

## THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

MICHELE M. SCHUMACHER

*[The originality and vigor of Balthasar's use of the term *Stellvertretung*—literally “representation” (*Vertretung*) by taking one's place (*Stelle*)—lies in his depiction of Christ as the *Stellvertreter* or representative of the Father. Christ's irrevocable gift of self, even unto death, reveals and mediates the Father's love. Such a vision of the Father of mercies is opposed to that of the vengeful deity inevitably imagined when Balthasar presents Christ as the representative of the human race, one who takes upon himself humanity's sins and the awful fate that accompanies those sins.]*

THE CONCEPT *Stellvertretung*, rendered in English as “representation” by a majority of translators, holds a prominent place in the soteriology articulated by Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>1</sup> Balthasar's originality was to conceive of the concept in terms of the Creator-creature relationship, one that he treated both “katalogically” and “analogically.” Representation was for him, as Karl-Heinz Menke describes, a bridging concept between the immanent and the economic Trinity, hence between trinitarian theology and the other systematic treatises relating to the theology of creation, Christology/soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Regrettably this bridge

MICHELE M. SCHUMACHER is “collaboratrice scientifique externe” in the department of theology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, where she obtained the S.T.L. She obtained her S.T.D. from the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C. She is former director of Family Life and Social Justice for the Diocese of Yakima, Washington, and former adjunct professor for the University of Dallas's Institute of Religious and Pastoral Studies in the Portland, Oregon, Archdiocese.

<sup>1</sup> The importance of the term is clarified in Balthasar's preface to *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory 4: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) 11. Karl-Heinz Menke proposes that the meaning of the word *Repräsentation* embraces all three models which he proposes as mediating a direct proportionality of unity and difference, characteristic of an authentic *Stellvertretung*: (1) the *persona corporativa* model which mediates this proportionality between individual and community; (2) the *traditio* model which mediates between future and past; and (3) the *repraesentatio* model which mediates between image and prototype. The word *Repräsentation* also includes, however, all non-proper (external or purely juridical) forms of *Stellvertretung*, and is thus subject to misunderstanding. See Menke, *Stellvertretung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1991) 23–24, at 20, and 263–310.

tends to diminish Balthasar's unique insight—corresponding to his descending Christology—that Christ is primarily the representative of the Father whereby he is the unique Savior of the human race and its “sole mediator” (1 Timothy 2:5) before God.<sup>2</sup> Even his role as the covenant in person and as the concrete universal,<sup>3</sup> whereby he is fittingly conceived of as the representative of the human race, arise from the foregoing relationship of Father and Son in that these roles emphasize Christ's terrestrial obedience as a form of his eternal and transcendent love for the Father. Here the bridge remains one-directional: the mission (and the obedience of the Son) is a form of the eternal procession (including his willingness to be begotten, or generated, from the Father).

The concept of representation in Balthasar's theology is obscured, in my judgment, by a subtle reversal of the Creator-creature relationship so that the creature rather than the Creator becomes the primary referent. In this understanding, Christ is conceived as the representative of the human race, not because he is the eternal prototype in whose image creation is fashioned, but because and insofar as he responds in time to the human race's needs by taking humanity place in the jaws of death and even beyond the gates of hell. The issue here is not denying human persons their freedom to the extent that another, namely Christ, acts in their place and for them, as Rahner contended.<sup>4</sup> I agree with Balthasar's insistence that both the world and God have their ultimate input in his theo-drama.<sup>5</sup> But my concern lies in his contention that the “representative bearing of guilt” determines in the final analysis “whether a theology is anthropological or christocentric” and this precisely in its scandalous effect (see 1 Corinthians 1:18) which bespeaks the unfathomable character of divine love.<sup>6</sup> Ironically enough, it

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.* 305, 383.

<sup>3</sup> Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 10–21; *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory 3: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992) 220–29.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Rahner, “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 21, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 255–69. Balthasar argues: “The mere forgiveness of God would not affect us in our alienation from God. Man must be represented in the making of the new treaty of peace, the ‘new and eternal covenant’. He is represented because we have been taken over by the man Jesus Christ. When he ‘signs’ this treaty in advance in the name of all of us, it suffices if we add our name under his now or, at the latest, when we die” (Balthasar, *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen*, trans. Michael Waldstein [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985] 86–87).

<sup>5</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 4.318.

<sup>6</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 82; see also his *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics 7: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil, ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius,

is precisely here, at the point where Balthasar focuses more on Christ's role as the representative of sinful humanity and less on his role of the representative of the Father, or at the point where Christ is said to assume both roles so as to endure the "conflict between God and man 'from both sides'" (as God offended by sinful humanity and as the sinner subject to God's judgment),<sup>7</sup> that Balthasar's soteriology is perhaps too human in its perspective. Ironically it bears many of the faults he attributes to an anthropological or transcendental theology, a perspective he refutes as being methodologically in error for the simple reason that "God's message is theological, or better theo-pragmatic. It is an act of God on man; an act done for and on behalf of man—and only then to man and in him."<sup>8</sup>

Thus it might be argued that Balthasar's soteriology lies at the crossroads of two opposing streams: one representing an authentically Catholic theology of redemption, another lending itself to the very interpretations which such a theology refutes. My intention here is not to diagnose the reason for this apparent contradiction in Balthasar, but simply to raise questions about its interpretation. I propose to follow through on Balthasar's initial insight into the mystery of the inner life of the Trinity so as to arrive at a more congruous soteriology, one that presents the salvific mysteries as encompassed within the divine communion of persons without compromising human freedom and without defying an authentic logic of love which avoids the unnecessary confusion caused by notions such as appeasement and vengeance. Specifically, I argue for a theology of redemption presented as the incorporation of the human person into the trinitarian life of giving and receiving, by means of a self-gift empowered by the gift received: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12).<sup>9</sup>

---

1989) 207 and 222; and *Does Jesus Know Us? Do We Know Him?* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983) 33.

<sup>7</sup> The English translation of "Dogma des stellvertretenden Tragens der Schuld" as "dogma of vicarious suffering" already implies an interpretation; see *Theo-Drama* 4.346 where Balthasar refers to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 396. See further *The Glory of the Lord* 7.210 where he describes the prophet as "designated and condemned to play the role of a double representation, representing God among men and men before God"; also *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990) 121; and *Does Jesus Know Us?* 35.

<sup>8</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone* 7–8.

<sup>9</sup> See Balthasar's commentary on the passage in *You Have the Words of Everlasting Life: Scripture Meditations*, trans. Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 86.

### METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION

Certainly Balthasar would have insisted that it is not the human condition of sin, however miserable it be, that elicits or provokes a response from God. Indeed, he faults those such as Girard, Schwager, and Pannenberg who seem to give human beings the initiative in the redemptive process in so far as they cast their sins on the Lamb of God, "while God, whose part it is always to love and forgive (K. Rahner), simply looked on, failing to measure up to the divine action of self-giving."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, he grants that it is "men themselves in their darkness" who burden the Lamb of God with the "load of all the world's No to divine love." This burdening presupposes that the Lamb be "both willing and able to bear sin."<sup>11</sup> What needs to be avoided, Balthasar insists, is the notion of the Trinity as hovering unmoved above the events of the Cross (an idea that he attributes to the doctrine of the beatific vision) or the notion that the Trinity is somehow entangled in sin (an idea for which he faults process theology).<sup>12</sup> Both errors are bypassed in his teaching that the kenotic or self-emptying love of God is logically prior to sin, God having already reckoned with misdirected created freedom in his plan of redemption before the creation of the world.<sup>13</sup> Christ's willingness to bear the sins of humankind, Balthasar teaches, "springs from the mission given him by the Father, which is rooted in his coming-forth from the Father," or, more profoundly, in "the distinction . . . within the mission, between the 'life,' which is preparatory, and the 'hour,' which is the goal of his expectation."<sup>14</sup> This absolute primacy of God in the "theo-drama" is evident, he continues, in Christ's eucharistic surrender prior to the act of treason whereby he is handed over to death by sinful human beings. Certainly the "analogical" relationship between the creature and the Creator does not imply anything less for Balthasar than that the glory of the Creator is manifest in his creation: an ascending or transcendental anthropology presupposes a descending Christology.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, the metaphorical language Balthasar uses to depict the mystery of redemption is such that one might question whether its origin lies in an all-too-human conception of justice, a conception which dims the

<sup>10</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.317.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 4.334.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 4.333; Balthasar likewise argues against the extremes of interpreting Christ's sufferings either as "a punitive raging of divine anger against the innocent victim" or as the mere "manifestation of the superabundance of divine love" (*The Glory of the Lord* 7.205).

<sup>13</sup> Such is Balthasar's interpretation of the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) in *Mysterium Paschale* 34.

<sup>14</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.334.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 4.241, 4.223.

glory of divine love manifest in the cross of Christ and thus the “glory” of Balthasar’s primary and essential insight into the mystery of our salvation.<sup>16</sup> How else can one explain the reasoning whereby Christ’s solidarity with sinners, his *pro nobis* interpreted by Balthasar as a mystical incurring of our guilt, leads to the result that “like a lightning rod, he draws the judgment of God . . . on to himself”?<sup>17</sup> Or, to complete the image, how else can one understand Balthasar’s explanation of the Eucharist as created by the Father who shatters and distributes the Son “as by lightning” among sinners because of his solidarity with them?<sup>18</sup> While the Son is said to accomplish the work of redemption through his absolute “readiness” to do the will of the Father, the latter is said to accomplish it “by turning upon his Son the face of his severity, and even anger, at the sinfulness of the world (Matthew 27:46).”<sup>19</sup> Beyond this and even more dramatically, Balthasar insists that Christ really suffers “what the sinner deserves, i.e., separation from God, perhaps even complete and final separation,” that is to say, the pains of hell.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For an explanation of this methodology, see *Love Alone* 7–10.

<sup>17</sup> *Does Jesus Know Us?* 32; see *Mysterium Paschale* 122. On the assuming of guilt, see *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 230–31; *Love Alone* 83; and *The Glory of the Lord* 7.223. Balthasar describes the mysterious “hour” and the “chalice” of the Passion Narratives as the “entry of the sin of the world into the personal existence, body and soul, of the representative Substitute and Mediator” (*Mysterium Paschale* 101); see *The Threefold Garland: The World’s Salvation in Mary’s Prayer*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 79; and *Theo-Drama* 4.336.

<sup>18</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.348.

<sup>19</sup> *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983) 256; see *Mysterium Paschale* 123; and *New Elucidations* 233–34.

<sup>20</sup> *Does Jesus Know Us?* 36. “Jesus’ ‘for us’ is by no means intended as a merely juridical, moral or satisfactory gesture but beyond that as something real, one could almost say ‘physical’. It is my abandonment by God, which is inherent in my sin, and my dying apart from God and into the darkness of eternal death that he experiences in his ‘being delivered up’; and he experiences them more deeply and definitely than any mere creature can experience such things” (*New Elucidations* 116); see also *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 38–41; *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 84–85; *Glory of the Lord* 7.14, 7.232, and 7.216, where he argues that “the deepest experience of abandonment by God” is “vicariously real in the Passion.” Balthasar clarifies that while men are “instruments” of treason, or abandon, it is first and foremost God who is said to abandon the Son (*The Glory of the Lord* 7.224–25). This experience of being forsaken is so great that Balthasar insists it is incompatible with the idea of Christ possessing the beatific vision; see *Truth is Symphonic* 40; *Engagement with God*,

## BALTHASAR'S REBUTTAL

Balthasar was not unfamiliar with objections that ascribe to his soteriology the idea of appeasing an angry God. Indeed, he was quick to resolve these apparent oppositions in the mysterious and even scandalous character of trinitarian love that endures the contradictions between love and rage, justice and mercy. He wrote that "God's anger at the rejection of divine love encounters a divine love (the Son's) that exposes itself to this anger, disarms it and literally deprives it of its object."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, "in the Crucified, both things coincide: God's fury, which will make no compromises with sin but can only reject it and burn it to ashes, and God's love, which begins to reveal itself precisely at the place of this inexorable confrontation."<sup>22</sup> "The whole idea can be contained only within the trinitarian context, so that the entire act of judgment remains contained within the love of the Father who gives the Son up (John 3.16) and the love of the Son who places himself at the Father's 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 (Galatians 3.13)."<sup>23</sup> There can be no question of penal substitution, Balthasar insists, because the Son suffers as an act of love and therefore voluntarily, having eternally willed to do so.<sup>24</sup> Because of the "trinitarian inversion"<sup>25</sup> whereby this eternal decision is made known to the incarnate Son by the Holy Spirit, it merely appears as if the Father loads the sins of the world upon him.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, I return in Balthasar's thought to his theme of Christ as the representative of the Father. The incarnate Son in this concrete act of obedience is presented by Balthasar as "a uniquely suitable medium for this power of the Father as he gives himself expression, a medium that shows itself in its capacity to bear the burden, to be itself divine. Only God can go right to the end of the abandonment by God."<sup>27</sup> Hence, the last words of the dying Son ("Forgive them," "Today you will be with me in

---

trans. John Halliburton (London: SPCK, 1975) 50–51; *Mysterium Paschale* 101, 125–26; and "Ist der Gekreuzigte selig?" *Communio* (IKZ: German edition) 1987, 108.

<sup>21</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.349–50.

<sup>22</sup> *The Threefold Garland* 101.

<sup>23</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.225. Elsewhere Balthasar declares, "And so it is really God who assumes what is radically contrary to the divine, what is eternally reprobated by God, in the form of the supreme obedience of the Son towards the Father, and, thereby, in Luther's words, *sub contrario* discloses himself in the very act of his self-concealment" (*Mysterium Paschale* 51–52). See also *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979) 87, *New Elucidations* 232; *The Threefold Garland* 28.

<sup>24</sup> *You Crown the Year* 85; see *Mysterium Paschale* 112.

<sup>25</sup> See *Theo-Drama* 3.183–91; and *The Christian State of Life* 191.

<sup>26</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.335.

<sup>27</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.211.

paradise,” and “It is consummated”) are to be understood as “the very voice of the Father and the Spirit in the Son.”<sup>28</sup> For Balthasar, the entire drama of salvation is played out within the inner-trinitarian relations into which all of world history, including the whole reality of sin as humanity’s rejection of God, is taken up by way of the *admirabile commercium*, “the central feature of Jesus’ mission,”<sup>29</sup> whereby God enters into history so as to assume history into himself, that is, into his communion of persons.

As Balthasar insists, reconciliation cannot take place from outside (for our benefit); it must occur from the inside (in our place).<sup>30</sup> This “from within” is achieved “by the process of God’s self-emptying in the person of his Son” who brings liberated humanity “back home to the open spaces of the divine freedom.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, “[the Son] takes the tragic one into himself” a self that has been emptied by virtue of his obedient love for the Father, and he endures humanity’s fate through to the bitter end, thereby bridging the distance between the sinner and God.<sup>32</sup> In this way, the Son “creates nearness” in the very process of assuming our state of estrangement from God.<sup>33</sup>

Here, one finds an original interpretation of the traditional theology of recapitulation. “All norms ultimately come down to the Son’s (unlimited) capacity for obedience: The Father asks him to give tangible proof of the divine love for the world and loads upon him the totality of men’s free

<sup>28</sup> *The Threefold Garland* 101–2.      <sup>29</sup> *Theo-Drama* 3.237.

<sup>30</sup> For Balthasar it is “on the Cross that the sinner changes place with the only Son,” that is to say, Christ’s mission is accomplished only insofar as the *commercium* bespeaks “a real exchange of places” which, in turn, presupposes that “*unus ex Trinitate passus est*.” “For it is only by virtue of his divine person that he can enter into the desperate situation of a free human being vis-à-vis God,” in order to truly transform his or her sorrowful plight (ibid. 239–41). See also *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 29–30.

<sup>31</sup> *Engagement with God* 37.

<sup>32</sup> *A Theological Anthropology* 71. Compare the statement: “The movement of the Incarnation, according to the Father’s purpose, does not come to an end until all man’s remoteness from God, all his guilt and pain, have been endured and undergone in performance of this obedience” (*Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory 2: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992]). As “the infinitely Other of the Father,” Christ grounds and surpasses all we mean by separation, pain and alienation in the world” as well as “all we can envisage in terms of loving self-giving, interpersonal relationship and blessedness.” (*Theo-Drama* 4.324–25) Michel Beaudin describes the “becoming sin” of 2 Corinthians 5:21 as the divine form of love penetrating the chaos and informing “it from within by appropriating it in the whole and in detail, in a personal, trying experience” (*Obéissance et solidarité: Essai sur la christologie de Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Héritage et Projet, no. 42 [Montréal: Fides, 1989] 155.)

<sup>33</sup> *Theodramatik 4: Endspiel* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1983) 236. (This is not to be confused with vol. 4 of the English edition, which corresponds to vol. 3 of the German).

turning away from God.”<sup>34</sup> Balthasar’s teaching about representation includes the Son’s assumption of the world’s “no” to God from which he forms his absolute “yes” to the Father.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, the Son is the norm of humanity to the extent that he substitutes himself for the others, thereby making “up the difference” and paying “for everything he says with his life.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, his confession of the world’s sins on the Cross becomes the archetype of all subsequent confessions.<sup>37</sup> As a true son of Adam, he assumes the “incomprehensible and, for man, impossible task of meeting from within the fallen world God’s original demand of perfect love.”<sup>38</sup> The Son assumes the Adamic act into his own readiness for the Father’s will that amounts to a resumption from below of all creation sliding towards its loss.<sup>39</sup> Hence in the final analysis, all the world’s sin is drawn within the infinite distance between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit,<sup>40</sup> so that the creature is able to turn away from God “only because in the embrace of the incarnate Word of God, it is incorporated into his orientation *toward* the Father.”<sup>41</sup> This orientation toward the Father involves his being forsaken by him on the Cross, and this forsakenness is for Balthasar, the very means whereby Christ recapitulates the sinner’s mode of alienation from God, that whereby he represents us, takes our

<sup>34</sup> *Theo-Drama* 2.85.

<sup>35</sup> Beaudin, *Obéissance et solidarité* 170. “It is this refusal to obey that the obedience of Jesus Christ assumes even to its last consequences, in the ‘defiguration’ of the *Ecce Homo*” (ibid. 146). Balthasar argues that Christ assumed the “eschatological ‘No’ in regard to the event of salvation which came about in him” (*Mysterium Paschale* 172); see *A Theological Anthropology* 240.

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* 269.

<sup>37</sup> *Does Jesus Know Us?*, 48; see Adrienne von Speyr, *Confession*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> *The Christian State of Life* 159.

<sup>39</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.218, and Beaudin, *Obéissance et solidarité* 182. Balthasar argues that Christ’s time assumes into itself the time of sin “in order to fill it with valid meaning” (*Theology of History* 35–36).

<sup>40</sup> See *You Crown the Year* 84–85, and *Theo-Drama* 4.324–25, where he argues that the sinful alienation of the creature is located within the distinction of the hypostases. Similarly, Balthasar argues that “[s]ince the world cannot have any other *locus* but within the distinction between the Hypostases [there is nothing outside God: *Theo-Drama* 2.260–62], the problems associated with it—its sinful alienation from God—can only be solved at this *locus*. The creature’s No resounds at the ‘place’ of distinction within the Godhead” (ibid. 4.333–34). See Gerry O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990) 35–36, 67–68.

<sup>41</sup> Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* 191. The exchange is also such that following Christ’s sacrificial gift of himself on the Cross, where “he makes us *his* sacrifice, by presenting us to God,” the Father sees us in no other “light than that of the Son’s self-surrender” (*Does Jesus Know Us?* 49).

place.<sup>42</sup> As Balthasar would have it, the true sense of the *admirabile commercium* exceeds the meaning given it by the Fathers of the Church: “even the sinner’s alienation from God was taken into the Godhead, into the ‘economic’ distance between Father and Son.”<sup>43</sup>

### UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS

My difficulty with Balthasar’s teaching about representation is that first of all even his most faithful interpreters understand it as redemption through substitution,<sup>44</sup> an interpretation which seems to imply, at least indirectly insofar as the Son is abandoned or forsaken by the Father as a result of his exchange of place with sinners, that the sinner would otherwise be rejected or forsaken by God if not for Christ’s intervention as representative.<sup>45</sup> However, if one grants, as Balthasar insists, that God is always already reconciled—the crucifixion of Christ being proof of that (see Romans 5:6–11)—then the pain of hell that he suffers for us cannot be a revelation of our fate as sinners, or of what would have been our fate, had it not been for the salvific event.<sup>46</sup> Hence, it seems arbitrary that Christ should endure hell for our salvation. Similarly, if it were to be argued that humans are saved from the ultimate consequences of their sins (i.e., hell being here understood as a perpetual estrangement from God) by the fact that God in Christ has ventured even into this place where he is not—into this very state of God-forsakenness—then one is faced with a predicament: either we must once again admit to an arbitrary connection between sin and the consequential state of estrangement from God or we must admit to a limitation of human freedom in our power to refuse God. With regard to

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 3.228, 4.335–36.

<sup>43</sup> *Theo-Drama* 6.381, 6.495. Compare: “The movement of the Incarnation according to the Father’s purpose does not come to an end until all man’s remoteness from God, all his guilt and pain, have been endured and undergone in performance of this obedience” (*Theo-Drama* 2.84).

<sup>44</sup> Marc Ouellet, for example, interprets Balthasar as insisting upon “the realism of the ‘pro nobis’ ” as meaning “‘in our stead,’ in the sense of substitution (*Theo-drama* 3). It is a literal truth that Christ took upon himself the sin of the world and that he emptied it of its injustice and its offensiveness by the superior force of his obedience of love. Balthasar sees here the necessary condition for the establishment of a true Covenant between God and man” (“The Foundations of Christian Ethics according to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* 17 [Fall 1990] 383).

<sup>45</sup> The idea that God rejects the sinner is, it seems to me, the sinner’s interpretation of his own rejection of God; see, e.g., Micah 6:3–5; Hosea 5:4.

<sup>46</sup> That is to say, it could not be so unless hell be regarded, as I would insist, as the sinner’s obstinate rejection of God, his absolute refusal to abide in the divine company. Balthasar does write, however, that “Jesus by his obedient death takes over the guilty death that is our fate. This, and this alone, can undermine death from within and draw its sting” (*Theo-Drama* 4.495).

the first option, the superabundance of God's mercy in the sending of his Son for the forgiveness of sins and in Christ's own willingness both to lay down his life (and, as Balthasar argues, even to suffer the pains of hell) is overshadowed by the capricious character of the divine will which seems whimsically to require the punishment of hell, the sinner's eternal estrangement from God, from all who die in a state of deadly sin. As for the latter option, Balthasar acknowledges the seriousness of the sinner's refusal of the gift of grace: "once a person has refused to accept the gift of this grace there is nothing left 'behind' the Cross but the specter of judgment." Hence, "in Jesus judgment is actually present precisely because he is making love's last offer."<sup>47</sup> It follows that despite his own hope, Balthasar is forced to admit that no definitive statement can be made with regard to whether "all men [will] be saved."<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, is it not highly problematic to assume that Christ, the new Adam, loves God in our place so as somehow to exempt us from the command to love him with all our heart? Menke, commenting on Balthasar's teaching on representation, argues that Christ's representation of the human person in no way remits our need for conversion. Rather, because of Christ's death, abandonment, entrance into hell, and Resurrection, there remains no depth of human sin which cannot be atoned for. "The 'place' (*Stelle*)—as expressed in image—in which is gathered all that which has no communion with God, becomes in the event of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday, a 'place' of hope."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Balthasar argues that the mere fact of God's forgiveness could not affect our alienation from him. For that, there must be a mutual reconciliation requiring that we assent to his representative action.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, the issue is not one of deciding between God's anger and mercy but rather of insisting upon the serious nature of human liberty. God's willingness to remit sins is one thing; the actual remission which supposes conversion is another. Hence we must admit the possibility of a sin which by its very nature is unforgivable.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Does Jesus Know Us?* 81, 83; see *Love Alone* 76.

<sup>48</sup> See *Dare We Hope "That All Men be Saved"?* with a *Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) esp. 208.

<sup>49</sup> Menke, *Stellvertretung* 309. "Every sin committed in the world is borne and atoned for on the Cross, including that sin that by its very nature 'brings forth' the 'second death' (Revelation 21:8; James 1:15); it follows that the Cross must be erected at the end of hell, without being equated with the latter" (Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 4.495).

<sup>50</sup> See Balthasar, *A Short Primer* 87, and *Does Jesus Know Us?* 33.

<sup>51</sup> The famous case of the "sin against the Holy Spirit" (see Luke 12:10; Matthew 12:31 f.; Mark 3:28 f.) is, Aquinas taught, "unforgivable by its very nature" by excluding the very "elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place"

No doubt Balthasar agreed with this view.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, the link in his soteriology between the Cross and this conversion—which in my view is the final reason for the Cross<sup>53</sup>—remains so obscure that one is left with an arbitrary connection between one's estrangement from God and one's persistence in sin.<sup>54</sup> Since there is little hope for an impasse in the confrontation between an obstinate God and a hardheaded sinner, Balthasar was forced simply to do away with the confrontation through a notion of substitution: "the dialectical relation (bilateral covenant)" is for him dissolved, as Michel Beaudin sees it, in "a non-dialectical relation (unilateral covenant founding the first)" rather than being integrated into it.<sup>55</sup> Balthasar insists perhaps too unilaterally on a resolution to the problematic from on high. The Creator-creature dynamic is dissolved into the eternal drama between the Father and the Son with the latter's pre-existing obedience tending to "substitute itself for the God-man relation rather than integrating it into itself."<sup>56</sup> Hence it seems that Balthasar must live up to his own demands: the fulfillment of finite freedom requires not only that "the Infinite take the finite into itself (and absorb it)" but also that the finite "be capable of taking the Infinite into itself."<sup>57</sup> Christ's obedient "yes" to the Father cannot simply take the place of our own; it must instead be appro-

---

(*Summa theologica* 2-2, q. 14, a. 3). John Paul II argues that this sin consists "in the refusal to accept the salvation which God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, working through the power of the Cross" (*Dominum et vivificantem*; Encyclical Letter, "On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World" [May 18, 1986] no. 46).

<sup>52</sup> "Did this unconditional forgiveness of God's . . . not also stipulate an efficacious acceptance of this forgiveness—demonstrated by conversion and readiness for mutual forgiveness?" (Balthasar, "Jesus and Forgiveness," *Communio* 11 [1984] 329).

<sup>53</sup> In short, it is necessary to demonstrate, as Marc Ouellet puts it, that Christ's "response to the love of the Father *pro nobis* makes possible our response to the trinitarian love 'through him and in him' ("The Foundations of Christian Ethics" 376).

<sup>54</sup> He argues, for example, that Christ's "whole human substance is 'made fluid' so that it can enter into human beings; but this takes place in such a way that at the same time he also makes fluid the boulders of sin that have formed in resistance to God's fluidity and dissolves them in that experienced godforsakenness of which they secretly consist" (*New Elucidations* 116-17).

<sup>55</sup> Beaudin, *Obéissance et solidarité* 307.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 284. "The entire event of salvation . . . unfolds within the divine inner-subjectivity" (Balthasar, *La foi du Christ: Cinq approches christologiques*, trans. Jacques Guillet et al. [Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968] 191). "If classical Christology was an attempt to fit Christ into the world of being, von Balthasar's is the opposite: to fit the world of being into Christ, the primary intelligible. This he calls "Christologic" (Gerald Reedy, "The Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Thought* 45 [1970] 409).

<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 2.201.

priated in such a way that the human creature is anchored in God's freedom both objectively, "in God's truthfulness," and subjectively, "in his own attitude of truth," which is to say that "it must commit itself to this truth, which is freely offered to it."<sup>58</sup> In so doing, in letting itself be brought into the realm of infinite freedom, there is no danger that the creature will become alienated from itself, for the simple reason that self-surrender is the very law of trinitarian being: the divine nature "is always both what is possessed and what is given away," the "fullness of blessedness" lying simultaneously in "giving and receiving both the gift and the giver."<sup>59</sup>

### CONTRIBUTION TO A CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION

The strength of Balthasar's soteriology is most apparent precisely in the image of created freedom being incorporated into trinitarian freedom by means of the mutual giving of persons. What is primary here is not the fact of Christ's taking on sin, although this indisputably belongs to Balthasar's theology of redemption and thus to his concept of Christ as the representative of the human person, but the reality of the kenosis, the radical self-giving of the Father in the person of His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, Christ is present as the representative of the Father, so that "the vertical descent of the Word into the deepest state of the flesh is identical with the flesh being filled with the eternal Word of God."<sup>60</sup> This focus in Christ's relationship to humanity upon communicating divine life rather than taking on sin avoids many of the conflicting images previously highlighted. It emphasizes, moreover, the fact that Balthasar portrays Christ's relationship to the human race as an extension or continuation of his relationship with the Father as expressed in his priestly prayer.<sup>61</sup>

For Balthasar the Son's obedience unto death is simply an act of his eternal love for the Father which in turn is "nothing but the act of making space for the eternal love of the Father for the Son."<sup>62</sup> This is so because in the act of the eternal generation, the Father gives himself to the Son in

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 2.253.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 2.258.

<sup>60</sup> *A Theological Anthropology* 243.

<sup>61</sup> Balthasar comments: "When the Son petitions the Father for glory in his priestly prayer (John 17) what he requests is no mere restoration of an original state, but rather the integration of the obedient love . . . into the original intimacy and 'perfect joy' of the dwelling with one another of Father and Son" (*The Glory of the Lord* 7.260). "The potentiality that he realized in the Incarnation even to the total renunciation of obedience unto death on the Cross had its foundation in the pure actuality of the eternal life of the Blessed Trinity. There can be no going forth that was not subsumed in and surpassed by the eternal procession of the Son from the Father, and no return that could be accomplished apart from the eternal return of the Son to the Father" (*The Christian State of Life* 189).

<sup>62</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.251 and 7.291.

such a way as no longer to possess himself. Instead, the Son possesses him and as his representative reveals him to the world.<sup>63</sup> When Jesus says “he who sees me sees the Father” (John 14:9), he is claiming, Balthasar argues, not merely that he has come from the Father, but that even now he is coming from him: The believer sees in the Son’s movement from the Father the Father himself “who simply is this fathering and is nothing behind or beyond it.”<sup>64</sup> Precisely because he has given everything over to the Son (and in God there is nothing that he has other than what he is), the Father “cannot do more than ‘pitilessly’ hand over this All to the world.”<sup>65</sup> When Christ says, therefore, “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (John 15:9), his meaning is not simply analogical: he is “the love that flows from God the Father to men.”<sup>66</sup> That is to say, because he actually identifies with the life that he eternally receives from the Father—a life which, in the historical mode of time, assumes the form of a mission<sup>67</sup>—there is a perfect and eternal correspondence between the Father’s bestowal and his own reception.<sup>68</sup> The gift of divine life which the Son communicates is properly his own, but only as received from the Father.<sup>69</sup> The Son’s self-gift

<sup>63</sup> “[The Son] in the whole of his earthly existence allowed himself to be led and ‘fertilized’ by the Father; but in such a way that, at the same time, as a man, he represents the originally generative force of God in the world” (*Credo: Meditations on the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. David Kipp [New York: Crossroad, 1990] 78).

<sup>64</sup> *You Have the Words of Everlasting Life* 80.

<sup>65</sup> *Theo-Drama* 3.519.

<sup>66</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.454. Christ, explains Balthasar, is “the ecstasy of the divine eros flowing out of itself in which God hands himself over and entrusts himself to the world” (“*Fides Christi: An Essay on the Consciousness of Christ*,” trans. Edward T. Oakes, in *Explorations in Theology 2: Spouse of the Word* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991] 78). “We are not speaking, as we did in the case of Adam, of a blessing that flows from the mysterious fecundity of the Blessed Trinity into one who has been created in the image of God, but rather of a direct outpouring of the divine fecundity itself through the instrumentality of Christ’s humanity” (*The Christian State of Life* 234).

<sup>67</sup> *A Theology of History* 27; see Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 1, q. 43, a. 1.

<sup>68</sup> In response to the Father, who is disappropriated in the act of begetting him, the Son, Balthasar teaches, hands himself over in an eternal act of “thanksgiving” (*eucharistia*). “His thanksgiving is the eternal Yes to the gift of consubstantial divinity. . . . It is a Yes to the primal kenosis of the Father in the unity of omnipotence and powerlessness. . . . Here, spanning the gulf of the Divine Persons’ total distinctness, we have a correspondence between the Father’s self-giving, expressed in generation, and the Son’s thanksgiving and readiness” (*Theo-Drama* 4.326; see also 4.324). “Insofar as he is God, he is eternal, infinite freedom; insofar as he is the Son of the Father, he is this freedom in the mode (“tropos”) of readiness, receptivity, obedience and hence of appropriate response” (*Theo-Drama* 2.267).

<sup>69</sup> In chapter 17 of John, the verb *didonai* (to give) is used thirteen times in reference to the Father (compared to three times in reference to the Son) and in none of these occurrences is it said that the Father gives directly to human persons.

is a revelation of the unconditional love of the Father who hands him over.<sup>70</sup> Balthasar draws from Eckhart the insight that the Father's self-emptying in the generation of the Son is presented to the world in the emptied body of his Son; in the open heart of Jesus "God himself pours himself out."<sup>71</sup> Within the Son's self-sacrifice, which constitutes the "spring" of the Eucharist, is the eternal surrender of the Father's love.<sup>72</sup> Christology therefore never has the last word in Balthasar's theology, for "behind the Son stands the Father; behind the *fiat* of the Son to the will of the Father stands the heart of the Father who allows the Son to go into the total abandonment of Hell," as an act of love for the Father.<sup>73</sup>

Here, again, we meet the paradox of the abandonment that Balthasar attributes to God's love for the sinful human race, the Son's love for the Father, and the Father's love for the Son that allows him to prove his filial love in precisely this way: "the One who forsakes is just as much affected (in his eternal life) as the One who is forsaken."<sup>74</sup> Hence salvation appears in Balthasar's theology as a trinitarian affair: "Outwardly it may seem that men cause Christ's Passion: they put him in chains, scourge and crucify him; they pierce his heart. But inwardly it is a trinitarian action, in which God has the chief role and men are merely supernumeraries."<sup>75</sup> What if human persons were to be granted a determinant role in the drama of salvation? What if the abandonment of Christ were to be interpreted as the Father's nonintervention, so that once Christ is handed over to sinners, he is so radically given as to be taken back only in the Resurrection? What if, in other words, Christ's eucharistic outpouring were interpreted in terms of the irrevocable character of the Father's gift in the person of his Son? Could it not be said that what we witness on Calvary is not so much the Father's abandonment of the Son in place of sinful humanity, as the sinner's abandonment of God who gives himself unconditionally in the person of his Son?<sup>76</sup>

---

Ignace de la Potterie stresses the unity of the Father and the Son in the work of salvation based on the assertion, "The words that you have given me I have given to them" (John 17:8; see 7:16, 24) (*La vérité dans Saint Jean* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978] 2.729).

<sup>70</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* 111.

<sup>71</sup> *Glory of the Lord* 7.85; see also *Theodramatik* 4: *Endspiel* 407; and "Who is the Church?" in *Explorations in Theology 2: Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 190.

<sup>72</sup> *Theodramatik* 4.443.

<sup>73</sup> *The Glory of the Lord* 7.538.

<sup>74</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* 4.501; see *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975) 51; *The Christian State of Life* 256.

<sup>75</sup> *Truth is Symphonic* 42-43.

<sup>76</sup> Although it is not consistently present in his work, such a conclusion is not

According to Balthasar it is of the very nature of the Son to offer himself to the Father in thanksgiving for the gift of himself, a gift constituted by the Father's own self-outpouring. When this radical self-giving by an act of love enters into the realm of creation, the immanent Trinity being revealed as the economic Trinity, it is challenged in a manner yet unknown (in the experimental sense) to the divine persons in their perfect communion of giving and receiving.<sup>77</sup> When this noncalculating divine love encounters a freedom which instead of receiving it refuses it, the result is that rather than integrating this freedom into itself and rather than drawing back the gift, divine freedom manifests itself in a new mode. It is revealed in the form of absolute vulnerability, love surrendered unto death, and a horrendous death at that!<sup>78</sup> In Balthasar's words, "given the plan to bring about creatures endowed with freedom, the ultimate form of this pouring-forth [i.e., of the Son who, in response to the Father's own self-gift, is eternally at His disposal to give himself in whatever way the Father determines] will be that of the Eucharist, which, as we know it, is intimately connected with the Passion *pro nobis*."<sup>79</sup> The severity of the rejection in the form of the Cross is thus enabled by the extreme defenselessness of the one who gives himself unto death: "Man's refusal was possible because of the trinitarian 'reck-

---

completely foreign to Balthasar's thinking. Because the Father has commissioned the Son "to reveal God's nature and his disposition toward man," Balthasar reasons that the cry of dereliction on the Cross is a revelation of "how God is forsaken by sinners" (*Theo-Drama* 3.224–25).

<sup>77</sup> "The divine hypostases know and interpenetrate each other to the very same degree that each of them opens up to the other in absolute freedom. None is overwhelmed by being known by the others, since each subsists by being *let-be*" (*Theo-Drama* 2.259). Indeed, "the hypostases do not possess the divine nature in common like an untouchable treasure; rather, the divine nature is defined through and through by the modes of divine being . . . This nature is always both what is possessed and what is given away" (*ibid.* 2.258).

<sup>78</sup> "[T]here is something in God that can develop into suffering. This suffering occurs when the recklessness with which the Father gives away himself (and *all* that is his) encounters a freedom that, instead of responding in kind to this magnanimity, changes it into a calculating, cautious self-preservation. This contrasts with the essentially divine recklessness of the Son, who allows himself to be squandered, and of the Spirit who accompanies him" (*Theo-Drama* 4.328).

<sup>79</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.330; see *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 31. Balthasar argues that "this self-giving in our fallen world was from the very outset meant to be soteriological: the Son is 'sent' by the Father into the desolation of the Cross, because he really 'takes upon himself' the sin of the world (Jn 1:29) and represents it in its entirety (2 Cor 5:14, 21; Gal 3:13; Eph 2:14–16)" (*New Elucidations* 115–16). On the other hand, he argues that the Son is delivered "into the hands of men who will do things to him which were not intended by the goodness of God's will to salvation" (*The Threefold Garland* 39).

lessness' of divine love, which, in its self-giving, observed no limits and had no regard for itself."<sup>80</sup> In this, it showed both its power and its powerlessness and fundamental vulnerability."<sup>81</sup> What is central to this understanding is both the influence of finite freedom in its interaction with divine freedom and the absolute character of the divine self-surrender: a love that gives itself without counting the costs. The eucharistic outpouring is not a sin-offering, a making-right of the wrong that may be identified with the refusal of the self-gift of God in the person of his Son. Rather it is a sharing of the divine nature, a pouring forth in time of the divine substance eternally poured forth in itself so as to be mysteriously identified with this constant dynamism of giving and receiving.<sup>82</sup> Within the context of sin and the resistance that it necessarily implies, the eucharistic outpouring consists in the gift of unconditional forgiveness: "For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27). Whereas Abel's blood cried out to the Lord for vengeance, Christ's blood cries out for reconciliation.<sup>83</sup>

Here the Lord's command to his disciples requires nonresistance even to the point of death. What is primary is not death as such, not even death as

<sup>80</sup> "The Father's Word, made flesh, is definitively given and distributed by him and is never to be taken back. . . . The 'liquefying' of Jesus' earthly substance into that of the Eucharist is irreversible" (*New Elucidations* 117-18). "Kenosis is an emptying out to provide a space that can be filled, and the Eucharist is the permeation of the kenosis with God's love being poured out in it as flesh given up and blood shed" (*ibid.* 126).

<sup>81</sup> *Theo-Drama* 4.329. "Here lies the 'unfathomable' (Eph 3.8) mystery of the Cross in the momentum of the collision of the entire burden of sin with the total powerlessness of the kenotic existence" (*The Glory of the Lord* 7.208-9). Balthasar writes that "[E]very 'risk' on God's part is undergirded by, and enabled by, the power-less power of the divine self-giving" (*Theo-drama* 4.327). Rather than leave the insight here, however, he returns to the conclusion that the human actor has little, if any, determining influence upon the conclusion of the drama: "So we must say both things at once: within God's own self—for where else is the creature to be found?—and in the defenselessness of absolute love, God endures the refusal of this love; and, on the other hand, in the omnipotence of the same love, he cannot and will not suffer it." Hence "the creature's No . . . must be located within the Son's all-embracing Yes to the Father, in the Spirit" (*ibid.*).

<sup>82</sup> "[T]he Father's act of self-giving by which, throughout all created space and time, he pours out the Son is the definitive revealing of the trinitarian act itself in which the 'Persons' are God's 'relations', forms of absolute self-giving and loving fluidity. In the Eucharist the Creator has succeeded in making the finite creaturely structure so fluid—without fragmenting or violating it ('no one takes my life from me': Jn 10:18)—that it is able to become the bearer of the triune life" (*New Elucidations* 119).

<sup>83</sup> See Dominique Barthélemy, *God and His Image: An Outline of Biblical Theology*, trans. Aldhelm Dean (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 177-78, at 170.

a retribution (as in the *lex talionis*),<sup>84</sup> but rather the absolute or unbounded gift of self which in the person of Christ is the gift of God's self-communication to human persons. Such a reception implies a certain openness that may be considered a form of self-gift or availability.<sup>85</sup>

The Father does not command the Son to justify humanity before God by standing in its place so as to take on its punishment for sin or to reverse Adam's refusal of God through Christ's own filial obedience. Nor is the Son's task, as Balthasar describes it, "to allow the sins of the world to enter into him who is 'dispossessed' out of love of God—to become 'the lamb of God who bears the guilt of the world' (John 1.29)—and my sins."<sup>86</sup> Rather, I am convinced, the Father's command consists in this: that the Son return to the Father with the world for whose sake he came forth from the Father on mission. In Balthasar's words, "the command Christ received from the Father is that he love us as the creatures of God and draw us into his own Sonship."<sup>87</sup> It is a command to surrender his life along with the Father's love for those to whom he is sent by the Father.

The filial obedience that is the other manifestation of the Father's command<sup>88</sup> is of essential importance here, for it reveals the *pro nobis* of salvation as a revelation of the even more profound *pro patre*. By the same disposition of loving openness, Christ is given without reserve to the Father and to the world alike,<sup>89</sup> so as to set a precedent for the formula "he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). Thus, while the creed explains the meaning of his death as "for us and our salvation," the Synoptics as "for you" (Luke 22:19–20) and "for many" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24), Paul as "for us" (Romans 5:8), John recognizes Christ's final surrender as a gift of love for the Father: "I do as the Father has commanded

<sup>84</sup> Exod 21:24 f.; see Leviticus 24:19–20; Deuteronomy 19:21.

<sup>85</sup> This reality is expressed by Balthasar in the German word *Hingabe* which denotes simultaneously an act of devotion and one of surrender.

<sup>86</sup> *Love Alone* 81.

<sup>87</sup> *You Have the Words of Everlasting Life* 191.

<sup>88</sup> Christ's mission and obedience are so perfectly coordinated that what comes from the Father as a "command" (John 10:18; 12:49) returns to him as the Son's entreaty: "May they all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee" (17:20). One might observe in John's Gospel, for example, a perfect parallelism between the objective and paternal perspective of redemption (3:16–19) and the subjective and filial one (12:46–49). This accord between the Father's command and the Son's obedience is, according to Balthasar, "the economic form of the common spiration of the Spirit" (*Theo-Drama* 3.188), who, as the fruit of their mutual love and as the "seal" of their common Yes, witnesses to their eternal unanimity (*ibid.* 511).

<sup>89</sup> Like the prophets before him, the obedient Son achieves, according to Balthasar, a double solidarity (with God and humanity) in virtue of a single fidelity (to God) and is thereby vowed (and not "doomed") to die, being "claimed" and "stripped" by both God and man (See *La foi du Christ* 88).

me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31).<sup>90</sup> It follows that the command that the disciples receive from the Son, "that you love one another as I have loved you" (15:12), is a kind of extension of the command that the Son received from the Father: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (15:9–10).<sup>91</sup> Here Christ is the Father's representative, the fullness of his revelation (see Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:2; etc.) in the world.

### CONCLUSION

Despite its weaknesses, there is much in Balthasar's theology of representation that remains positive. One can fault his dimming of the initial and final insight that Christ is the representative of the Father by his occasional focus upon Christ's role as the representative of sinful humanity, whereby he takes upon himself the sins of the world as well as the fate accompanying the bearer of this sin. Granted that this is performed as an act of the utmost charity—as the Father's love for the world and as the Son's love for the Father—we are faced with the dilemma of how the Father's abandonment of the only-begotten Son should be the greatest revelation of His love for those whom he wills to call sons. In the image of the forsaken Son—as opposed to the welcome prodigal son—it is difficult to discern the merciful face of the Father. We are left with the revelation of a God who banishes from his presence the one who allows the sins of the world to enter into himself inasmuch as he is dispossessed out of love of God.<sup>92</sup> Balthasar's response to this quandary is to present the Father's rejection of the Son as a form of His paternal love for him: the Father allows the Son to prove his filial fidelity in accord with this eternal desire in precisely this way. In this way Balthasar is not only forced to leave the realm of revelation; he is also forced to abandon the time-honored tradition of the beatific vision, for the Son who calls out to the Father on the Cross obviously has forgotten this eternal desire.

Without denying that Christ does reveal "man to himself" (so as to be his representative), we must therefore insist that this occurs "in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love."<sup>93</sup> Primary in this

<sup>90</sup> "Because the Son loves the Father, he also loves his mission, which consists of loving and transmitting that love to us. All of this is a single reality for Christ . . ." (*You Have the Words* 191). Similarly, Balthasar argues, "As *God-Man*, he is the identity of love and obedience, insofar as his *missio* is the appearance in this world of his *processio* in God: the revelation of the Father. . . . Thus in him there is no tension between love for the Father and love for mankind" (*New Elucidations* 235).

<sup>91</sup> See *The Glory of the Lord* 7.256. <sup>92</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone* 81.

<sup>93</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World no. 22.

revelation is his eternal communion with the Father, a relation into which we are incorporated to the extent that we are likewise dispossessed out of love of God so as to receive his Spirit of adoption. As bearers of his Spirit, human persons are not only integrated into Christ's loving communion of life; they also participate in his mission of drawing others into this same trinitarian embrace. Hence it is possible to address with Balthasar the subject of an "inclusive" representation: that mystery whereby the human person participates in Christ's mission of revealing and transmitting the Father's love. Concretely, this means participating in what Balthasar calls his essential eucharistic fluidity by which he crosses the boundary into the actual Passion through the irrevocable gift of self. Balthasar teaches that for the Christian there may no longer exist frontiers separating the fact of disposing of oneself and that of being at God's disposal.<sup>94</sup> Hence the "new commandment" is twofold: "that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love each other" (1 John 3:23); this implies a double dynamism, for it emphasizes both the receptive aspect of faith and its responsive aspect. As the representative of Christ, the disciple remains, with and in him, the representative of the Father.

<sup>94</sup> See *New Elucidations* 122 and 237; *Engagement with God*, trans. John Halliburton (London: SPCK, 1975) 82. Christ shares his "pro-existence" with us: "the only one who was able to be 'a man for others' with full efficacy now introduces his followers into the same ability" (*The Glory of the Lord* 7.466). See also Balthasar, "Catholicism and the Communion of Saints," *Communio* 15 (Summer, 1988) 163–68.