service of the Ignatian definition of human being moves from God to the human being in an exemplary way, giving great “assistance to the other” and, at the same time, being both a “cause of social and political order” and the “core of a religion more centered and more profound.”

This substitution of Greek schemes for Christian ones is present in the Ignatian dynamics, which move from the “craving for the power of the kings” to the “want-to-be-more” which is possible only by “self-abasement” as a “pure attitude of service even to taking the ‘lowest position’ at table.” Such a dynamic, which has its source in Christ, is seen from the Balthasarian perspective on the Cross as “Glory to the Father, reverence to His Name, and service” up until death, and even “the most painful death”, as the “culmination” of the *Principle and Foundation*, namely, in the praise given to the Father, in the “reverent distance” as a key to the reading of Matthew’s abandonment (Mt 27.46), and in the “supreme service” (the mission entrusted is accomplished, cf. Jn 19.30). Even *Sheol*, where the light of the Covenant did not penetrate, is incorporated into human destiny, as desired by God, thus saving the human being from his “social anxiety regarding the absolute upon which he would like to build his life, and in which he would like to see himself absorbed”, an internal movement that would be “unnatural”.<sup>56</sup>

There is a substitution of the Ascensional desire structure [*desiderium*], with its underlying danger of “selfishness that revolves around itself”, with the “co-descendant” service of God to the human being. As “*praise and joy* for the unattainable alterity of the other”, as “*reverential respect* of that other” as someone whom one ought always “to respect with responsibility”, and as “*service* which, in the everyday duty of one’s reciprocal engagements, in whichever profession, takes the human being to his religious fullness”, namely, “the descent of Christ into the perfect service of the Father [which] reaches its perfection when there is food and drink for his brothers, the human beings giving us an example.”<sup>57</sup>

The Balthasarian model of the PF is of praise and reverence and of a service which is the Cross, a model of service “as perfect on earth as it is in heaven” and which “erases the dividing line between heaven and earth.” The PF is an expression of the Ignatian “logic of indifference,” a “relentless logic” that seeks to “overcome all the disordered affections” which, “in advance, compel the person to follow what attracts him”, but also to “avoid what is painful” and to “hide [such disorder] perfectly behind the [excuse of] tendencies natural to all human beings.” From Balthasar’s perspective such *disorder* should be seen not as anthropological but, rather, as theological, especially in the matter of God’s will for each particular individual. Against the *disorder* is opposed the *disposition* to “find and do the will of God”, and its exercise is that which “prepares and disposes the soul.”<sup>58</sup> The overcoming of *disorder* [SE 23] as the antithesis of *disposition*

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, pp. 132–135.

<sup>57</sup> Idem.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, pp. 134–137.

[SE 1] is a path of “self-transcendence of the human being by praise, reverence, and service,” but it also implies “the manner in which the sacrifice of the Cross is present in the Eucharist” as a way of stripping oneself of “illusions,” chimeras, and sins in order to “follow naked the naked Christ” [*nudus nudum Christum*], and thus to awaken an attitude of “seeking the very center of the Gospel” in the “heart of existence.”<sup>59</sup>

The logic of indifference leads to the “logic of the more” [*magis*], because it unfolds the “abandonment” to God as the fruit of Ignatian indifference, of the person’s accepting what God has chosen for that person. The *more* is expressed in the “greater glory of God” [*ad majorem Dei gloriam*], in which one must “wish to consume one’s existence” and of which there is no comparative, for, in the way of Anselm of Canterbury, the *always-greater* is “incomprehensibly-greater” and, “if it is possible to understand it, it is not God” [*Si comprehendis non est Deus*]. Therein lies the impossibility of a Gestalt of the beauty of the love of God, the source of growth in obedience.<sup>60</sup> The *Gestalt* of Trinitarian Love lies in this obedience of the Cross, which Balthasar himself came to know in the hermeneutics of his own experience. However, before surrendering himself without reservation to the service of the One who calls unconditionally, like Ignatius in the meditation of the *Temporal King*, what touches him as an enlightening experience on his way is to follow the *path* of Ignatius, the “wounded one of Pamplona,” in that this path manifests the action of God which “breaks our existence in order to heal it and to make of it the instrument which is needed.” By this he means “to be placed with the crucified Lord, as Ignatius was, and to become his companion following the Father’s will.” There Balthasar understands that “he would have to obey, to serve, but without yet knowing to whom.”<sup>61</sup>

## 2.2. The First Week: The Conception of Mercy and Balthasar’s Hamartiology

For Balthasar, after the desire for *indifference* has been obtained as a grace, the *First Week* is presented as a “hell of self-knowledge”:

A purifier and a preparatory step, which before the Cross of Jesus, leaves the sinner naked of all awareness of having something as good as his own, so that, empty of himself, he enters the path of following [Christ].<sup>62</sup>

For the Swiss theologian, the purgative way of the *First Week* passes through a consciousness of the radical human corruption, of the human’s not having any goodness of its own, in which very moment of the Exercises “penetrates” into one’s life the “light of God’s judgment, the light of the terrible seriousness of the Cross.” This *emptiness* is the result of the purification of the “illusions we conjure about any constructing and achiev-

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, pp. 119–120.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, pp. 141–144.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem, pp. 99–100.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 173.

ing seemingly by our own forces,” a “humiliation until we understand the possibility of our own perdition.” In the theological sense, distinct from the anthropological, at least textually speaking, in what it says with regard to the Balthasarian perspective on the *Exercises*, *disorder* coincides with sin. This “great emptiness” that the *First Week* should cause must also “open up an immense abyss” that makes possible both a “deep emotion because of one’s own disorder” and a “longing for the true order of life”. This begins the disposition (availability, first movement) so that God may then *put* the exercitant *into place* (dis-ponere, second movement). Thus, there is a liberation of one’s freedom, of “finite freedom as availability toward infinite freedom”, that assumes a rupture with the “multiple bonds of the Self.” Such a “rupture”, for Balthasar, has to be “accomplished through a systematic, perhaps tedious effort.” The *First Week* is presented as an invitation to the “self-denial which is required in the following of Christ”, which “may include a moment of asceticism, self-discipline, and conscious renunciation of many things”, which abnegation ought to be directed, not to oneself—as would be the case with the Buddhist, according to the Swiss theologian—but to the Christ-model, as the “Cross is never an end in itself but a path toward the salvation of the world or toward participation in its fecundity in the Savior’s company.”<sup>63</sup>

For the Swiss priest, even “an ascetic[ism] and a mystic[ism] built on the natural desire of the divine vision” (*desiderium naturale visionis*) would be “anthropocentric”. That is, “the human being, his desire, his eros, the realization of himself—in short, his perfection—constitutes, in this case, the measure and the end.” On the contrary, the ascetic[ism] and the mystic[ism] would be “theocentric” which would take as its starting point the “creaturely character of the human being and its radical requirements”, namely, the praise, reverence, and service of the Lord and “obedience to Him.”<sup>64</sup>

In the face of the experience of sin and the possible condemnation by the “Absolute Norm”, the “Son of Man,” the Cross is the principle of true objectivity and subjectivity, for “from the contemplation of the Cross there is a place for meditation on one’s sins and on those of the world.” From a “Christian point of view”, according to the Swiss author, “there is no fruitful meditation on sins outside that which leads to confession, and the origin of confession is the Cross.” In addition, “only in the light of the Cross and the judgment regarding sin that is realized on it can the sinner hope to understand and to evaluate, in some measure, what is his sin.” Not even the “conscience”, good or bad, “however necessary its function may be, will suffice by itself”, for “sin is, by its essence, a lie, and, consequently, there is an obscuring of the inner vision” which can result in a “global despair.” Hence it is from the Cross that there comes the “correct objectivity” (God’s desired measure of understanding of sin) and the “correct subjectivity” (God’s desired measure of contrition, conversion, and lived repentance) regarding sin. There is a “dialectic of the Cross”, of recognizing in the contemplation of the Cross the being deserving of one’s own condemnation as the “murderer of eternal Love” and, at the

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, pp. 174–175.

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem, pp. 175–176.



same time, of recognizing in that contemplation that the vicarious death of Christ *pro me* invites the following of Christ as obedience. Such a dialectical movement is seen by the Swiss theologian as the “nucleus of the authentically Catholic Tradition.”<sup>65</sup>

But the “dialectic of hell” consists in that the believer, “because he believes” and “because he loves”, has the task of “having to approve the condemning sentence of the Father on the sinner” and the “terribly severe judgment that is the Father’s”, then only “faith and love” are the attitudes that “expect all good from the Father”, and this “expectation of all good includes the acceptance of just condemnation”, just because the Son assumes the sins that are those of the creatures [“because the Son took over for me and in my place”]. According to Balthasar’s perspective, this meditation is an “intelligible ambivalence to worldly intelligence” but is “clear and unfathomable for faith.” God’s mercy manifests itself in the beauty of the Cross, as terrible as it may be, and the obedience of the Son for the love of the children of God composes the *Gestalt* of repentance and the beginning of the inner disposition [availability].<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3. *The Second Week: Balthasar’s Esthaurologic Christology*

The contemplation of Jesus’s life inaugurates the Christian following, which,

being open to everything, will confer on each one, by imprinting it with grace, the form of life which *descends from above* [author’s emphasis], in which one can, as matter fully moldable by God, respond to His will and thus “come to perfection” in one’s Christian Life.<sup>67</sup>

Such perfection consists in “not being deaf, but ready and diligent” to respond to Christ’s call, which call continues throughout the contemplation of Jesus’s life, producing the *Gestalt* of the Christological figure, in order to be able to “collaborate with Him in the election”:

To opt for God’s choice for him, to renounce his freedom as a pure creature—a freedom set loose by original sin, set against that of God (Take, Lord and receive all my freedom... [SE 234])<sup>68</sup>

The election is seen by Balthasar as the center of the Ignatian *Exercises* and as putting “the totality of life at stake”, for in it one finds one’s “own identity in God.” In the election is found a more pronounced Balthasarian *esthaurologic* (*sthaurós*) Christology than the Christology of the public life, although without denying it, for, just as the “spiritual combat of Christ” had fundamental importance for the “reconciliation of the world”, the “combat of the disciple of Christ” must have essentially social dimensions, “never isolating the drama of Christ from the drama of the Church.”<sup>69</sup> Christ’s missionary pro-

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, pp. 180–181.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem, pp. 182–185.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem, p. 189.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, p. 190.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, pp. 201–202.

gram and its being centered on the Cross is a scandal not only for the world but also for the whole Church, with the election being presented through an “image of God centered on personal sovereignty” and the “image of the human being” in a *via negativa*, that is, accentuating that “it is not centered on the aspirations and longings of the heart and its cravings for absolute realization”, but on the availability [disposition] to fulfill God’s will, which “never”, “neither in its entirety nor in its details”, can be deduced from our nature.

There is, in Balthasar’s understanding of freedom, an Augustinian anthropological assumption that appears in the Second Week Christology and, consequently, in the Ignatian journey, resulting in the understanding of freedom as arising from obedience under the sign of the Cross, the place where God’s will is realized and human nature humbles itself. If the other religions, for the Swiss theologian, “seek to escape from suffering”, “Christ has made Himself man to suffer more than anyone could ever have suffered”, and the one who wants to prevent it “is His adversary”. It follows that the Christian is the one called to an imperative:

Take up your own cross for love of me and for the good of your brothers, for whose salvation you must suffer. There is no other way of salvation outside of me. Your salvation does not consist in liberating your *ego* but in offering your *ego* [author’s emphasis] incessantly for others, and this is not achievable without pain and without the Cross.<sup>70</sup>

On the Ignatian journey, in the Meditation on the Two Standards, the Augustinian paradigm is also chosen, so as to think of the “demonic kingdom of Babylon” and the “heavenly Kingdom of Christ” in the context of “intimate attitudes with God” inviting us to a “dialectic of humility” as a disposition to “intimate and growing humiliation.” Within the Three Modes of Humility the process begins with a willingness to “obey in all things the law of God our Lord” (Old Testament) and moves to the “foolishness of the Cross” as an “indication of availability [disposition]” to the will of God, which leads to the “election of the Cross” (New Testament), understanding the dynamics of the “Ignatian doctrine of indifference” as an existential doctrine common to the two Testaments.<sup>71</sup> The presupposition of the election is “to believe in the calling”, and this “means offering and sacrificing the totality of the self, with its desires and pursuits, to a mission of unpredictable reach” wherein one comes to feel like a “citizen of heaven.”<sup>72</sup>

Christ’s public life is seen as a “general call” to the Christian life (in which the option of the marital state will usually follow) and then some receive a “particular call” in response to which one would normally follow a “priestly life” or the “evangelical counsels”. Although Balthasar does not deny the importance of family, there is an Augustinian reminiscence or an Augustinian aspect with regard to matrimonial life, seeing it as a state to which one does not receive a particular call:

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 193.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem, pp. 204–205

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, p. 219.

No Christian not blinded by prejudice will ever say of himself that he has chosen the marital state because of a divine election, comparable with the election and the call that recognizes and experiences in itself a vocation to the priesthood or the personal following of the religious life. Whoever chooses marriage is simply the one who has not previously made such a particular election in his soul and who chooses the marital state with the best conscience in the world, without feeling guilty of any imperfection, but also without boasting of following a path particularly chosen by God.<sup>73</sup>

Christ “chose” to live this *general call* in the first place with the Incarnation and, in a second moment, to accept a *particular call*, which in His case results in the election of the Cross, the source of all special calls.

#### 2.4. *The Third Week: Theodramatics*

The Ignatian journey (Kingdom [SE 91SS], the Two Standards [SE 136SS], and the Three Ways of Humility [SE 165ss]) are seen as the “foundation of obedience”, the fruit hoped for in order to welcome “the noble passion to serve the crucified Lord” and thus to assume the “willingness [disposition] to obey,” the “spirit of the true Bride of Christ.”<sup>74</sup> The *esthaurologic* understanding of the Christian existence in Balthasar’s perspective reaches its climax in the *Third Week*, focusing on the “Cross of Christ” on which is exposed “the Father’s Love.”<sup>75</sup>

The merciful love of the Father is seen as the gift of the Son to save the lost sinner, and this is “the work of God” [SE 236] who “manifests Himself by assuming the supreme risk of surrendering his Son for a lost world,” where the Son “descends into the abyss of the sinner’s abandonment, even to the loss of the Father” and the “most strenuous search for the God that was lost.”<sup>76</sup>

The Eucharist is seen as a “body given for you” (Mc 14, 24), an example of how to “dispose of oneself” in order to be “surrendered-available [disposed]”. The “Father’s hour” is presented as a “terrible baptism” to which the Christian must respond with the help of the grace of the “configuration of the human being in the image of the Crucified Jesus” and by a “pure consent to the descending movement of God” that “leads to the Cross through the *Kenosis*”, a movement of obedience. Passion is a *soteriological* grace and those who makes the *Exercises*, especially the Jesuits, must wish to follow Christ laden with humiliations as the “authentically Christological grace of the Passion”, as an essential aspect of their being called to “total love”. This is the only way that the *Exercises* begin to “make themselves intelligible.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem, p. 198.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, p. 225.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p. 236.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, p. 226.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, pp. 229–235.

Balthasar's ecclesiology included, understanding the "Catholic concept of the Church (that of Augustine and of the whole tradition)" is presented as a Body co-crucified with Christ and as the Spouse of Christ who suffers with Him at the foot of the Cross". In addition, the Swiss theologian presents himself as amazed by this fact:

It is strange and humiliating for Catholic theology that no theologian has brought to mind the idea of taking, as the theme for a Christological-ecclesiological study, the numberless documents about the experience of abandonment by God lived by canonized and non-canonized Christians.<sup>78</sup>

The Cross must be understood in the "dialectic of 'consolation' and 'desolation'" in which each welcome movement of the disposition to obedience can find consolation.

### 2.5. Fourth Week: Balthasar's Eschatology of Easter's Logic

For Balthasar "All faith is, from start to finish, faith in Resurrection," although "in it is included the contemplation of the Cross."<sup>79</sup> The "Christian existence" is seen "essentially" as "availability for the call and as a follower of Christ" in "all episodes of his life, even to the Cross", but also "to the Resurrection" understood as "the development of the Church". Mary asks that "the Incarnation of the Word, consummated on the Cross and in the Resurrection, be communicated to the entire community". From this dynamic it follows that obedience to Christ unfolds in "personal obedience that is integrated into the ministerial structure of the Church and submits to it: great and supreme self-denial". "Obedience as the realization of the most intimate spousal attitude of the same Church to Christ" is "the core of following Christ: *Ecce ancilla.*"<sup>80</sup>

In Balthasar's conception, "for Ignatius, everything happens in a theology of obedience" which mirrors "Christ's obedience to the Father". The "Trinitarian obedience" is objectively revealed and offered to the world in the obedience of Christ, and by Christ is revealed and offered entire to the Spouse of Christ, which is the Church, which has in Mary its origin and its always generative bosom.<sup>81</sup>

Balthasar's *sentire cum Ecclesia* is derived from the "feeling [*sentire*] that arrived into fullness in Mary," an example of how the "feeling [*sentire*] with the Church is a *feeling-in-oneself* the obedience of the Church," a fruit of the Spirit which is poured out after the Resurrection as the "universalization of Jesus's life under the action of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>82</sup> the path back to the Father.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, p. 236.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, p. 179.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem, pp. 241–243.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem, p. 244.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem, pp. 241–250.

<sup>83</sup> *El Misterio pascual In Mysterium Salutis: Fundamentos de la Dogmática como historia de salvación* 3/1. Madrid, 1969, p. 288.



## 2.6. The *Contemplatio ad Amorem*: Theology of the Balthasarian Praxis

In the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, it is the Church “in its own self-transcendence and surpassing itself in the same” which teaches us to find God in all things, yet God’s dialogue with the world is given as a “drama” between “infinite freedom and finite freedom” and has as its “last word” the Cross, which is God’s way of working, the dialectic of the Cross, source and the expression of Balthasar’s *Theodramatics*.<sup>84</sup>

The Contemplation to Attain Love aims to see in all things this love of the Father who sends the Son to die for the sins and gives the Spirit [which enables one] to live the dialectic of the Cross and to acknowledge the call. In the soteriological act, the divine *economy* is the dialectic of the Cross as “commitment”, and this is the “original image” of God [*Urbild*].<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

The differing concepts of the *Spiritual Exercises* in Rahner and Balthasar, as well as their respective theological projects, converge in the necessity of an existential approach to Ignatian spirituality, whether as a *logic of existential knowledge* in Rahner or as an existential configuration [*Gestalt*] of love promoted by the aesthetics of glory, but in an existence marked by the sign of the Cross, in von Balthasar.

If a limit of Rahner’s project is the issue of language, the *Theological Aesthetics* being a far more advanced resource, I would risk saying here, however, that in the Balthasarian conception of the *Spiritual Exercises* Catholic identity is accentuated, often criticizing other traditions, such as the Lutheran and the Buddhist, as well as Greek thought, and highlighting a certain superiority of the Catholic tradition, while in Rahner the accent is placed on the alterity, adapting to the needs of the contemporary individual and “the change of epoch” and, for this very reason, to a “new orientation of the Christian Life.”<sup>86</sup>

In this sense, there are some divergent elements, such as the soteriology of the PF, which, in Balthasar, accentuate the necessity of recognizing the Christian God present in the need to praise and revere and “thus to save himself”, besides serving, while Rahner, given the question of anonymous Christianity, emphasizes serving as an agapic-soteriological element *par excellence* that shifts one away from “apathy and indolence”.<sup>87</sup>

Although both criticize any comparison of Christianity with a Stoic form of asceticism,<sup>88</sup> the Swiss theologian points to the realization of the *SE* in an “ascetic and mysti-

<sup>84</sup> *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* – vol. I: Prolegomena. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 251–261.

<sup>86</sup> BALTHASAR, *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*, op. cit., p. 134; 181; 193; RAHNER, *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitiën buch*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 131–132; *ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193; *ibidem*, p. 28.

cally passionate way, and with scrupulous observance of the commandments” and with the willingness “not to avoid what is painful”, as well as requiring a “systematic effort” which is at times “tedious”. In contrast, the German Jesuit accentuates the “impulse of grace” and the “spiritual life” as a “living in God and for God” as a “pure gift of God’s free grace”, and, similarly, the “grace of the Cross” is not limited to “maintaining the silence of sorrow”, but the “asceticism” is a “dimension of a concrete praxis” which does not cease to call for existential cooperation with grace as a way of welcoming it.<sup>89</sup>

In addition, the Balthasarian accent on obedience connects to the *si comprehendis non est Deus* as adherence to faith and love even in the face of the terrible judgments of the Father, which leads to a growing obedience, whereas in Rahner the understanding of the Mystery, even without exhausting it, is fundamental to the knowledge of oneself and to the recognition of God’s love, which results in a liberation from the hamartiological effects in personal history.<sup>90</sup> Grace, as an animator of liberty, also has distinct accents since, for the one theologian, freedom is the “foundation of obedience” and, for the other, freedom establishes a *praxis* which moves one from the indifference of a “Christianity from birth” to a “Christianity by choice”.<sup>91</sup>

It is worth mentioning that there is in Balthasar’s perspective a disparaging accent on the anthropological question which, by accentuating the Cross, sees Christian existence as sacrifice and as a “citizen[ship] of heaven”, whereas in Rahner’s perspective, even without its becoming an optimism, there is a more positive vision of life which allows a pedagogical understanding of the growth in grace, acting on what is possible [“let us perform with love the love we can now do”] and asking for grace for the *magis* [“Give me what I do not achieve”] without dramatizing [“we would not dramatize”].<sup>92</sup>

There is in both authors, despite their different situations and accents, an awareness of the inherent bond between faith and justice in the social and political order, and the Swiss theologian, at least in the writings on the *SE*, is more explicit.<sup>93</sup> However, Rahner’s conception of *praxis* is positioned to identify the signs of the Spirit’s action in the world, an element that better allows the contextual theologies to unfold.

Despite Balthasar’s *esthaurocentric* aesthetic, present even in its Ignatian perspective, there is a *harmonization of conflict* that insists on seeing the beauty of the Father’s love on the Cross. This is not to say here that the work of Balthasar is deficient in these aspects which have a place in the Catholic Tradition, but rather that there is a risk of receiving this aesthetic of the Cross in the *SE* in an imagination which has serious limits for carrying out a critical look at history, incurring the risk of harmonizing the conflicts of reality and thus feeding into the social pathology of a litigious culture. One thing is the acceptance of fate and the recognition of God’s love which does not abandon us

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, p. 130; 137; 174; ibidem, p. 71.

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem, p. 142; ibidem, p. 70-71.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem, p. 225; ibidem, p. 28; 71.

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem, p. 219; ibidem, pp. 272–273.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, p. 135; ibidem, pp. 62–65.

when facing suffering, and another is the harmonization of conflicts being used as a silencing of the suffering of others and as an ignorance of historical causes, including unjust ones, given that an immature vision of faith can create this perception. As Balthasar himself points out, such a one can feel like a “citizen of another world”, but deep down these are symptoms of “indifference regarding the world and society, complexes of sensuality not overcome, and, above all, fear of life.” Such feelings, especially the “inferiority complexes” of “almost all young people”, produce “blockages” which yield “irritating noises” in the discernment of reality.<sup>94</sup>

This does not mean that there is no awareness of the theology of the Cross in the Rahnerian understanding of the *SE*; rather, the Cross is read as a “manifest absurdity” and is considered as a dimension of the conflict even in the scenes of Jesus’s life, such as that of His being forgotten in the Temple, understood as a “very real conflict” between Mary and Joseph. The Cross is seen not as the harmonization of conflicts, especially in the face of the fateful existential, but as the “sobriety of a realistic individual” who, instead of “despairing”, offers himself in an “exercise of availability for [a sharing in] the Passion of Christ.”<sup>95</sup>

It does not seem to us that Rahner’s theological project and his appreciation for Ignatian spirituality, more extensive than what Balthasar includes, is responsible for “leaving aside prayer”, as this sounds like an absurdity. Moreover, even the Balthasarian concept of the *Exercises* admits that, in the deepest core of religion, the question of justice and its unfolding in the social and political order is present.<sup>96</sup> Mysticism and social commitment are two intrinsic factors in the two great theologians, both heirs to contemplation in action. The difference lies in how to interpret the alterities of the new times.

<sup>94</sup> BALTHASAR, *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*, op. cit. p. 222.

<sup>95</sup> RAHNER, *Betrachtungen zum ignatianischen Exerzitiienbuch*, p. 211; 159; pp. 232–233.

<sup>96</sup> BALTHASAR, *Textos de Ejercicios Espirituales*, p. 135.