

phenomenology of forgiveness. Along the way, he brings the role of unconscious mental processes to bear on the acts of offering and receiving forgiveness. His nuanced presentation, with abundant notes, includes Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and a host of psychologists with a variety of theoretical orientations in dialogue with such issues as moral agency and free will.

All of this philosophical and theological analysis precedes V.'s turn to a book-length exploration of Christian forgiveness. Perhaps, this is why V.'s work often reads like a reference volume. There are so many intriguing and detailed conversations woven into this monograph that considerable rereading becomes a necessity. V. does, very helpfully, regularly provide summaries at key points along the way.

The third major section of V.'s project is where many readers will probably concentrate their efforts. Here V. highlights and evaluates the work of Lewis B. Smedes, Miroslav Volf, and L. Gregory Jones. This section could easily suffice as a separate book. In sum, V. finds numerous shortcomings in Smedes's popular studies on forgiveness. V.'s preferred theological conversation partners are Volf and Jones. V. concludes that there is an identifiable Christian forgiveness, even in this postmodern world where many do not think of themselves as sinners.

How can this finely researched, thoughtfully executed, volume be used? Most likely as a resource for theologians, graduate students, and a few intrepid clergy. The bibliography and extensive notes alone are valuable. And pastoral theologians, in particular, will be drawn to V.'s "landscape of Christian forgiveness."

Gary S. Eller
Creighton University, Omaha

Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought. By Jennifer Newsome Martin. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015. Pp xi + 310. \$35.

Martin proposes an introduction to and an analysis of the theological method of Hans Urs von Balthasar built upon the premise that it is experimental rather than nostalgic (198). She demonstrates it through an "excavation" (1) that leads her readers through the way that "Vladimir Soloviev, Nikolay Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov, and also Balthasar, received the Schellingian Idealism to varying degrees as well as different degrees of critical distance" (15–16). M. shows that this interpretation of the Russian theologians and Balthasar can be demonstrated in two ways: through the thematic content, and a theological method based on a creative fidelity to the tradition and marked by originality (17). The thematic contents—*aesthetics, myth, eschatology, and apocalyptic*—correspond to the second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters of this book. M. justifies their choice affirming that these categories function "as synecdochic indices of the relation between infinite and finite" (17). The introduction of each chapter with parts of poems of Rainer Maria Rilke illustrates, in a subtle way, the understanding that M. has of the speculative theological method of Balthasar. The method is proposed as a hypothesis in the first chapter, and then is demonstrated in the following chapters by indicating

how Balthasar converges, diverges, or establishes parallel lines of thought with the Russian theologians and their treatment of Friedrich W. J. Schelling.

It is in the first chapter of the book and in its conclusion that M. presents the different premises of the theological method of Balthasar, although they are implicit and referred to in the other chapters. M. considers that, besides Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen has also a very decisive importance as a “more proximate *methodological* type to Balthasar” (21). This importance of Origen is explained by the weight of the Johannine word-mysticism in Balthasar’s method and proposals, especially in the articulation between the whole and the fragment. It is also shown by the legitimacy of speculative theologizing, grounded on revelation, being engaged in a dialogue with philosophical discourses that keeps present the notion of mystery, and an intrinsic articulation between faith and knowledge, a Christian gnosis (34). The speculative theological method of Balthasar, inspired by Origen, is legitimized if it fulfills the five principles summarized by M. in the conclusion: it must preserve the mystery of God; the knowledge of God must be always located in its properly Christian context; it must indulge but not always readily sanction a plurality of voices; it must be generous to accept the often ambiguous cultural contribution of the world; and it must be trinitarian, privileging Christology and Pneumatology together.

Among the three Russian theologians, Bulgakov is the one with whom this method seems to converge the most (73). In the second chapter focused on aesthetics, M. relates the agreement between Bulgakov and Balthasar regarding the importance of the Holy Spirit in its aesthetic role, although they diverge in the specification of the role (74). M. points out in chapter 4 that by focusing on eschatology from an anthropocentric point of view, there is a certain discomfort of Balthasar regarding Bulgakov’s proposal of *apokatastasis* (145), though both authors share striking similarities regarding the theology of death and resurrection (131). By concentrating on eschatology from a theocentric point of view, chapter 5 is decisive in showing the importance of Bulgakov in the development of Balthasar’s apocalyptic trinitarianism. The concept of *Ur-kenosis*, based on the idea that self-donation is essential and the key to understand the life of the Trinity, was taken by Balthasar from Bulgakov, and together with a shared Johannine framework, enabled him to establish his theological proposal about the relationship between the immanent and economic. As M. points out, “The economy is all gift of love, and an expression of the same mode of love that characterizes essentially the immanent Trinity” (194).

This book is an important study for someone who wants to approach Balthasar from a methodological point of view. The “excavation” of M. gives us more than just Balthasar. It shows us the significance for both the Russian theologians and Balthasar of Schelling and Jakob Böhme, among the representatives of German Idealism and Romanticism. Balthasar and the Russian theologians well represent European culture, in particular the Russian culture in its religious expressions, by highlighting this central relationship of art, culture, and theology. M. thus offers contemporary theologians some criteria to develop, or to discuss, a speculative theological method.

João Eleutério
University of Saint Joseph, Macau