"A GREAT MYSTERY": THE ANALOGY OF THE SEXES IN THE TRINITARIAN *COMMUNIO* OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR IN LIGHT OF A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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This project attempts to expound the theological anthropology of Hans Urs von Balthasar as a decidedly Trinitarian anthropology. The method of this project explores the writings of Balthasar on the analogy of the sexes grounded in the Godhead, and incorporates the critical engagement of feminist theologian Tina Beattie. Central to the conclusion of this thesis is an understanding of the Trinity as a reciprocal Gift-Exchange of Love between the Persons; a model after which the human sexes, male and female, were created and called to imitate. This thesis questions the degree to which Beattie's critique of Balthasar fails to take into account the Trinitarian grounding of Balthasar's vision of the human sexes.

Dedicated to Rev. Father Mark Gruber O.S.B.

who formed me in the Balthasarian vision long before I encountered the theologian.

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Of the many people to thank, I first must express gratitude to my thesis director Matthew Levering and my committee members William Portier and Jana Bennett for seeing this thesis to completion. My inspirational influence in constructing this project is immense, but first privilege must go to my future wife Gabrielle Genovese, whose bond of love and self-giving I pray will continue to become evermore akin to the Trinitarian Gift-Exchange poetically articulated by Balthasar. I recognize also my family for fostering such a *communio* of love from which I was thus able to be sent forth from your midst, and which I proudly claim as my own. I am forever indebted to my friend and colleague Jim Wykes, whose comments and conversation on this project have been indispensable. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the thoughts, prayers, and eternal friendship of Father Mark Gruber and Father Mark Wenzinger, who continue to educate me by their dedication to the cross of Christ.

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ABBREVIATIONS

TD-Theo-Drama

TL-Theo-Logic

GL-The Glory of the Lord

TA-Theological Anthropology

CSL-The Christian State of Life

NCF-New Catholic Feminism

SDM-Sex, Death and Melodrama

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A PRAYERFUL BEGINNING

When beginning a theological discussion of the Trinity or any theological investigation, it seems somehow appropriate to appeal to a contemplative and prayerful methodology. This belief is certainly held to be true by both core thinkers explored in my thesis: Tina Beattie and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Theology must begin on one's knees, and even more appropriately it should lead there. The theologian ought to reflect on the content of her work and strive to consider whether or not her conclusions advance the betterment of humankind and the glory of God. It should therefore be of grave concern to any theologian whether one's theology traps the human person in a kind of slavery or promulgates inaccuracies pertaining to the mysteries of God. This project aspires to transcend both pitfalls and offer some spiritual contribution to an understanding of both God and humanity.

Andrei Rublev's fifteenth century icon of the Trinity offers such a necessary gateway into mystical contemplation of God in relation to humanity. Catherine Mowry Lacugna, a feminist Catholic theologian, interprets this iconic representation to be proof that "true communion among persons is the deepest meaning of life."[1] She suggests this conclusion by focusing on the open circle that draws the gaze of those who look upon the

[1] LaCugna, Catherine Mowry, ed. "God in Communion with Us: The Trinity," *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective.* (New York: HarperCollins Inc, 1993), 108.

icon, transporting them into a Trinitarian *communio* of persons. She explains that "the eucharistic cup in the center" is the "sacramental sign of our communion with God and with one another."[2] She thus sees as important the proper understanding of Trinitarian life as non-hierarchical, loving, and welcoming.[3]

Hans Urs von Balthasar's own theological work could be seen as a similar icon that draws the reader into the "drama" of God. Balthasar's Trilogy opens up for the Christian a mystical understanding of God's purpose for the world as moving toward the divine. The Christian is beckoned to the table where the Father, Son, and Spirit share a Eucharistic meal of self-giving love for the "other" who is truly "other." In a similar way, Tina Beattie is advocating "the makings of a new sacramentality of being in the world,"[4] one that utilizes prayer and mystical contemplation.

Another Catholic feminist, Michelle Schumacher, understands the gravity of both their messages and vocational calls to imitate and share in the divine life of love. She interprets the experience of a true gift of self as

> an experience of a relation with the living God who is Love and who loves the human person, each and every human person, into being by creation and into action by the liberating power of redemption and the call to mission. This 'divinely stimulated' action might, in turn, be conceived as a participation in the *communication* of love whose goal is –for the self and the beloved 'other'—a participation in the *communion* of Love (divine life).[5]

Similarly, Balthasar recognizes this "mission" of the person to live in the fullness of the *imago Trinitatis* as constitutive of a "cosmic liturgy." In this phrase Balthasar defines a concept from Maximus the Confessor that seeks to articulate how one must "live united

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[2] Lacugna, 84.
[3] Lacugna, 85.
[4] Tina Beattie, *New Catholic* Feminism, 188.
[5] Michelle M. Schumacher, "An Introduction to a New Feminism," in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*. ed. Michele M. Schumacher, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), xii.

to God in order to be united to ourselves and to the cosmos."[6] David Schindler explains that as "cosmic entities" that participate in the gift of being, humans are oriented to the "the gift-giving of God" that overflows to "the service of others."[7]

The reality of this cosmic liturgy is revealed to humankind in another liturgical act, the incarnating of Christ, the Son of the Father, in his temporal mission and his Eucharistic presence. Balthasar explains that the Trinitarian love is "the essence of all being and has become visible in Jesus Christ" who reveals the Father, as "a wellspring of reciprocal love."[8] This begins to get at the title of this thesis which quotes Saint Paul's naming of the relationship between Christ and the Church as "a great mystery" (Eph 5:32). The nuptial imagery implemented here, with Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as Bride, is applied by Balthasar in two directions: downward onto human relationships and upward to the Trinitarian *communio*. Christ's marriage to the Church is the "great mystery" that unlocks the key to both the human and divine sides of the analogy. Who Christ is in relation to the Church reveals who God is (in Himself and in relation to us) and who human beings are in relation to each other (particularly as male and female).[9]

Balthasar's nuanced directionality in this analogy is important to comprehend. There is a fundamental difference between saying that the Triune God is like the male and female sexes and that the human sexes are derived from relationships within the reciprocal gift exchange of the Trinity. Balthasar, advocating the latter, utilizes Richard

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[6] Pope Benedixt XVI, weekly audience of 25 June 2008; cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

[7] Schindler, Embodied Person as Gift, 416.

[8] TL III, 438.

[9] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 773, "In the Church this communion of men with God, in the "love [that] never ends," is the purpose which governs everything in her that is a sacramental means, tied to this passing world. (*1 Cor* 13:8)."

of Saint Victor to make a point of how the human sexes are analogously reflective of the Trinitarian relations:

> When two love each other, exchanging the gift of their heart in intense longing, and love flows from the one to the other and from the other to the one and thus in each case tends in an opposite direction toward a diverse object, there is indeed love on both sides, but the partners do not yet love with each other [*condilectio*]. We cannot say that they love with each other until the two love a third in harmonious unity, lovingly embracing him in common [*socialiter*], and the affection of the two surges forth as one in the flame of love for the third.[10]

The mystery of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ opens up the meaning of human relationships, so that Balthasar can claim "in the encounter of two people who love each other we have a pale reflection of this state of affairs: this is how it *should* be."[11]

Balthasar's understanding of Trinitarian theology constantly informs his anthropology of human beings. His *Theo-Logic* will then be indispensable for a proper understanding of his *Trinitarian* anthropology. I would like to preface Balthasar's theological anthropology with a quote pertaining to the Trinitarian foundation of the sexes and how, given this context, differences between them are in not to be understood negatively:

> Christianity is the religion of incarnate love, and this love ultimately presupposes God's Trinitarian mystery, in which the 'persons' are so different that they cannot be subsumed under any generic concept of person and precisely thus constitute the one and only essence of God. This suggests the following anthropological principle: the more diverse the characteristics of man and woman in the identity of human nature, the more perfect and fruitful their union in love can be.[12]

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[10] Richard of Saint Victor, *De Trinitate* III, 19; Translation is Balthasar's.

[11] TD III, 531.

[12] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 23, no. 4 (1996): 701-9, 703.

This should potentially dilute at least some anxiety about reducing the female sex to an inferior position in relation to the masculine.[13] Beattie's worry that Balthasar's project leads to a reaffirmation of patriarchal subjugation of women is certainly a respectable concern. Traditional theology, particularly that of *kenosis* and self-gift have been used in the past to keep women in situations of oppression. Beattie has a valid fear that Balthasar's theology might reaffirm such notions and thus hinder the feminist struggle to relate to "a God beyond patriarchy."[14] Her solution, which is not antithetical to Balthasar's, involves a prayerful contemplation of God and the material world that draws "the praying self into a space of vulnerability which, in Christ, becomes a space of strength and wholeness."[15] As will become clearer later, my reading of von Balthasar's theological anthropology of man and woman does not hinder feminist empowerment because his anthropology is a *consequence* of his Trinitarian theology, and must be read in that hermeneutic.

The structure of this thesis will be in three parts. The first chapter seeks to lay out Balthasar's anthropology of the female-male polarity, derived from its *imago Trinitatis*, and explore how the sexes exhibit a dual unity-in-difference that allows for reciprocal union. This chapter explores the nuptial relationship of Christ to the Church as it is revelatory of both human sexuality and divine relationships. The second chapter expounds Balthasar's construction of a Trinitarian Gift-Exchange between Persons and the way in which those relations are infused into humanity. This is accomplished by a consideration of how the economic Trinity reveals the immanent and Balthasar's claim of

[13] Full consideration of concerns about Balthasar's intentions as they have been challenged by feminists like Tina Beattie will be discussed in Section IV of this thesis.

[14] NCF, 75.

[15] NCF, 75.

"supra-sexuality" in God. It will be determined that the *imago* which the sexes embody is specifically founded in the Trinitarian Gift-Giving Event of Love. The final chapter brings to light the objection by feminist theologian Tina Beattie to von Balthasar's theological anthropology. I will examine her critique and pose some questions pertaining to the degree to which she appropriately contextualizes Balthasar's anthropology within his Trinitarian theology. I seek to further her dialogue and engagement with Balthasar and a new feminism that desires to move past the ideological impasse in which Beattie believes feminist theology is trapped.

Our point of departure then must be a contemplative one that humbly strives to plumb the depths of God and the human person. As already suggested, this thesis will constantly meditate on how Balthasar understands the human sexes to reflect the *imago Trinitatis*, and what specifically that might entail in terms of God's interiority. I assert with Balthasar, that the *communio* of Persons in the Trinity is one of reciprocal love and gift-giving, one to the "other." The implications of this will hopefully be clearer by the end of this project, and so for now I end this introduction with a meditation by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger:

> Man is constructed from within, in the image of God, to be loved and to love…In the Trinity, Love's own essence portrays itself. Man is in God's image and thereby he is a being whose innermost dynamic is likewise directed toward the receiving and giving of love.[16]

[16] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God and the World*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 189.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING THE PROBLEM: BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Preliminary Concerns: The Chasm of Being

Given the intention of this paper, which will rely closely on an analogical connection between God and creation, it is incumbent upon us from the start to address the feasibility of this task. The Godhead, in relation to all of creation, is situated across a seemingly infinite chasm of difference, one that produces much difficulty for any theological investigation that attempts to bridge this gap. On the one hand, God's existence *is* His essence; He is sheer, infinite to-be; Pure Act; subsistent-being. God cannot be limited by mere "*kinds* of act" that have potency, for "to-be-God" (particularly) is "to-be-the-form-of-God" (in essence). Creatures on the other hand exist as finite, particular bodies, composed of matter and form, and are *not* the same as their essence. Rather, each are a *particular* instance of that nature (or genus), for the *fullness* of "being-human" does not lie in "being-a-particular-individual." Von Balthasar upholds this "real distinction" made by Aquinas, understanding that "every limited being (*essentia*) participates in real being (in the *actus essendi*), but none of them is identical with it." [17]

[17] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Last Act*, Vol. V of *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (TD), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 68.

How is it possible then to speak of any similarity between the human and the divine, or must theologians resort only to pondering the *maior dissimilitudo*? Von Balthasar, in Nicholas Healy's distillation, suggests that human reason has a "natural ordination" to perceive and receive the "*visio Dei*."[18] Essentially, the human *being* is already preconditioned, by its emergence from Infinite *Being*, to receive the Divine Word and express, however imperfectly, the divine logic.[19] Balthasar even makes the claim that creaturely "*becoming* is rooted in absolute *Being*"[20] in such a way that creaturely otherness from God is actually grounded in the Trinitarian distinction of persons.[21] If this is true, as will later be investigated, then the abyss of "the real difference between the creature and God no longer needs to occasion any anxiety in the former, because ultimately it is grounded in the real difference between the divine hypostases."[22] This then allows for an affirmation of the goodness of creaturely otherness from God because it has its foundation in God's "fullness of actuality."[23]

Balthasar's unveiling of the infinite difference between God and creation as having some grounding, some analogy within God Himself, while controversial, is a foundational assumption for understanding a nuptial analogy in God. For von Balthasar, the world, including the world of the sexes, is from the Trinity, and thus every aspect of the world must be accounted for in some way in the inner life of God. The reality that the

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[18] Nicholas Healy, *The Eschatology of Han Urs Von Balthasar: Being as Communion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21.

[19] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth of God*, Vol. II of *Theo-Logic* (TL), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 81; This theme will be taken up again in the second chapter.

[20] *TD V*, 77;

[21] *TD V*, 68, Here Balthasar explains that the real distinction in creatures "has something to do with the distinction in God between that being which is common to the Persons and the qualities that distinguish them."

[22] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, Vol. II of *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (TD), Trans. Graham Harrison, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 288; Cf. (TD II, 266), "The infinite distance between the world and God is grounded in the other, prototypical distance between God and God."

[23] Healy, 24, 26.

creature stands "over against God" is, as expressed above, an image of the Trinitarian life, but for Balthasar this also "imparts a new dimension of significance to the man/woman polarity."[24] Within the Trinity, the Father is *not* the Son, and the Son is *not* the Father, and the Spirit is *neither* the Father nor the Son. Balthasar explains that this negation within the Godhead, while not being identical to the "not" between God and creature, does constitute the foundation for analogy, even pertaining to the sexual difference of the creature.[25] Before moving on, more must be said about the nature of analogy and similitude.

There is a theological problem present in Balthasar's methodology in that any attributes such as sexuality that one might use to describe God first signify a finite, concrete reality rather than an infinite, self-subsisting perfection.[26] Aquinas therefore proposes that by the *via remotionis* some affirmation of God can in fact be made, albeit only imperfectly and never comprising the divine essence *in itself*, but only as *we* can know it.[27] This process first entails enacting the principle of excellence, thereby understanding that God always exceeds our human concepts and is thus always "ever-greater." The second operation is remotion, which strips away the properties not present in God; in other words, the *mode of signifying* which is always through finite human concepts.[28] God then *is* Good, but *not* in our finite mode of signifying.[29] Nonetheless, the *reality which is signified*—the perfection of Goodness—is understood to exist super-

[24] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, Vol. III of *Theo-Drama* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 340.

[25] TD II, 266.

[26] For example, one can think of a house as being good, in that it fulfills well its function as a house. And yet if one says, "God is a good house" there is no signification of the divine substance, in that this statement is only properly a *metaphor* expressing that God is *like* a house.

[27] *Summa Theologiae* (ST), I. 13. 1-2.

[28] Cf. *Summa contra gentiles* (Contra.gent.), 1. 15-27.

[29] ST, I. 13.3.

eminently in God, stripped of its finite mode of signifying. By this procedure, Aquinas preserves the distance of God's transcendence (which is not an unconquerable distance or aloofness) without collapsing it into univocal being, while at the same time he is left with neither mere metaphor nor equivocation.[30]

This task is accomplished by working back from creation, in other words, from the *effects* (universe) to the *cause* (creator). It is clear in Aquinas that because finite created beings are considered God's effects "we can be led from them so far as to know God…what must necessarily belong to Him."[31] Whatever perfections of being that is in the effects *must* be found in the cause, albeit in a more excellent and super eminent way. So, in actuality this *via negativa* "does not cancel creaturely perfections, but finds them again in God."[32] In ascending to knowledge of God, then, the creature and creation is not left behind, but by analogy, the causal likeness of creatures to God reveals something true about the Triune God. Balthasar cautiously explains, however, that while the daring Christian comparability of the being of creatures and their Origin is more than pre-Christian cosmology could have ever dared to hope for, one must nonetheless be respectful of an always persistent distance.[33]

The definition of this predication of God by analogy can be defined as "a simultaneity of likeness and greater unlikeness."[34] *Analogia* is one of three types of *similitude* in that the two terms "share a form though not of one type."[35] *Esse* is this

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[30] ST, I. 13.5.

[31] ST, I. 12.12.; cf. Contra gent. I. 28.

[32] Healy, 31; A subsequent discussion concerning the disagreement regarding certain perfections such as passivity or receptivity will occur in another chapter. It should also be noted that the perfections of being, from a Thomistic perspective, would be transcendental perfections and not material reality.

[33] TD II, 401, Balthasar explains that the Christian "lives in the paradox of nearness and distance at the same time." cf. (Ibid., 416), Balthasar insists here that a greater dissimilarity still always remains.

[34] Healy, 36.

[35] Healy, 39.

common form which both God and the human creature share, for created being is dependent on self-subsistent Being's persistent presence.[36] Every perfection within created *esse* comes from a participation in *esse* itself, but the nature of *esse* is such that it contains both poverty and richness.[37] Healy explains how there is a dependency inherent in *esse* that allows for gift:

> We can describe this paradoxical dependence of created *esse* upon essence as poverty, or rather the unity of poverty and wealth that Ulrich takes to be a sign of true love. *Esse* is rich in being the source and image of God's supreme perfection, and yet poor in its non-subsistence, which again points back to God as the ultimate ground of both *esse* and essence in their reciprocal relation.[38]

Healy explains that in Balthasar, as opposed to Thomas, the real distinction in creatures becomes a positive image of Giver and Gift, "revealed paradigmatically in interpersonal love,"[39] and opens up Christ's exposition of Trinitarian being. Von Balthasar's "creative retrieval and development" of Aquinas' *via remotionis* yields a new development of the *analogia entis*—being as gift—one that is "capable of undergirding the reciprocal revelation of worldly and trinitarian being in Christ."[40] In reference to human sexuality then, the same form, and the same dynamism that animates the exchange of love between husband and wife, insofar as it approximates reciprocal gift, can be said to be present in the Trinitarian gift exchange. In reality, that dynamism *is* the Trinity—Love *is* the Trinitarian God. This font of identity however, is still to be considered ever greater in

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[36] Healy, 40; cf. ST. I a, q. 8, a. I; This is Healy's reading of Aquinas and does not constitute other perspectives on St. Thomas.e

[37] Healy, 48; cf. (Healy, 59), According to Healy, "the non-subsistence of *esse* means that the complexity of the essence in its non-identity with *esse* does not imply a limit that is foreign to *esse* itself, but is rather a difference that is generously allowed by *esse* itself—essence truly 'affects' *esse* without, for all that, depriving it of its simple fullness." cf. (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, Vol. IV of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (GL), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 401-404; Von Balthasar follows Ferdinand Ulrich drawing from his *Homo Abyssus*, pp 46-60.

[38] Healy, 48.

[39] Healy, 54.

[40] Healy, 25, 54.

God, such that human sexuality is a diminishment of the dynamism that is an ever present "event" in the Trinity.

The analogy of being struggles to become clear without the central player in the theological drama—Christ.

> The God of natural theology, distanced from all worldly being by the major dissimilitude of his act of being, is primarily negatively incomprehensible; he slips through all the mind's instrumental categories that try to pin him down with their "what?" and "how?". However, when God, whom no man has ever seen, is "interpreted" (Jn 1:18) by his Son in human words and deeds, we find that the negative incomprehensibility turns into a positive one.[41]

Christ then is the interpretive key that unlocks the mystery of God's inaccessibility, without, at the same time, eschewing the mystery of God. Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is the "concrete *analogia entis*."[42] Because of this Christological reality mankind and creation find their fulfillment and true meaning within the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man. The Son is the *form* of the world; "the Word is the world's pattern and hence its goal."[43] All the foregoing tensions of human existence and the created order are resolved in the Incarnation and salvific mission of the Son of God. It is only by Jesus' mission in revealing the Father and the entire Trinity that the human intellect can attend to the mystery of the Trinity. As Balthasar says, "We cannot 'have' the Father without the Son."[44]

The revelation by the Son of God will also be the mediating link between what we can say about created sexuality (male and female) and an *analogy* of gender in God. Who Christ is—his gender, the "great mystery" of his relationship with the Church, and what

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[41] TD II, 260.
[42] TD II, 267.
[43] TD II, 261.
[44] TL III, 444.

he says about himself and his place in the Trinity—will be our telescope of inquiry. We must then not seek to project onto God *from below* the interpersonal relations of humans; rather we ought to more truly see how the human genders are an *abstraction* from their foundation in the Trinitarian mystery. Any knowledge is, as always, revealed by Christ and made incarnate into our human pattern of expression. This bold probing into the mysteries of God must carry with it an awareness of inevitable shortcomings. For no human logic is adequate enough to "bear the weight of an authentic rendering of divine logic" because all systems are, as Balthasar explains, "images that look upward from below."[45] Nonetheless, the theologian would do well to "attend to various structures of man's being in order to shed a certain light on the structures of God's being presupposed in faith."[46]

Von Balthasar recognizes both the incomprehensible depth of the mystery and the boldness afforded by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The mysterious realm toward which the theologian aims is both beyond her grasp and yet can be miraculously received as an "unlimited trinitarian communication of the inner-divine love."[47] Balthasar thus offers encouragement for our project in saying:

> "To know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19) is therefore only superficially a paradox, for love offers itself to be known; to be known, of course, not by a knowledge that is enclosed in its own principles, but by a knowledge that remains open to the miracle of that love which wells up, eternally groundless, from within itself.[48]

Balthasar suggests that one must not become resigned to a "purely apophatic theology" because "the irreducibility of love, which wells up in the Father's act of being, is not

[45] TL II, 65.
[46] TL II, 65.
[47] TD II, 260.
[48] TL III, 443

something irrational."[49] And furthermore, because Jesus has revealed God as love, our probing the depths of God "is not in vain" in that "we are meant thereby to understand the gifts bestowed on us by God."[50] As established hitherto, this project is sustained by a positive affirmation of an analogy between creatures made in the *imago Trinitatis* and God the Triune Creator. Jesus Christ, the concrete analogy of the Trinitarian "inner-divine love" is what grounds our knowledge. The next task will be to elaborate Balthasar's core beliefs in his theological anthropology of man and woman given that Christ becomes incarnate as a man, through a woman.

Von Balthasar's Theological Anthropology: An Introduction

In von Balthasar's theological anthropology human beings are repeatedly given the appellation *imago Trinitatis*. This stems no doubt, from the Genesis story wherein Adam and Eve are said to be made in the *imago Dei*; though the nature and enactment of this image is not explicitly elaborated in the Genesis text. Balthasar makes an additional claim—not only human persons, but *all* of creation likewise reflects back this Trinitarian image. Precisely *how* the created order comes from the Trinity and continues to embody it is a difficult question that Balthasar attempts to answer in his anthropological and theological investigations.

A Trinitarian context safeguards at least a semblance of equality between the sexes, given that

> In the dogma of the Trinity, the Persons must be equal in dignity in order to safeguard the distinction that makes the triune God subsistent love; in a similar way, the Church stresses the equal dignity of man and woman, so

[49] TL III, 442.
[50] TL III, 444-445.

> that the extreme oppositeness of their functions may guarantee the spiritual and physical fruitfulness of human nature.[51]

Additionally, we must also be reminded by Balthasar that there is "no vantage point from which to give a *conclusive* definition of the essence of the male and the female."[52] Neither gender can be exhausted, at least in part because no one person can embody the entirety of the male/female polarity. With these preliminary concerns now given a cursory consideration, let us proceed to Balthasar's theological and anthropological conclusions from the Genesis story.

Von Balthasar on Genesis: "Man and Woman He Created Them"

> *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness…So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them then God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply."* (Gen 1:27-28)

Balthasar takes the plural reference "Let us," in conjunction with the proximate commission for fecundity, to signify the Trinitarian likeness as being a community of persons that by its nature is self-diffusive; pouring out from itself.[53] As will be explored throughout this paper, Balthasar is constructing a Trinitarian ontology of the human person as revealed in scripture.

The second creation story highlights a more detailed description of man and woman. Adam, made from the ground, is alone in original solitude before all the world.[54] Adam cannot find a partner from among the animal pairs, for "such a partner would have

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[51] Hans Urs von Balthasr, "Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture." *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 22, no. 1 (1995): 164-70 RT, 169.

[52] TD III, 292; emphasis added.

[53] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (CSL), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 226.

[54] Pope John Paul II explicated the meaning of this "original solitude" in his General Audience on October 15 1979, page 14, taken from *L'Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English.

to be both cosmic (sexual), and, to match Adam, metacosmic, in touch with the *theion*."[55] Eve satisfies both criteria. In the second creation account Eve is fashioned from the side of Adam and from this Balthasar draws three conclusions.[56] (1) The man possesses a primacy "alone before God," but also "potentially and unconsciously bears the woman within him, he cannot give her to himself." (2) The loneliness experienced by Adam is not something good, thus Balthasar emphatically dispels any sympathy for an androgynous myth. (3) Only by being robbed, lowered, and *kenotically* self-emptied does the man find fulfillment.

Pertaining to the first conclusion, the man's priority is "located within an equality of man and woman"; it is grounded in their equal relationship together, between the two, "where each is created by God and dependent on the other."[57] The next section will deal specifically with man's priority and woman's response, but for now it should be understood that Balthasar sees Eve as the completion of the lonely, discontented Adam; a "richness" that can only be "released" by God who acts *above* them both.[58]

Balthasar's second point is that the human being is a "dual unity, two distinct but inseparable realities, each fulfilling the other and both ordained to an ultimate unity that we cannot as yet envisage."[59] This unity-in-difference preserves both the unique integrity of each gender while at the same time equalizing them under the same *essentia*. The woman is entirely inexhaustible to the man, entirely other, though at the same time equal

[55] TD II, 365.
[56] For the following three points please refer to TD II, 373.
[57] TD II, 373; cf. "Woman being 'from man' (1 Cor 11:8) and 'for man' (11:9); all the same, 'man is for woman' (11:12), in such a way that neither of the two can do what he likes with his own body; in each case it is the other who has control (7:4)." (TD II, 373)
[58] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* (TA), (Sheed and Ward, 1967), 308.
[59] TD II, 365-366.

in essence. She is "flesh of his flesh" (Gen 2:23) and yet neither is able to "govern" the other—as Balthasar says:

> The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide neutral ground for mutual understanding.[60]

Women and men, each existing as a complement of the other and the fulfilling happiness of the other, are always in communion with their "counterimage" yet neither is exhausted.[61] The depths of the opposite sex can never be fully plumbed, just as "the human 'I' is always searching for the 'thou,' and actually finds it without ever being able to take possession of it in its otherness."[62]

This division of the sexes (which allows for a greater union) affects not just the genitalia according to von Balthasar but the whole person. Such a division "touches man's spirit so totally, from the deepest roots to its highest pinnacle, that the physical difference appears insignificant in comparison."[63] Each sex is a different way of being-in-the-world, though each in their duality is created out of their shared essence, by the Creator. Since woman was once in man, and man once held woman, it follows that the male and female sexes each have elements of the other in their unified individuality.[64]

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[60] TD II, 365.

[61] TD II, 366.

[62] TD II, 366; Thus, when Adam is unsuccessful in finding a partner it is "not because he lacks communication from spirit to spirit: what he misses is the relationship in which bodily things are communicated spiritually and spiritual things bodily." (Ibid.) It is in this way that complete and full union is frustrated in this world. But, "The nature of human love shows how indissolubly intellectual being and the personal are bound up with each other. Both in his natural being and in his personal being man finds his completion and his happiness only in communion with another human being. This is the basis of the sexual difference in which the profoundest wisdom is revealed)…through the natural difference itself it shows man the eternally unbridgeable, unimaginable difference between one spiritual being and another." (TA, 45).

[63] CSL, 227.

[64] A connection here can be made to the *circumincessio*, or mutual indwelling of the Trinity.

The final point Balthasar makes involves man's forfeiting of his primacy for *kenotic* self-giving that "results in the God-given fulfillment whereby he recognizes himself in the gift of the 'other.'"[65] Balthasar understands nuptiality between the sexes as the prime "training ground for pure love and selflessness;"[66] it is this kind of marital *kenosis* that he will connect to the cross of Christ and an analogy of the Trinitarian life itself. Our next section explores the starting point for the man's *kenotic* gift, his *primacy*, along with his helpmate's *receptive* response and returning gift.

Woman as *Antwort*: The Primacy of Man and the Receptivity of Woman

In Eden, Adam names each of the creatures but as Balthasar observes, none of them is capable of answering back with a response, thus his search ends in frustration and loneliness. Eve however, is decidedly different, for when the man existentially shouts out to his helpmate she actually does possess the capacity for a reciprocal return dialogue. For this reason Balthasar calls woman the *Ant-Wort* (Answer) to the man's longing.[67] She is the principle that stands "over against" the man yet each are ordered to the other. Balthasar explains, "If man is the word that calls out, woman is the answer that comes to him at last (in the *end*)."[68] Only because the woman is like him, from him, and equal to him can the man then shout, "At last! bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

[65] TD II, 373.
[66] CSL, 240.
[67] That is longing in the existential search for a companion of equal capacity for dialogue, particularly, meta-cosmic dialogue.
[68] TD III, 284

Such a bond between Adam and Eve is truly reciprocal since "the word that calls out only attains fulfillment when it is understood, accepted and given back as a word."[69] In this way "man can be primary and woman secondary" yet "the primary needs a partner of equal rank and dignity for its own fulfillment."[70] According to von Balthasar the relation between Christ and the Church, God and the human being, and even God to God in the Trinity all bear a likeness to this primal nuptial relationship. Balthasar will ground this relationship within the reciprocal communion of Trinitarian Persons.

So it is important that whatever analogies are constructed from this story take great care to respect the woman's *equal* and *uniquely individual* response. Von Balthasar makes it clear that any association of the male with the "heavenly spirit" and the feminine with the "earthly material" is to be avoided.[71] He wishes to avert any kind of subjugation of the woman or "cosmic realm" to inferiority, realizing that the relation of the *imago Dei* to human sexuality is best characterized as "in-and-above": it is *in* human sexuality insofar as God reveals Himself *in* the symbolism of fatherhood, motherhood, and the nuptial mystery, but *above* it insofar as sexuality is still connected to animal, created, sexuality.[72]

There is still another aspect of woman to be discussed, and this highlights her *distinctive* role relative to the man. Not only does woman *receive* the gift from man, she also contributes her own unique gift, *returning* it back to him in an entirely new way.

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[69] TD III, 284.

[70] TD III, 284.

[71] TD II, 367. Moreover, von Balthasar outlines two wrong approaches; on the one hand you cannot "make the *theion* the prototype of the sexual dimension" because then sexuality in the Godhead would reduce the divine to a fantastic myth (TD II, 368). But on the other hand you cannot make the cosmic worldly realm the prototype of the sexual because otherwise transcendence is no longer possible (Ibid.), and it borders on reducing that realm to inferiority (Ibid., 382). There must always be a tension then between "human sexuality's cosmic and hypercosmic situation." (Ibid., 368).

[72] TD II, 370; In this insight Balthasar follows Erich Przywaara.

Von Balthasar calls woman *Antlitz*, meaning "face," for she is not defined by the man's probing word that seeks fulfillment, but in fact she possesses her own fruitfulness. Although the woman's fruitfulness is not primary according to Balthasar, but an "answering fruitfulness," nonetheless she is not merely "the vessel of his fruitfulness: she is equipped with her own explicit fruitfulness."[73] In Balthasar's reading of Genesis the "woman does not merely give back to man what she has received from him: she gives him something new, something that integrates the gift he gave her, but 'faces' him in a totally new and unexpected form."[74] One of those ways in which she responds is by reproduction.

The woman takes from the man his "actively responding power," but it is she who does all the work, which "he proposes and stimulates."[75] For von Balthasar, the woman constitutes a "double principle" in that she is the answer to the man but the "common 'fruit' of them both."[76] The fruit of their encounter, the child, is more than the sum of the two spouses' mutual self-giving,[77] for Eve upon receiving a son exclaims, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1).[78] The child can only be explained by the nuptial sacrament whereby the two spouses stand before God, giving Him their fidelity and self, and then receive back from Him the gift of life. Here Balthasar sums up woman as a double principle:

> Woman "cannot be tied down to a formula. First of all, since she is both 'answer' and 'face' , she is dependent on the man's 'word', which calls to her, and his 'look', which searches for her; but at the same time, she is

[73] TD III, 285. Cf. "Since it is woman's essential vocation to receive man's fruitfulness into her own fruitfulness, thus uniting in herself the fruitfulness of both, it follows that she is actually the fruit-bearing principle in the creaturely realm." (TD III, 286)
[74] TD III, 286.
[75] TA, 313.
[76] TD III, 287.
[77] CSL, 246.
[78] TD II, 372.

> independent of him in virtue of her free, equal rank. Then she is even more elusive because of her twofold orientation toward the man and the child; this both constitutes her as a person through dialogue and makes her a principle of generation. In one relationship, she is the answer that is necessary if the word that calls to her is to attain its full meaning; in the other relationship, she herself is the source ('Mother of all the living': Gen 3:20), and hence she is the primary call addressed to the child.[79]

For Balthasar then, the woman escapes definition and is better described as a *process*, oscillating between "Virgin Bride to Mother of the Church," and he blames the theoretical concepts of men for trying to "make this flux and flow into a rigid principle."[80]

Now that we have explored the substantial uniqueness of the two sexes let us revisit once more the "dual unity" of man and woman. It is Balthasar's belief that what is natural in marriage has both a supernatural origin and purpose.[81] Here he draws yet another analogy to the Trinity from his observation of its image—the male/female embrace:

> It would be false to say that Adam and Eve were one only in some abstract 'human nature' and achieved concrete and, therefore, fruitful oneness only through their sexual union. On the contrary, the source of their abstract oneness as human beings was the concrete spiritual oneness and fecundity that made them the image of the concrete divine oneness of nature and fecundity within the Trinity.[82]

It should also be noted that "Both man and woman individually (and not only together) constitute an 'image of God'; thus each has a guaranteed direct access to God."[83]

The Genesis author is limited in his vocabulary to express what Balthasar finds implicit in the story: the unity in difference between Adam and Eve; Man and Woman;

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[79] TD III, 292-293.
[80] TD III, 293.
[81] CSL, 229.
[82] CSL, 227-228.
[83] TD III, 286. Cf. TD II, 370.

Word and Answer; the Look and the Face that returns the gaze. Nonetheless, Genesis speaks with an appropriate symbolism when it tells how Eve was fashioned from Adam's *side* instead of from his reproductive organs. It is clear then that "Eve is potentially in Adam, but he himself cannot produce her from within him."[84] Therefore this action must be done by God while Adam is sleeping; i.e. inactive. Balthasar claims that had this not been the case their unity would have been an "external" one.[85] Balthasar then makes a daring jump from the creation of Eve to the generation of the Son within the Holy Trinity. He explains that by Adam losing his rib he is "allowed to participate in the mystery of the Father's self-giving to the Son, by which the Father empties himself of his own Godhead in order to bestow it on the Son who is eternally of the same nature as he is."[86]

There are multiple concerns with this connection between the analogy of the sexes and Trinitarian mutuality. We anticipate one of them here:

> The answer in the form of the **Son does not come, as it were, to the Father's 'aid': he is a response of equal stature**; and the Spirit, the fruit of their love, proceeds from their union—as their essence, their product, their testimony, their matrix—but he does not become an independent and separate instance, founding new generations himself. Thus the life of the Trinity is a circle, eternally fulfilled in itself; it does not need the world.[87]

The elaborations of a Trinitarian analogy must wait until the appropriate time, so next we concern ourselves with two additional aspects of Balthasar's anthropology: the Christological implications of Balthasar's anthropological hermeneutic and the repercussions of this understanding for marital life.

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[84] TD III, 285.
[85] TD III, 285.
[86] CSL, 228.
[87] TD III, 287.

Christological Implications

The reality that God's Logos comes as a *man* cannot be "bracketed out" of our anthropological discussion as something to be disregarded as a mere socio-political or cultural accident.[88] In other words, it is von Balthasar's belief that Jesus Christ's masculinity cannot be a "matter of indifference."[89] The role of Christ's masculinity plays an important role in his salvific mission, but also fully and most truly reveals the nature of the human person, *both* male and female. Both of these functions will be discussed presently, but first a brief introduction to Balthasar's Christocentric hermeneutic.

As was said earlier, Jesus is the *form* of the world; its pattern and goal.[90] The world, in essence, reflects the mutuality of the Trinity,[91] and Christ in turn, is the *form* of that icon, the agent that corrects and transforms the broken image of mankind and creation, thereby revealing their true Trinitarian meaning.[92] Christ Incarnate as the "concrete *analogia entis*"[93] reveals the final meaning to the world and brings "what is human to its perfection (and superabundantly so)."[94] Christ's maleness (connected with his mission) reveals not only the Triune God, but how the inner life of the Trinity is the derivation for the polarity of the human sexes (and their differentiation) made thus in the

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[88] TD III, 283.
[89] TD III, 283.
[90] TD II, 261.
[91] See Bonaventure's reflection on perceiving the vestiges of the Trinity in the world in *The Journey of the Mind to God* trans. Philotheus Boehner O.F.M., ed. Stephen F. Brown, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).
[92] Cf. Robert A. Pesarchick, *The Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality as Revealed by Christ according to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. "The Revelatory Significance of the Male Christ and the Male Ministerial Priesthood," (Roma: *Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia*, v. 63. 2006), 173; "In Christ and through his mission, the meaning and goal of all created realities are revealed. In him, how creation bears a likeness to its Trinitarian Creator is fully expressed."
[93] TD II, 267; cf. (TD II 407) Jesus stands "on both sides" of the analogy of being; "the analogy goes straight through his consciousness." In other words, by accepting human nature Jesus accepts to live within the *analogia entis* relative to God.
[94] TD III, 283.

imago Trinitatis.[95] The nuptial union is especially reflective of this *imago*—revealing the meaning between Christ and the Church, God and his people, God to God, and Male to Female.[96]

If the foregoing is true, then there will be a connection between the Old Adam in the Genesis creation story and the new analog in Christ. Balthasar reads the creation of Eve from Adam as foreshadowing the culminating union between Christ and the Church.[97] Just as there was a feminine aspect in him that Adam recognized when he saw Eve, so too Balthasar claims that "the Son of God has this 'feminine' element in him at the deepest level, not because he is a creature, but because he is the Son of the Father; he knows simultaneously what it means to be God and to be begotten of the Father."[98] Balthasar seems again to make the audacious leap from observing created beings to a discussion of life within the Trinity itself. Not only does Christ possess a gender on earth, but in heaven there seems to be an analog of human gender and what Balthasar will call "supra-sexual" relationships. To us it may seem as though Balthasar is projecting the sexual sphere onto the Godhead, but rather it will be demonstrated that the human sexes are the derivative of the Trinitarian reality.

Although it will be further explicated in the chapter on the Trinity, I offer just a few guidelines that will be necessary in order for us to proceed. God the Father is the supra-sexual representation of masculinity based on His *primacy* (like Adam's) as the

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[95] Pesarchick, 8-9; cf. (Ibid., 9): "The ultimate foundation of the sexual polarity is in the Triune God."

[96] This analogy will have to be qualified given that some of these relationships represent a clear inequality, and thus taken to their logical conclusions would result in gender misrepresentation.

[97] As does *Gaudiem et Spes*, #22: "The mystery of man becomes clear only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. Adam the first man (*primus homo*), was a type of the future, that is of Christ our Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love, makes man fully clear to himself, makes clear his high vocation."

[98] TA, 313.

origin without origin. God the Son is eternally generated by the Father and therefore is receptive and feminine in response to the Father. The Son's mission however, which is concomitant with his person, is to *reveal* the Father as the one who sends Him. Therefore, Christ's mission dictates that even though in relation to the Father the Son is receptively obedient, in relation to creation he is originative (masculine). The point to bear in mind here is that when Christ enters the world he does so as a man because his mission is to reveal the Father to the world. And So Christ enters the human scene from one side of the male-female polarity:

> The Word of God, on account of its absolute priority, can only enter the world of the human in the form of a man, 'assimilating' the woman to itself (Eph 5:27) in such a way that she, who comes from him and is at the same time 'brought to him' by God, is equal to him, 'flesh of his flesh.'[99]

Again, it is important to take note that Balthasar does not relegate the female to a lower position than the masculine, nor does he correlate the man with the divine; a claim with which Beattie will later take issue.[100]

Next, we must speak about the *saving action* of Christ as it relates especially to the male-female polarity and how it resolves the various anthropological tensions. Balthasar understands the purpose of Christ's mission as twofold: salvation and revelation. He writes:

> When the word of God goes forth, the creature is given insight into God's purpose in creation and realizes something entirely new: God undertook that first communication of his being, whereby finite, self-aware, free beings were created, with a view to a 'second' act of freedom whereby he

[99] TD II, 411.

[100] For proof on this point cf. ("Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women," 704) "Insofar as the incarnate Son has to reveal and represent in his existence the love of the Father vis-à-vis the world, he can do this only as a male. For the Father, as the absolutely fruitful origin, is not dependent upon any insemination. On the other hand, this is not at all to suggest that the Father is the archetype of the created male, who himself comes from the woman (1 Cor 11:12) and who cannot be fruitful at all without her. Addressing God as Father thus has nothing to do with 'patriarchy'."

> would initiate them into the mysteries of his own life and freely fulfill the promise latent in the infinite act that realizes Being.[101]

Christ then, reveals to creation its true purpose (as stated above), and at the same time offers an entrée into the inner nature of Trinitarian life. The Godhead, revealed as self-giving, self-diffusive love, seeks to bring all things into it in order to share in its mutuality; it seems logical therefore, that creation should have imprinted within it a foretaste and image of the Triune God. Creation ought to have latent within it the tools necessary to image the Trinitarian mutuality, and even the capacity for God to enter into this mode of being by the Incarnation, like a hand into a glove. Yet, a fallen creation is plagued by lingering tensions and contradictions that can only be resolved through Christ's saving work.

Anthropological Tensions and Contradictions

There are three anthropological tensions about which Balthasar speaks and for which only Christ can offer resolution. Humankind finds itself embracing the polarities of spirit and body, man and woman, and the individual and community.[102] There are negative frustrations inherent in all these polarities that cause Balthasar to define the human person by this engagement in a reciprocal crossing of boundaries, finding respite in the opposite pole.[103] We will see that despite any transcendence of boundaries there remains one intervening constant that pervades them all: death. Death is the "great rock thrown across the path of all thinking which might lead to completeness" because the

[101] TD II, 400-401.

[102] TD II, 355; Balthasar follows Erich Przywara in these three anthropological categories.

[103] TD II, 355; These tensions are not entirely negative for Balthasar. For example, he does see the difference in the sexes as being a positive image of the Trinitarian difference. In this sense then, he is not advocating the dissolution of difference as much as the negative effects inflicted on the Trinitarian *imago* in the relationship of male and female by the advent of sin.

"descent into corruption destroys any vague remaining hope of integration."[104] Any potential unity in all three of the polarities is threatened by the crisis of death, only to be overcome in Christ. This is important for Balthasar's conception of the human sexes as finding their fulfillment in Christ's marriage to his bride; i.e. the Church. Let us look briefly at the first two polarities (as they pertain more directly to our thesis) before moving on to an examination of the marital life, which takes its inspiration from the bridegroom who is slain.

There is a severe "hiatus" in mankind's situation of displacement and "homelessness" wherein he belongs to the cosmic natural world but at the same time displays a "super-cosmic," spiritual relation to God.[105] Mankind possesses an "inner torn-ness" in that the spirit and flesh are in conflict with each other,[106] and the human person can be both at home in the world but forever alien to it, striving always for the lost, unattainable, prelapsarian, and Edenic life. Woman and man are transcendent of the world by their "intellectual and spiritual faculties" but also embedded in it by their sensory nature.[107] The corruption of the body terminating in death ends any progress from temporality toward infinitude. Pre-Christian anthropology could not reverse this "wound,"[108] this frustration of man; but now through the eternal love of the "Son of Man"

[104] TA, 48-49; Cf. (TD II, 395), "It threatens the unity of spirit and body that actually constitutes the individual, the unity of personal and generic sexuality and now the unity of individuality that has direct access to God while at the same time being bound to the community."

[105] TD II, 337; cf. (TA, 48); cf. (TD II, 359), "The war between spirit and flesh results in man being made captive (Rom 7:23)."

[106] TD II, 359.

[107] TD II, 337; Sensory nature for Balthasar does not necessarily suggest a pejorative label for sexuality, although sexuality is clearly connected to that realm. Balthasar believes that human love, embodied in sexuality, transcends the sensory (without leaving it beyond) to image the purely spiritual Trinitarian gift exchange. Eg. He says elsewhere that "The interplay between us is not simply through the meeting of minds, our bodies being hermetically sealed off from one another: there is a sphere—far beyond sexual union—in which our bodies, too, communicate with one another," (TD II, 410).

[108] TD II, 394.

who is also the "Son of God," humanity's ultimate riddle of finitude may be thereby placed "in the lap of God's eternity."[109]

As alluded to above, the tension between man and woman is an unbreachable chasm of otherness. Both the masculine and feminine side of the polarity dependently relies on a reciprocity with the other; "the opposite principles are, as it were, only the presupposition for their mixing."[110] This union, alas, must inevitably fall victim to the sting of death and disintegration. Balthasar outlines several trajectories of thought concerning the "reciprocity of generation and death,"[111] including thinkers such as Hegel, Augustine, Aquinas, and the Greek Fathers. He is critical of all their approaches primarily because it is impossible to resolve the ambiguous relation between sexuality and death from a postlapsarian viewpoint.[112] Balthasar speaks summarily about the various attempts at resolution:

> In reality they are aiming to draw a dividing line, today beyond our grasp, which cuts right through the sexual field and would forbid any synthesis: on the one side, the fruitful encounter between man and woman in their personal mutual self-giving—and, on the other side their sexual union.[113]

The question must be left unanswered, with the two extremes held in tension until the consummation of the world. As Balthasar insists, "man acts out his role between earth and heaven, and in heaven there is no marriage (Mt 22:30): there the Marriage of the Lamb is celebrated." The figure of Christ must be the key that unlocks the mystery of the sexes and their union, especially if what Paul writes in Gal 3:28 is true.

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[109] TA, 64; TD II, 364.

[110] TD II, 368; There is a similarity here between the unity in difference within the Trinity, the Giver and the Gift, between God and creation.

[111] TD II, 374.

[112] TD II, 378.

[113] TD II, 381.

Jesus' victory over death and his union with the Church as his bride brings about "a new unity of procreating love and death" one that is "no longer a question of the closed anthropological cycle of the sexes that lies in man's animal and generic nature."[114] Balthasar speaks of a "purely personal love"[115] that comes in the person of Christ and that undoes the chains of death. Humanity mirrors the image of God precisely in its imitation of uncreated freedom, and by looking toward this infinite freedom it realizes who it truly is in its "natural state."[116] The contradiction between the sexes finds a new rhythm, one that is not bound by "the cycle of sin, birth and death," one that is paradoxically and perhaps incomprehensibly "suprasexual, which is not sexless."[117] This leads us finally to a consideration of the human, sexual, marital embodiment present in the suprasexual consummation of Christ and his Church.

Christ and His Bride: The Marital State of Life

"As the Father loves me, so I love you. Remain in my love" (Jn 15:9). This statement from Jesus can have crucial import for our discussion if we are also conscious of the tradition of Christ's nuptial relationship with the Church (e.g. Eph 5: 22-28). Truly then, there is an analog between marriages enacted on earth (amongst women and men), between heaven and earth (Christ and the Church), and in heaven within the Trinitarian embrace.[118] Could it be, that the original intention for how the human sexes were to relate in mutuality (and continues to elicit an occasional residue) was a reciprocal exchange of

[114] TD II, 413.
[115] TD II, 413.
[116] TD II, 397.
[117] TD II, 413.
[118] For support on this point see Balthasar's quote (TA, 311-312): "In Ephesians 1:23 it is not clear whether Christ 'fills' his Body, the Church, which is his fullness, or 'is filled' by her. Both are true in the relationship between Christ and the Church, which points down to the relationship between Adam and Eve, but also up to the tremendous relationship of the persons of the Trinity and their mutuality within eternal, complete fullness."

self-giving love such that the *imago Trinitatis* was imaged in that union (though not entirely). If so, perhaps Adam and Eve and men and women might have *remained* in the love of the Trinitarian likeness.

Here again we run against the problem of analogy and metaphor encountered earlier. Balthasar acknowledges the fact that "God's language is *not* that of his creatures,"[119] but any understanding and revelation of God can only be enacted if God chooses to share his Absolute Being, allowing us to participate in it. This is precisely the image of the Church (Bride) found in the wedding of the Lamb in the book of Revelation.[120] The liturgy of the Church follows the journey of this bride in the book of Revelation (a liturgically prescriptive book), as she is raptured up to union with God in the Eucharist and sent down "out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). The Church, (the descending bride), shines "with the glory of God" (Rev 21:11), as it partakes of God's self-communication, (the divine life), prompting the priest to exclaim *Ite Missa Est*. Balthasar speaks of the agent of this rapturous self-revelation of God as being Christ Incarnate:

> The Absolute bends down toward the creature, but it only reaches the creaturely level, substantially, by lifting the latter up, beyond itself and its entire natural substance, to its own level, giving it access and citizenship in the sphere of the Absolute…If man is destined to share the divine nature, he must also be called to it in a way that is recognizable as such.[121]

Such a way is made visible by the marriage of Christ to the Church and therefore also to each individual soul. This love of Jesus for his bride, which is apparently similar to how the Father loves the Son ("As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you," Jn. 15:9), must be an analogy of something like the nuptial bond in the Godhead itself.

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[119] TD II, 399.
[120] Cf. Rev 19:6-8.
[121] TD II, 399.

Balthasar speaks in numerous places about this bond between Christ and the Church, but he speaks of it in a curious way; as resolving the forgoing tension in postlapsarian human history toward which we have hinted—the association between begetting and death.

> After paradise, sexual love had become involved in a dialectic of birth and death from which no human person could rescue it. Inordinate desire and anxiety had been caught up in a circle from which there was no escape because the perfect love that God, in the beginning, had bestowed on husband and wife as the principle of marriage could not be rediscovered in the realm of marital guilt. This tragic circle was not broken until Christ on the Cross."[122]

Present here is a complexity in that the resolution of this fallen dialectic necessitates that the incarnation of Christ occur within the succession of sinful generations in order to avoid Gnosticism, yet at the same time the purpose is to break the cycle of birth and death by the Resurrection, (prefigured by the Virgin Birth).[123]

It is for this reason then that the Word enters into the human situation *as* a man but *from* the pole of femininity, thus reversing the situation, for: "As woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman" (1 Cor 11:12).[124] Note the purpose of the connection to and redemption of the First Adam by the Second is "to liberate mankind from all 'futility' (Rom 8:20) and to bring about that ultimate relationship between man and woman that is dimly anticipated in the paradise legend and set forth as a final destination in the 'marriage of the Lamb' in the Book of Revelation."[125] In this way the marriage and union of Christ on the Cross to his Bride the Church, which is born in the same moment, becomes the model for married life.

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[122] CSL, 247.
[123] TD III, 289.
[124] Balthasar cites this passage from Corinthians in defense of his claim that the situation is reversed, TD III, 289.
[125] TD III, 289-290.

We might anticipate here one objection. Balthasar writes that:

> "When Christianity raises the relationship between Christ and the Church (represented archetypally by Mary) to the status of the prototype of all marriage relations between man and woman (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-23), does it not thereby irrevocably enshrine the subordination of the woman to the man? After all, even in Mary the woman is just a creature, whereas in Christ the man is God."[126]

On the contrary, Balthasar claims that while creation's primary role in the relationship to its Creator is feminine and receptive, it is not to be interpreted negatively as a kind of passivity but as a kind of "supremely active fruitfulness."[127] This will be a claim that we will explore further in our third chapter.

Now that the sexual dialectic of birth and death has been resolved, let us look at this strange new "suprasexual" founding of Christian marriage on the Cross of Christ. Balthasar speaks of the Church being born of Christ on the Cross, recalling the analogy to the First Adam wherein "from the side of the sleeping Adam, the woman is drawn; now, from the (wounded) side of the sleeping Savior (on the Cross), the answer 'face' of the woman is taken and 'fashioned' (Eph 5:27)."[128] I provide two examples for the relations of the sexes taken from the selfless act of love on the Cross: First, men should love their wives as Christ loved the Church; that is by dying for her (Eph 5:25). Secondly, women will be saved by childbirth (1 Timothy 2:15) provided that they have faith. In other words they already participate in the *paschal mystery* by their self-sacrifice.

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[126] Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women, 705.

[127] Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women, 705.

[128] TD III, 288-289; cf. (TD III, 288); Here Balthasar makes it clear that Christ (which is not the case for the union of male and female), "possesses all 'fullness' in himself (Col 1:19; 2:9); out of his fullness he creates a vessel, then pours his fullness into it. fulfilling both it and—in a certain sense—himself through the realization of its possibilities (Eph 1:23; cf 4:13, 16)." This means then that Christ is the acting agent that consummates and fulfills the marriage and is thus not left open to a potential unfulfilled action.

It has been found then, that a self-giving, *kenotic* love, as shown by Christ on the Cross and established as a model example, has transcended the tragedy among the sexes, namely, an infinitely incomplete union plagued by death. What does it mean however, that Christ's marriage to the Church is suprasexual? It seems to signify that the relationship is both above our common notion of human, physical sexuality but not without some link to male-female nuptial love. What does this mean? As we stated earlier, who Christ is, particularly as a male, *must* matter. If it is true that to ask *who* Christ is, is to ask *what* he has done, then the entire existence of Jesus (as revelatory of the Father), ordered to the *kenotic* self-emptying on the Cross for the sake of the Church, must speak to some truth about the Trinitarian reality.[129] In the words of Balthasar "The suprasexual (and not sexless) relationship between the incarnate Word and his Church is a genuinely human one; human beings can be enabled to participate in it."[130] This human participation in Christ's Love on the cross enables humanity to "transcend the sexual—as a function specific to earthly existence—in favor of a form of existence in which God's Agape, which also reveals its nuptial aspect (sealed in the death on the Cross), becomes the all-inclusive total meaning of life."[131]

However, this must not be read as leaving the sexual behind, for Christ became incarnate, as with all things, to fulfill and perfect the original intention and meaning of marriage. Balthasar writes that Christ pours his grace from the cross into marriage, filling it "with a grace that had its source more deeply in the mystery of God than did the

[129] Cf. (Pesarchick, 93); "In the Paschal Events, Christ completely expresses the absolute love of the Father and, thus of the entire Trinity."

[130] TD II, 413.

[131] TD II, 414; cf. (TD II 413): "The reciprocal fruitfulness of man and woman is surpassed by the ultimate priority of the 'Second Adam,' who, in suprasexual fruitfulness, brings a 'companion,' the Church, into being. Now the 'deep sleep' of death on the Cross, the 'taking of the rib' in the wound that opens the heart of Jesus, no longer take place in unconsciousness and passivity, as in the case of the First Adam, but in the consciously affirmed love-death of the Agape, from which the Eucharist's fruitfulness also springs."

marriage of paradise."[132] Here then, the resultant tension of the fall is healed but the meaning of the marital embrace is extended beyond its original foundation, though not its original intention:

> The small and limited fecundity of paradisal marriage has yielded to the universal, Eucharistic fecundity of the redeeming love of the Word made flesh and the redeemed love of his Bride and spouse, the Church, which is also his body.[133]

Christ's sacrifice of love on the Cross, according to Balthasar, provides the model and foundation for Christian marriage in addition to the elected state of life. We cannot exhaustively account for Balthasar's entire corpus on the states of life here, and so a brief explanation with a focus on the married state must suffice.

The elected state and the married state of life both take their inspirational foundation from the same Christ-Event: the Cross. From Balthasar's perspective, "just as the state of election is founded directly on the Cross and receives from the Cross all its potentiality and strength, so Christian marriage derives its ultimate sanction and perfection indirectly from the Cross."[134] That which the Cross represents, self-giving love, becomes the redeeming power and inspirational model for spousal love. Although Balthasar believes that the state of election represents a greater kind of self giving than is possible in married life, (because the meaningfulness and fruitfulness of virginity and the evangelical counsels are founded *directly* on the cross), nevertheless the marital state is still rooted to the cross in a similar way. [135] Given that Christian spouses live according to

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[132] CSL, 233; cf. (CSL, 244), where Balthasar also claims that "Christian marriage retains something of the spirit of paradise as it was before the division of the states of life."

[133] CSL, 233.

[134] CSL, 243.

[135] CSL, 235. In fact, according to Balthasar, if marriage is made holy by Christ's passion, we are called to perform the same passion. I.e. "The bonds that join man and woman in marriage on the one hand and Christ and the Church in the redemption on the other hand are so closely related that it is impossible to understand one without reference to the other…This transforming assimilation to Christ [which all things,

the "disposition of the Cross, in which all desire, insofar as it is disordered and selfish, is vanquished by the selflessness of Christian self-giving,"[136] then it would happen that "the 'yes' of the marriage vow and the 'yes' of the counsels [would] correspond to what God expects man to be in imitation of Jesus Christ, who, on the Cross gave all he possessed, body and soul, for the Father and the world."[137] This reveals that the marital gift of self between the sexes was intended to, and finds its greatest fulfillment in, imaging the reciprocal, Trinitarian community of immanent love.

Married couples united to the *agape* inherent in the cross of Christ imitate and image this kind of mutuality and love that Jesus came to reveal about God. Again, to summarize, Balthasar poetically explains that:

> Their love—exteriorly something that is expended between the two of them—shares in a hidden manner in the unlimited love of the Lord, which is always universal and Eucharistic, and whose fruitfulness surmounts every barrier and expends itself infinitely. It can do so because, in the fruitfulness of the Lord's love on the Cross, the law of Trinitarian love is itself revealed…Only by thus sharing in the Cross does the physical self-giving of the spouses achieve its ultimate and redeeming justification, for it no longer appears, as it did in man's original state, as merely a symbol of the invisible grace of faith, hope and charity, but is revealed instead as an explicit sharing in the Incarnation of divine grace, which, in the Lord's life and Passion, no longer acts without the *instrumentum coniunctum* of his flesh and blood.[138]

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people, and states of life must undergo] is not only required, but also bestowed—in the sacramental grace that turns the paradisal community of marriage into a Christian community." (CSL, 225)

[136] CSL, 248.

[137] CSL, 238; cf. (CSL, 238), "In the married state, the Christian, by his sacramental 'yes', gives his body and soul to his spouse—but always in God, out of belief in God, and with confidence in God's bountiful fidelity, which will not deny this gift of self the promised physical and spiritual fruit."

[138] CSL, 247; cf. (TA, 47): "Quasi-infinite love [i.e. Nuptial Love] is possible between two finite beings only if infinite love is operative in the ground of their nature, that is, if that which the lovers swear to each other is not necessarily an intoxicated exaggeration, or a 'trick of nature' or else *hubris*."

And because there is no love in the world other than "the form of love with which he has loved us,"[139] the love of the cross overflows to Christian marriages and every other instance of human mutuality.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has sought to postulate the following main positions of Balthasar: (1) The created world is iconic of the Trinity as a cause is present in its effects. Christ then is the concrete *analogia entis* that brings to light the fulfillment of creation's meaning. By his revelation of God and creation, the chasm of difference between heaven and earth is made traversable, if only imperfectly. (2) The *imago Trinitatis* comes to rest uniquely on the mutual relationship between man and woman. This female-male polarity exhibits a dual unity-in-difference that allows for reciprocal union. (3) The man represents a primacy that *kenotically* offers his own being. The woman is the "answer" that receives man's fruitfulness and that "faces" him with her own unique fruitfulness.

(4) Next we established that for von Balthasar, Christ enters into the human situation from the masculine side of the polarity in order to espouse the created order to himself, and that this is revelatory of the Trinitarian relation of love between Father and Son. (5) The Adam typology of Christ characterizes the resolution of the anthropological tensions inherent in postlapsarian humanity leading to a new suprasexual union of Christ and the Church. (6) This nuptial union, consummated in the *agapic* love of Christ on the Cross, becomes the redeeming model for Christian marriage and the whole world. For "the more closely human love resembles God's love, the more it forgets and surrenders itself in order to assume the inner form of poverty, chastity and obedience, the more

[139] CSL, 244.

divine will be its fruit: a fruit that surpasses all human fecundity or expectation."[140] Our next chapter will expound the interior life of this God who is love, and how the sexes can be seen as made in the image of this Gift-Exchange.

[140] CSL, 248.

CHAPTER III

THE TRINITARIAN FOUNDATION OF GIFT BETWEEN THE SEXES

As we have alluded to in the forgoing chapter, and will attempt to demonstrate in a more complete fashion here, all finite being has a "fundamental trinitarian constitution"[141] such that it is also the case that "all earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal 'happening' in God."[142] The purpose of this chapter will be to exposit, by an examination of Balthasar's Trinity, what aspects of God's *communio* might be found reflected in the marital embrace of lovers. Balthasar claims that there is an analogy, albeit perhaps a debated one, between created and uncreated being. It will be our present task to explore more deeply how Balthasar understands the foundation of the sexes in the Trinity. This task will involve a theological probing of the Trinitarian mystery as articulated by von Balthasar, beginning with his insistence on the economic Trinity's aptitude for revealing the immanent. It will then be necessary to outline the specificities of the Gift-Exchange of Love as it occurs within the Trinitarian mutuality. Finally, this chapter will unpack the dual meaning of God's indwelling in the sexual embrace and the "supra-sexual" characteristics in God.

[141] TD V, 73.
[142] TD V, 67.

Human Logic and Divine Logic: The Economic Reveals the Immanent

The New Testament revelation of God, initiated by Jesus Christ, is first and foremost a Trinitarian one; as von Balthasar insists "Jesus does not speak about God in general but shows us the Father and gives us the Holy Spirit."[143] The task of Jesus in his dramatic life—and in fact, his entire being—is to express the Fatherhood of God,[144] and by so doing make manifest God's "hiddeness."[145] Balthasar goes so far as to say that there can be no entrée into the mystery of the Triune God other than this revelation of Christ.[146] How Jesus relates to the Father and the Spirit—what he says about them (or to them), and how he acts towards them—are humanity's only access points to the intratrinitarian relations. His Trinitarian theology is always understood through a Christocentric lens. That means that the economic Trinity, as revealed in Scripture, discloses the immanent Trinity.[147] This is not to say that the economic *is* the immanent, but that Balthasar seeks to find a way to view "the immanent Trinity as the ground of the world process (including the crucifixion) in such a way that it is neither a formal process of self-communication in God, as in Rahner, nor entangled in the world process, as in Moltmann."[148] We will continually return to the earthly events of Jesus' life and how they can be understood as a temporal translation of the eternal "happening" in the Trinitarian relations.

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[143] TD V, 67.
[144] TD III, 172.
[145] TD III, 173; For Balthasar, this 'hiddeness" is ultimately revealed by Christ on the Cross.
[146] TL II, 125.
[147] TL II, 138; In this Balthasar follows Karl Barth, cf. (TD II 298): "The Son's Trinitarian relationship becomes transparent in his creaturely attitude."
[148] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Action*, Vol. IV. of *Theo-Drama*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 320; cf. (TD IV, 323): "The immanent Trinity must be understood to be that eternal, absolute self-surrender where by God is seen to be, in himself, absolute love; this in turn explains his free self-giving to the world as love, without suggesting that God 'needed' the world process and the Cross in order to become himself (to 'mediate himself')."

At present I would like to exposit the means by which the Divine Word is revealed in humanity. This is done, according to Balthasar, through the medium of human logic, which is not opposed to divine logic but in need of assistance from it. Though fallen, the human creature still retains the *imago Trinitatis* in which it was made. This starting point paves the way for the possibility that, through the grace of God, the creature "might become inwardly capable of serving him as a loudspeaker through which to express himself and make himself understood."[149] In this regard we can speak of a language, to which every human being has access by virtue of existence, and that resides "in the structure of worldly being itself."[150] Balthasar suggests then that the ways in which humans communicate, one to the other, face to face, word to answer, is *not* antithetical to communication between God and humanity. This is why Jesus becomes the *Word* that is made flesh and incarnated amongst a *community* of human beings. By his incarnation, the *Logos* attempts to exposit divine logic by means of human logic and finds the human existential, religious, ethical, and rational grammar a suitable medium for speaking about God.[151]

Jesus speaks in parables and stories, in the mode of human history and logic, but, "the true intended meaning of the parable can never be grasped in its otherness without the subjective in-shining of the light of the Spirit of Jesus and of the Father," who make explicit what is already implicitly present in the human drama.[152] This infusement of

[149] TL II, 81; Since humanity is already in the image of God, "is not God therefore capable in principle of taking possession of this openness in order, if he wills, to make himself known immediately through a human being?" (TL II, 126).
[150] TL II, 81-82.
[151] TL II, 78-79.
[152] TL II, 78-79.

grace "transfigures" the creature, but is only possible because there is a residual divine image that even sin cannot entirely destroy.[153] Balthasar explains that:

> The '*imago'* has been created for the sake of the '*similitudo'*, not in order to develop toward it by its own self-perfection or through a dialectical process, but to serve as a place where the divine Archetype can be implanted.[154]

This means that not only can human philosophy and finite reason exhibit a receptivity and openness to the "divine speech," but so can the institution of marriage.[155]

As Balthasar says, it is *grace* that "transfigures the created *imago* into a similitude," and by it, the recipients are called to participate in the divine life.[156] The giver of these graces—the Spirit—assists humanity "from below and from within," so that what unfolds from this departure point in the creaturely realm "is a dialogue between God and man—one, moreover, that ultimately points back to an otherness in God (Between God and his Word)."[157] Through the Logos' incarnation and marriage to humanity in the iconography of the Church, the dialogue that was always intended to occur is thereby fostered.

The human being is meant for communion, a communion with others and with God. It is destined for this communion because it was made in the image of another communion—a Trinitarian one. That is why when Jesus, the Word of the Father, comes to a fallen humanity, there is a residual grammar that is conducive to re-bridging and advancing the dialogue between God and humanity. There is a creaturely logic that

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[153] TD III, 525.
[154] TD III, 527.
[155] TD V, 73; cf. (TD V, 99): "Since God's very essence is communication, the 'copy' must continue to be open to the 'prototype,' there must be a sharing between them." This desired impulse in the creature to share in the divine life is the reason that God endows the creature with freedom in the first place, but which inevitably led to sin.
[156] TD III, 528.
[157] TL II, 79.

possesses the capacity to "sustain the full weight of divine logic," even though it "owes this capacity to God's artistry" and his light of grace.[158] As Balthasar says again:

> The logic of the creature is not foreign to the logic of God; it could be likened to a dialect of the standard language spoken in pure form by God. Yet, our simile limps, because Jesus can make the divine archetype shine forth in the worldly images and similitudes. Human beings will need the one gift of the divine Spirit to understand Jesus' language.[159]

Jesus is the bridge that reveals the Trinity (and his relationship in it) by transposing the "immanent" onto the "economic" scale. As we will see, this Trinitarian revelation finds particular resonances in the world, even in the mysterious analogy of the sexes, precisely because creation has its origin from the Trinity.

The World is from the Trinity: Being and Becoming

As we have been developing in our preceding discussions, all of creation images the Trinitarian divine life, and "this image of God in things points beyond itself to the primal image."[160] This section will seek first to explain the location of the world vis-à-vis God, and what this means for God. Next, it will be necessary to outline the worldly aspect of "otherness" that Balthasar believes is a Trinitarian reflection. And finally it will explore the challenge and call posed to the finite by the infinite.

According to von Balthasar, creation is located "in the Son" and thus within God. In fact "the world can be thought of as the gift of the Father to the Son," which is then given to the dominion of the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son.[161] Balthasar understands creation to be a gift of love "from God to God," in which "creation is

[158] TL II, 81.
[159] TL II, 84.
[160] TD V, 101.
[161] TD II, 262.

glorified by partaking of the divine life of Love."[162] It is important to note that the Godhead is also glorified by this gift exchange but nonetheless does not *need* the world in any capacity (e.g. to perfect itself), for this would be to drag God into the processes of the world. Balthasar is always cautious to avoid a Hegelian process theology wherein "the Trinitarian drama needs to pass through the contradictions of the world" so that it might become real and concrete.[163] Instead, Balthasar attempts a two-pronged paradoxical approach: an apophatic methodology that prohibits process theology as myth, and at the same time an understanding that the possibility of the world drama is somehow grounded in God.[164] Balthasar explains that the begetting of the Son is the ground for creation, although "there must be an infinite difference between the creation of a finite world and the eternal generation of the Son."[165]

What seems to be developing here (if we can speak about it in this way) is a "space" in God, or in fact an "otherness", although Balthasar warns us again that God did not have to create a void in himself in order to create the world.[166] The generation of the Son as "other" than the Father sustains and affirms the goodness of the otherness of creation. This "otherness" is one of the qualities that Balthasar sees as echoed positively in creation:

> The gulf between Creator and creature, even when the latter receives grace and a 'share in the divine nature,' thus proves to be impassable. There is an 'ever greater dissimilitude' between God and the creature… Nevertheless, the revelation of the Trinity throws an unexpected bridge across this (abiding) abyss. If, within God's identity, there is an Other, who at the same time is the image of the Father and thus the archetype of

[162] Pesarchick, 157.
[163] TD IV, 327.
[164] TD IV, 327.
[165] Healy, 115; To not respect this principle would be to fall into the error of Hegelian Idealism.
[166] TD II, 262-264; cf. (TD IV, 327): "It is nonsense to imagine a point in time within infinity when the triune God decides to create a world."

> all that can be created; if, within this identity, there is a Spirit, who is the free, superabundant love of the 'One' and of the 'Other,' then both the otherness of creation, which is modeled on the archetypal otherness within God, and its sheer existence, which it owes to the intradivine liberality, are brought into a positive relationship to God.[167]

We begin to see that Balthasar is expressing the goodness of the other's existence, an affirmation that he believes goes back to the Council of Nicaea's condemnation of Arius.[168] The Council argued that the Son can be "other" than the Father and yet still *homoousios* with the Father.

When Balthasar speaks of the "other" in God it is important to have in mind that the difference between the hypostases "is not what is other *than* God, but the (personal) other *in* God."[169] In this assertion, Balthasar is not attempting a dialectical approach that "makes the 'other' the negation of the One" in favor of integrating both into a higher synthesis.[170] Rather, he seems to mirror Richard of St. Victor who put forth a *dialogic* that "seeks to define the creaturely images in terms of the positivity of the intradivine others (the Son and the Spirit), understood as the archetypal paradigm of these images."[171] The dialectic approach has as its highest level "absolute knowledge" whereas the dialogic, where the other is affirmed as positive, is fulfilled on the level of love.[172] Ultimately both of these methods, says Balthasar, are only "approximations of the eternal archetype, the absolute love event."[173]

Why does Balthasar insist on this "distance" and "otherness" in God? He believes that the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity allows for true *agape* (or *caritas)*,

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[167] TL II, 180-181.
[168] TD V, 81-82.
[169] TD V, 65; emphasis added.
[170] TL II, 43; cf. (Ibid.): "The 'other' in God is pure posit-ion [*Position*] and positivity, and in no way the negation of the One or its 'reversal.'"
[171] TL II, 43-44.
[172] TL II, 44.
[173] TL II, 44.

in that there can exist a "reaching out toward the other."[174] This is perhaps one of the most crucial aspects for comprehending Balthasar's grounding of the human sexual analogy in the reality of the Triune God. This is seen in Balthasar claim that "the difference between the sexes and their specific roles, cannot, despite their *maior dissimilitude*, be utterly without foundation in the life of the living God."[175] Just as the difference among women and men allows for a greater union, so too the Trinity is most truly itself—if defined as love—when there is an "other" to be loved. So in this way, Balthasar can say that "the world's becoming has its origin in the sublime transactions between the Persons of the Trinity."[176] The "otherness" *in* creation (male and female), and the "otherness" of creation *from* God mirrors the "otherness" *in* God:

> Within God himself there is the original of that of which man's relationship to God is a copy: room for love between Father and Son—for God in the mode of creative giving and for God in the mode of created receiving and giving back in full measure—in the unity of the Spirit of love which alone emerges from the double fount of love and, as the eternal fruit of love, unites and distinguishes the Father and the Son.[177]

Hence, the Trinitarian distance between hypostases is grounding for distance between God and creation, and also can be the foundation for the distance between man and woman who too are supposed to reflect this reciprocal mutuality.

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[174] TD V, 82; For this insight he cites Gregory the Great; cf. (TL II, 82) "Without the difference between the hypostases, God cannot be the God whom revelation knows him to be: The God of love. If, on the other hand, it is absolutely good that the Other exist, this otherness within God's perfect unity of substance also founds both the possible otherness of the (non-consubstantial) creature and the ineliminable differences that characterize it as such. There can, of course, be no question of violating the creature's *maior dissimilitudo* [greater dissimilitude] with respect to God, for the creature, no matter how high grace may lift it, can never overtake the divine aseity. Nevertheless, there must already by something in God that enables him to plan and to posit in existence a creature that in its being and essence is an image of, and so is similar to, the triune God."

[175] TL II, 83.

[176] TD V, 80; cf. (Pesarchick, 157) "Creation is 'in' the Trinity. There is nothing outside of God, and so creation then must take place within the processions and relations that constitute the life of the Triune God." cf. (TL II, 185) Balthasar follows Gustav Siewerth in proclaiming the "absolute positivity of difference" and that one can "derive speculatively all differences solely from the real difference of the divine substances." cf. (TD II, 256-266).

[177] TA, 69.

According to Balthasar, the creature's finite freedom can only be truly what it was intended to be, that is, an image of infinite freedom, by "getting in tune with the (Trinitarian) 'law' of absolute freedom (of self-surrender): and this law is not foreign to it."[178] The creaturely call to love and be united to God must forget the boundaries of finite love and move beyond to imitate the Trinitarian life.[179] And the greater the degree to which the creature responds to this challenge to align itself with the Trinitarian life, the more "generative and fruitful" it becomes.[180] For Balthasar, the polarity between the species and the individual, and seemingly between the sexes as well, "images the way in which the divine hypostases are one with the divine essence and yet distinct in relation to one another."[181] Similarly, the male and female sexes both share in the one human nature yet both are distinct in relation to each other, which allows for a potential union of "reaching out toward the other" in love. Balthasar considers that any Christian, "believing in the absolute love of God for the world, is obliged to understand Being in its ontological difference as pointing to love, and to live in accordance with this indication."[182]

This alignment, this "living in accordance" with Trinitarian Being, is only dimly approximated in creaturely relations. This fallen situation ought not to be cause however to expurgate the revelation of the creature's idealized vocation to love as God loves. The sinful Christian reality that bespeaks hypocrisy must not be justification for the denial of

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[178] TD II, 259.
[179] TD V, 101.
[180] TD V, 101.
[181] TL II, 83; cf. (Ibid.) "An image cannot contradict what it show's forth" implying that "even in God there must be what Buber, speaking of creaturely being, termed 'original distance and relation.' Indeed, in God the two aspects must be so intertwined that, while one hypostasis in God can never be another, what belongs to the one can nevertheless belong to all in common."
[182] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, Vol. V of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, (T & T Clark and Ignatius Press, 1991), 649.

the Trinitarian ideal itself. As we will see, Beattie's critique of Balthasar's Trinity is too muddled by the exploitative, fallen relations of this world. What she seems forgetful of is that the Christians' faith teaches them

> to see within the most seemingly unimportant interpersonal relation the making present and the 'sacrament' of the eternal I-Thou relation which is the ground of the free Creation and again the reason why God the Father yields His Son to the death of darkness for the salvation of every Thou.[183]

One interpersonal relation that opens up the mystery of being and the Trinity according to Balthasar is that between mother and child. Balthasar speaks of how the mother's smile awakens in the child an awareness that being is gifted as love, even though the mother's love is only a dim approximation that points towards Being Itself as Love.[184]

Many of the themes of this section will be revisited again as we unpack the Trinitarian mystery and its implications for living as man and woman. The next section will attempt to analyze what "happens" in the space of "otherness" in God; a space that facilitates the most intimate dialogue between Father and Son.

Father and Son: The Giving "Event"

(a)

We must begin to look now at distinction and unity in the Trinity according to von Balthasar. If, as we have been arguing, there is some analogical grounding for the mutuality and nature of the sexes as male and female in the Trinitarian Embrace, then Balthasar's articulation of this Trinitarian "event" is crucial to our understanding of his anthropology. The previous section spoke of the "otherness" in God as the ground for the "otherness" in creation. Precisely what Balthasar intends to convey is that a non-

[183] GL V, 649.
[184] Cf. TL III, 242.

Trinitarian God is incompatible with the Christian revelation in Jesus Christ.[185] If the Godhead is merely a Monad, then

> Such a unity would be self-sufficient and could not be communicated; 'otherness' would be a mere declension from it. But where God is defined as love, he must be in essence perfect self-giving, which can only elicit from the Beloved, in return, an equally perfect movement of thanksgiving, service, and self-giving.[186]

Thus, there is in God a "space" that allows the Father and Son to be "separate" or distinct from each other. This "otherness," however, always takes place within God and never outside the Godhead. So that when Jesus addresses the Father as "Thou" it is an "expression of an eternal relation in God himself—a relation in which the Son turns to the Father in knowledge, love, adoration, and readiness for the Father's very wish."[187]

For Balthasar the "distance" is necessary in order to preserve the mutual relations of Father and Son—to allow them to be who they are. The Father, Son and Spirit each "allow" the others their respective freedoms.

> The Persons of the Trinity 'make room' ('space') for one another, granting each other freedom of being and action. Thus the Giver detaches himself from the One on whom he bestows this gift, and the latter receives himself from the Giver in genuine freedom and so distinguishes himself from him.[188]

It is important that "none of the hypostases in God overwhelms any of the others with its personal property but rather leaves it 'time' and 'space' to unfold its mode of subsisting in the common Divine Being."[189] In other words: The Father is not and does not want to be the Son, and in the same way, the Son is content to be generated by the Father and

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[185] Likewise, a non-Trinitarian God could also not be a creator; cf. (TD IV, 61); cf. (Pesarchick, 154, 157): Creation then must "be considered to be within the 'spaces' or 'realms' of infinite freedom in God that arise from the self-giving of the Hypostases in God."

[186] TD IV, 82.

[187] TL II, 126.

[188] TD V, 93-94.

[189] TL II, 83.

does not in any way seek to usurp the priorities of Fatherhood. For von Balthasar, the protection of such a distance is important for three reasons: (1) to preserve "the personal distinctness of each Person both in being and acting." (2) To establish in the immanent Trinity a precedent for the distance required by the economic Trinity (even to the abandonment of the Cross).[190] (3) Finally, this "letting be" of the other is important because it shows that what "happens" in the Event of Love in God is entirely unlike the human experience of gift (although we are a copy). There is no subjugation or imposition of the Son by the Father any more than there is any resentment of the Father's priority by the Son. There is no co-dependent neediness, no grasping aspirations, and no insecurity of affirmation. Both recognize and exhibit a diffused reciprocity of Gift-Giving.

The Father gives the gift of Himself, the gift of his Godhead, to the Son—thus "the Father generates the Son as God, that is, out of his substance, but precisely as Father, and not as substance."[191] Christ then owes himself *only* to the Father and not to the Godhead that is fruitful within Him,[192] although the Son does share in the same Godhead of the Father. In this way the divine essence is not the agent of the procession in God, even though each hypostasis is identical with the divine essence.[193] Thus the Father is Himself by being in relation to the Son *qua* Father.[194] Likewise, the Son is himself only

> to the extent that he is 'service' to the Father—a 'service' that is wholly identified with love because the Father generates the Son in love and the Son knows that his own essence consists in returning this love in the same infinite perfection in which he has received both it and himself from the Father."[195]

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[190] TD V, 94; Both points taken from this source.
[191] TL II, 130.
[192] TL II, 131; If Christ owed himself to the Godhead this would fall into the trap of Arianism.
[193] TL II, 135.
[194] TL II, 128.
[195] CSL, 186.

Therefore, the Son *is* the Son by his "servicing" relation to the Father, though both still share the Divine nature.

This concept of "service" might easily be construed by someone such as Beattie, as being a hierarchical imposition or oppressive servitude. Such an interpretation would be to take the Gift-Exchange out of the context of Divine Love and place it into the realm of finite sinful relations. This is clearly not Balthasar's intention since the Son's relationship to the Father does not

> imply any subordination, as between 'master and servant': the Son shares the same, native, divine sovereignty and freedom that the Father is, so that the Father does not issue a 'command' to the Son (as the eternal misreading of Anselm's doctrine of the Incarnation would suggest), but, as Adrienne von Speyr says, with profound insight: 'Thus the Father is the first to ask, and he asks the Son, in order to give him the joy of granting his request…Even before the Son asks him, the Father wants to make his request, as if to give the Son precedence in the delight of granting.' The Father does this, seeing the Son's willingness, seeing 'how spontaneously love answers him in the Son.'"[196]

We must say a little more about the nature of this Giving Event of Love, for which "distance" is essential.

There is of course no possibility within the Godhead for "spatial separation." Balthasar's concept is best understood through the "hierarchal distance of the procession" such that the Father is the origin of the Son even as both are co-eternal.[197] Each hypostasis eternally and mutually grants each other freedom—a freedom oriented to love. Love needs this interplay of distance and nearness, this commute from identical essence to differentiated relations:

> In God, distance and nearness exist in a unity that exhibits their constantly intensifying relationship: 'The more the Persons in God differentiate themselves, the greater is their unity.' It is like the relationship between

[196] TL III, 226.
[197] TD V, 94.

> the sexes: 'The more different the other is, the more worthy of love he appears. There may come a point of interpretation in their union where neither is aware any longer of where one begins and the other ends; but in this very unity the Thou is ever more exalted'"[198]

It is clear that Balthasar believes this unity in difference exhibited by the Trinitarian event of Love is imaged (however imperfectly) in the unity of the sexes in sharing an equal human nature yet still exhibiting sexual difference. The Gift Exchange of Love in the Trinity "provides the foundation for the meaning and goal of creation and of human sexual differentiation as revealed in Christ."[199] In the sub-section that follows we will continue this discussion as framed by von Balthasar's expansion of the psychological analogy of the Trinity.

(b)

Von Balthasar believes that in past Trinitarian theologies there has been an unfair privileging of the unity of the divine essence over against the plurality of the hypostases.[200] Balthasar therefore emphasizes the divine distinction of persons—insisting upon the *unique* possession of the same divine essence by each Person in the Trinity. Balthasar does not diverge too drastically from a Thomistic Trinitarian theology in that he still insists on the importance of understanding the Persons as subsistent relations:

> The distinction between being and directionality allows us to understand the hypostases as *relations subsistentes* [subsistent relations]: the unrepeatable uniqueness of each person lies in the *relatio*: his identity with the simple divine essence, on the other hand, lies in the *subsistens*.[201]

Nonetheless, Balthasar sees any tendency to favor either an interpersonal or intrapersonal model to the detriment of the other as problematic—because there are flaws on both

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[198] TD V, 94-95.
[199] Pesarchick, 131.
[200] Pesarchick, 136; cf. TL II, 119, and 120 note 3.
[201] TL II, 133.

sides. He explains that "the interpersonal model cannot attain the substantial unity of God, whereas the intrapersonal model cannot give an adequate picture of the real and abiding face-to-face encounter of the hypostases."[202]

One proponent of intrapersonal models of the Trinity was Augustine of Hippo, who decides to start from within the person by beginning with the expression of "being, knowing, and willing."[203] He then puts forth a second account: "mind, awareness, love."[204] But according to von Balthasar, even Augustine's third account[205] taken in conjunction with the other two, still only ever "constitutes one Person, never three hypostases," for "inner-mental activities do not produce persons."[206] Balthasar believes that Augustine's Trinitarian model of *memoria*, *intellectus*, and *voluntas*, based off of the "inner structure of the created spirit" inevitably "closes the created spirit in on itself and is unable to show how genuine objectification and genuine love—which is always directed toward the other—can come about."[207] He claims that Augustine's view requires a "complementary counterimage," which he believes to be found in Richard of Saint Victor's extension of Gregory the Great's words: "Charity cannot exist between fewer than two. For no one can be said to have charity for himself. Rather, love [*dilectio*] must tend toward the other in order to be caritas."[208] Not only is "otherness" and "distance" required between the real relations for love to operate, but so too for the Son to be able to

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[202] TL II, 38.

[203] Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, II; *De civitate Dei*, XI, 26

[204] Augustine, *De Trinitate* X, 3, 3; "For mind cannot love itself unless it also knows itself."

[205] "*Memoria* (the ground of the mind), *intellectus* (self-knowledge), and *voluntas* (loving self-affirmation). These three models are distilled from Balthasar's notes taken from Theo-Logic II, 38-39.

[206] TL II, 132; cf. (TL II, 40): "The one 'I' with its three functions is thus ultimately only a weak image that fails to capture the essence of God's triune life. If each of the Divine Persons possesses the whole Godhead, and if the Godhead itself knows and loves as a 'personality,' how can knowledge and love be attributed to the Son and the Spirit except by way of appropriation?"

[207] TD III, 526.

[208] Gregory the Great, *In Evang*. 17, I (PL 76, 1139); Translation is Balthasar's, (TL II, 40).

worship the Father. Balthasar explains that "all worship has its primary basis in the other's otherness" and that "worship is a relation to a Thou: a relation so strong and pure that only the Thou is of any account."[209] Richard of St. Victor's interpersonal, "I-Thou" model, while helpful, similarly falls short of expressing the three hypostases in one unity.[210]

From Balthasar's perspective, one should not discard Augustine's model and harden the perspective into a purely interpersonal one (as does Richard of St. Victor) but that the theologian must "look upward to the incomprehensible archetype through the irreducible polarity of these two intraworldly images."[211] A second exercise that assists one in approaching the Trinitarian mystery for Balthasar is that one must seek to correlate the immanent Trinity with what has been revealed in the economy of salvation.

The economy, expressed in scripture, reveals the Trinity in three essential ways. The first is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separate—in some way distinct from each other. If this were not the case then the Father could not "send" the Son, and the Father and Son could not "breathe" forth the Spirit into the church. The second revelation is that the Father and Son are one: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:10), and "he who receives me receives Him who sent me" (Matt 10:40). Similarly, during the Incarnation the Spirit is both *above* the Son and *in* him.[212] The Spirit can be "over" Jesus

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[209] TD V, 96; cf. Adrienne von Speyr, *The World of Prayer*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 209: "Where there is mere oneness, worship is not possible. The Son does not worship the Father because the Father is like him; that would mean that the Son found himself worthy of worship and that he worshipped himself."

[210] Cf. TL II, 41 "Richard's intuition goes even farther. In fact, the movement of charity 'toward the other' yields, not yet an image of the Trinity, but, at best, an I-Thou. This I-Thou is already a We, of course, but not in a way that yet suggest the third hypostasis in God."

[211] TL II, 42; cf. TD III, 527.

[212] TD III, 520; The Spirit is *in* Jesus and also *over* him; cf. TL III, 173; This articulation stems from Balthasar's concept of the Trinitarian Inversion, by which the Son's Incarnation is viewed as a Trinitarian activity where each hypostasis contributes in its own fashion (TL III, 127, 181). The Spirit is

at his Baptism, descending to rest upon him for the remainder of his ministry, but also *in* him in such a way that the Son can be compelled by him (Lk 4:1), or offer him to others (Jn 15:26). Balthasar speaks of how each of the Persons of the Trinity possess their own properties but also still share in the divine nature "in its concrete unity," such that their identity with it can be defined as their "mutual indwelling."[213] But to think of this *circumincessio* (mutual indwelling) as "an afterthought is *ipso facto* to rule out the hypostases' relationality."[214] In reference then to the first two facts from Scripture Balthasar advises us that:

> Faith knows from the facts of revelation that the hypostases really exist in their relative opposition, just as it knows from the same facts, and from their ecclesial interpretation, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Any speculative grasp of the mystery of the identity of both aspects always requires the convergence of two propositions—which resist every attempt to reduce them to one.[215]

The third revelation of Scripture is that the essence of God (in all the Persons) is expressed as selfless, interpersonal love where "being is in giving away."[216] This notion of "being" as "given away" elucidates how

> the self-gift of the Father is an act of love that cannot be anticipated. This is received by the Son as such, not only 'passively' as the Beloved, but, since he receives the *substantia* of the Father as love, simultaneously as

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thus, *in* the Son (he is the Spirit of the Son) and *above* the Son (he is the Spirit of the Father, sent by the Father (TL III, 192). In this Inversion the Son deposits his divinity in the Father, with the Spirit (who acts as the mediator of divinity to Christ) and "the Word becomes flesh as a result of the work of the Spirit, who overshadows the Virgin" (TL III, 171). The economic *taxis* is reordered to accommodate the Incarnation, but the condition for this reordering is already found in the *circumincessio* and distinction among the Persons in the immanent Trinity.

[213] TL II, 137.

[214] TL II, 15; cf. TD V, 95, "If there is to be this reciprocal indwelling, however, it follows that what is specific to each Person must not be withheld from the others."

[215] TL II, 133.

[216] TL II, 136; cf. (Pesarchick, 141): "No one doubts that, as the New Testament tells us, the Father's act of giving up the Son and the Spirit in the economy is pure love, as is the Son's and the Spirit's act of freely letting themselves be given up. But how could this fundamental claim about the economy of salvation have no foundation in any property of the essence of the triune God?"

> co-Lover, Lover-in-response, as the One who responds to all of the Father's love, as the One ready for all in love.[217]

The identity of the Father from all eternity is to "dispossess himself in favor of the Son" and then "through the Son to the Spirit."[218] The Father *is* Father by giving himself away, just as "being" is experienced as a gift of love (given away); so too the Son *is* "always himself by allowing himself to be generated."[219] The scriptural message conveyed by the cross is that God's nature is limitless, self-giving love, which "is part of this bliss of absolute freedom."[220]

Jesus as Son of the Father is also the image and expression of the Father.[221] We encounter this in Jesus' earthly mission where he presents himself and his mission (which coincide) as the expositor of the Father.[222] What does he reveal about the Father and how is this possible given that the Son, as we established, is *not* the Father? Firstly, Jesus reveals in his mission, which is never separate from the "One who sends," that the Trinitarian embrace from which the Son is sent is an event of love. Balthasar explains that because the Son so intimately knows and is affirmed by the Father, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing…the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing."[223] Therefore the Son can do nothing other than love as the Father loves, which, as we have said, is in the manner of self-

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[217] TL III, 145-146.

[218] TL II, 137.

[219] TD II, 256; cf. (TL II, 136) The Father possesses his divinity only by giving it away; "he remains the eternal Father only insofar as he has eternally given over to the Son all that is his, including the divinity." (The same applies to the Father and Son together spirating the Holy Spirit.)

[220] TD II, 256.

[221] Cf. Pesarchick, 13; cf. TL II, 155.

[222] TL, II, 66; cf. (TL II, 69) "Jesus bears witness, not to himself, but solely to the Father. On the other hand, the Father bears witness to himself in him (Jn 5:37)."

[223] TD III, 169, (Jn 5:19f.); Balthasar insists that the received affirmation of the Son is what conditions his capacity to be sent: "For every distancing of himself from the center has no other purpose than to show how immovably he has taken his stand in this center," (CSL 190).

surrendering gift. Balthasar elaborates upon the Son's intimate knowledge of the Father that conditions his perfect revelation:

> Since the Son receives from the Father not merely 'something' (for example, the divine essence), but the self-giving Father himself, he receives the 'giving' in the 'gift'. In receiving, therefore, the Son is not only thanksgiving (*eucharistia*); he is also gift in return, offering himself for all that the Father's self-giving may require; his willingness is absolute."[224]

The entire existence of Jesus, as revelatory of the Father, is ordered to the kenotic self-emptying on the Cross, as the medium of expressing the Divine Gift of Love.

Jesus' relationship with the Father in the economy is the "temporal translation of his Person as eternal Son," so that as we explained earlier, "the identity and difference made visible between the divine Persons in the life of Christ opens up the identity and difference within the eternal God."[225] As stated, this revelation comes to fulfillment and ultimate self-expression, for von Balthasar, in Christ's Paschal Sacrifice. The Son was prepared from all eternity for this ultimate kenosis by watching, receiving, and understanding the primal *kenotic* giving of the Father. The Son's thanksgiving and giving back to the Father, which is "as equally groundless and unreserved as the original gift of the Father," blossoms into the Spirit, which "maintains the infinite difference between them" and seals the difference while at the same time bridging it.[226] All other "*kenotic* movements" and "self-externalizations" of the Godhead stem from this original *kenosis*

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[224] TL, III, 225-226.

[225] Pesarchick, 133, 135.

[226] Pesarchick, 151, TD III, 324; Cf. (CSL, 189), The Son's self-sacrifice and emptying "was not something unfamiliar to him; it was foreshadowed and made possible by the eternal self-renunciation of the Son in relation to the Father, in which the Son desires nothing but to be the adoring mirror-image of his source."; Cf. (TD IV 324), "The Son's answer to the gift of Godhead (of equal substance with the Father) can only be eternal thanksgiving (eucharistia) to the Father, the Source—a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender."

of procession and relation in the divine community of self-less love.[227] The following section will strive to address the fruitfulness of this selfless Gift-Exchange as it becomes personalized in the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit: The Fruitfulness of Gift in God and the Creature

According to von Balthasar the Holy Spirit's hypostasis cannot be exactly articulated but only safeguarded from error.[228] Balthasar nonetheless speaks at length about the Spirit in relation to the Father and the Son. The Father "shows himself" through the Son who in turn "points" back to the Father. And the Spirit (deriving from both of them) "directs attention to this reciprocal 'showing' that reveals God as love."[229] He goes on to explain that the Spirit does not empty Himself as the other two hypostases do, for He is "the fruit of the Trinitarian relations."[230] There is a crucial connection here that Balthasar makes between the fruitfulness of Trinitarian life and the fruitfulness of the female-male relation:

> The total self-donating love of the Father and Son is so 'ecstatic' that it overflows in the Spirit. The Spirit is the 'excess' or fruitfulness of their freely given love as well as the 'ever-more' element of rapture or ecstasy found in all genuine love.[231]

All "genuine love" can mean for Balthasar the nuptial love between man and woman. This section will attempt to better articulate this human and Trinitarian correspondence of love in von Balthasar's theology.

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[227] Pesarchick, 152; for Balthasar other movements and externalizations are summed up in Creation, Covenant, and Cross. Following Bulgakov, Balthasar asserts that "the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial '*kenosis'* within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent *kenosis*" (TD IV, 323).

[228] TL III, 117.

[229] TL III, 185.

[230] TL III, 201.

[231] Pesarchick, 148; cf. TL II, 150.

As stated, Balthasar considers the Spirit to be the fruit of the Father and Son to the point that their breathing forth together the Spirit finds its "creaturely reflection in the child's issuance from its parents."[232] Between the two Givers, the Spirit is the gift "*par excellence*,"[233] in the same way that between two lovers, a child is the gift of the nuptial embrace. The fruitfulness of this encounter between husband and wife, and supereminently between Father and Son "transcends itself in bringing forth love per se, the 'Spirit of love.'"[234] Balthasar draws on Bonaventure in this regard, claiming that

> the procession of the Son who expresses the Father is itself an act of the Father's love (just as the man's natural generative act is, or ought to be, the expression of the begetter's love); Bonaventure reflects explicitly on the love between man and woman as an image for the common production of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.[235]

As we have explored at length already, Balthasar insists on humanity being made in the image not only of the Son but the entire Trinity, and thus is called to imitate such a community of fruitfulness. This means that the male-female relationship is called to the same self-sacrificial, self-giving love for the "other" as evidenced between Father and Son; not, as we will see, in a dialectical mode but a mode of absolute love.

Balthasar's unique conception of being as gift-love is poetically expressed in his description of the awakening of the child's awareness of the giftedness of being through the mother's smile. He also insists that the child awakens to "genuine freedom only through his parents' sacrificial self-denial."[236] For Balthasar, Love "abides" only by "giving itself" away; thus he claims that "the image of the child as testimony to a past,

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[232] TL II, 163.
[233] TL II, 156.
[234] TL II, 153; cf. Bonaventure, *Sent*. I, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1 (1:201a): "If the child could come about solely as the result of the reciprocal love of man and woman (without a physical act), the similarity to the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son would be even more perfect." [Perfect in the sense of representation and not necessarily to be understood as negative in relation to bodily sexuality].
[235] TL II, 167-168
[236] TL III, 242.

temporal act of love on its parents' part is only a pale echo" of the love between Father and Son of which the Spirit is the fruit.[237] This Trinitarian reality of fruitfulness and love "sets the pattern for creatures."[238] One might recall from chapter one, how the woman is the fruit bearing principle of both herself and the man, and how mutual equality is preserved within difference (distance) by grounding the male-female distinction within the unity and difference of the Triune God (wherein there is no inequality).[239] Here again is proof for Balthasar's Trinitarian context for speaking of the sexes.

Balthasar's insight finds continuity in John Paul II's theology, particularly *Mulieris Dignitatem*. In it he adopts much the same position as Balthasar, explaining that the man and woman's *imago Trinitatis* "involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other 'I'", such that this communion acts as a prelude to the unity and distinction of the Trinity.[240] The nature of the *imago Trinitatis* means that together (and individually) the woman and man are "called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God,"[241] especially the fruitful fecundity of that communion. This human sexual fruitfulness of two people coming together as one, in such a way that a child results, pre-exists by analogy in the Trinitarian embrace and subsequent overflowing of Love which is the Holy Spirit. Balthasar sums up this exchange best:

> For both, the event of this oneness is a gift: the *bonum* of a mutual love is a *donum* for the lovers. Thus both, the loving Father and the loving Son, receive this mutuality as a gift. This gift, however is not the calculable total of their love, nor is it the resultant identity of their love: it is an

[237] TL III, 243.
[238] TD V, 73.
[239] Cf. TD III, 286; cf. (Woman Priests in a Marian Church, 169); cf. (TD V, 103): "The pole of the species and the pole of individuality, which is again a remote reflection of the mystery of the Trinity, where each of the Persons is identical with the divine essence and yet distinct from the other Persons."
[240] *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.
[241] *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

> unfathomable more, a fruit (as the child is the fruit of the 'one-flesh' relationship of man and wife); for even divine love, and every love that reflects it, is (as we have already said) an 'overflowing', because, in it, the pure, unmotivated nature of goodness comes to light, as the ultimate face, *prosopon*, of the Divinity.[242]

The fall of humanity into sin mars this fruitful embrace in many ways, not the least of which is a halting of the overflow process. The refusal to reflect Trinitarian love, to which men and women are called, "reveals that abyss in the creature whereby it contradicts its own character as analogy and image, a character that arises necessarily from its position within the Trinitarian relations."[243] Although flawed, the intention which inspires the coming together of the human sexes as one nonetheless remains recognizable as imaging the Trinitarian fruitfulness.

The spoiled effects of sin on this man-woman encounter are present in many theological and philosophical articulations. What Balthasar is seeking to avoid, yet for which he is unjustifiably criticized for espousing, is a dialectical transaction between man and woman. Balthasar critiques "the dialectical movement" understood as "the 'consciousness of my unity with another,' which means that I acquire my self-consciousness only as the sublation of my being for myself."[244] In this approach the "I" is established through a "negative movement" that seeks to make the other "my other."[245] This perspective is unsatisfying for von Balthasar; claiming that "a gift that is not given *gratis* is not a gift but a business transaction."[246] The Hegelian dialectic, contrary to a Balthasarian structure, "understands the passage over to the "other" as alienation and not

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[242] TL III, 226-227.
[243] TD IV, 329.
[244] TL II, 46.
[245] TL II, 47.
[246] TL III, 225; Cf. Ibid., "Similarly, a gift that is not intended to express and give the giver remains at the level of a prospective deal. In a genuine gift, the giver wishes to give himself by means of a transparent token."

as love (or loving self-emptying), that is, because he [Hegel] logicizes and, ultimately, absorbs love in absolute knowledge."[247] There is, in the Hegelian dialectic, no mutuality or diffused reciprocity, but an unbridled, capitalistic grasping for scarce resources. Additionally for Hegel, sexuality "belongs entirely to the natural side of man," and displays only a pejorative connection between begetting and death.[248]

This is not, for von Balthasar, an appropriate articulation of the *imago Trinitatis* because it is not a proper expression of the Trinitarian *communio*, or even of the relationship between God and the creature. As we spoke about in chapter one, Balthasar wants to ground the creaturely "other-than-God" in the "uncreated 'Other-in-God'" while simultaneously "maintaining that fundamental 'distance' which alone makes love possible."[249] Balthasar sees this exchange as opening up a "relationship" between heaven and earth:

> Insofar as grace, understood here as the handing over of the divine *donum*, does not destroy the 'dialogical' relationship of Father and Son within the Godhead but rather brings it to superabundant perfection, there can be no question of this giving of the *donum* to the creature threatening the latter's dialogical position over against God.[250]

In this way the Trinitarian *imago* can be infused into a created humanity without compromising the creature's otherness from God. This otherness is not destroyed but "refashioned" and "drawn into the otherness of Father and Son"; thus in Balthasar's balanced approach the virtues of the human are transformed while at the same time "the

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[247] TL II, 48; Cf. (Ibid.): "Since the individual is seen solely in his antithesis to the other, the other must appear as a contradiction through which the individual must find himself—and not as an equally legitimate other with whom alone he becomes who or what he is in the give and take of mutual dialogue, indeed, in a having always already been mutually addressed."

[248] TL II, 59.

[249] TD V, 105; cf. (TD V, 108): "Only a Trinitarian God can guarantee that man will not forfeit his independent being when united with God. God 'does not put us into a uniform of love. He lets his own love, out of which he has created every man, be reflected in the particular way in which each person loves' (Ka II, 170)."

[250] TL III, 232.

divine qualities express themselves in the created being."[251] This "indwelling" of God in the creature, extends even to the sexual embrace.

Von Balthasar laments the hermeneutic by which the sexual embrace is negatively viewed because it precludes any real consideration of the fruitfulness of sexuality as an authentic expression of the *imago Trinitatis*.[252] Balthasar seeks to transcend Hegel and many of early theologians' "post-lapsarian" vision of sexuality by following, among others, Scheeben, and recognizing that "the bond of matrimony already has a *religious* character by reason of its natural end; production of new images of God."[253] Balthasar does not espouse then the perspective of a zero-sum game at work between the sexes, but rather a residual resonance for and original intention for a Trinitarian Gift-Exchange of Love:

> The relationship described here, which is the simple but necessary complement to the dialogic outlined above, remains, in spite of all the obvious dissimilarities, the most eloquent *imago Trinitatis* that we find woven into the fabric of the creature. It not only transcends Augustine's self-contained I, but also allows the 'condilectus [co-beloved]' that Richard's model imports from the outside to spring from the intimacy of love itself—precisely as its fruitfulness—while avoiding the dangerous tendency of the dialogicians to allow interpersonal encounter to slide into a mere two-way monologue (with a religious background, to be sure). It is permanent proof of the triadic structure of creaturely logic.[254]

This section has established the fruitfulness of Trinitarian logic inherent in the human logic. Our next task will be to exposit what Balthasar means to say by speaking of the Trinitarian *Communio* with "supra-sexual" language.

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[251] TL III, 235.
[252] TL II, 60.
[253] TL II, 61-62.
[254] TL II, 62.

Supra-Sexuality in the Gift-Exchange of Love

Throughout the greater part of our discussion we have endeavored to speak of the intricate mystery of the Trinity with minimal use of sexual language. This means to show that it is indeed feasible to construct Balthasar's Trinitarian theology without projecting from the creature onto the Trinitarian communion, while still recognizing an infused Trinitarian mutuality within the creature. This is imperative to bear in mind for this section, for though it will not exceed these preliminary constrictions, it will push them to their limits. Here Balthasar intends to analyze how the Trinitarian community manifested in its created effects (i.e. the sexual dichotomy of man and woman) bears resemblance and origin within the Godhead. It will first be necessary to establish what Balthasar says about this derivation of sexuality in the supra-sexual Trinity, then to examine what aspects of the Gift-Exchange suggest these characteristics, and finally to ground this reality in a non-calculating Communion of Love.

Balthasar sees at play within the Godhead two movements: "action and consent". This, in our discussion, can better be referred to as "giving and receiving":

> The divine unity of action and consent—which, as we have seen, share equal dignity within love—is expressed in the world in the duality of the sexes. In Trinitarian terms, of course, the Father, who begets him who is without origin, appears primarily as (super-) masculine; the Son, in consenting, appears initially as (super-) feminine, but in the act (together with the Father) of breathing forth the Spirit, he is (super-) masculine. As for the Spirit, he is (super-) feminine. There is even something (super-) feminine about the Father too, since, as we have shown, in the action of begetting and breathing forth he allows himself to be determined by the Persons who thus proceed from him; however, this does not affect his primacy in the order of the Trinity. The very fact of the Trinity forbids us to project any secular sexuality into the Godhead (as happens in many religions and in the Gnostic *syzygia*). It must be enough for us to regard the ever-new reciprocity of acting and consenting, which in turn is a form of activity and fruitfulness, as the transcendent origin of what we see

> realized in the world of creation: the form and actualization of love and its fruitfulness in sexuality."[255]

The Father, in giving everything that he *is* (his divinity) to the Son,[256] possesses what Balthasar terms "initiative" or "primacy." This action of giving himself away (an action that he "both 'does' and 'is'") is the generation of the Son as "infinitely Other *of the Father*."[257] This is not to suggest a hierarchy or temporal priority[258] but a manner of being the first giver and the potential vulnerability which that implies. There is a "recklessness with which the Father gives away himself,"[259] in a mode that his divinity is not just "lent to the Son," but that the Son can receive and possess it equally.[260]

The Father, paradoxically, does not lose himself in this Giving/Self-surrender of his person to the Other, but this "perfect gift" becomes the "source and origin of God and all being"; an exchange that is meted out for all encounters of love.[261] The Trinitarian exchange of love is the paradigm of being-as-love:

> The Father, in uttering and surrendering himself without reserve, does not lose himself. He does not extinguish himself by self-giving, just as he does not keep back anything of himself either. For, in this self-surrender, he *is* the whole divine essence. Here we see both God's infinite power and his powerlessness; he cannot be God in any other way but in this 'kenosis' within the Godhead itself.[262]

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[255] TD V, 91.

[256] Cf. TD V, 84, "for in God there is only being, not having."

[257] TD IV, 325; It is important to recognize the emphasis "of the Father" since this "otherness" is still in God and only refers to the *relation* to the Father.

[258] Cf. TD IV, 323, "The Father must not be thought to exist 'prior' to this self-surrender (in an Arian sense): he is this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back. This divine act that brings forth the Son…involves the positing of an absolute, infinite 'distance' that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude."

[259] TD IV, 328.

[260] TD IV, 325.

[261] TL III, 225; This is true even though this love is only ever imperfectly realized outside the Trinitarian Communion of Persons.

[262] TD IV, 325.

This kenotic giving between Father and Son, which determines love, is not a losing of oneself but reveals "the essential realization of oneself," because "self-emptying is the dawn of authentic being."[263] Essentially, God *is* this process of self-giving love.

Balthasar, following Ferdinand Ulrich, declares that the Father-Giver "can really be present in the gift—understood as a 'giving away.'"[264] Here we begin to see the importance, as argued earlier, for the "distance" between the hypostases such that the "other" is not dialectically conquered, so to speak, but loved:

> For the giver, this means that 'the Other's otherness is not a sting of death, piercing him in the flesh of his 'I=I'; it is not an 'objective provocation' that has to be overcome! Rather, he accepts the Other's otherness, which arises from their separation, in such a way that, inwardly, it actually facilitates his self-communication. Only in this way can he verify that his gift has separated itself from him, that his being is lived as gift, that it has been received. Only through the separation from the Thou can the I appropriate itself and, in this act, affirm the origin of its own being (together with the Other).'[265]

Thus the Persons in the Trinity interpenetrate as much as they "allow" the other to be. There is utter trust, utter interdependence, and sheer freedom in such a way that no hypostasis "is overwhelmed by being known by the others, since each subsists by being *let*-be."[266] It is only within this context, this loving embrace/self-surrender of trust (one

[263] TD V, 74. cf. (Ibid.): "Giving does not retain what it has but contains what it gives.' In bolder terms it can be said that 'self-giving preserves it's identity by giving itself away. By relinquishing itself, it preserves itself."

[264] TL III, 225; cf. Ferdinand Ulrich, *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Frankfurt am Main: Knect, 1973) (79-81).

[265] TL III, 225; cf. Ferdinand Ulrich, (Ibid.).

[266] TD II, 259. cf. (TD II, 262): "The realms of freedom in God come about through the self-giving of the hypostases and by each hypostasis in turn 'letting' the other two 'be'. No one hypostasis wishes to be the other two. This is not a retreat or resignation: it is the positive form of infinite love. For that reason, God himself does not need to retreat either; he does not need to 'close in on himself,' he needs no 'kenosis' when causing the world to exist within himself."

which the world cannot fully know or enact), where the separation of "I" and "Thou" can be upheld while there yet exists a freedom that does not seek to control the other.[267]

The Father's always giving himself away is an utterly groundless love, that is unmotivated by anything outside of itself.[268] The Son, receives this capacity for kenosis from the Father in "the mode of receptivity,"[269] which for Balthasar is a supra-feminine characteristic. In relation to humanity however, the Son, because he represents the Father (who is super masculine), must appear in the form of the man.[270] This aspect of the mutuality between Father and Son, particularly the Son's necessary masculinity, will prove contentious for Beattie.

Moreover, in the Trinitarian *communio* there is a dual action of each hypostases freely "letting the other be" and a true "interpenetration" where each does not just "keep to his own side" but enacts a true reciprocal exchange "which is perfected and sealed in their joint breathing forth of the Spirit."[271] Here we see the intersection of identity and otherness in the Gift-Exchange analogous to the male female polarity:

> It is a boundless love where freedom and necessity coincide and where identity and otherness are one; identity, since the Lover gives all that he is and nothing else, and otherness, since otherwise the Lover would love only himself. Yet, even where it is a case of total reciprocal self-giving, this distinction cannot be ultimate: without disappearing, it must transcend itself in a new identity of love given and received, which the lovers themselves are bound to regard as the miracle, ever new, of their mutual love. Thus in God there must be 'an eternal amazement at, and affirmation of, this reciprocal otherness that accompanies the oneness.[272]

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[267] Cf. (TD V 85): "For the 'other' must be himself, and not 'I'."

[268] Cf. (TL III, 441): "For if love, as such, is genuine, it has no other ground but itself: this love that has its source in the Father is, initially, the Father himself (since, as Father, he is nothing other than the pure surrender of himself; the Father does not 'have' love, he 'is' love)."

[269] TD V, 105: "This receptivity simultaneously includes the Son's self-givenness."

[270] TD II, 411; cf. (Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women, 704).

[271] TD V, 105.

[272] TD V, 83.

The "space" in which the Son receives in a quasi-feminine manner the gift of the Father's divinity, actually "embraces the closeness" of the relation between Father and Son. In other words, there is no point at which the "distance" between the Son and the Father ever becomes a chasm, for the love and the trust ever present in their intimate bond cannot allow any separation.[273] The Son is always aware, even in the darkness of the Cross, that he is the Beloved of the Father; this he cannot doubt. It is because the Son receives his primal affirmation from the Father that he possesses the capacity to offer himself *kenotically* back to the Father.

It is therefore in the Paschal Mystery that the "groundless" but "all-grounding gratuity of love reigns beyond every utilitarian calculation"[274] and is revealed to humanity as the model of self-less love. Love's power and efficacy lies in this transcendence of self that goes out from oneself:

> from the "'I' to the 'thou', and to the fruit of this encounter, whether it is the sexual encounter of man and woman (where the fruit may be the child, but also, over and above this, some broadly human element that goes beyond sexuality) or some other encounter in which the 'I', giving itself to the 'thou' becomes really itself for the first time, the two being realized in a 'we' that transcends their egoisms.[275]

Balthasar lists marriage as an example of a human institution that breaks through the closed model of selfishness or coercion of the "other". This indeed means that "to love truly is to give credit; the lover does not watch the beloved anxiously. The lover gives the beloved room for personal growth, and by doing this the lover must accept the risk of

[273] Cf. (TD V 86), Although within God "there is no hiatus here between question and answer", the human communion does experience a chasm of insecurity, only to be completely bridged in the beatific vision.

[274] TL II, 140-141.

[275] TD III, 526.

letting the beloved go."[276] And yet, within this distinction and separation the Spirit actively unites the love, bridges the distance and represents the "realized union" of an "unsurpassable love."[277] This ideal, lived out in the Trinitarian communion is only dimly approximated in the creaturely realm.

Balthasar admits that this precise kind of Absolute self-giving does not exist in the male-female dichotomy as we experience it.[278] But he explains that:

> We are not asking here whether this is the nature of human beings or whether and to what extent they are capable of living in this way. Our concern is with the nature, the *pure essence*, of love itself. And in every purest expression of it, we encounter anew the mystery of self-giving. For the sake of the beloved, love would gladly renounce all its possessions if it could thereby enrich the beloved. It would gladly *accept* gifts if it knew the beloved would find happiness in the act of giving. For love, even receiving is a form of self-giving. Love adorns itself, not to be beautiful for its own sake, but to appear beautiful to the beloved. Hence it will just as readily deprive itself of all adornment if by this means it can adorn the beloved.[279]

Here again in the creaturely realm, it is the role of the Spirit to "impel the believer toward the full, Marian Yes";[280] the yes that actively "lets-be" and is the pre-condition for a Gift-Exchange of Absolute Love. It should be clear then, that what Balthasar is speaking about is a remnant of the perfect Trinitarian Gift-Exchange. For "what lover would not gladly lay the whole world at the feet of the beloved? If we love, we do not know the difference between command and wish. The wish of the beloved is our command."[281] This sentiment finds a pre-ordained resonance among human beings who experience love for

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[276] *Kath. Briefe*, *Vol II*, 198. (The Catholic Epistles of the New Testament).
[277] TD IV, 326.
[278] TD V, 82.
[279] CSL, 29.
[280] TD III, 357.
[281] CSL, 28.

the other, perhaps even in the greatest form of love "to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

We can begin to see how there is a constant interplay between Giver and Receiver: both give, but in varied ways. The Father "initiates" the gift while the Son actively receives the gift and returns it in utter thankfulness, and the Spirit unites and "fans into flame" this love. Balthasar understands the Son to be supra-feminine vis-à-vis the Father and the Father to be supra-masculine. Balthasar sees this analogy of Gift-Love acted out in what men and women are called to exemplify in their own love for the "other." In the Trinity, there is always one Person who is passive and one who is active,[282] but as stated above, even receiving is a kind of active giving. And because this exchange takes place with a "distance" and with differentiation, the sexes are likewise divided, but only for the sake of a greater unity:

> The fragmentation of nature through sexuality ceases to be tragic. Even nature differentiates in order to unite; how much more so does the bridal secret between heaven and earth, which gives us a share in the differentiation of the Trinitarian unity. On all planes the truth and depth of union depend on preserving the differences. 'Equality' of the sexes prevents the real interlocking of man and woman and levels out the organic and constructive unity to one that is abstract (the identity of human nature) and ineffectual. One sex is unable to discover in the other, beyond the valuable difference, what is its own. For if there is this 'equality,' each already knows simultaneously itself and the other.[283]

The question at issue here will be raised in Beattie's feminist critique that interprets masculine priority as evidence of oppression against the "receptive" feminine. Our next chapter's purpose will be to address, from a feminist standpoint (primarily articulated by Tina Beattie), some of the contentious issues raised by Balthasar's Trinitarian theology and anthropology.

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[282] TD V, 85; "The Father begets; this implies necessarily that the Son is begotten."
[283] TA, 314.

CHAPTER IV

TRINITARIAN EXCLUSION: TINA BEATTIE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH BALTHASAR'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Introduction

Positioning Tina Beattie amidst feminist theology is a difficult task for she stands perched upon the intersection of several perspectives. Her relationship to Hans Urs von Balthasar is even more complex: she seeks to engage him on his own terms yet in almost every regard she remains antagonistic to his theology. On the surface however, there appear to be a few resonances between them. Both expose an intellectualization and loss of sacramentality in the Church following the Second Vatican Council and attribute this to a masculinization of the culture.[284] Both thinkers seek then to recover a sacramental embodiment for the Church. Beattie and Balthasar believe that "theology is inseparable from prayer and faith,"[285] and they aspire through their work to revive a kind of prayerful theology. There is similarity also to be found in their insistence on sexual difference between men and women, but here Beattie begins to diverge. She believes that von Balthasar is not faithful to his claims of sexual difference and thus he denies unique

[284] See Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (NCF), (New York: Routledge, 2006), 301 and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations* trans John Riches, (London: SPCK, 1975), 70; cf. Women Priests? A Marian Church in a Fatherless and Motherless Culture," 164-166.

[285] NCF, 45.

signification to women, and in fact "writes [her] out of the script of salvation."[286] According to Beattie, Balthasar still insists on perpetuating a rigidity of gender stereotypes and roles, particularly by highlighting the sacrificial aspect of the mass, the nuptial symbolism of the Church, and the insistence on a masculine priesthood.[287] Thus, regarding the loss of sacramentality, Beattie advocates quite a different solution from those who seek to advance Balthasar's theology, for she claims that these neo-orthodox followers create "a false mystique rather than a true mysticism."[288] Indeed, Beattie is advocating her own mystical feminist theology that goes beyond what she believes to be an "intellectual stagnation"[289] of contemporary feminist theology, secular feminism, and neo-orthodox feminist theology. It will be necessary to contextualize her work amongst these various ideological camps.

One of Beattie's main dialogue partners is the 'new catholic feminism,' referring primarily to Michele Schumacher's collection of essays *Women in Christ*.[290] Beattie's agreement with some of their points is tempered by her belief that their thought is clouded by a reaffirmation of traditional Catholic teaching. Resisting the desire to caricature their project, she understands their work to have "rich insights" particularly in their attempt to envision "women's dignity and sexual mutuality as persons made in the image of God," but in large respect she accuses their project of lacking "scholarly integrity."[291] Yet in the introduction to *Women in Christ*, Schumacher writes something

[286] NCF, 112.
[287] NCF, 301.
[288] NCF, 301.
[289] NCF, 3.
[290] Beattie's criticism of von Balthasar is taken primarily from her article "Sex, Death and Melodrama" and her recent book *New Catholic Feminism*, wherein she is responding to the 'new catholic feminism' influenced so heavily by John Paul II and Balthasar's thought.
[291] NCF, 23, 24.

that sounds strikingly familiar to Beattie's own attempt to move past the ideological cul-de-sac hinted at above:

> Our primary purpose is to forge a way through the impasse these ideologies have created in Western society and, more positively, to rise above an often degraded cultural vision of the human person in general and of women in particular.[292]

Moreover, these 'new feminists' seek to establish a relational model of the self that is understood "vertically as well as horizontally."[293] Ultimately Beattie concludes that the influence and intelligence of these women is too important to ignore and suggests a constructive engagement with them and their theology. This will be the approach Beattie takes when engaging Balthasar's theology, especially since it is so often implemented to reiterate a defense of the masculine priesthood.

The 'new feminists' could agree, in large part, with the critique of secular feminist theology that is put forth by Beattie. She admonishes feminist theology's "desire for academic acceptability rather than an ongoing commitment to the struggle for justice"[294] and that in their work

> prayer is rarely mentioned, and the whole idea of the theologian being open to the revelation and otherness of God tends to be set aside, either because the appeal to women's experience has taken the place of scripture, revelation and prayer as the primary source for Christian understanding of God, as is the case in liberal feminism, or because postmodern feminist theologians have uncritically conformed to the methods and criteria of feminist critical theory, in such a way that their theological insights are

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[292] Michele M. Schumacher, "An Introduction to a New Feminism," *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele M. Schumacher. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 2003, x; I would consider also that Beattie implements much of the same tactics which accuses her feminist contemporaries of using—vitriolic generalizations of their position. At one point she contemplates dismissing their work, caricaturing their intention as: "an authoritarian form of Catholicism that emerged under the papacy of John Paul II, heavily influenced by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, based on the belief that true Catholicism entails absolute, unquestioning loyalty to the Pope and to the teachings of the Church, and that any form of criticism, however conscientious and well informed, constitutes a form of disloyalty that calls into question one's very right to be Catholic," (NCF, 25).

[293] WIC, xi.

[294] NCF, 28.

> silenced through what might perhaps be seen as an over-enthusiasm for the latest trends in secular academia.[295]

Beattie wants to challenge this neglect of theology but also to reclaim the significance of the body (especially the female body), which she believes is resisted in both Catholic theology and postmodern feminist theory.

Beattie is speaking of two extremes. The first side is that of the 'new feminism,' which "confidently asserts that, if women would only open themselves in faith to the light of revelation, mediated through the Church's doctrines and teachings, they would find an answer to their questions in the essential nature of their God-given femininity."[296] The second extreme is one in which "women are asked to unmask all ontologies and essentialisms as discourses of power by means of which society reproduces the heterosexual body through the manufactured illusions of identity, interiority, nature and sexual embodiment."[297] Where Judith Butler, from the latter camp, makes the body an "inaccessible mirage" by her "performance of identity politics"[298], the new feminist movement "robs the female body of all possible transcendence and signification."[299]

As stated above, Beattie moves beyond this impasse not by ignoring but by engaging both sides. This chapter will deal particularly with her consideration of the new feminism that has grown from the theological anthropology of Balthasar and John Paul II's theology of the body. Essentially, Beattie wants to rediscover a form of Catholic

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[295] NCF, 26; Beattie goes further to suggest that "The challenge that confronts feminist theologians is the need to hold together the demands of academic rigor and objectivity positively construed as critical reasoning and argument, and one's responsibilities and commitments to communities of women, children, and men who represent diverse and often contradictory ideas and values, and whose lives may be untouched by the rhetorical games of the (post)modern academy." (NCF, 28)

[296] NCF, 33.

[297] NCF, 33.

[298] NCF, 36.

[299] NCF, 39-40. The two extremes, she notes, are in actuality (though unrecognized) closer in similarity to each other by the implementation of the fluidity of gender. This is dependent upon Beattie's reading of Balthasar's "transgendering" male priesthood.

sacramentality that is not hostile to women and their bodies, that completes the incarnation and signification of the sacred in women's bodies as well as men's, and that is not "captive to an uncritical allegiance to neo-orthodox Catholicism."[300] As will be clear in this chapter, the effort for women's ordination and the struggle to escape from "male ecclesiastical control"[301] is Beattie's primary solution to the problems she finds inherent in the aforementioned theologies. This concern, while valid, will not be directly discussed in this thesis, which cannot be straightforwardly concerned with every consequence of Balthasar's theological anthropology, particularly one so politically weighted as the ordination of women. Deliberation on the issue of the female priesthood must be set aside and will be mentioned only where central to Beattie's argument. This move serves the purpose of advancing the theological discussion at hand, so that the potential political consequences may not be allowed to pronounce judgment on the theological inquiry.

As this chapter begins to move into the areas of contention between von Balthasar and certain feminist theologies, it is important to bear in mind the direction of Balthasar's theology—it is his concept of the Trinity that informs his anthropology of men and women, and not vice versa. This is a principle that is apparently ignored by Beattie, for rarely, if at all, is the Trinity mentioned in Beattie's argument in *New Catholic Feminism*, and is even absent for most of her portrayal of Balthasar's own thought. This is problematic in that the Trinitarian Gift-Exchange is central to all of von Balthasar's theological and anthropological thinking, for much of what he has to say about the sexes is grounded within the *communio* of Persons in the Trinity. One potential reason for this

[300] NCF, 42, 291, 301, 302.
[301] NCF, 22.

neglect might be her misunderstanding or misrepresentation of *kenosis* in Balthasar's and the new catholic feminism's thought. To this we will return later.

My exposition of Beattie's position will be divided into several discussions of her main critiques and some responses to them. The first will deal with her claim that Balthasar associates the masculine with the divine and the feminine with the material and will include a consideration of Balthasar's supposed denial of bodiliness and sexual difference. The second section will discuss the controversial relationship between Christ and the Church in conjunction with the connection Beattie makes between Balthasar and his mystic inspiration, Adrienne von Speyr. This will be followed by Beattie's interpretation of the "other" according to Balthasar. Within this section I will discuss her perception of Balthasar's account of woman as *Antwort*, and what this means for the relations between men and women. Lastly, I shall attempt to rebut some of her objections, particularly related to her misunderstanding of *kenosis*, by contextualizing her thought amongst other feminist dialogue partners on this topic.

Finally, I would add that the ongoing conversation into which I humbly insert myself is far too elaborate, within the given space for this project, in order to fully encompass an exhaustive account of any position. In light of this, much will have to be tabled for later discussion. My aim in this chapter, then, is to bring to light some critical questions to contribute to this dialogue; a discussion which I believe, like Beattie, to be most fruitful and necessary for the Church today.

The Human and the *Theion*

(a) The Male is God

One of Beattie's main objections to Balthasar's schema of theological anthropology is his language involving man's primacy vis-à-vis the woman. Beattie, using Irigarian language, accuses Balthasar of advocating a "phallocentric model," which thus "equates God's creative power with male sexual activity."[302] If true, this would mean that Balthasar perpetuates the "age-old" gender stereotypes[303] of identifying the man with "reason, transcendence and God," and the woman with "emotion, the body and creatureliness."[304] In other words, Mary Daly's famous phrase reappears: "If God is male then the male is God."[305] According to Tina Beattie, implicitly undergirding this deification and idolatry of the man is the reason why Balthasar insists on Christ's maleness—"an identification of the divine fatherhood with masculine sexuality and the male body."[306]

Balthasar's three polarities discussed in the first chapter (individual-community, man-woman, and spirit-matter), only serve to reinforce Beattie's point that the woman is always secondary in this dichotomy and that "her existence is always oriented toward his."[307] Beattie responds to one of Balthasar's long passages about humanity's inner-torn embodying of a corruptible and incorruptible nature:

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[302] Tina Beattie, "Sex, Death and Melodrama: A Feminist Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar, (SDM)," *The Way* Vol. 44 Issue 4 (October 2005), 164; cf. (NCF, 129): "Balthasar's Father God is indeed made in the image of the transcendent male, a phallic, inseminating God *kenotically* emptying himself into a feminine creation." Beattie understands this, which will be referenced later, as God's orgasmic creation.

[303] These stereotypes begin with Greek philosophy in the "incorruptible male soul and the corruptible female body," (NCF, 156).

[304] SDM, 163.

[305] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, (Beacon Press, Boston), 1973, 19.

[306] NCF, 113.

[307] NCF, 156.

> Balthasar's sexually charged theology is in fact the epic drama of the lonely hero, who must constantly resist the siren voices that seduce him and would lure him onto the rocks of the body, sex and death. But this is a Sisyphean struggle, because Balthasar's heroic man cannot ultimately be reconciled with the reconciling love of the risen Christ…a man for whom love is a devouring abyss that must be resisted and conquered if his manhood is to survive.[308]

As will become clear, Beattie is attributing many themes and assumptions to Balthasar's text that may not be entirely justified, especially if read within the context of his Trinitarian theology.

At least on one level, Balthasar somewhat anticipates this criticism himself and recognizes the dangers of associating the masculine with "spirit" and the feminine with "matter".[309] As discussed in the first chapter, the difference between the sexes is grounded in the equality and interdependence of both. Balthasar gravely understands that "from Plato to Aristotle and on to the well-known misogynistic utterances of the Fathers and Scholastics,"[310] that there has been a linguistic and cultural subjugation of women by negatively associating her with matter and the body. It is this danger that Balthasar explicitly says must be avoided. Instead, Balthasar sees a hiatus between human sexuality's "cosmic and hypercosmic situation," where, as we said before, the *imago Dei* rests both *in* and *above* the sexual.[311] This means that while there is some aspect present in the sexual embrace that reflects the *imago Trinitatis*, the physicality of one gender or the other is not to be correlated with the divine. While Balthasar's explicit awareness and insistence on avoiding this problem may not fully acquit him of Beattie's accusations, nonetheless it is a point that she fails to recognize and consider. In addressing this first

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[308] NCF, 156-157.

[309] TD II, 367; Beattie makes the rather bold claim that "Christianity from the very outset was a convergence of the earth-honoring Motherline with the cult of the sky-god Father," (NCF, 264).

[310] TD II, 367.

[311] TD II 368, 370.

remark we have touched on another of Beattie's critiques—Balthasar's rejection of the body and sexuality.

(b) The Rejection of Sexuality and "Bodiliness"

We saw in the last subsection that in Beattie's reading, Balthasar's "man" must reject and repress his own bodily sexuality toward which the woman is always drawing him, and instead he must move toward transcendence. Beattie brings her assumptions to the text when she analyzes his echoing of the common Pauline notion that Christ conquers the flesh (Rom 8). She suggests that "the flesh" for Balthasar is "supremely identified with the female sex."[312] Beattie thus attacks Balthasar's portrayal of the Church as the *casta meretrix* (chaste whore) and hell:

> For von Balthasar, the most appropriate image to describe the 'pure evil' of hell, the 'quintessence' of sin, is the harlot—the sexual female body finally exterminated in the fires of hell.[313]

Beattie admits however that this is only an indirect condemnation of the feminine imagery since he uses it to refer to the hypocrisy and sin of the masculine church hierarchy.[314] Beattie sees Balthasar as playing out a fantasy of "rape and denigration" projected onto the feminine flesh of "non-being."[315] In this fantasy "Christ humiliates

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[312] SDM, 169; For this association Beattie provides no citation except the following example of Balthasar's imagery of hell and the *casta meretrix*.

[313] SDM, 170.

[314] SDM, 174: "It is surely suggestive that von Balthasar's vitriolic denunciation of the *casta meretrix* is directed at the male-office-holders of the institution Church. Like the prophets of old, von Balthasar seems to think the best way to describe men's infidelity to God is through metaphors of wanton female sexuality."

[315] SDM, 174; cf. (NCF, 176): "The earthly Church is, as we have already seen, a community of men acting up as women, men in drag perhaps. It is the institutional, Petrine Church, personified in Peter's absence from the cross and his denial of Christ. So Balthasar's sexual tirade is actually a metaphorical assault on men, who suffer the ultimate indignity of being portrayed as a raped and ravaged female body,

sinful men by casting them in the role of whores who must be raped and conquered so that he can purify them."[316]

At times, Beattie is projecting onto Balthasar a willful misreading of his text. This can be found in Balthasar's insistence that Christ does not conquer by rape, but rather Christ says "I have defeated you through weakness."[317] Moreover, Beattie's reading is dependent upon her interpretation of Balthasar's male "transgendering" priesthood, about which we will speak at greater length later. At present, this issue is closely related to the question of Balthasar's condemnation of bodily sexuality, particularly the female sex.

Beattie purports that Balthasar's anthropology is "profoundly hostile to the body" and that he replaces it with a suprasexual relationship between Christ and the Church.[318] She emphatically states that

> Balthasar never represents human sexuality in positive terms, as the coming together of bodies in mutual love. Sex is always a cipher for something else: for the eschatological desire of Christ's relationship with the Bride (which is represented in bodily, finite terms by virginity, not marriage).[319]

If Balthasar's theology truly "allows little if any scope for the bodily goodness of sexual love,"[320] one might ask why Balthasar utilizes it so often. Anyone who implements human sexual relationships as analogical to relationships in God cannot totally eschew bodily sex from the realm of reciprocal love. We saw in the last chapter how Balthasar

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subdued and conquered by the male God. 'The Conquest of the Bride' is a fantasy of male rape, and the female flesh is the abyss, the non-being, upon which this fantasy is inscribed."

[316] SDM, 174.

[317] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979 [1954]), 197; Moreover, Beattie understands this triumph through powerlessness—*kenosis*—as unhelpful for the plight of women (which we will discuss in a later section).

[318] SDM, 168-169; cf. (Ibid.), For von Balthasar, our experience of sex is so contaminated by its association with death that we have no way of knowing what unfallen sex might have been like. On Calvary, the 'suprasexual' relationship between Christ and his Bride, Mary/the Church, is revealed as it was intended by God in the beginning, since the 'vicious circle of sexuality and death is broken.' (TD III, 325)."

[319] NCF, 157.

[320] SDM, 169.

was so bold as to compare the spiration of the Spirit from the mutual love and embrace of the Father and the Son to the fruitfulness of a child in the love between spouses. This expression does not bespeak a theologian who rejects bodily sexuality. Beattie's crucial neglect of Balthasar's Trinitarian theology (wherein there is both masculine and feminine suprasexuality[321]) perhaps contributes to her accusation.

Is it possible that Balthasar at least privileges the "suprasexual" relationship over against the bodily one? Beattie believes this to be the case in that "it is hard to find in his [Balthasar's] work any real connection between the exalted vocation of the suprasexual celibate, and the day to day realities of human sexuality."[322] Elsewhere she says that

> Balthasar does not allow the sexual body any positive significance in the form of human bodily love. His 'suprasexuality' is a projection into a transcendent sphere in which sexuality is both idealized and rendered remote from the ordinary interactions of human love and commitment.[323]

It certainly is the case that Balthasar in some way highlights the celibate state of election, particularly in its being founded "directly" on the cross. This is not to say that the marital life is something wholly separated from the self-giving of the cross—but rather, to the degree that men and women give themselves to each other in accordance with Christ's gift of self, the nuptial bond demonstrates equality with the celibate life.

In fact, for Balthasar, the bond between men and women, and Christ and his Church, are inseparable since all people in all states of life must undergo the "transforming assimilation to Christ."[324]

> In the married state, the Christian, by his sacramental 'yes', gives his body and soul to his spouse—but always in God, out of belief in God, and with

[321] Balthasar insists upon "suprasexuality" in the Trinity in order to avoid any kind of material attribution to God and need not be interpreted as hostility to the body.
[322] SDM, 169.
[323] NCF, 163.
[324] CSL, 225.

> confidence in God's bountiful fidelity, which will not deny this gift of self the promised physical and spiritual fruit.[325]

That which Balthasar is aiming at here is the need for transformation and redemption of the bodily sexual state. Does this then mean that suprasexual relationships are antagonistic to sexual ones? Given that he claims God will preserve the promised "physical fruit" as well as the spiritual, this does not seem to be the case.

Moreover, Balthasar in several places expresses both the goodness of marital love and an insistence that the body and spirit are not to be dichotomized. In the first instance, Balthasar claims not to promulgate a dualistic notion of the body saying that "everything that would disincarnate, spiritualizing in the direction of idealism, is anti-Christian." Similarly, "all philosophy, theology, and mysticism that is hostile to the body" is anti-Christian.[326] Balthasar plainly states his disapproval of those who draw a "dividing line" between "the fruitful encounter between man and woman in their personal mutual self-giving—and, on the other side their sexual union."[327] He equally chides Hegel for negatively construing sexuality as the "natural side of man," thus equivocating sex and death.[328] Von Balthasar critiques this position, because it precludes the possibility of viewing the fruitfulness of sexuality as an *imago Trinitatis*.[329]

Secondly, Balthasar is adamant about the incarnate goodness of self-giving in sexual, married love:

> It is not correct to regard the married state as exclusively the state of physical love, and the state of election as that of purely spiritual love, for both sates of life represent the one spiritual love of Christ for the Church,

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[325] CSL, 238.
[326] Both above quotes from TL III, 247.
[327] TD II, 381.
[328] TL II, 59.
[329] TL II, 60; cf. (TD V, 103): "The pole of the species and the pole of individuality, which is again a remote reflection of the mystery of the Trinity, where each of the Persons is identical with the divine essence and yet distinct from the other Persons."

> and in the Church for mankind. Through the Incarnation of grace, the spiritual love of the state of election became of necessity an incarnate love, and the physical love of the married state became of necessity a love justified even in the body and integrated with spiritual love.[330]

While Beattie sees the projection of sexual relationships onto the suprasexual relationship of Christ and the Church (Mary) as a disembodiment of sex, thus privileging celibacy over nuptial love, Balthasar understands *all* love to be redeemed by this connection.[331] He believes in the need for the redemption of sexuality (*eros*) by heavenly *agape*.[332] This redemption would consist of an alignment of marriage with the self-giving aspect of Christ on the Cross.

Beattie apparently does not deem such redemption necessary and instead dismisses the suprasexual life as merely "spiritual," claiming that "sex is deferred, transcended, idealized, but never incarnate in the coming together of human bodies."[333] Elsewhere she charges Balthasar with perpetuating western "necrophiliac stereotypes" of sex and death, lamenting that for Balthasar

> sex is not the loving encounter of bodies in mutual desire (which is always also vulnerable to wounding and grief), but the unthinkable process to which man owes his existence. Sex is not the beginning of the fecundity and joy of life, but the terrible origination of the inevitability of death. Sex drags being away from its spiritual relationship to God, and condemns it to the carnality and mortality of human existence. Thus the whole orientation

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[330] CSL, 247; cf. Balthasar, *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery*, trans. A.E. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), pp. 128-29: "In the Thou, wife and husband are told and shown who he is, and who she is in truth. Love is creative for the fellowman; it produces an image of him with which the beloved would not have credited himself, and when love is genuine and faithful it gives him the power to come closer to this image or make himself like it."

[331] Cf. NCF, 151: "Balthasar's 'suprasex' is therefore an altogether transcendent, disembodied affair, which is analogously like sex between man and woman/husband and wife, and is therefore not at all like sex between man and woman/husband and wife."

[332] TD V, 505.

[333] NCF, 160; cf. (Ibid.): "Desire circulates, not horizontally between human bodies but only vertically between human spirits and God, so that the less sexual we are in our humanity, the more fully we participate spiritually in the suprasexual life of the Trinity and the relationship between Christ and the Church."

> of life must be to struggle against this offensive carnality, in order once again to attain to the spirituality of being beyond sex and death.[334]

On two separate occasions Beattie positively construes sex as "desire between bodies." I would like to take issue somewhat with this portrayal, for it is by this standard that she accuses Balthasar of eliding sexuality and bodiliness.

Sex is not just something that occurs between bodies, but something, as Balthasar, in conjunction with John Paul II has shown, that happens between embodied souls.[335] There is an anthropology of the soul expressed in bodily acts that rises up from within the human person. This "theology of the body" therefore is neither an imposition upon the realm of the body nor a transcendence of carnality, but an embodied presence of the *imago Trinitatis*.[336] David Schindler, arguing within this same vein of thought, asserts that "the body, in its very bodiliness, can participate in the *imago Dei*."[337] Human existence does experience conflict and sin (uncontrolled passions and corruptibility) as Balthasar maintains, because, while the human person is finite corruptible matter, the person at the same time yearns for spiritual renewal and immortality. This straddling of

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[334] NCF, 157-158.

[335] While Balthasar insists on the unity of the spirit in human relations, he is still not susceptible to Beattie's critique that the body serves no purpose whatsoever. See (TD II, 410): "The interplay between us is not simply through the meeting of minds, our bodies being hermetically sealed off from one another: there is a sphere—far beyond sexual union—in which our bodies, too, communicate with one another."

[336] See also Michele M. Schumacher's essay "The Unity of the Two" where she quotes John Paul II, general audience of February 20, 1980. English translation from *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine* Plan (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1997), p. 76: "The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it."

[337] David L. Schindler, "The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America: *Status Quaestionis*," *Communio: International Catholic Review,* 35 (Fall 2008), 401. He goes on to say something very similar to Schumacher and John Paul II, and what Balthasar says of spiritual and bodily love: "The soul as it were lends its spiritual meaning to the body as body, even as the body simultaneously contributes to what now becomes, in man, a distinct kind of spirit: a spirit whose nature it is to be embodied." I.e. "The spiritual takes on a corporeal meaning, even as the corporeal in its very distinctness as such thereby gives new meaning to the spiritual."

the cosmic and meta-cosmic divide (and not a Gnostic dualism which favors one over the other) is what Balthasar intends to convey through his polarities.

This polarity of man and woman, for Balthasar and for John Paul II, says something analogically of God according to sacred Scripture.[338] Balthasar's polarities are not constituted by a "violent struggle"[339] or conquering conflict as Beattie insists, but as will later be discussed, an articulation of relational otherness. This is consistent with *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

> Man and woman created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.[340]

The sexual act is an encounter with the meta-cosmic "other" that reminds the embodied soul that for which it was made; that which it has so sparingly sought.

In this way the sexual act moves beyond sexual gratification of desire merely for the body and incorporates the communion of souls as integral to the embrace. For Balthasar, some aspect of sexuality *does* need to be transcended—the selfish, acquiring, neediness of sex—and grounded in the reciprocal trust and 'letting-be' of the Trinitarian life. Sex is a *kenotic* giving of self, not orgasmic desire, as Beattie would construe it, which neglects the unitive aspect of body and soul inherent in the action. It is a giving over of one's embodied self, a sharing of the deepest sentiments and highest aspirations between human persons.[341] And by this action of gifting oneself, the 'I' is not lost

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[338] *Mulieris dignitatem*, #8.
[339] NCF, 303.
[340] *Mulieris dignitatem*, #7.
[341] The dynamic encounter of sexual persons gifting themselves to the other, which is done both physically and spiritually, is the true reflection of the *imago Trinitatis*. This is what the act conveys to the deepest, most impenetrable and incomprehensible depths of a person's being (despite the person's wanton neglect or denial of such import). Balthasar (even as a celibate), understands more than most, that the

entirely, but one must *risk* losing it entirely. For the Father, as stated earlier, does not lose himself in the embrace of the Son, nor does the Son lose himself in the agony of the cross, but as Balthasar never tires of expressing, being sustains itself only by giving itself away.[342] A fuller interpretation of this *kenotic* giving as understood by feminists must wait until a later section, but for now it is clear the notion that Balthasar intends to convey.

Given this context, Balthasar's suprasexual connection between Christ and his Church and the sexual encounter of the spouses, becomes not just "isolated individual acts of specific organs," but "the total surrender of one's own being."[343] As we will encounter later in the section on 'otherness', the consequences of failing to adopt this approach to sexuality are clear:

> If the scheme of interpretation of metaphysical love is determined by the *eros* of the ancients to such an extent that the *Victorines* do not in essence distinguish it in structural terms from agape, then *eros* from Augustine on is seen as *desiderium*, i.e., as all that is contrary to a love which victoriously takes possession, rather than a love which powerlessly and longingly yearns and which disposes itself for the reception of free grace. As such it also permeates the first ontological attempts to construe Being and the existent itself as gift.[344]

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sexual embrace means more than perhaps we can comprehend (particularly in that moment), and it is for that reason that it should be pursued with caution and trepidation. For, far be it from anyone to lie with their body and suggest some meaning, by their "desiring between bodies," that they perhaps did not intend. Not only that person (as an embodied soul) but their joint partner is left existentially crushed and confused. Is there not something inherently sinful if the man engages in his sexual desire for the "colonization" of the "other," or for the lusting gratification of his own 'I'; or if the woman desires the 'other' for her own manipulative purposes of neediness? To deny a sinful reality to sex, as Beattie comes close to doing, is to further subject humans to the slavery which Christ came to abolish.

[342] TL II, 136

[343] Women Priests, 169.

[344] GL V, 640; See also how Aristotle Papanikolaou in "Person, *Kenosis* and Abuse: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation," *Modern Theology*, Vol. 19:1 (January 2003), 58-59, echoes the same sentiment: "Kenosis is not primarily self-sacrifice [although this does often occur], but a state of being that liberates *eros*, the desire to be in relation with the other. It is a precondition for relations of love and freedom, the only context in which the self is truly given."

Beattie's conception of sexuality, while not explicitly embracing this perversion of *eros*, lends itself to the possibility of being manipulated in that direction (where love and sex become a grasping, needy conquering instead of the giving of a gift).[345] Again, as always, Balthasar understands sexual love as being infused with the image of Trinitarian communion that exhibits equal mutuality and trust. It seems that to some extent, Balthasar's portrayal of the body's sexual nature is dependent upon how one chooses to prioritize or contextualize his statements. The next section will move in another direction; for Beattie suggests that while Balthasar insists on the difference between the sexes (for the purposes of this communion of love just discussed), at the same time he eradicates sexual difference by making the male quasi-feminine vis-à-vis God.

(c) The Eradication of Sexual Difference

This section will seek to make clear the contradictions Beattie finds in Balthasar's thought, especially pertaining to his supposed inconsistency when speaking about gender. She argues that "sexual difference is the architectonics which structures his whole theology,"[346] but also insists that his portrayal of difference is highly problematic and inevitably destructive of true difference. I would take issue with Beattie's privileging of sexuality as Balthasar's driving theological vision. While sexuality does come into prominent relief in certain areas of his work, it is by no means the "architechtonic" of his theological schema. If this were true, it would be highly problematic for positioning Balthasar within any kind of "traditional" Catholic metaphysics. As indicated in my

[345] John Paul II recognizes this danger and trend in contemporary culture in the following quote taken from *Evangelium Vitae*, March 25, 1995, #23: "From being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another in all the other's richness as a person, it [sexuality] increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts."

[346] NCF, 92.

chapter on the Trinity, much, if not most of Balthasar's Trinitarian vision can be constructed without using sexual language. Moreover, the influence of Biblical exegesis, the figure of Christ, and various other Biblical kerygma are far more essential to Balthasar's Trinitarian vision.

Returning to the question of sexual difference: Beattie draws a comparison between von Balthasar and Luce Irigaray, and uses Irigaray to expose Balthasar's "denial of the otherness of woman" and Balthasar's theology to bring to light her "denial of the otherness of God."[347] Balthasar's denial of true sexual difference revolves around his efforts to define and essentialize the sexes of men and women, whereas Irigaray desires to "trace her [woman's] disappearance behind the screens of sameness masquerading as difference."[348] Beattie begins her objection to Balthasar's anthropology in a critique of his account of Genesis:

> The foregoing account of Eve's creation cannot sustain any real difference between the sexes, for if the man 'bears the woman within him', if her creation means that he is *kenotically* 'robbed of part of himself,' if she is 'taken' out of the male other, then she is not really other at all. Only if *ha'adam* is the non-sexed origination of both sexes is it possible to sustain the idea that human beings are united by a common human nature while being radically differentiated in terms of sex.[349]

Regardless of whether or not Balthasar is misinterpreting Genesis, it is not clear that his reading denies Eve as a unique other. At least Balthasar's intention is firmly rooted against this outcome as has been stated several times. The removing of Adam's rib from his side is important in this debate. Eve thus does not issue forth from Adam's genitals,

[347] NCF, 13. cf. (NCF, 94), "In Irigaray's work, the difference between God and creation is negated by way of a theological reductionism in which 'God' becomes a Feuerbachian projection of human subjectivity, or a space of transcendence too narrowly defined in terms of human sexuality."

[348] NCF, 94.

[349] NCF, 105.

nor does she emanate from his thought process. Adam is sleeping and is entirely inactive in the creation of Eve; she is the product of *God's* handiwork and not Adam's.

Balthasar sees in this account a complementary "unity of the two":

> In the relationship between the two, where each is created by God and dependent on the other, even though one is 'taken' out of the other, the man's (persisting) priority is located within an equality of man and woman. Paul will formulate this in terms of woman being 'from man' (1 Cor 11:8) and 'for man' (11:9); all the same, 'man is for woman' (11:12).[350]

This quote answers two objections. The first is that man's "priority" (the meaning of which will be discussed later) is grounded in the equality that both share. The second concern is something to which we will return to throughout this chapter, the objection that the woman is denied an 'I' of her own and exists only as "man's fullness" or projection of himself.[351] It is clear from the above statement that Balthasar also believes man to be the fullness of the woman.

Another accusation from Beattie centers on the fluidity of the man's gender in relation to God. According to her, ""Balthasar's 'woman' is not in fact a sexually differentiated person in her own right, but a mask, a persona, which enables the man to position himself as a creature in relation to God."[352] For Balthasar, all creation is feminine vis-à-vis the Creator. Beattie claims that if this is the case then the "locus of sexual difference," which Balthasar so emphatically insists upon, disappears.[353] For Beattie, Balthasar's assertion of sexual difference is incompatible with his view that both women and men are "quasi-feminine" in relation to God. Her portrayal of von Balthasar's "feminized creation", intended to caricature the consequence of his thought is as follows:

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[350] TD II, 373.
[351] See SDM, 166.
[352] NCF, 10.
[353] NCF, 110.

> There are female bodies without personhood, male bodies who are women, and a divinized, transcendent masculinity that puts in an occasional appearance in the form of the male priest who represents God pouring himself out in the orgasmic kenosis of creation, incarnation and crucifixion.[354]

Not only is this a grave misinterpretation of Balthasar's concept of kenosis, but it leads to her interpretation that the male needs the feminine other "to express [his] (homo)erotic desire for Christ."[355]

At this point we must ask to what degree has Beattie left behind the intention of Balthasar's text? It seems that Balthasar is merely speaking metaphorically in these cases where Beattie, for the convenience of argument, takes him to be quite literal. After all, Balthasar does admit that there is "no vantage point from which to give a *conclusive* definition of the essence of the male and the female."[356] This contention may have to wait until later discussion for some attempt at resolution. Still, Beattie is resolute in her charge that

> Balthasar imports into this pre-modern theological scenario a thoroughly modern understanding of a fundamental physical and psychological difference between the sexes. This biological essentialism freezes the dramatic interplay of gendered relationships, resulting in a series of exclusions and occlusions with regard to female sexual embodiment.[357]

Beattie seems to be fronting a two-pronged attack: she believes that Balthasar insists on biological essentialism between the sexes, but at the same time projects masculinity onto God (affording the male a dynamic gender fluidity), thereby eliminating the masculine from creation and erecting it in place of the feminine. Masculinity is therefore projected in two directions—onto the Godhead and onto the abyss of the female sex that is

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[354] NCF, 129.
[355] NCF, 127.
[356] TD III, 292; emphasis added.
[357] NCF, 112.

eliminated from creation. We have already discussed Man as *theion*, but this notion that the man must become "she" (to the point of homoeroticism) in order to "remind himself that he is not-God"[358] seems to be an absurd perversion of Balthasar's sexual symbolism.

Nonetheless, in Beattie's estimation, the Church is constituted by "men in drag"[359] who need the feminine in order to become the bridal 'other' to the God who is masculine[360]—this is what she calls the transgendering male priesthood. One of her potential solutions to this problem is the ordination of women to the priesthood, "which would recognize the significance of both male and female bodies for the presencing of God in creation and worship."[361] What Beattie is aiming at here and what she sees as the "challenge for Catholic sacramentality" is that it must:

> retain its sense of the revelatory significance of gender and sexuality, while acknowledging the equality in difference of the sexes as beings before God. This difference is not constituted by stable polarities of masculinity and femininity but by the dynamics of difference and desire which suggest to us something of the nature of our relationship to God.[362]

On one level Beattie criticizes Balthasar for his fluidity of gender, but on another, for his rigidity. She protests that Balthasar's use of *Mensch* to refer to the generic human in relation to God is in contradiction to his insistence that the polarity of sexual differentiation is fundamental to the person's existence.[363] By following Balthasar's

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[358] NCF, 115.

[359] NCF, 176.

[360] NCF, 114; cf. (NCF, 114-115): "Balthasar's 'woman' is the body of Christ, while 'man' is the headship and divinity of Christ. 'She' is the community of the Church, while 'he' is the representative of the one and only true man, Jesus Christ. 'She' is the woman, identified with humanity, creation, derivation. 'He' is the man, identified with God, creator, origination. But he is not God, and in order to become other than God, in order to establish the diastasis that marks the separation between 'man' and God and to experience the desire that draws 'man' to God, he must become what he is not—he must become 'her.'"

[361] NCF, 127; cf. (NCF, 114): "Thus we must turn this argument on its head, in order to see that Balthasar's theology does indeed posit a thoroughly sexed creation: a feminine creation, with the only masculine presence being the priest who represents the divinity of Christ, and therefore of God the Father as the (masculine) origin and source of life."

[362] NCF, 127.

[363] NCF, 101-102.

logic, Beattie claims that were this polarity true, then "it should not be possible to say anything about the human being except…in language that is consistently gendered."[364]

Beattie ignores the possibility that such difference is already included in Balthasar's concept of the generic human being and contends that

> the sexual differentiation of the human only becomes a central feature of Balthasar's theology when he addresses the question of the woman's role in theo-drama. The suspicion therefore arises that, in Balthasar's theology, the question of the subject in God and the person in Christ is in fact the question of the male subject in God and the male person in Christ…Balthasar's *Mensch* is either an androgynous primal being, a sexless first man (a possibility which he explicitly denies), or he is a male who can be situated in the cosmos quite independently of the woman, and who therefore shows sexual difference, and the woman herself, to be a non-essential aspect of what it means to be human.[365]

This "suspicion" by Beattie results in her conclusion that Balthasar's theology excludes the woman and her body from his "theological system" and eradicates her from the "scene of salvation," for the purpose of man being able to dress up as woman and take her place.[366]

Beattie's solution to this violence against the woman is, as raised earlier, an "equality in difference" that is both dynamic and still retains the particularity of the feminine. This unique particularity of the sexes working in concert with a mutual equality sounds somewhat similar to Balthasar's "unity in two" language. The real point of

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[364] NCF, 102.

[365] NCF, 102.

[366] NCF, 111; cf. (NCF, 114); But Beattie is not entirely clear or consistent in her own right in that she wants to say that woman becomes a projection of the masculine (NCF, 94) thus eliminating the particularity of the woman, *and* that man is eliminated from creation: "For Balthasar and the new Catholic feminists do not eliminate woman from creation: they eliminate man, and that is where the real issue lies. Balthasar's woman is 'by nature, a being that exists for/by another', who 'may just as well not be as be', because, while 'woman' has a role to play in this drama, her body is quite redundant to the performance, which is really 'his.'" Her contention that Balthasar's woman exists as a fullness of another might do well to consider the above quotation where Balthasar also explains man as the fullness of the woman. Her following objection then might be deflected: "An individual who exists as another's fullness, as his glory, is not a genuine other. As Irigaray would argue, a woman who exists as man's fullness is nothing but the mirror wherein man sees only the other of himself," (SDM, 166).

contention between the two thinkers seems, at least in part, to be epitomized in the exclusion of women from the priesthood.[367] This Beattie sees as the only possible solution to the problem of redeeming sacramentality, as she states numerous times in her last chapter of *New Catholic Feminism*. While I certainly recognize that Balthasar's theology has and does to some degree lend itself to the defense of the male priesthood, and that this is a critical issue for feminist theologians like Beattie who desire to uproot this entrenchment, as indicated in the introduction above, this thesis cannot hope to resolve the matter. Our next section will consider some of the issues raised in this section in the context of Beattie's account of the "suprasexual" relationship of Christ and the Church and von Balthasar and von Speyr's embodiment of it.

Christ and the Church: Balthasar and Von Speyr?

Tina Beattie portrays the relationship between Adriene von Speyr and her spiritual director Hans Urs von Balthasar as a dysfunctional representation of the suprasexual bond between Christ and His Bride.[368] In doing this she adopts a Freudian and Girardian lens,[369] and suggests that von Speyr was what allowed Balthasar to convey his "repressed femininity."[370] She even goes as far as to accuse him of "more than a whiff

[367] Beattie has in mind here both Balthasar and the New Catholic feminists, who, according to her, make two self-contradictory claims: "The New Catholic feminists try to affirm the sacramental significance of the female body, while defending the exclusion of women from the sacramental priesthood on the basis of a nuptial ecclesiology that owes a great deal to Balthasar's influence." (NCF, 128)

[368] In this she follows the article by Johann Roten, S.M. "The Two Halves of the Moon" in David L. Schindler (ed.) *Hans Urs von Balthasar—His Life and Work* (Ignatius Press 1991), p 73.

[369] Cf., NCF, 202: "Balthasar wants what Speyr wants: consummate union with Christ. But Balthasar also wants what Christ wants: consummate union with Speyr. Desire begins to flow restlessly from one to the other, nameless and abject. Does Christ say 'no' to Balthasar's desire for Speyr, because Speyr belongs first and foremost to Christ? Christ is both model and rival, but Speyr too is model and rival."

[370] Tina Beattie, "A Man and Three Women—Hans, Adrienne, Mary and Luce." *New Blackfriars* 79, no. 924 (February 1998), 102.

of symbolic adultery"[371]; attributing the dysfunction to a "too literal interpretation of sexual symbolism."[372] Although their relationship at times might appear somewhat strange (and potentially open to insinuation), I believe that here again Beattie is projecting, with little charity, her own psychoanalytic agenda onto an ambiguity that she herself hardens into literal sexual symbolism what perhaps ought to not be construed as such.

Beattie reads sexual innuendo into a vague and poetic rendering of confession by Adrienne von Speyr, stating that:

> The slimy sinfulness of the woman threatens the confessor priest, making him want to stop her in her advances. But this is an act of sexual consummation which takes away his advantage and refuses to allow him control, insisting on a reversal of expectations. So he now begins to experience the helplessness of Christ, who rails at his Bride as she sexually overwhelms him.[373]

Here Beattie asserts not only Speyr's meaning but Balthasar's own intentions and reactions. Where Speyr speaks of sin and guilt, Beattie reads subjugation; where Speyr talks about "nakedness" before God's judgment and vision, Beattie inserts Balthasar's undressing eyes. For Beattie, Balthasar becomes the imposing and controlling male confessor, who inserts himself into the role of Christ as mediator between Adrienne's mysticism with God.[374]

Michelle Gonzalez, whom Beattie cites but fails to include as an opposing opinion in the Speyr-Balthasar relationship, represents a somewhat different interpretation. Gonzalez highlights Balthasar's humble acknowledgement of Speyr's "profound

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[371] SDM, 169.
[372] A Man and Three Women, 102.
[373] NCF, 177; The cited text from Speyr is on the same page
[374] NCF, 166, 177.

influence" on his work.[375] She also commends him for "bring[ing] forth the voices of women as theological sources," and for citing her and other women's work "among the voices of the Church Fathers."[376] Gonzalez, while not as negative in her interpretation as Beattie, does still suggest that Balthasar may have held women mystical sources close to but not equal to theology.[377]

Despite this opposing view Beattie nonetheless perceives Balthasar as violently perpetuating his theological relegation of woman to a secondary status. Adrienne (or woman in general) is for Balthasar "not a person in her own right," but only a being-for-man so that "he can discover his own 'feminine' self even as he drains away her life."[378] Beattie even calls into question Balthasar's "psychological and spiritual health,"[379] and claims that he is "a man torn between sex and death, desire and conquest, masculine aggression and feminine seduction."[380] Her psychoanalytic portrayal of Balthasar extends even to Balthasar's depiction of Christ.

Beattie critiques the suprasexuality between Christ and Mary (representing the Church), explaining that "Mary provides the womb in which Christ begins the phallic trajectory of his mission."[381] Here Beattie adds that sexual difference is erased since the

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[375] Gonzalez, Michelle. "Hans urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *Theological Studies*. Vol. 65, no. 3. (Sept. 2004), 8.

[376] Gonzalez, 9.

[377] For a contrary position that believes Balthasar considered mystical sources as genuine theology see Angelo Cardinal Schola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style*, (William W. Eerdmans, August 1995), 262-263.

[378] NCF, 178; cf. (NCF, 166): "Is the fullness of life in Christ really discovered in the form of a sado-masochistic 'marriage' which condemns a woman to solitary hell so that a man's theology can bear fruit? A woman who even takes on his physical illnesses, despite herself being apparently at death's door? …. Or should we recognize in Speyr's suffering and slow dying the extent to which there is, as Teresa Brennan argues in her study of Frued, a psychophysical dimension to these sexual stereotypes, so that Speyr became, quite literally, the embodiement of Balthasar's femininity?"

[379] NCF, 181.

[380] NCF, 170.

[381] NCF, 152-153.

woman is not an 'I' but "a 'we' in relation to his 'I'."[382] Beattie draws the parallel from Balthasar and Speyr to Christ and Mary, by explaining that the man robs the woman of her distinctive personhood in that "she becomes the feminine, communal body of the masculine Christ."[383] Elsewhere Beattie claims that this eliminates the female body because the location of the woman's redemption occurs "in the body of the Church, where only male bodies are necessary for enacting the nuptial relationship."[384] It is true that Balthasar says that Mary "renounces her I"[385] on Calvary so that the Church can come into being. It will be made clearer in the sections following that (1) this renouncement is best understood as imaged after the Trinitarian 'letting be' and (2) Balthasar believes that between the sexes and within the Trinity there is no conquest of the other such that identity is lost. Balthasar construes Mary's sacrifice not as a loss of personal identity but as a freedom of love. [386]

Beattie recognizes that for Balthasar the "meaning of the creation of the sexes in Genesis" can only be completely comprehended "from the perspective of Calvary"; "when the Church is taken from the side of Christ on the cross."[387] This birth of the

[382] NCF, 155.

[383] NCF, 110.

[384] SDM, 167; cf. (NCF, 108): "We begin to detect the hidden movement in Balthasar's thought, a dramatic unfolding of a story in which the female body is contingent, inessential and secondary to the man. The maternal feminine persona in theo-drama, 'woman', refers not to the sexual female body but primarily to the collective body of the Church, and derivatively to the bodies of men who are women in relation to Christ." For an opposing viewpoint to Beattie, see Mary Aquin O'Neill "The Mystery of Being Human Together," in *Freeing Theology*, pp. 139-60,), 155-156: "Only the two figures together [Jesus and Mary] can reveal the radical saving truth about being male and female, virgin yet procreative, lover and live giver in the new age ushered in by the coming of the promised one. Only a hermeneutic of the two figures, male and female…,can allow for the discovery of the common and reciprocal story of salvation."

[385] TD III, 352.

[386] See also the quote from (TL III, 242): "Mary's perfect freedom, which is born of the Cross, must go and stand under that same Cross in order to help the Spirit of freedom to arise in the Church. Finally we must remember that the entire freedom of the creation rests upon the slaughter of the Lamb."

[387] SDM, 166.

Church mirrors Eve's being fashioned from Adam's side, but here Beattie's critique seems to falter. Consider the following three quotes from Beattie:

> While Eve's creation from Adam's rib by God implies personal differentiation from Adam, the Church's creation from Christ allows for no such personal distinction between the two.[388]

> Von Balthasar seems to define femininity as something which proceeds from or emanates from the masculine. Thus, Christ must be 'quasi-feminine' because he proceeds from the Father, and the feminine, 'designed to complement the man', comes forth 'from within him.' But a being who is produced as another's potential from within himself and in order to complete him is a projection, not an authentically different person.[389]

> An individual who exists as another's fullness, as his dream or his glory, is not a human subject in her own right, i.e. in God. She is not an 'I' but only a 'thou'. She has no essential significance of her own, but exists only as the other of the man—a projection, a necessary complement to his being.[390]

In the first place, Beattie seems to contradict her own argument claiming at different points that first Eve *does* receive "personal differentiation from Adam," and then again that she exists merely as "a projection." What is clear in her argument is that she believes that the Church and woman have no personal identity, for it has been renounced and surrendered for the sake of the other.

Balthasar has much to give answer to these objections. As we have already discussed Balthasar believes that the man is also the fullness of the woman and therefore it is not just the woman who exists for the sake of the man.[391] More importantly, Balthasar grounds both the "I-Thou" relationship between Christ and the Church and analogously between man and woman in the *communio* of the Trinitarian embrace.

> It is clear from the words of Jesus about his relationship with the Father that they interpenetrate in their reciprocal loving self-surrender. Both renounce being a mere "I" without a "thou": this allows us to glimpse the

[388] NCF, 108.
[389] SDM, 166.
[390] NCF, 110.
[391] See TD II, 373.

> identity of poverty and wealth in the divine love; for wealth and fullness are found in the self-surrendering Other (this also applies to the Father, since without the Son he could not be Father).[392]

For von Balthasar, renouncing an 'I' is putting oneself in the context of being-for-another, a 'thou.' In this relationship, the 'I' is not lost but sustained by 'letting the other be', by self-gifting oneself for the sake of the other (just as being is sustained in giving itself away). As in the Trinity, the sexes 'interpenetrate,' and are dependent on the other for their 'fullness'; but without a grasping neediness. It is within this hermeneutic that Balthasar's suprasexual relationship between Mary (the Church) and Christ must be viewed. A more complete discussion of Balthasar's notion of otherness and *kenosis* in relation to Beattie's will occur in the following section; at present we will consider more of Balthasar's defense of suprasexuality between Christ and Mary.

Beattie acknowledges that Balthasar's primary concern in establishing this suprasexual relationship is to reincorporate Mary's role as co-redemptrix instead of solely as a figure relevant for the sphere of morality; chiding the Vatican II Council for eliminating this aspect.[393] Von Balthasar maintains:

> The divine act whereby Christ provides himself with a vessel, a Bride (Eph 5:26f.), is not simply one-sided, for the divine-human Agent has himself been brought into the world by a woman. Her cooperation, the work of her who serves both as a woman and as a creature, is not forgotten: it is integrated into his. Both redemption and preredemption spring from the same Cross but in such a way that she who is preredeemed is used in the Church's coming-to-be.[394]

It is clear from this passage that Balthasar views Mary as possessing an "active fruitfulness" that surpasses the natural ability of humanity and in his estimation is

[392] TL III, 226.
[393] NCF, 154.
[394] TD III, 351.

"superior to that of the man."[395] This concept goes back to Balthasar's anthropological belief that man's "helpmate" (woman), "does all the work, which he only, as it were, proposes and stimulates."[396]

Beattie's anxiety about woman as always being considered inferior and secondary to the man, especially juxtaposed to the male hierarchy of the Church, is somewhat challenged by Balthasar's articulation of the Petrine and Marian sides of the Church (which are not in conflict but concert with one another). Although Peter and the disciples "receive masculine tasks of leadership and representation within the comprehensive feminine, Marian Church," they "can never match the quality of the primordial Church, the 'perfect Bride,' the *Immaculata*."[397] Furthermore, Christ is "the origin of both the feminine and masculine principles in the Church."[398] This is not as Beattie might have it, the same old stereotype of men imposing their primary precedence. Rather, in the context of the new creation, it is the leveling of the tragedy of the sex polarities and a renewal of the gender relations as *imago Trinitatis*. No longer are there to be competitive, capitalistic, possessing "I-Thou" relations, but genuine giving for the other—gift is what sustains the world and the relationship between male and female. The grounding of the origin of the Marian and Petrine offices in Christ is not that the "masculine" is granted precedence, but that Christ guarantees the *equality* of both.

The role of the sexes in the Church for Balthasar, unlike Beattie, does not constitute a zero-sum game, but a Trinitarian, diffused reciprocity:

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[395] Women Priests, 167.
[396] TA, 313.
[397] Women Priests, 167.
[398] Women Priests, 168: And by Christ "Mary is pre-redeemed, and Peter and the apostles are installed in their office." cf. (TD III, 354): "After all the 'Bride' herself is nothing but the extension and product of the living reality of Christ, and the fact that she is rendered fruitful by the 'institution' simply guarantees the constant flow of life from him to her."

> Who has the precedence in the end? The man bearing office, inasmuch as he represents Christ in and before the community, or the woman, in whom the nature of the Church is embodied—so much so that every member of the Church, even the priest, must maintain a feminine receptivity to the Lord of the Church? This question is completely idle, for the difference ought only to serve the mutual love of all the members in a circulation over which God alone remains sublimely supreme.[399]

There is in fact something already analogous to Beattie's dynamic particularity and equality present in Balthasar's schema for the Church. For Balthasar, "The New Testament's 'revaluation' of the woman to equality of dignity is inseparable from the simultaneous accentuation of the difference between the sexes."[400] Balthasar can make this claim a reality only by grounding the male and female relations within the Trinitarian unity in difference, where there is no hierarchy or conquering, but only *kenotic* giving and 'letting be' of the other. The next section will explore this reality in Balthasar and Beattie's accounts. In summation of this section then, and as anticipation for the next, I end with this passage from Balthasar which describes Christ's bond with the Church as mediating between Trinitarian love and the relationship between the sexes:

> In Ephesians 1:23 it is not clear whether Christ 'fills' his Body, the Church, which is his fullness, or 'is filled' by her. Both are true in the relationship between Christ and the Church, which points down to the relationship between Adam and Eve, but also up to the tremendous relationship of the persons of the Trinity and their mutuality within eternal, complete fullness.[401]

The "Other" in Beattie and Balthasar

Beattie is very critical of von Balthasar's interpretation of Genesis, where the man is understood as *Wort* and the woman as *Antwort*. Beattie understands this dialogical movement toward the other as the process of becoming an 'I'; an awakening to self-

[399] Women Priests, 170.
[400] Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women, 703.
[401] TA, 311-312

consciousness.[402] But this relation to the "other" constitutes, for Beattie, the loss of the woman's subjectivity in that she exists only as the man's fullness, a component of *his* self-awakening. According to her, there is no genuine 'I-thou' relationship between men and women in Balthasar's account of sexual difference, given that the woman does not possess her own sense of "questioning subjectivity."[403] She explains:

> An answer, to be relevant and comprehensible, is defined by and bound to the question. If woman is the answer to man, she can exist only within the parameters of the man's question. She must await his word and respond to his initiative, but how can she then reveal her difference and otherness? And if woman is man's answer, to whom does she address the question of her own being?[404]

In some ways, this objection has been addressed before when we said that Balthasar makes man the fullness also of the woman. In my view, if there is a disproportion in Balthasar's emphasizing of the woman as the 'fullness' and 'glory' of man, it is explained by his own masculinity and thus his familiarity with this position within the polarity of male and female. Nevertheless, it should be clear, that since Balthasar does understand both sides as reciprocally dependent upon the 'other,' there is a relationship at work here that is closer to the Trinitarian *communio* than what Beattie articulates.

Beattie wants to construe the man and woman encounter of the 'other' as the colonization or domination of the Answer by the Word:

> The desire for union in his theology takes the form of destructive lust rather than life giving desire, for it is oriented not towards consummation and love but towards consumption and obliteration: it is a desire which seeks not to let the other be, but to become the other.[405]

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[402] NCF, 100-101.
[403] NCF, 102.
[404] A Man and Three Women, 99.
[405] NCF, 161.

If Balthasar is truly developing a *Trinitarian* anthropology as I have been arguing, then this objection holds no warrant. As we observed in chapter two, the Persons of the Trinity are constantly creating 'space' for the other, to 'let them be'. The freedom of love and union can only occur within a separation of trust and a mutual indwelling. Father and Son are both 'Other', but both are also the same Godhead. Their relationship necessitates an affirmation of the other *qua* other. Mary Aquin O'Neill similarly observes this reality lived out among human beings in her comments on Genesis: "when God's will for human beings is realized, the longing of one for the other will not result in the loss of self."[406]

Aside from taking Balthasar's anthropology out of the framework of Trinitarian love, Beattie laments the fact that Woman, as *Antwort*, (a) lacks the capacity to question being and (b) is determined by the question of man. Firstly, I believe that it is Balthasar's intention to convey that the very exchange between man and woman *is* that questioning of being. We can recall that in von Balthasar's account, man could not find among the animals a "metacosmic" partner, and only finds this capability in Eve. Only to Eve can man's questioning of being be directed, and as we have attempted to establish, the same is true for Eve in relation to man. In some sense however, Eve holds all the "power"[407] in the dialogue, even from the perspective of gift. Eve can refuse Adam's gift of self; she could refuse to answer or even deem worthy his questioning of being. Or she might choose to enter into this existential and theological questioning as co-partner with Adam

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[406] Mary Aquin O'Neill, "The Mystery of Being Human Together," *Freeing Theology: The essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, (New York: HarperCollins Inc, 1993), 142; cf. (Ibid.): "'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' (Gn 3:16). The text reveals that the subordination of women to men is a result of sin and not part of the created order portrayed prior to what has come to be known as the Fall." Elsewhere O'Neil states, in continuity with Balthasar's thought, that "the image of God is reflected in a community of persons, in a humankind that is created male and female." She characterizes the male-female polarity as "other, yet given for communion." (Ibid., 141).

[407] Even though I am insisting on taking the mutual dialogue of man and woman outside of this notion of power and weakness and placing it in the Trinitarian Gift-Exchange of Self, I use it here to follow what I believe are the implicit terms of Beattie's framing of the encounter.

(and Co-Partner in this sense means as a true equal, in the same way that the second person of the Trinity is in no way inferior to the first). As *Antwort*, in some way she holds the key to dictate the next direction of the dialogue.[408] But if one assumes that utter freedom and 'space' is given to the other to 'be other,' as Balthasar insists so fervently is the case within the Trinity, then there can be no anxiety about Eve being determined by Adam's question.

The divine person of the Father generates the divine person of the Son, as we have said, out of his substance, but as Father and not as substance. The Father and Son are coeternal and coequal mutual relations—thus woman and man image this *communio* of persons in an analogous way. Woman is therefore not created as an afterthought, but, as it were, in the same breath, the same thought of God's creation of humanity. There is no subordination in woman being an Answer, for *both* can be answer, and both can question the 'other' in this reciprocal dialogue. The relationship is also seen in the Son's relationship to the Father who *sends* him into the world. Jesus as "the one sent" is not subordinated to the command of the Father for both the Son and Spirit are coeternal and together they determine "in their *circumincessio* what God is and wills and does."[409] Likewise, the one sending, the one gifting, the one with priority, does not have "power" over the "other" but a providing love for them, as the Father "dispossess himself in favor of the Son"[410] Love between the sexes then is not a conquering of the other but a giving-

[408] If woman were to have been created first and therefore held the same 'primacy' as Adam, would Beattie protest that Adam had then the power to control the dialogue by providing whatever 'Answer' he fancied and that Adam was the culmination of what Eve could not accomplish on her own in original solitude? This type of argumentation is unhelpful because again it does not see the encounter through the lens of a Gift-Exchange.

[409] TL II, 147-148; cf. (TD III, 516): "The divine Sender manifests a disposition that, both in sublimity and in lowliness, is expressed in the serenity and surrender of his Ambassador."

[410] TL II, 137; cf. (Women Priests, 165), This Trinitarian understanding of giving and providing for the other is opposite from what Balthasar sees as a major deficiency of the fallen hyper-masculinized

over-to-the-other (which is not to lose oneself). As articulated earlier in chapter two, Balthasar eschews any notion of a dialectic that establishes an 'I' by the sublation of the 'other'[411], and promotes the concept of gift that preserves both sides and yields an ever greater more: a child.

In Beattie's interpretation of Balthasar, the 'otherness' of the woman "taunts" and frustrates man who desires sameness.[412] But Balthasar merely seems to say that this polarity exists so that men and women can "engage in reciprocity, always seeking complementarity and peace in the other pole."[413] In Balthasar's mind there is difference and space for the sake of a greater unity that does not dissolve difference into sameness (in Trinitarian terms: Monadism), but that preserves the uniqueness of the two in union with one another. If Balthasar laments in any way the polarity between men and women it is not because he wishes to elide sexual difference altogether, but because sinful reality frustrates the more perfect union to which human beings were destined to live—in the *imago Trinitatis*.

Often Beattie's objection to Balthasar or the 'new feminists,' particularly related to the concept of the gift of self between the sexes, is that social contexts "fall far short of this kind of gifted relationality."[414] But the fact that the realities of "subordination, ownership, and control" have been perpetrated by men, and men in the church through the centuries, ought not to obscure the capacity for someone like John Paul II or the 'new

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world: "When philosophy ends where the contemplative-receptive glance has turned into a merely calculating one (what one can do with a thing), a feminine element—to state it briefly—that makes a person secure in nature and in being is abandoned in favor of a preponderance of the masculine element, which pushes forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own."

[411] TL II, 47.
[412] NCF, 110-111.
[413] TD II, 355.
[414] NCF, 47.

feminists' to speak about the *ideal* relationality of the sexes as grounded in Trinitarian mutuality. Tina Beattie consistently asserts that the mere fact of a male hierarchy, or even the maleness of the Pope, clouds whatever insights spoken thereby with the historical shame of oppressive masculinity.[415] The final section will seek to move beyond this critique and understand Beattie's misconception of *kenosis*, as it is central to her misreading of Balthasar's Trinitarian anthropology of gift.

Kenosis and the Feminist Dialogue

(a) Beattie and Papanikolaou

As indicated above, this section will seek to expose a profound misrepresentation of Balthasar's thought by Beattie in that she takes his anthropology out of the context of his decisively Trinitarian theology. Beattie fails to cite a single reference from von Balthasar's third installment in his trilogy—the Theo-Logic—which insightfully expounds the nature of God revealed as Trinity. Beattie thus references Balthasar's concept of the *kenotic* Trinity only a handful of times and never seriously develops his context of a *communio* or mutual gift-exchange between the Persons as indicative of his anthropology of the person oriented toward gift. She does devote a few pages to *kenosis* but portrays it only in a negative light.

Beattie construes Balthasar's understanding of *kenosis* as "the originating Word" that is "a male ejaculation."[416] Ultimately, she concludes that when the kenotic movements of creation, incarnation, and cross are gendered, there arises a perception of *kenosis* as "the willingness of the masculine God to be seduced into the female flesh and

[415] NCF, 20, 46, 47.
[416] NCF, 159.

lured to his death."[417] Beattie thus associates Balthasar with a conception of *kenosis* (described by Sarah Coakley) similarly found in fourth century theologians such as Cyril of Alexandria who conceived of *kenosis* as "the feminized abasement of masculine divinity so that it represents a violent confrontation between God and 'his' greatest enemy—the female flesh experienced as weakness, corruption, seduction and death."[418] In Beattie's own estimation, kenosis ought to seek to include not just "masculine self abasement" but would be founded upon "metaphors of maternal embodiment and birth"[419] She wishes to transcend the predominantly male-oriented concept of kenosis, which in her estimation is a desiring of the other, and "explore the possibilities for sacramental sex beyond Balthasar."[420] Beattie desires then to unfreeze the association of sexuality and divinity that reinforces "the patriarchal representation of God,"[421] which she believes Balthasar locks firmly into place. Beattie claims, untruly, that "Balthasar does not make the *kenotic* move that Coakley proposes, in which the vulnerability of Christ reveals God's own power in vulnerability"[422]—thus Beattie laments that Balthasar is founding his conception of *kenosis* on "the mutually kenotic desire of the sexes."[423]

In some way this last analysis is correct—Balthasar does *not* ground *kenosis* in the relationship of desire between the sexes, but in the gift-giving within the Trinity. Beattie appears primarily unaware or unconcerned with this move by Balthasar, and

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[417] NCF, 161.

[418] NCF, 162; Here Beattie refers to Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing", in Coakley (ed.), *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p. 29; cf. (Ibid. 12-13): "For Cyril, the word *kenosis* signified no loss or abnegation, but simply the so-called 'abasements' in the taking of flesh."

[419] NCF, 161.

[420] NCF, 162.

[421] NCF, 162.

[422] NCF, 161; It is unlikely that Beattie agrees with Coakley's argument in its entirety (certainly not Papanikolaou's reading of Coakley), but she does on numerous occasion highlight and privilege Coakley's concept of kenosis as closer to her own feminist vision.

[423] NCF, 161.

because of this, her directionality is reversed. She fails to consider significant the sexes and their relation to each other as *derivative* of the Trinitarian Persons in reciprocal love, and sees only a projection of gender onto the Godhead. This causes her to overlook the essentially Trinitarian foundation to Balthasar's understanding of *kenosis*, and thus his articulation of the relations between the sexes.

Beattie also misunderstands Balthasar's Trinity and the *kenotic* relations therein in another fundamental way. She claims that "while the second person of Balthasar's Trinity empties 'himself' in the incarnation, God the Father remains invulnerable and inviolate."[424] But this statement is to ignore what Balthasar says concerning the "recklessness with which the Father gives away himself,"[425] which entails a "risk" in giving over his divinity to the Son who is situated across a "*diastasis*" (distance) that constitutes their "otherness" (we must remember, for Balthasar, "distance" and "otherness" are merely the precondition for a greater unity). Again we turn to a quote from the last chapter pertaining to the Father's *kenosis*:

> The Father, in uttering and surrendering himself without reserve, does not lose himself. He does not extinguish himself by self-giving, just as he does not keep back anything of himself either. For, in this self-surrender, he *is* the whole divine essence. Here we see both God's infinite power and his powerlessness; he cannot be God in any other way but in this '*kenosis'* within the Godhead itself.[426]

[424] NCF, 162.

[425] TD IV, 328. cf. (TD III, 518): "Fatherhood can only mean the giving away of everything the Father is, including his entire Godhead. …. As God, however, the Son must be equal to the Father, even though he has come forth from the Father." Thus the Father does not remain invulnerable (though it is not a vulnerability as human beings experience it, plagued by sin), and the Son (the receptive person) does not become subordinated to the Father (this will be discussed subsequently).

[426] TD IV, 325. See also (TD V, 86): "The Father causes the Son to be, to 'go'; but this also means that the Father 'lets go' of him, lets him go free. So too, in the act of begetting, a man causes his seed to go on its way while he himself retires into the background."

This is a portrayal of *kenosis* which sounds strikingly familiar to Sarah Coakley's 'power-in-vulnerability.'[427] In denying this similarity Beattie goes against both Michele Gonzalez and Aristotle Papanikolaou.[428]

Gonzalez rightly recognizes that "Balthasar's kenotic understanding of God informs his anthropology." and that "*kenosis* is the way of divine being."[429] She also acknowledges that Papanikolaou's understands Coakley to be compatible and synergetic with Balthasar's articulation of *kenosis* in that it is not defined in self-sacrificial terms, but by the manner of self-giving.[430] Gonzalez, like Balthasar and other 'new catholic feminists' such as Schumacher argue against the autonomous, self-sufficient individual, and instead advocate

> relational understandings of the self, a self that is constituted in and through community and communion. Such notions of the self reject oppositions of 'one' to the 'other', but affirm rather a notion of the 'one', of identity that includes the 'other.'[431]

This conception of the other, informed by Balthasar's *kenotic* relations, is positioned in direct contrast to a Hegelian conflict between the 'I' and the 'Other' that Beattie incorrectly believes to be at work in Balthasar's thought. On the other hand, Gonzalez suggests that one of the most positive aspects of von Balthasar's theological anthropology is this "relational construction of the human."[432] We will briefly return to this discussion of the relational self, but at present we look to Papanikolaou's argument.

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[427] Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing," in *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*, (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 1-17., 108.

[428] For Beattie's critique see NCF, 182.

[429] Gonzalez, 12, 13; She is still critical of some of Balthasar's thought; suggesting that "a Christology that emphasizes Christ's suffering and humility runs the danger of appearing as if it endorses the unjust sufferings of peoples throughout history," (Ibid., 13).

[430] Gonzalez, 14.

[431] Papanikolaou, 57.

[432] Gonzalez, 5.

Aristotle Papanikolaou recognizes that various articulations of *kenosis* have been used to "maintain women in situations of oppression," and so he aims at "the retrievability of *kenosis* for a Christian theological anthropology."[433] He even goes so far as to suggest that a proper understanding of "*kenotic* personhood," outlined by von Balthasar, might actually be an appropriate method to empower abused victims to move toward healing.[434] Daphne Hampson finds fault in the historical representation of *kenosis*, claiming that in the Judeo-Christian tradition nothing akin to empowerment through *kenosis* can be found. Papanikolaou and Coakley critique Hampson's position asserting that "*Kenosis* is not self-inflicted humiliation through self-abasement, but a giving over of oneself for the sake of self. Such a surrender is an act of courage, not shame."[435] Likewise, Coakley argues that kenosis ought not to be narrowly defined as self-sacrifice, but as self-giving for the other. According to her, this means that "true empowerment involves vulnerability" (a 'power-in-vulnerability' or "a strength made perfect in weakness" 2 Cor. 12:9) that demands "the practice of silent prayer" and "a silent waiting on God."[436] This is a kind of "self-emptying that is not a negation of self, but the place of the self's transformation and expansion into God."[437] It may be interesting to reflect on the resonance of this statement with Beattie's call to mystical prayer and contemplation.

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[433] Papanikolaou, 42; cf. (Ibid.), Papanikolaou explains, that "the dichotomy between powerfulness and powerlessness and the divine-human relation implicit in this paradigm is, according to Hampson, an essentially male construct that speaks only to male experience: 'It is as though men have known only too well their problem, and so have postulated a counter-model.' Useful as it may be for men, it is 'inappropriate for women,' (Daphne Hampson's "On Power and Gender", *Modern Theology* Vol. 4 no 3 (July, 1988), 239)." He goes on to explain that in Hampson's view, "the call for kenosis as a breaking of the self so that God may be present has no meaning for women who are denied a self within patriarchal and oppressive structures," (Ibid., 44).

[434] Papanikolaou, 42.

[435] Papanikolaou, 56.

[436] Coakley, "Kenosis and Subversion," in *Powers and Submissions*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 36.

[437] Ibid; cf. (Papanikolaou, 42): "Personhood, for Balthasar, is not a quality possessed, but a unique and irreducible identity received in relations of love and freedom that can only be labeled as kenotic."

At any rate, Papanikolaou explains that for Balthasar, the "theological meaning of *kenosis* is more properly Trinitarian" than anthropological or Christological.[438] He sees Balthasar's Trinitarian Persons, relating *kenotically* and enacting the giftedness of love, as being constructive examples for victims of abuse who have been robbed of personhood. Essentially, by demonstrating and inviting the person into *kenotic*, trusting, and loving relationships the victims empty themselves of fear and "make space for the presence of the other."[439] The victims are once again empowered to enter into the vulnerability that is inherent in all relationships, except now with the assurance of trust and 'letting-be' of the other.

Again, this is accomplished through Balthasar's notion of the Trinitarian gift-exchange (an understanding of the communion of persons which Beattie does not utilize for her interpretation of Balthasar). In this reciprocal exchange, distance allows for closeness, for "there cannot be true kenosis without hiatus."[440] Each Person in the Trinity is constituted by "the free, *ekstatic*, self-giving of the one toward the other" so that the being of the divine persons *is* this "gifted event."[441] This relationship, which as I have argued, is analogous to the relationship of woman and man, always entails a letting-be of

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[438] Papanikolaou, 46.

[439] Papanikolaou, 55; cf. (Ibid., 54), "Abuse leads to a 'distorted relationship of weakness, vulnerability and dependence.' It turns vulnerability into weakness, and results in a destroyed capacity for vulnerability on the part of the abused victim even toward those trusted loved ones, i.e., family members, friends, etc. A victim either avoids dependency or vulnerability or is immersed in pathological forms."; cf. (Ibid., 55): "The entering into a therapeutic relationship is itself a kenotic act on the part of the victim of trauma insofar as it involves a self-emptying of fear for the sake of the other (the therapist initially, but more stable, intimate relationships in the long term), as well as risk, vulnerability and trust." Essentially then what Papanikolaou is suggesting is that "kenosis is able to adequately describe such a movement, that the healing toward personhood involves a kenosis. One can better understand the process of healing by first understanding the evil that is involved in situations of abuse," (Ibid., 53).

[440] Graham Ward, "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection" in Lucy Gardner, et al., Balthasar at the End of Modernity (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 44. cf. (Papanikolaou, 51), "otherness and 'distance' in Balthasar do not mean separation. 'Otherness' is constituted in and through 'distance', which is the precondition for real communion. It is only in communion that the 'other' is constituted."

[441] Papanikolaou, 47-48.

the other's freedom, for this is the prerequisite for true communion with God and with others in God.[442] The next sub-section will explore further this relational notion of the person in communion with others, in an effort to move beyond Beattie's conflict analysis of Balthasar's Trinitarian anthropology.

(b) The Positivity of Receptivity: An Alternative Feminist Dialogue

Beattie critiques Balthasar's notion of *kenosis* as pigeonholing the female sex into a passive/receptive role that implies inferiority. David L. Schindler, a major proponent of Balthasar's thought, argues that in God there is "the fullness of generativity *and* receptivity" and that this receptivity is grounded not in potency but in 'act'—and is thus a perfection.[443] Receiving is not mere passivity in this portrayal of the Trinity, but is a perfection of *esse*.[444] When Balthasar applies this concept then to the sexes it need not be interpreted as relegating the woman to a lower status by reason of her primarily *receptive* nature and elevating man by virtue of his primarily *generative* nature. This is true for several reasons.

The first is that, according to Schindler, all of creation "receives" its "be-ing" from God. Because of this, receptivity should characterize all of the human person's actions—which at their most fundamental level must be "contemplative."[445] But why is such importance ascribed to the receptive nature in humanity and even within God? Schindler argues that

> Receptivity is a perfection, because it is necessary for a complete concept of love. Love consists not only in giving, but also in receiving and turning

[442] Papanikolaou, 51.

[443] David L. Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization." *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20 (Summer, 1993), 203, 211.

[444] Cf. (Schindler, Catholic Theology, Gender etc., 204): "'Receiving' and 'letting be,' as characteristic of the very Trinitarian life of God, are thereby inscribed in the very perfection of esse."

[445] Ibid., 220.

> back…When we view Pure Act from the beginning in terms of Trinitarian Love, we are brought to realize that act (*esse*) in all its purity includes the dimension of receptivity: love in all of its purity is not only a pouring forth but a receiving and giving back.[446]

The second reason that receptivity does not need to imply inferiority in the female sex is that, according to Schindler's reading of Balthasar, the feminine principle better characterizes creation's receptive call in that "it is precisely through the receptivity, the continuing 'fiat,' of the mother that the child first experiences *the truth of (created) being as gift*."[447] The mother's smile initiates the recognition of the giftedness of one's being, indeed, one's "reception is a response to the gift" that is already in fact an orientation toward the "generosity proper to gift-giving."[448] As Balthasar explains, "by virtue of the incommunicable otherness of each hypostasis, in God receiving is just as positive as giving, and letting happen."[449] This receiving in some way even dictates the possibility of giving. One meditative example where receiving orders and prescribes the parameters of giving can be found in Peter's refusal to let Christ wash his feet. Not only must each person become Christ-like, humbling herself as the servant to give the first gift, but the 'other' in the dialogue or exchange, must accept a similar kind of humility to receive the gift of self of the other.

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[446] Ibid., 204.

[447] Ibid., 221; cf. GL V (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991, 611-56. Cf. (Ibid, 221-2): "It is in and through the mother's smile that all human beings experience the truth that being is not something which I own but which I am given, something into which I have been—utterly gratuitously—granted entry."

[448] Schindler, Embodied Person as Gift, 402.

[449] TL II, 83; Therefore Balthasar is quite clear about the fact that "the Son's handing himself over, while a form of passivity, is still "a form of action," (TD III, 186), and that "The Son's "willingness to 'let it happen'" is not in any way to be interpreted "in a passive sense" (TL III, 182). Ultimately then, "where absolute love is concerned, conceiving and letting be are just as essential as giving. In fact, without this receptive letting be and all it involves—gratitude for the gift of oneself and a turning in love toward the Giver—the giving itself is impossible." (TD V 86)

A third reason that receptivity and generativity are not to be read as unequal is that *both* (supra-)genders are present in God. As Schindler notes, "all three persons share both 'genders' (share in some sense both generativity and receptivity), but *always by way of an order that remains asymmetrical*."[450] Men and women image together the Trinity, possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, but each in a different way—where "what is proper to each can nonetheless be somehow shared simultaneously with the other."[451] Hence, even the Father has "a certain passivity, qualified by the '*passive actio*' of Son and Spirit,"[452] because of his (the Father's) propensity to be 'affected' by each. The relationship of man and woman is analogous:

> The need of man for woman (and vice versa) does not stem simply from inequality: as though each lacked simply what was proper to the other. On the contrary, this need is coincident with essential identity and hence equality (Gen 2:23), and hence with a common completeness as human. Thus both the distinction and the 'transcendent' unity between genders in human beings must be interpreted in a way that is (analogously) Trinitarian. What this means is that the distinction between genders, for all of its being irreducible is not dualistic (two halves of gender make up the whole of gender); and that the 'transcendent' unity between genders is not androgynous (wholeness of gender without real distinction of gender).[453]

In other words, there is not a fractional sex complementarity (where ½ + ½ = 1) but an "integral complementarity" (to borrow from Prudence Allen, where 1 + 1 = 2) following after a Trinitarian mode of thinking.[454]

Schindler and Balthasar become contextualized among feminist thinkers such as Prudence Allen and Michele Schumacher who advocate the ontological foundation of

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[450] Schindler, Catholic Theology and Gender etc., 207.
[451] Ibid., 222-3.
[452] TD V, 87.
[453] Schindler, Catholic Theology and Gender etc., 223.
[454] See also, (Prudence Allen, R.S.M. "Philosophy of Relation in John Paul II's New Feminism," *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele M. Schumacher. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003, 94: "This complementarity is always of a man and woman as two concrete human beings in relation and not as fractional parts of a man and a woman who in relation make up only a 'single human being'"

gender complementarity and the essential relatedness of the self.[455] One aspect of this complementarity, as we have noted earlier, is the relational orientation the 'other' across distance, and hence, difference. Allen finds evidence of this "simultaneous equal dignity and significant differentiation of woman and man's identity" within the Christian tradition amongst thinkers such as Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein.[456] Schumacher also characterizes one of the defining aspects of the 'new feminism' in that it realizes the nature of man and woman as "given in communion with other persons, human and divine."[457] According to her:

> Femininity and masculinity are thus natural expressions of the giftedness of the human person—of the fact that both men and women are called to realize themselves by giving themselves to others. On the most natural level this means that man and woman are oriented toward one another in the natural bond of marriage, which is to say that their bodily union is an expression of the spiritual union of their persons.[458]

In other words, just as Balthasar understood the Trinitarian persons defined as an event of *kenotic* self-giving, Schumacher likewise believes that it is "by giving of herself without seeking in return that she [woman] actually fulfills herself in accord with God's own manner of being and acting."[459]

By this Trinitarian understanding of the relational person and this expression of *kenosis* as self-giving, the sexes and their relationship are shown to exemplify a "unity of the two," a sameness and difference that does not seek to conquer or subjugate. To the degree that this idealized relation is poorly exercised or dimly approximated, then both male and female fall short of their vocational call to be gift for the other after the likeness

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[455] P. Allen, 94.
[456] P. Allen, 73.
[457] Schumacher, xii.
[458] Schumacher, 230.
[459] Schumacher, xiii.

of the Trinity. A final synthesis and summary of the argument that has been put forth hitherto will seek to conclude our discussion.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: "THE GREAT MYSTERY" OF CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

At the end of this project I find it incumbent upon us to reflect once more on the nature of Christ's love for the Church, realizing that this is both revelatory of God's love for the world and also a vocational call to the sexes to live and love each other as God does: as Christ loved the world from the Cross. The bridal imagery associated with Christ and his bride the Church is of course only analogous to the human marriage of men and women. While the divine Bridegroom retains "primacy" over the Church there are two points to bear in mind: (1) this is a *gifting* primacy and (2) the fact that Jesus is divine and his bride is human is not transferred to the male bridegroom and the female bride. Schumacher states that the purpose of this marital imagery is to show that "God's love for us in Christ maintains a certain primacy" and that the Christian offering of herself or himself really is necessary.[460]

Schindler says about the relationship between Christ and the Church:

> The feminine dimension of Christ is best retrieved, not by blurring his distinctly masculine role as priest (as representative of the Father in and for the world), but on the contrary by drawing out more fully the intimacy of his spousal relation with the Church (through Mary). The intimacy is precisely that of a unity that does not eliminate distinctness.[461]

[460] Schumacher, 220.
[461] Schindler, *Catholic Theology and Gender*, 215-6.

There is, as Balthasar and John Paul II spoke about, a unity in difference between two individuals, where their distance is a precondition for union. Unlike Beattie's "(homo)erotic" portrayal of the transgendering priesthood, or men who must become feminine vis-à-vis God, the new Catholic feminists intend to portray men as "*analogously* feminine,"[462] and women as making up the bridal feminine Church which "becomes like him in the act of becoming one with him, that is to say, in her bridal gift of self, in her self-surrender to the Beloved."[463] Salvation then is not deprived of the woman but is related to "God's gift and our response," in other words one enters into the salvation of the Trinitarian *communio* "by the very means that characterize it: the *mutual self-giving of persons*."[464]

This giving and receiving "event" in God, upon which the sexes are analogously based, entails otherness and distance whereby each Person is respected as uniquely independent, yet there persists a mutual indwelling of all three. Balthasar desires to ground all love between human persons in this gift-event of love in the Trinity that exhibits no semblance of fallen human acquisitiveness:

> If we are convinced that everything—more, indeed, than we are able to give—belongs to the beloved, the word supererogation has no meaning for us. "In the generated Son, who is 'turned toward the bosom of the Father' (Jn 1:18), who says 'Abba' with infinite affection, we see the same love in the form of infinite gratitude, infinite readiness to be, to become, to do—and to suffer—all that the loving Father wills. All that the divine love can conceive in the drama of saving history has been planned and harbored for all eternity in the abysses of this love. This reciprocity of love (relational opposition) is so inconceivable that its fruitfulness can find no adequate term except, once again 'love': he is at once the objectivized fruit and the

[462] Allen, 69; cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988), #25.
[463] Schumacher, 217.
[464] Schumacher, 218.

> most intimate flame, the supreme objectivity and the highest subjectivity, of the triune love, which is identical with the divine essence.[465]

Christ, giving himself to the world on the cross reveals the nature of this Trinitarian love upon which the human sexes were founded. So it is through Christ and his relationship to his Church as Bride that we can come to reclaim the *imago Dei* marred by a fallen creation.

Ultimately, in God and among the sexes, initiative (primacy) merely means the giver of the first gift, with receptivity meaning the returning of the gift in reciprocal exchange that does not demand a calculus. Beattie's misconstruing of Balthasar's anthropology occurs because it is not viewed through such an event of gift. Beattie however, does suggest a parallel solution that bears some resonance to what Balthasar advocates:

> If there are some forms of feminism that are not compatible with Christianity, there are many others in which women and men together seek new ways of relating, not through a struggle for power over one another, nor through regarding one another 'as enemies to be overcome', but in a shared endeavor to understand and unmask the dynamics of power, domination and oppression as these affect the relationship between the sexes.[466]

I believe that by reading Balthasar correctly, his Trinitarian anthropology can be made to serve Beattie's goal of theology, because within true gift-love there can be no struggle for power. Beattie herself claims that she wants to "keep the horizons of feminist theology constantly open to the new and unexpected sources of transformation and renewal that Christians call grace."[467] I believe that Balthasar could not agree more with her solution in this regard: that her purpose of feminist-theology is accomplished by "a vision inspired

[465] TL II, 140.
[466] NCF, 21.
[467] NCF, 31.

by an awareness of the primal relationality of the human creature as a being created in and for love."[468] This origin and *telos* of the human creature is for Balthasar, most fully revealed and embodied by the great mystery of Christ's self-gifting love for the Church which reflects a Trinitarian love.

[468] NCF, 31.

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