

BALTHASAR: PROPONENT AND BENEFICIARY OF THE THOUGHT OF FERDINAND ULRICH¹

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“[T]he fact that we are going to die marks our life so strongly that every attempt—or temptation—to escape it destroys our life from within.”



The theological oeuvre of Hans Urs von Balthasar and the smaller body of philosophical works by Ferdinand Ulrich,² who was

1. A version of this essay was originally published with the title “Balthasar promoteur et bénéficiaire de la pensée de Ferdinand Ulrich,” in *Montrer aux hommes le chemin qui mène au Christ. Mélanges offerts à Mgr André Léonard à l’occasion de son 80e anniversaire*, ed. Éric Iborra and Isabelle Isebaert (Paris: Artège Lethielleux, 2020), 271–300. Reprinted with permission.

2. As of 2021, his only work translated into English is *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. D. C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018) (hereafter cited as *HA*). In German, this is volume 1 of his *Schriften* series, published by Johannes Verlag in Freiburg. The other volumes of the *Schriften* are vol. 2: *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod*, ed. Martin Bieler and Stefan Oster (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1999) (hereafter cited as *LELT*); vol. 3: *Erzählter Sinn. Ontologie der Selbstwerdung in der Bilderwelt des Märchens* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2002); vol. 4: *Logo-Tokos: Der Mensch und das Wort*, ed. Stefan Oster (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2003)

nearly thirty years his junior, are much more closely linked to each other than the still quite limited appreciation of Ulrich would suggest.³ In their intellectual formation, both were certainly indebted to their “excellent and unrelenting mentor” Erich Przywara,⁴ and to Balthasar’s “old friend” Gustav Siewerth,⁵ who was a professor in a Pedagogical Institute, as Ulrich would later become as well. Critics here and there have taken note of the strong resonances between Ulrich’s writings and Balthasar’s world.⁶ This is particularly the case of an expert on Siewerth who, having discovered Ulrich through Balthasar, goes so far as to affirm that together these two figures ring out a “choral piece in which the philosophical theology of the latter responds in a great alternation with the Trinitarian ontology of former.”⁷ He also speaks of their “mutual enrichment,” attributing it to “the logic of a single mission.”⁸

(hereafter cited as *LTK*); vol. 5: *Gabe und Vergebung. Ein Beitrag zur biblischen Ontologie*, ed. Stefan Oster (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2006) (hereafter cited as *GV*). His other works, all published by Johannes Verlag, are the following: *Der Mensch als Anfang* (1970) (hereafter cited as *MA*); *Gebet als geschöpflicher Grundakt* (1973) (hereafter cited as *GG*); *Gegenwart der Freiheit* (1974) (hereafter cited as *GF*); *Atheismus und Menschwerdung* (1975) (hereafter cited as *AM*).

3. See esp. Reinhard Feiter, *Zur Freiheit befreit. Apologie des Christlichen bei Ferdinand Ulrich* (Würzburg: Echter, 1994); Stefan Oster, *Mit-Mensch-Sein. Phänomenologie und Ontologie der Gabe bei Ferdinand Ulrich* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2004); Marine de la Tour, *Gabe im Anfang. Grundzüge des metaphysischen Denkens von Ferdinand Ulrich* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016). For a quick overview of Ulrich’s thinking, see Jacques Servais, SJ, “Le grandi linee della filosofia di F. Ulrich,” *Il nuovo areopago* 19, nos. 2–3 (2000): 159–76.

4. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 11.

5. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Zu seinem Werk* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2000), 111.

6. Emmanuel Tourpe underlines how radically the theologian’s views coincide with those of the Regensburg philosopher: “Really, the doctrine of *Homo Abyssus* is ‘in the background’ of Balthasar’s late theology to an extent that most do not suspect.” See his *L’être et l’amour. Un itinéraire métaphysique* (Brussels: Lessius, 2010), 80.

7. Emmanuel Tourpe, “La positivité de l’être comme amour chez Ferdinand Ulrich à l’arrière-plan de *Theologik* III. Sur un mot de Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Gregorianum* 89, no. 1 (2008): 109.

8. Roberto Carelli, *L’uomo e la donna nella teologia di H.U. von Balthasar* (Lugano: Eupress FTL, 2007), 177.

The aim of this essay is not so much to present the figure and work of a Christian philosopher who remains insufficiently known both in his own country and beyond. It is above all to cast light on the role that Balthasar played in the promotion of Ulrich's thought and the benefit he progressively drew from it in the development of his own work.

1. THE LIFE AND CAREER OF FERDINAND ULRICH

Ferdinand Ulrich was born on February 23, 1931, at Odry in Silesia (Czech Republic) and spent his whole childhood not far from there at Fulnek, in what is now the Czech Republic. In 1946–47, when the German-speaking population was expelled from the Sudetenland, his family fled to Mühldorf am Inn, near Altötting, Germany. There he entered the seminary of Freising, where he completed the first cycle but had to leave after spending many months in the clinic at Kempfenhausen am Starnberger See for typhus treatment. He then continued his studies as a layman at Munich's Ludwig Maximilian University, where in 1954 he submitted a licentiate thesis that already showed the direction of his thought: *Sein und Wesen. Spekulative Entfaltung einer anthropologischen Ontologie* (Being and essence: Speculative development of an anthropological ontology). Two years later, he received his doctoral diploma with a thesis that confirmed this trajectory: *Sein und Materie. Inwiefern ist die Konstruktion der Substanzkonstitution maßgebend für die Konstruktion des Materiebegriffes bei Thomas von Aquin, J. Duns Scotus und Fr. Suárez?* (Being and matter: To what extent is the construction of the constitution of substance determined by the construction of the concept of matter, according to Thomas Aquinas, J. Duns Scotus, and Francisco Suárez?). In the meantime, he had lost his father, who came back gravely afflicted from the war and its aftermath. After a brief student job at Töging, he found a less precarious post as a librarian at the German College in Rome, which allowed him to support himself for a time. The rector of the College in those days was Fr. Franz von Tattenbach; the spiritual father was Wilhelm Klein, both Jesuits.

In 1958 Ulrich obtained his habilitation from the University of Salzburg with a dissertation titled *Versuch einer spekulativen Entfaltung des Menschenwesens in der Seinstellhabe* (Toward

the speculative development of human nature in ontological participation). At that time, he received a teaching position at the Pedagogical Institute of Regensburg, where in 1967 he became an “ordinary” professor.⁹ When this professional school was integrated into the university, he was appointed to the chair in philosophy. He was also named visiting professor at the University of Salzburg (1964–91) and at the Philosophical Institute in Pullach, Munich, run by the Jesuits. Beginning in 1961, he participated in numerous philosophy conferences, most notably at Gallarate in Italy.¹⁰ It was on account of this that he had the opportunity to interact with not only Balthasar but figures as diverse as Henri Bouillard, Augusto Del Noce, Gaston Fessard, Helmut Kuhn, Jean Ladrière, and fellow young philosophers like Claude Bruaire and André Léonard. He became an emeritus professor in 1996 and retired from teaching completely at that point.

Alongside his strictly academic activities, Ferdinand Ulrich frequently offered study sessions for seminarians and young men in Rome in the spring, first at the German College and later at the Casa Balthasar. Frequenting the convent of the Franciscan Sisters of Armstorf in his own country from 1994 onward, little by little he became the spiritual director of numerous people, notably male and female religious who sought out his help and who would make retreats under his direction according to the method of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Over the years, his wife, who was several years younger than he and who gave him three children, accompanied him on his trips, bestowing a feminine touch on the gentle rigor of philosophy. In this vein, a brief note from Fr. de Lubac attests to the fact that they occasionally sent

9. The job did not come easily, as a 1964 note from Balthasar to Elisabeth Siewerth attests. See Manfred Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Philosophenfreunde. Fünf Doppelporträts* (Würzburg: Echter, 2005), 183–84 (hereafter cited as *Philosophenfreunde*). It seems that Balthasar himself discreetly intervened, contacting Romano Guardini to help give the necessary push.

10. On the Congrès de Gallarate, see Valerio Bortolin, “Il Movimento di Gallarate,” in *La Filosofia cristiana nei secoli XIX e XX*, ed. Emerich Coreth et al., vol. 3 (Rome: Città Nuova, 1995), 723–41. On the Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani, see Umberto Muratore, “I Rosminiani nel XX secolo,” in Coreth, *La Filosofia cristiana*, 703–22. On the Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici and the Istituto di Studi Filosofici, see Marco Maria Olivetti, “Enrico Castelli (1900–1977),” in Coreth, *La Filosofia cristiana*, 677–89.

“scrumptious cakes” that she made as a gesture of friendship.¹¹ He lived with his wife in Regensburg, Brittingstrasse 32, where he was regularly visited by friends and acquaintances after he became an emeritus professor. He died peacefully on February 11, 2020, from a heart attack he suffered on Christmas Eve, which had caused his transfer to a nursing home, the “Elisabethinum.”

2. BALTHASAR: EDITOR OF *HOMO ABYSSUS*

Ulrich owed the publication of his dissertation and the success of his university career more broadly to Balthasar. The day after Ulrich’s defense of his voluminous dissertation at the beginning of May 1959, Balthasar was passing through the Eternal City and paid a visit to Fr. von Tattenbach, SJ, a former fellow novice with whom he remained in contact. He had occasion on that visit to speak with Fr. Klein, SJ, himself an esteemed theologian and spiritual adviser, who had served as the intermediary between Ulrich and him.¹² Some time later, Ulrich sent his manuscript to Balthasar, who decided to print it through his publishing house, Johannes Verlag. The dissertation appeared with few modifications in 1961 under the title *Homo Abyssus. Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (*Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*). This marked the beginning of many lively exchanges between them which did not remain simply on the professional level—

11. “Long live Metaphysics, which, in its spiritual depths, inclines people to such gestures of friendship!” wrote the French Jesuit, with his characteristic touch of humor. See Henri de Lubac to Ferdinand Ulrich, 28 January 1974, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome (photocopy).

12. Lochbrunner reports two letters from Balthasar to Ulrich referring to this visit to Fr. Klein (*Philosophenfreunde*, 166). See also Manfred Lochbrunner, *Balthasariana. Studien und Untersuchungen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016), 238–39. Ulrich was strongly influenced by Fr. Klein, with whom he maintained a very close relationship until the priest’s death in 1996. On Klein’s life and work, see Gisbert Greshake, “Wilhelm Klein,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), which highlights one trait that surely left a mark on the young Ulrich: “Influenced by G.W.F. Hegel and following the Socratic manner, he taught [his students] to direct the gaze—through all ‘external,’ ‘ambiguous’ reality, including that of ‘evil’—to the ‘fundamental reality,’ namely the presence of ‘pure creation,’ which is at work everywhere, contrary to all appearances” (122). In Balthasar’s correspondence with Alois Dempf, he mentions Ulrich as a possible candidate for the chair of philosophy at the University of Basel (29 July 1959, cited in *Philosophenfreunde*, 133).

almost all of Ulrich's books were published by Johannes Verlag—but rather quickly became a true spiritual friendship. Later, the young philosopher met with the theologian during the course of the Gallarate conference,¹³ where he was giving a presentation on the power of man according to Friedrich Nietzsche.¹⁴ Thereafter, they not only maintained a healthy amount of correspondence—some excerpts of which are included below—but also met regularly, most notably during the summer at the cabin on Mount Rigi (a resort in the Swiss Alps, located in the canton of Lucerne), where Balthasar would receive intimate friends. Nor was it rare for Balthasar to place the house at Ulrich's disposal when he was accompanied by this or that young Jesuit whom he was helping to finish a dissertation.

In *Homo Abyssus*, Ulrich develops an idea that he undoubtedly discovered in Przywara: being and man maintain a relation of mutual belonging. In its relation to man, being manifests its *superessence* in view of the *essence* of man and is therefore for him a reason for “crisis.”¹⁵ The “anthropological ontology” that Ulrich

13. Upon his return from the Convegno Internazionale del Centro di Studi Filosofici in Gallarate at the beginning of September 1962, Balthasar wrote to Przywara, “Gallarate was stimulating, the rhetoric of the Italian philosophers like an opera by Verdi. Lotz was kind and intelligent. Guardini did not come (strong criticism), the Jesuits competently ‘manage’ all philosophy in Italy right down to Palermo, and even the *amici comunisti* were there to resist amicably,” as cited in Manfred Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Theologenkollegen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 98 (hereafter cited as *Theologenkollegen*). Balthasar had presented on the power of man in biblical revelation.

14. He later wrote to Ulrich to tell him how much he appreciated the artfulness with which he removed “all the veils which cover a person, always with a ruthless gentleness” (10 June 1964, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome [photocopy]). The author is probably referring to “Die Macht des Menschen bei Friedrich Nietzsche,” which had been published in *Potere e responsabilità. Atti del XVII Convegno internazionale del Centro internazionale di studi filosofici. Gallarate 1962* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1963), 154–98. The letters we are referencing from Balthasar to Ulrich come originally from the Ulrich Archives in Passau, Germany. A copy was sent to me at the request of Professor Ulrich. It is my understanding that, after Balthasar's death, Ulrich destroyed many of these letters. At the Balthasar Archives in Basel, Switzerland, numerous letters from Ulrich to Balthasar have likely been preserved, which will one day permit a better appreciation of their relationship. Some of the facts reported in what follows rely on testimony that I personally received.

15. *HA*, 1; cf. 41. The “proper way forward,” wrote Przywara in 1932, is to “grasp the correlation between this meta-transcendental *esse* and this me-

elaborates therein aims to highlight the “gratitude” that man is in himself, insofar as he amounts to concrete thanks subsisting in ontological receptivity in person.¹⁶ The freedom placed in his hands is for man a gift but also a task, that of sustaining “the crisis of being” in its superessentiality. The creature whose action enjoys a true infinity of fullness is called to limit himself by means of an “essence” distinct from him. The *esse* that he is insofar as he is given to himself does not have “subsistence” in itself: it is inherent to created natures and in particular to man, where it finds the means by which to subsist. It is altogether whole: fullness and nothingness at the same time. It is fullness as the actuality of all acts and consequently the perfection of all perfections—God’s first and most proper effect—because “it is by being that God produces all.”¹⁷ But it is also nothingness, because it does not exist as such.¹⁸ And yet this suspension between fullness and nothingness demands of man himself a discernment in all his undertakings: a critical discernment between two opposite options—“the one thing necessary” and the loss, “the death of the action.”

Man thus finds himself, in the real and present exercise of practical reason, before an option that, beneath the forms of the relative, can become decisive as an “ontological solution.”¹⁹

ta-transcendental *homo*” (*Analogia Entis*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 129).

16. *HA*, 5. “Man sets out on the path to himself—as personal gratitude for the reception of being—only out of the concrete ‘essential past’ (*Gewesen*) that has been . . . always already handed over to him” (*HA*, 323). In his usage of the term *verdanken* (see *LTK*, 96–97; *GG*, 80–81), Ulrich was probably inspired by a comment of Fr. Gaston Fessard critiquing Hegel, where the Jesuit notes that the French word *reconnaissance* means “gratitude” just as much as “recognition” of fact and of right, in contrast to the German word *anerkennen* (to recognize). Cf. Gaston Fessard, *Autorité et bien commun* (Paris: Ad Solem, 2015), 110.

17. Thomas Aquinas, *De divinis nominibus*, chap. 5, lectio 1.

18. “Ipsum esse non significat sicut ipsum subjectum essendi, sicut nec currere significatur sicut subjectum cursus: unde sicut non possumus dicere quod ipsum currere currat, ita non possumus dicere quod ipsum esse sit” (Thomas Aquinas, *De hebdomadibus*, lectio 2, no. 23). “Nihil . . . potest addi ad esse quod sit extraneum ab ipso, cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non ens, quod non potest esse nec forma nec materia” (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaest. disp. de potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2 ad 9). See Ulrich’s commentary in *HA*, 28–30.

19. Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 321. Ulrich cites this passage from *Action*: “For what counts on

The author has implicit recourse here to Blondel's concept describing this alternative as "auto-ontological."²⁰ As the philosopher from Aix-en-Provence explained, this alternative is presented to us in what appears simply temporal and relative but which, by virtue of the very same contingency that marks our earthly life, in reality offers the matter for a judgment that either justifies or condemns it. It is this "principle of selection, of intelligibility, of internal critique, of adaptation or of immanent justice," present in all the forms of being, that places man in "crisis" and obliges him to "risk" his life on the ontological question.²¹ Making this idea of Blondel's his own, Ulrich develops in his thesis a sort of "onto-drama," which is not unrelated to the "theo-drama" of the Swiss theologian.²² Moreover, he makes no secret of the theology by which his work is manifestly illuminated, a theology that is fundamentally Balthasarian. For him, as for Balthasar, what is at stake is the very meaning of being and of the struggle of finite freedom. Only obedience to the logic of his existence permits man, who exists in time but always also stands before eternity, an authentic opening to God on the basis of the ontological difference. There, where reason finds its concrete subsistence as enfleshed spirit by following the voice of the absolute positivity of being, it is in a position to overcome this crisis by submitting itself with humility and holy indifference to the necessary ontological meaning of created existence.²³

the whole is not to will what we are, it is to be what we will, separated as we are from ourselves, so to speak, by an immense abyss; and this abyss we must cross over before finally being such, absolutely such, as what we require of ourselves" (*Action*, 137, cited in *HA*, 369n). Elsewhere he also refers to Blondel's "logique générale" (*HA*, 333n). On this key notion of the French philosopher, see Jacques Servais, SJ, "De la logique formelle à la logique morale selon M. Blondel," *Gregorianum* 82, no. 4 (2001): 761–85; and "Una logica del concreto. Blondel di fronte all'illusione idealista," in *Logica della morale. Maurice Blondel e la sua ricezione in Italia*, ed. Simone d'Agosto (Rome: Treccani, 2006), 79–97.

20. Maurice Blondel, "Principe élémentaire d'une logique de la vie morale," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris, 1997), 374; cf. *Action*, 330–31.

21. Blondel, "Logique," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 692.

22. Cf. de la Tour, *Gabe im Anfang*, 110.

23. *HA*, 399n.

Homo Abyssus hardly received the welcome Balthasar expected.²⁴ Balthasar, for his part, saw it as a milestone of contemporary Western thought, bridging immanentism and extrinsicism. In his eyes it represented a happy attempt at overcoming the divorce of Christian faith from philosophical reason. Among the appraisals and analyses preserved in the archives of Johannes Verlag, there are Balthasar's own words:

The philosophy of Ulrich, like every other great creative achievement, moves at its ease in the company of all other great intuitions, precisely as a function of its own inseparable unity: It speaks as immediately with Thomas as it does with Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger. What is more, it has one great advantage over all the other ontologies with which I am familiar: It stands in intimate contact with the mysteries of revelation, offers an access to them, and yet never abandons the strictly philosophical domain. In this sense, it overcomes the baneful dualism between philosophy and theology, and it does so perhaps more successfully than ever before.²⁵

Balthasar later declared, in reference not only to Siewerth but also to Ulrich, "These men, especially the latter, helped me see the intellectual history of the West in its totality and to appreciate the Christian and theological presuppositions of the more recent history of philosophy."²⁶

24. It received, nevertheless, some valuable reviews, for example that of Claude Bruaire (in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 19 [1965]: 171–75), who wrote that the book "may well announce a renewal of the philosophical project" (*ibid.*, 171).

25. This passage is found in a letter Balthasar wrote to Ulrich on May 28, 1962. It is partially reproduced on the back cover of the second edition of Ulrich's *Homo Abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage*, 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998). See Stefan Oster, "Thinking Love at the Heart of Things: The Metaphysics of Being as Love in the Work of Ferdinand Ulrich," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 661.

26. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Our Task* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press—Communio Books, 1994), 38. The "totality" in question does not, in Balthasar's eyes, mean a systematic set of elements forming a whole through their reciprocal dependence; rather, as we will see later, it indicates the truth, i.e., the "whole" present in the fragments and vicissitudes of history, the reality in its original creaturely goodness and fully restored in redemption.

3. A PHILOSOPHY RECOVERED ON THE BASIS OF THEOLOGY

Balthasar was before all else a theologian, but he had many philosopher friends²⁷ and distinguished himself, above all in his youth, by one or another important work of philosophy, in particular by what he called a “phenomenology of truth.”²⁸ Desiring, as St. Paul said, to “take every thought captive in obedience to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5), he was searching for a philosophical instrument adapted to this end. He was convinced that “without philosophy, there can be no theology.”²⁹ Metaphysics—with its question of being as such—is a requirement internal to theology itself. “In order to be a serious theologian, one must also, indeed, first, be a philosopher; one must—precisely also in the light of revelation—have immersed oneself in the mysterious structures of creaturely being (and the ‘simple’ can do this just as well as, and presumably better than, the ‘wise and understanding’).”³⁰ He also realized that an authentic collaboration between philosophy and theology presupposed at the same time that the disciplines remain interiorly open to each other. This required of the theologian, but no less of the philosopher, a particular effort at integration. He explained this at a colloquium held at Namur in 1983 in a presentation with the noteworthy title: “Recovering a Philosophy on the Basis of Theology.”³¹ This signified a sort of reversal of the traditional adage *philosophia ancilla theologiae*. Rather, theology should make

27. Manfred Lochbrunner has sketched the profile of five or six of them. In *Philosophenfreunde*, he focuses on Balthasar’s relationship with Josef Pieper, Romano Guardini, Joseph Bernhart, Alois Dempf, and Gustav Siewerth. In another work he deals with Erich Przywara (*Theologenkollegen*, 18–146), whose influence on Balthasar’s early philosophical work is “obvious,” even though, in the Swiss theologian’s own words, he later distanced himself from Przywara’s “tendency to extreme negative theology” (*Our Task*, 38).

28. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 1: *Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 31 (hereafter cited as *TL*).

29. *TL*, vol. 1, 7–8. See *TD*, vol. 2, 192.

30. *TL*, vol. 1, 8.

31. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Regagner une philosophie à partir de la théologie,” in *Pour une philosophie chrétienne. Philosophie et théologie*, ed. Pierre-Philippe Druet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1983), 175–87.

itself a servant of philosophy to permit it access to truths that the philosopher, illuminated by grace, might discover in the world of nature and creation upon which they are founded.

From his years of formation, Balthasar was thus at pains to unite theology with an existential philosophy/metaphysics that took into account what Przywara had taught him: the meaning of the “real distinction.”³² As Balthasar affirmed in 1946, in the approach adopted by its practitioner, philosophy, which is essentially rational in its method and object, is existentially linked to one’s passion for ultimate realities. Metaphysics should not be limited to an “objective” study of the *verum*. If the one who practices it is Christian, he ought to have a sense for the “catholic” truth, the universal truth, and thus to be in a position to embrace all truths, even apparently irreconcilable ones. His “passion” is faith in Jesus Christ: for him wisdom (*sophia*) is inseparable from the love (*philos*) revealed in the Word made flesh. In addition, he ought to allow his thought to be kindled and shaped by the witness of the revealed Truth which has the trinitarian form of the infinite love exchanged between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit (Jn 4:8). His thought ought to open all finite truth of this world to the mystery of God, but at the same time—given that the *analogia caritatis* is planted in the creature itself—it ought to discern in the earthly figure the presence of the infinite Truth.³³

32. In a letter to a fellow Jesuit dating back to 1935, Balthasar writes, “More and more it seems to me that all philosophy can only be religious philosophy, as it was in the time of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas, and that ‘we’ (Suarez, etc., etc.) have allowed ourselves to be drawn into a kind of deistic rationalism that thinks it deals with being *ut sic* without dealing with BEING, and (even more gravely) doing so ‘objectively’ and in a disinterested (Scholastic) way without necessarily including a personal ‘subjective’ or, as we say today, existential relationship. For me, it is the fundamental vice of ‘our’ metaphysics to neglect this aspect of the real distinction (certainly!): transcendence of any ‘essential,’ objective philosophy (or theology) toward an existential and therefore incommunicable (in the sense that notions can be communicated) and ‘esoteric’ philosophy (or theology)” (Hans Urs von Balthasar to P. de Guibert, SJ, 9 October 1935, reproduced in *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 45 [1995]: 21). On the *distinctio realis*, see Manfred Lochbrunner, *Analogia caritatis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 97–99, 105–07.

33. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time,” trans. Brian McNeil, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 156–57. On the rational character of philosophy, see the Vatican I document *Dei Filius*, chap. 4.

Moreover, if in the light of revelation the being of beings manifests its essentially “trinary” structure in its very exercise, then a true “science of being” is always also inextricably a marveling at the *pulchrum* and definite choice with regards to the *bonum*.

With time, Balthasar deepened the study of St. Thomas that he had undertaken in his first writings, and under the tutelage of his friend Gustav Siewerth he concentrated his attention on the ontological distinction between being and existence more than on the distinction between essence and existence as before. Thus in *The Glory of the Lord* IV and V, the study of theological aesthetics “in the realm of metaphysics,”³⁴ the guiding idea assuring the unity and continuity of his thought from this point onward will be what Thomas calls *ipsum esse*, the act of being *simplex et completum sed non subsistens*.³⁵ Being in general is *similitudo divinae bonitatis*,³⁶ image and likeness of the intratrinitarian Love, and for that reason it is love that does not hold itself back, a transcendent movement of expropriation by virtue of the positive analogy that similitude entails. In the 1984 book that served as a kind of last testament, Balthasar would confirm to what degree his metaphysician teachers Przywara, Siewerth, and finally Ulrich contributed the philosophical basis that his own theological enterprise needed:

Impressed by [Przywara’s] dialectical interpretation of St. Thomas’ real distinction, I was able to find my way to my later friend Gustav Siewerth, . . . and still later to Ferdinand Ulrich, to whose views I owe so much in the concluding part of *The Glory of the Lord* V and indeed in the *Theodrama*.³⁷

34. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vols. 4–5, trans. Brian McNeil et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989–1991) (hereafter cited as *GL*).

35. Aquinas, *Quaest. disp. de potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 1. Cf. Eliecer Pérez Haro, *El mistero del ser. Una meditación entre filosofía y teología en Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Barcelona: Santandreu Editor, 1994), 135 passim. We will see later that the “suggestive language” of Balthasar on “richness and poverty, word and silence”—which according to Haro (*El mistero del ser*, 150) expresses the Thomistic paradox—is strongly inspired by Ferdinand Ulrich.

36. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2 ad 2 (quoted in *HA*, 16–17 passim). See also *AM*, 27. In *GF*, 126, the author quotes *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.24.

37. Balthasar, *Our Task*, 38 (translation modified).

Later we will see the effect Ulrich's thought had on the last two volumes of his trilogy in particular.

In Siewerth (above all in his last works) and in Ulrich, Balthasar recognized "authentically Christian philosophers," in a position to make judgments on the basis of their Christian faith.³⁸ As he explains in his preface to a book dating back to 1939, which was republished after his death, Siewerth

does not speculate in the abstract. As a Christian philosopher, he considers the concrete; he considers man as he exists in his uniqueness, and he measures his present reality by the unique "archetypal exemplary image," by the paradisiacal Adam, who is always already created in grace.³⁹

For this "man with the brain of a lion and the heart of a child," the truth could never be separated from faith or love.⁴⁰ A comment from 1952 expresses well the meaning Siewerth gave to the last years of his life: "Only he who loves has the power of the truth, but only he who is true lives and remains in love."⁴¹ Such an affirmation could serve as the guide to a correct understanding of *Homo Abyssus*.⁴²

Are we to speak of this, then, as a "Christian philosophy" properly so-called? Balthasar attempted a response to this much debated question:

The *donum* of grace enriches and frees the *datum* (nature) in such a way that it is permitted a clarity of thought which, in the domain of created nature, of the world in general, and the world in its particularities, discovers laws

38. *GL*, vol. 1, 61n. Cf. *TL*, vol. 2, 182–83, 306.

39. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Geleitwort" (foreword) to Gustav Siewerth, *Die christliche Erbsündelehre* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1964), 7. In this writing, he adds, there is at once "the high speculation of the thinker and the very simple confession of the man" (*ibid.*, 5).

40. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 90.

41. Gustav Siewerth, "Was darf man einem Menschen sagen und was nicht?" in *Herders Haus-Kalender 1953* (Freiburg: Herder, 1952), 53, as quoted in Manuel Cabada Castro, *Sein und Gott bei Gustav Siewerth* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971), 140n.

42. See, for instance, *HA*, 344–47.

that, however purely natural they may be, are nevertheless totally closed to thought that is not indwelt by grace. It is only with hesitation that one can speak here of “Christian philosophy” in the strict sense, since the light of grace does not fall uniquely from the known Christian doctrine, but from a light which certainly extends beyond the historic space of revelation. But when this illuminated philosophical thought touches on ultimate questions—on the *theon* of Greek metaphysics—the historic present of Christian revelation will appear offering its solutions, and philosophy will be placed before a decision for or against these solutions. (The “option” of Blondel should take place here.)⁴³

It is in this sense, we believe, that Ulrich understood the expression “Christian philosophy” in 1954: philosophy is not Christian by essence, but it is so to the extent that it welcomes, in the realm of rationality, a light from on high that illuminates the creaturely gift.⁴⁴ Both Siewerth and Ulrich developed a philosophy that, without having access through itself to the affirmation of the faith, is completed by an adherence of faith—their real point of departure—because their approach is Christian from the beginning.

Nothing is done without reason, and such was the case in Balthasar’s wanting to situate himself within the thought of these metaphysicians. They themselves, and above all Balthasar, could see in the distance a “philosophy of conversion,” an ontology that takes as its ultimate reference point the person of Christ, who is the “Word that enlightens every man coming into the world” (Jn 1:9), and who in this way was able to meet the unbeliever and dialogue with him. Ulrich himself from the first page of *Homo Abyssus* had advised his reader that his reflection, rooted in the theory of participation, is marked by a continual movement beyond ontology into anthropology, and beyond anthropology into Christology. In fact, it is from on high that our

43. Balthasar, “Regagner une philosophie à partir de la théologie,” 183–84.

44. Ferdinand, Ulrich, *Sein und Wesen. Spekulative Entfaltung einer anthropologischen Ontologie* (Munich: Msk. Druck, 1954), 186, cited in Martin Bieler’s introduction to *HA*, xxiv. In the preface to *Homo Abyssus*, Ulrich states, “The subject matter itself has transcended ontology into anthropology, and anthropology into Christology—and I have followed in the wake of this movement” (*HA*, 1).

Christian philosopher arrived at the understanding of what man is (Jn 2:25). The intratrinitarian difference between “originating Origin” and the “originated Origin,” which is revealed in Christ, was the key that enabled him to understand the speculative difference between giver and gift in the created order, as we will see more clearly below.

4. SIEWERTH AND ULRICH

Before considering the effect *Homo Abyssus* had on the work of Balthasar, it is necessary to say a word about the relationship between Siewerth and Ulrich. Truth be told, the question of what influence the former may have had on the young philosopher from Regensburg is not easy to sort out, but neither is that of his influence on the “late” Siewerth.⁴⁵ In 1961, at Ulrich’s request, Balthasar wrote to Siewerth:

One more small thing: Ulrich is unhappy about what you wrote to him, as he believes that there is definitely something wrong with it historically. He says he doesn’t think of himself as dependent on the “Identity System,” but that he has strayed into the same patch as you by his own thinking, which I can well believe when I think of his type.⁴⁶

To which Siewerth retorted, laying out his point of view: “His claim, that ‘everything he writes comes from himself,’ is surely at best a charming misconception in view of his thorough study of the *Identitätssystem* and his previously expressed tribute to my

45. Andrzej Wiercinski, “Hermeneutik der Gabe. Die Wechselwirkung von Philosophie und Theologie bei Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Logik der Liebe und Herrlichkeit Gottes. Hans Urs von Balthasar im Gespräch*, ed. Walter Kasper (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2006), 355: “To what extent Ulrich already had a philosophical influence on Balthasar during Siewerth’s lifetime is not easy to judge factually, because Ulrich’s *Homo Abyssus* is indeed close to Siewerth’s metaphysics. One can only wish that the existing Ulrich-Balthasar correspondence will be made available to the public and that it will allow us to appreciate in full Ulrich’s influence on Balthasar, which possibly had already begun early on.”

46. Balthasar to Siewerth, 30 November 1961, in *Between Friends: The Hans Urs von Balthasar and Gustav Siewerth Correspondence 1954–1963. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Andrzej Wiercinski (Konstanz: Verlag Gustav Siewerth Gesellschaft, 2005), 111.

work.” This did not prevent him from adding this amiable word at the end: “He is certainly a promising talent, if he keeps his head, and with it the energy and the courage needed for sober thought, rationally conveyed.”⁴⁷ The dominant idea of his thought is certainly quite close to what one finds in Siewerth’s interpretation of Thomism as an “identity-system.” But while Siewerth searches first of all within reason for the basis of the ontological difference, Ulrich’s thought proceeds straightaway to the being of the existent entity and casts into sharp relief the positive character of the *bonitas*.

To be sure, Balthasar particularly appreciated the way in which the late Siewerth resolutely took the “marvel” of created being, understood as love, to be the fundamental object of metaphysics.⁴⁸ Did the views he expressed in *Analogie des Seienden* and in a different way in the second edition of *Identitätssystem* (published in 1961) actually take into account Ulrich’s intuitions, as Balthasar suggested? Siewerth’s whole scholarly work, Balthasar remarked, was elaborated ever more fully along the lines of an original intuition, of an integration of contrary dimensions brought back together in order to enrich each other. He cautiously added, “Can one perhaps say that in him there took place an increasing integration of the heart (that is, of man in his totality) in reason, without causing the dialectical rigor of speculation to suffer? It is permissible to hypothesize that in this work of clarification—which must in truth be called Christian—the writings of Ferdinand Ulrich do not remain without influence.”⁴⁹ Martin Bieler believed he could confirm this hypothesis by showing the influence of the first works of Ulrich on a book published prior

47. Siewerth to Balthasar, 28 December 1961, in *Between Friends*, 229. Balthasar himself was aware of the dangers of a youthful intellectual enthusiasm that can become overcharged with emotion. Thus, he recommends to Ulrich: “Let what is in you mature. Let all that is emotional be fully elucidated in the concept. Feelings must not take over; they must be channeled in the direction of thought. Only in this way will you get things done. And you will stay in contact with the ground at the same time” (28 December [year unknown], Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome [photocopy]).

48. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Vorbemerkung,” in Gustav Siewerth, *Analogie des Seienden* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1965), 6. The composition of this posthumous work was coordinated by Balthasar himself.

49. Balthasar, “Geleitwort,” in Siewerth, *Die christliche Erbsündelehre*, 7.

to the second edition in question, *Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes* (1958), in which Siewerth introduces a conception of being as *similitudo divinae bonitatis* that explains its “nonsubsistence” in terms of an unreserved communication of itself.⁵⁰

In the preface to this edition, Siewerth underlines the importance of “the difference between act and subsistence, never before noted until now.”⁵¹ Like Bieler, Tourpe believes that Ulrich—better than Siewerth—succeeds in seeking the roots of the act of created being in the originating reality of God.⁵² In reality,

in regard to the history of the interpretation of Saint Thomas, the doctrine of Ulrich represents . . . a real achievement: it deploys the hermeneutical line . . . of being as love, notwithstanding the magisterial work of Gustav Siewerth and going beyond it, of being as a resemblance of God. In this sense, one can consider the path opened by Ferdinand Ulrich as a major and superior accomplishment in the interpretation of Saint Thomas Aquinas today, distinctly in dialogue with Hegel, Heidegger, and Blondel.⁵³

According to Ulrich, the communication of being aims precisely at the subsistence of creatures. Reality and ideality, which form the two constitutive elements of substance, find their subsistence thanks to the perfection of being as “dis-appropriated” goodness, which, as he emphasizes over and over, brings them to their fulfillment.

50. Cf. Martin Bieler, *Freiheit als Gabe: Ein schöpfungstheologischer Entwurf* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 264. On the difference between Siewerth and Ulrich more generally, see the chapter “Subsistenz bei G. Siewerth und F. Ulrich,” in *GL*, vol. 4, 406. Balthasar uses Siewerth’s expression for the *ipsum esse*: “verweisendes Gleichnis der göttlichen Güte” (the allusive likeness of the divine goodness).

51. Gustav Siewerth, *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* (Frankfurt: G. Schulte-Bulmke, 1961), 18.

52. Tourpe, *L'être et l'amour*, 77.

53. Tourpe, “La positivité de l'être comme amour chez Ferdinand Ulrich,” 110. Tourpe does not hesitate to affirm that, in Ulrich’s interpretation of Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar “recognized . . . , with unabashed wonder, the most advanced form of Thomistic thought, a summit quite simply of the Catholic philosophical tradition” (*ibid.*).

5. ULRICH IN *THE GLORY OF THE LORD* (IV–V)

When *Homo Abyssus* came out, Balthasar had just published the first volume of this theological aesthetics. The second volume was well underway, and the author was already thinking about the third, which would be dedicated to a “general religious metaphysics.”⁵⁴ Without overlooking Ulrich’s proper genius,⁵⁵ what Balthasar appreciated in Ulrich first of all was his original interpretation of Thomism. In *Wahrheit der Welt* Balthasar had treated the innerworldly structure of truth, valuing as essential the *distinctio realis* of St. Thomas like his teacher Erich Przywara had taught it to him: the distinction of essence and existence as the original polarity of the creature, which “in their mysterious dual unity is the eternal mystery of every ontology of the created world.”⁵⁶ He had also studied the first edition of Siewerth’s *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* (Thomism as a system of identity). But in order to approach the question of glory “in the realm of metaphysics” he needed philosophical categories that were more refined. In an end-of-the-year letter likely dating to this period which mentions “the Christmas tree filled with candles” that Ferdinand Ulrich had sent with good wishes, he thanked Ulrich in terms that demonstrate how much he depended upon both his intellectual and spiritual closeness for the future development of this metaphysics: “Thank you for accompanying me so well. And yet I know all that still remains to be done, how much you precede me with your intuitions—and how much I will again have to thank you—which is for me a very welcome

54. *GL*, vol. 4, 13.

55. “I have read Eckhart and Tauler, and in a certain way you are in continuity with this nascent German spirit” (Balthasar to Ulrich, 10 June 1964, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome).

56. *TL*, vol. 1, 194. In a letter dated December 4, 1945, addressed to Fr. Richard Gutzwiller, his provincial superior, Balthasar presented his manuscript for censorship: “Here is the booklet—which came a little quickly (exactly 4 weeks!), but is perhaps not without value. . . . I believe that this is the first Ignatian theory of knowledge. Maréchal and Rahner are doing something impossible by being Thomists as Jesuits. There is a lack of style that pervades all. Thomas is a Dominican, right?! We must absolutely take another starting point. I have tried to do so” (Archiv SJ Zurich, Balthasar, 58, K 1945, #34).

thought.”⁵⁷ It is thus no accident that, at the beginning and once again in the conclusion of the third volume, he invoked the authority of Ulrich where he was trying to show an *inchoativum* (*in ordine creationis*) of the divine kenosis in the kenotic dimension of innerworldly beauty.⁵⁸ (Do not the two orders together form the unique economy in the Johannine vision that was so dear to him?) In the same place, he was trying to interpret the eschatological mystery of the kenosis of God in Christ on the basis of its grounding in the metaphysical mystery of being, which in effect “shines forth as it destroys, which mediates the radiance of the divine only by pointing forward to the utter humility of the Cross?”⁵⁹

In fact, when *The Glory of the Lord* IV and V were published (1965), one could find a number of significant references to Ferdinand Ulrich, and not only in the long chapter on St. Thomas in the concluding section.⁶⁰ In *Homo Abyssus*, Balthasar had read the successful attempt to ground the mystery of the divine kenosis in Christ analogically in the metaphysical mystery of being, which guarantees to the manifestation of divine love the necessary distance of the totally other with respect to human love. He used it to show that the communication of being—*completum et simplex sed non subsistens*—concerns the subsistence and goodness of creatures. In other words, beyond the dimensions of “ideality”

57. Balthasar to Ulrich, 28 December (year unknown), Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome (photocopy).

58. See Balthasar to Przywara, 24 January 1962, as quoted in Lochbrunner, *Theologenkollegen*, 82 (mentioning Ulrich).

59. *GL*, vol. 4, 38, referring briefly to *HA*. At the end of volume 5, he explains further: “The non-subsistence of the *actus essendi* is the creative medium [*Schöpfungsmedium*] which suffices for God to utter His kenotic word of the Cross and of glory and to send it as His Son into the world to experience death and resurrection. This word (which brings with itself its own grace) will ultimately be grasped only by those who hold out within the oscillation [*Schwebe*] of distinction and who do not make themselves guilty of ‘essentialisation’ [*Ver-essentialisierung*] (F. Ulrich) of defenceless and radiant Being [*wehrloses strömendes Sein*]—an ‘essentialisation’ which is the death and paralysis of both Being and the word” (*GL*, vol. 5, 631–32). Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1963), 95.

60. See *GL*, esp. vol. 4, 393–12, and vol. 5, 613–56.

and “reality,” which were highlighted there,⁶¹ what must be taken into consideration in the construction of substance is the existential perfection that confers “goodness”: *bonum dicit rationem perfecti*.⁶² Indeed, it is on the basis of goodness, as pledge of substantial perfection, that the two first dimensions ought to be developed. Perfection comes forth from the movement of “rounding out” inscribed in goodness, insofar as it is in itself the principle of substantial perfection. This is what the author wished to illuminate by recalling the formal coherence existing between the trinitarian structure of finite being and that of infinite Being, all the while without destroying the differences between them. “God-given Being is both fullness and poverty at the same time. . . . But equally, the created entities are simultaneously fullness and poverty. . . . Here, through the greater dissimilarity of the finite and the infinite existent, the positive aspect of the *analogia entis* appears, which makes of the finite the shadow, trace, likeness and image of the Infinite.”⁶³ In fact, “In what is actual there reigns a mystery beyond fullness and poverty, each of which expresses it accurately but still inadequately.”⁶⁴ The positive comparative here does not go without the negative comparative of the still greater difference. In Ulrichian terms, the movement of subsistence in the finite is the image that reflects, as if in a mirror, the movement of subsistence in the infinite, and in the medium of being outside of which there is nothing except nonbeing:

61. The ontological moment of ideality (*Idealität*) refers to the *esse* of things, as manifest to the intellect, as distinct from reality (*Realität*), which refers to things in relation to their posited essence: *res*. The third moment, the moment of goodness or “bonity” (*Bonität*), refers to the perfection of being in love and as such reveals the unity of the first two moments, insofar as subsistence is the (real) substance’s enactment in its *esse* (ideality). On these concepts, see D. C. Schindler, “Lexicon,” in *HA*, 493–94.

62. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 5, a. 1 (hereafter cited as *ST*).

63. *GL*, vol. 5, 627.

64. *GL*, vol. 5, 625. He refers again to the unity of wealth and poverty, as Ulrich presents it, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 32–33. See also his *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vols. 2–3, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990–1992), vol. 2, 256–57; vol. 3, 518 (hereafter cited as *TD*).

If we experience the absolute positivity of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*—i.e., God—then being unveils itself as “nothing.” . . . But this “nothing” makes it impossible to project being’s coming to subsistence [*Subsistenzbewegung*] into God as a mirror image of what happens in finite being. To do so would be to think that, in the movement into subsistence, by which “to be” achieves existing-ness, God too would come to himself by crossing the difference between himself and *ipsum esse*.⁶⁵

Homo Abyssus would remain an important reference for Balthasar. It is surely this work that he relied on again in 1985 when, in a key chapter on the ontological difference, he introduced the analogy between absolute subsistent Being and the freely created finite being, which does not achieve subsistence except in substances.

6. OTHER PUBLICATIONS AT JOHANNES VERLAG

The lack of commercial success of *Homo Abyssus* did not discourage Balthasar: between 1966 and 1974, Johannes Verlag published four other books by its author. Balthasar, who remained in contact with Ulrich, invited him shortly after the release of *The Glory of the Lord IV* to give a talk in Basel on a topic he had already taken up at Gallarate: the situation of man in relation to the problem of atheism. At the end of the presentation, Balthasar asked him for the manuscript and published it soon thereafter with the title *Atheismus und Menschwerdung* (Atheism and incarnation). What won him over in this brief piece was the original approach of the Regensburg philosopher, who did not treat the question from the religious, psychological, and sociological point of view as it so often was treated, but rather by positioning himself directly in the heart of ontology. “In a reflection which is very simple, profound, and crystal clear,” commented Balthasar, “Ulrich succeeds at surveying and unfolding the question of being and bringing it to the point where, out of it itself, the religious question arises not all from the outside but from within,” and thus one understands “what a mortal assault on the heart of

65. HA, 39.

man atheism represents.”⁶⁶ “This little masterpiece,” he continued, “can serve at the same time” as “an excellent introduction to the great work *Homo Abyssus* and is accessible to all educated people.”⁶⁷

Several years earlier, in 1970, Balthasar had published another work, *Der Mensch als Anfang* (Man as beginning), in the same *Kriterien* (Criteria) series of Johannes Verlag. This one was an essay on the philosophical anthropology of childhood. In it, Ulrich returns to and develops further a theme sketched out in the preceding short work: “the self-comprehension of man through word and love in the process of education.”⁶⁸ As Balthasar writes, Ulrich expounds

a theme which sheds light on the intuition found at the heart of his thought and which can offer the best model of critical engagement with the thought of our time. How does thought since Hegel, how do thinkers such as Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud confront the question of man’s childhood? As preliminary stages which one must leave behind or which the adult conscience must overcome and reformulate? Or is childhood rather a condition which can never be pinned down by a form of thought that seeks to dominate and which—as the condition of a being which is given to himself—remains an enduring premise?⁶⁹

The child, personal and real symbol of created being as love—and in this way representative of the ontological difference between being and the existent entity—comes into his own freedom in receiving himself from another and in giving himself in turn in the movement of gift in which he was conceived. The word of

66. Balthasar, catalog for Johannes Verlag (Johannes Verlag Archive, Basel, Switzerland).

67. Ibid. The author quotes a passage from this short book in order to show Mary as the real symbol of the Church, as a figure of freedom and acknowledgment. As the fruitful “Mother, she remains a virgin maid, since she can possess the gift only if she does not keep it for herself but uses it for the service of many (and she is one of the many), revealing the glory of God and witnessing to Being as Love making itself finite” (*AM*, 68, as quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery [1974; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986], 291).

68. *AM*, 16.

69. Balthasar, dust jacket copy of Ulrich’s *MA*.

those who begat him is the path by which he finds himself and takes possession of himself as a gift of freedom to itself. By means of the word a “thou” addresses to him, a word that in a certain sense comes from outside of him, the child leaves the realm of the freedom of the other and begins to “inhabit” himself.

Balthasar appreciated the way in which Ulrich pushed metaphysical reflection all the way to its ultimate conclusions by illustrating, in the evolution of the child, the concrete “risks” of a false resolution of the question of being, of which metaphysics is the bearer. On the one hand, there is the temptation to refuse the separation from the origin or else to deny the union with this origin, which has the consequence of closing the subject within a pure “abstract identity” with himself. The opening to the other, on the flip side, causes him to discover and experience the goodness of his existence, which is gift. Balthasar had just republished a work of Siewerth on the subject,⁷⁰ and he himself had also dealt with the topic.⁷¹ In Ulrich’s work he recognized the strength of a philosophy capable of letting itself be kindled and advanced by a serious adherence to the Christian faith, in particular the mystery of the Incarnation, with all its complex and unique reality. Thanks to an ontology that roots forms in common matter and that intimately links together being as gift, which is “finitized” with the Word of God that takes on flesh, the philosopher accentuated the mystery of the child, “event of love made flesh,” in an astonishing way by placing in a new light his “unique and unrepeatable existence in flesh and bone,” which is so often compromised.⁷² Being a child is a “permanent existential” of man; it is man in his constitutive “beginning.”

At the end of this book, the author opens perspectives and lays the groundwork of what would be the subject for

70. Gustav Siewerth, *Die Metaphysik der Kindheit*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1965).

71. Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3, 15–55 (contribution written for the collection *Mysterium salutis*). See also his *Das Ganze im Fragment*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1990), 274–83; and especially the last book he published in his lifetime: *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (1988; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

72. *MA*, 13, 63. Cf. *TL*, vol. 2, 225 (referring to *HA* and *AM*), 306. Singularity, according to him, is “the most burning of all philosophical questions” (Balthasar, *Das Ganze im Fragment*, 207).

another book: “Childhood is, par excellence, *the* (!) form of the liberated present of man as I-you-we.”⁷³ Philosophy has no other task, at bottom, than that of retrieving (*wieder-holen*) what a true pedagogy helps to find anew. In the school of St. Ignatius, Ulrich had learned and taught the “principle and foundation” of human existence: “recognition” full of gratitude for the faith of being created *umsonst*, for nothing, gratuitously, by a God of love. Three years later, Johannes Verlag accepted another of Ulrich’s books, this time for the series *Beten heute* (Prayer today). It was a meditation, the title of which itself says it all: *Gebet als geschöpflicher Grundakt* (Prayer as the fundamental act of the creature). Balthasar gave it an introduction that was particularly full of praise:

We have so many books today about the practice of prayer, both oral and above all meditative prayer. What we do not have is a deeper philosophical foundation. Prayer has remained something foreign to the great tradition of German philosophy flowing from Kant. One might therefore ask whether Ferdinand Ulrich, in these few, dense pages, has not endeavored to accomplish something we have awaited for centuries, and whether he has not achieved this in such a profound way—which immediately opens to the genuine fundamental act and at the same time speaks a decisively clear word regarding common misunderstandings—that there is almost nothing that would have to be added to these reflections. This little “summa” that he presents on prayer contains in its brevity such permanently valid insights that repeated meditative readings will not exhaust it but only begin to unlock its treasures.⁷⁴

In his eyes, one of the merits of this philosophy of prayer, and not the least of them, was to round out and correct a philosophical current of Cartesian origin that unilaterally emphasized the power of man’s self-determination.

73. *MA*, 155; see 20.

74. Balthasar, brochure of Johannes Verlag (Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome). See also his *TD*, vol. 4, 159. In 1974, as a sign of gratitude, Balthasar dedicated to Ulrich the fourth volume of *Explorations in Theology*. The central theme is the Church and the Christian today. “Dear friend,” Balthasar wrote by hand on Ulrich’s copy, “excuse this dedication, which could not be avoided this time, although the meager content makes it a shame.”

One year later, in 1974, Johannes Verlag released its last work of his in the *Horizonte* (Horizon) series: *Gegenwart der Freiheit* (The presence of freedom). Once again, Balthasar's introduction to the work was full of the highest praise:

Beneath the apparently abstract title lies hidden that which is most concrete: the freedom of man, around which everything revolves, not as a freedom given by the past and handed down, still less a future freedom to be searched for first, but rather—in the “we”—form of existence—a freedom always already present and given. The view into the past (as *religio*) is, set unilaterally, absolutized paganism; the view into the future (as U-topia) is, set unilaterally, absolutized Judaism. Both cancel each other out. The authentic presence of freedom is not attained except in the actualization of the divine “we” in the figure of the Christian community where alone the concerns of religion and of utopia are truly realized. Ulrich offers here—above all in the central dialogue with Nietzsche—a strict ontology that is at the same time enriched by the great tradition (from Aristotle to Heidegger by way of Thomas) and by the biblical-personalist approach.⁷⁵

In Ulrich, Balthasar appreciated a thinker who is concerned with the whole. “Life” is both the starting point of his thought and what he always keeps in view, in conformity with what undergirds his philosophy, namely the interpretation of being in its transcendental character as “goodness.” In fact, the Regensburg philosopher poses the question of the “present” or of the “presence” of creaturely freedom in this latest work from this perspective. More than Marx, whose thought Ulrich engages in his meditation on prayer,⁷⁶ the principal point of reference in *Gegenwart der Freiheit* is Friedrich Nietzsche, the thinker for whom Balthasar had reserved a central place in the three volumes of his *Apocalypse of the German Soul*, and whose writings he shortly thereafter presented in three anthologies.⁷⁷ Like the

75. Balthasar, dust jacket copy of Ulrich's *GF*.

76. Cf. *GG*, 14, 38, 49.

77. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* [1937–1939], vol. 1: *Der deutsche Idealismus*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1998). Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anthologien. Vom vornehmen Menschen, Vergeblichkeit, Von Gut und Böse*, ed. Hans Werner [pseudonym for Balthasar], 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 2000).

Swiss theologian, Ulrich has a very open, Christian attitude toward the Prussian thinker. He takes into account Nietzsche's indomitable combat, but he also always considers in counterpoint the invisible presence of the adversary at his side against which he struggles with such vehemence. Does the fact of "receiving," of "welcoming," and of "conceiving"—the term *empfangen* has all these nuances—prevent man from being truly free? Certainly, man is not his own origin, and thus his freedom is not that of an infinite being. But he is nevertheless really given to himself. Freedom is not the simple promise of an illusory future. It is the perfect gift granted to him from this very moment forward. It is the hidden presence of the origin of his finite existence, of an originating source that gives of itself without reserve and unconditionally.⁷⁸

7. FRUITFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN BALTHASAR AND ULRICH

The great financial effort associated with the publication of these books was hardly compensated. Balthasar had to yield to the facts: Ulrich's books simply did not sell. He had no option but to refuse other manuscripts. Their personal relationship, however, did not suffer. Following the death of Siewerth in 1963 and of Adrienne von Speyr in 1967, Ulrich became one of Balthasar's principal interlocutors. In 1975, while he was in the process of editing *Theo-drama* II, Balthasar gladly consulted his friend:

Your notes are of infinite help. I have the impression of diving into waters of life. I was wrestling with the same problems, but without finding the way through them. Now everything is falling into place. Naturally certain questions remain for me, but for the moment I prefer to follow what I believe I have understood and seen. It will be necessary to rewrite much of the preceding work.⁷⁹

This anthropologically crafted volume was to deal with the situation of man before God just as it appears in revelation:

78. See *GG*, 78–81.

79. Balthasar to Ulrich, 3 December 1975, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome (photocopy).

that is, a creature who, in the ultimate solitude that defines it, is capable of making a free decision in the presence of God's infinite freedom. Balthasar found in Ulrich someone who fully shared his conception of the christological *analogia entis*.⁸⁰ "In God's self-proclamation in Jesus Christ the more blessed mystery is revealed, namely, that love—self-surrender—is part of this bliss of absolute freedom."⁸¹ In the light of God as Jesus Christ has revealed him to us, we understand that richness and poverty are two faces of the same reality. Richness of the act as gift ("having," "possessing") and poverty of the potential essence ("surrendering," "giving" in separating oneself totally from what one gives) thus become key speculative notions: they allow us to specify the identity of Jesus' creaturely existence insofar as it is integrated in the act of this Being through which the eternal Son is what he is.

Balthasar's concern was to refine the nature of the analogy on philosophical grounds, holding faithfully to the distinction between the order of the *procession* and that of *creation*, the still greater dissimilarity emphasized by the Fourth Lateran Council. "In the terms of Christian philosophy," he writes at the end of the *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Theo-drama* (1973), "it could be said that God the Father beholds in the one Logos the infinite possibilities (*possibilia*) of his own imitability."⁸² The analogy between God and the creature, however, relies on an altogether special relation between the absolute and that which is relative in every sense. The logos in which the Father contemplates the possible models of its essence is not the personal Logos but an undetermined logos: being as ideal mediation. How can we, however, account rationally for the unity of the distinction between subsistent being and nonsubsistent being, which is uniquely intelligible in the singular existent entity, in such a way as to offer the philosophical basis needed not only by theology but above all by the Christian mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr? Following the fertile path

80. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press—Communio Books, 1994), 33n, 69–70. These notes indicate how much Balthasar had, long before his meeting with Ulrich, a clear vision of the nature of this christological *analogia entis*.

81. *TD*, vol. 2, 256; see *TD*, vol. 3, 222–23, 518.

82. *TD*, vol. 1, 566.

marked out by Przywara and Siewerth, Ulrich proposed, on the basis of a conception of the *bonum diffusivum sui*, a positive interpretation of the notion of *Entäusserung*, expropriation or disappropriation, which would help the theologian to develop his argument. Common being is a fullness that is both “rich” and “poor” at the same time insofar as it is surrendered to the essence to which it is already given from the beginning, even in its real difference with respect to that essence. If being is manifested here as negativity (*nonsubsistens*), it is nevertheless not because it is something negative but precisely because it is pure love, without any interest in reaping the rewards for itself. God brings about creation by the diffusion of his goodness. He is in himself the absolute giver of the being of the finite creature, which is a pure gift of himself to the creature. In the gift, God lets himself be seen—keeping in mind that in his Logos God gives everything and that the creature has nothing on its own. Thus, the element of *comparabilitas* with God, which contains the polar structure of finite truth by reason of its inner vitality, does not undermine the still greater difference between the Creator and the creature.⁸³

Some years later, in 1980, Balthasar again thanked Ulrich for his help: “It is incredible that there is someone like you here below on whom one can count—as much externally as internally.”⁸⁴ The following month he wrote to him, this time to share his discovery of a book to which until then he had paid little attention: *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Living in the unity of life and death), which Ulrich had published through KnechtVerlag at the same time as his little work on prayer. “I am only now beginning to read your book on life and death in any real depth,” wrote Balthasar, “and I am absolutely captivated with it. If I had done so before, I would have written less superficial things. But in contact with you I always recognize anew my great limitations.”⁸⁵ In the three meditations that make up the

83. *TD*, vol. 2, 398–99. Cf. *GG*, 58–64.

84. Balthasar to Ulrich, 11 June 1980, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome (photocopy).

85. Balthasar to Ulrich, 4 July 1980, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome (photocopy). The following year Balthasar wrote to Ulrich about “Sprache der Begierde und Zeitgestalten des Idols” (*Ltk*, 507–693): “Red with shame, I confess that I forgot to thank you for the ‘Idol,’ whose level of difficulty, like

book, Ulrich takes up again the theme he had developed in *Der Mensch als Anfang* of the image of man as a twofold totality with both eternal and ephemeral dimensions. But here this conjoined richness and poverty is now presented as the dynamic inner polarity of life and death. The title of the book communicates well the central idea: the fact that we are going to die marks our life so strongly that every attempt—or temptation—to escape it destroys our life from within.

Balthasar referred to *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* on several occasions. He did so first of all in 1983 in the last volume of *Theo-drama* in order to explain the positive quality of alterity.⁸⁶ The same year he laid out the argument in greater detail in a short article with a similar title in *Communio*: it is in the Christian sphere alone that it is possible not to miss the unity of life and death.⁸⁷ Otherwise, as he explained, one almost necessarily gives in to two symmetrical temptations, which Ulrich amply described.⁸⁸ Afterward, Balthasar himself published a meditation through Herder Verlag on the occasion of Holy Week with a similar title: *Leben aus dem Tod* (Life out of death). The second chapter draws its inspiration expressly from Ulrich's book, which had achieved a dialectic whose strength is guaranteed by the Gospel. The hermeneutical categories it employed cast decisive light on the archetypal unity existing between God and man as well as on the truth about God and, consequently (by reason of the analogy), the truth about creation. Moreover, in line with Balthasar's secret hope, these categories opened up the way to a deeper rational understanding of the pure ontological obedience of the creature on the basis of the kenosis of Christ to which revelation bears witness.

an étude by Chopin, far exceeds my mental laziness here at the Rigi. I will not give up" (postcard from Balthasar to Ulrich, September 1981, Casa Balthasar Archives, Rome, photocopy).

86. *TD*, vol. 5, 84, quoting *LELT*, 22–23, 122.

87. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Death Is Swallowed up by Life," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 49–54. See *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 5, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 230–38.

88. See Balthasar, "The Unity of Life and Death," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 5, 225–28.

8. ULRICH'S CONTRIBUTION
TO *THEO-LOGIC* II AND III

Together with *Homo Abyssus*,⁸⁹ *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* would continue to be a central philosophical point of reference for the final two volumes of *Theo-logic*, published in 1985 and 1987 respectively. Balthasar had found in Ulrich the philosophical instrument that allowed him to realize the program announced in his little book *Love Alone Is Credible*⁹⁰ and to conclude his trilogy with a hymn to the Spirit of truth understood as love. Thanks to him, Balthasar was able to give an account, from an ontological point of view, of the simple Johannine proposition: God is gift; he is love (1 Jn 4:8). By creating, God *gives* being to the created reality, says St. Thomas.⁹¹ In God, truth is life, and this superior life he is substantially does not hand itself over to us by virtue of dialectic (Eph 3:19) but only *in actu exercito*. In his volume on "the truth of God," Balthasar quotes Ulrich's words: "If one were to ask if the actual unity of life and death can be 'spoken,' for example, in the guise of a basic formula, the answer must be: No! Only love lived in flesh and blood, the word of love, says *everything*."⁹²

Two years later, Balthasar took up the subject again, this time from a pneumatological perspective. Relying on the Ulrichian conception of nonsubsistent being as gift pure and simple, he could state, by analogy, one of the essential properties of the Spirit: its being gift (1 Jn 3:24, 4:13). In its similitude to the divine goodness, created being as gift reveals the presence of the

89. See *TL*, vol. 2, 183, citing *HA*, 50. In the same work, referring to chapter 2 of *MA*, Balthasar explains, "We can understand this only if we dare to speak, with Bulgakov, of a first, intratrinitarian *kenosis*, which is none other than God's positive 'self-expropriation' in the act of handing over the entire divine being in the processions, or, with Ferdinand Ulrich, of the unity of 'poverty' and 'wealth' in absolute being itself—which unity, once again, can be exhibited concretely in the child" (178).

90. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press—Communio Books, 2004).

91. Thomas Aquinas, *In evangelium Ioannis expositio* 1, a. 133; see *Sent.* 1, d. 37, q. 1, a. 1; *Summa contra Gentiles* 2, ch. 30, a. 1.

92. *TL*, vol. 2, 120, citing *LELT*, 99.

giver precisely in the measure to which it does not retain the gift but, through it, places an authentically “other” in the state of freedom, causing the other *to be*. Indeed, the giver is all the more present in the gift precisely because a real separation takes place between the giver and that which it gives (surrenders). It is a proposition that Balthasar would ultimately clarify by citing long extracts from *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod*:

“The gift would not express the giver . . . if it remained trapped in its original unity with him. . . . The umbilical cord must be cut so that the blood system of the receiver can become independent, and he can pursue his path; for this is the purpose of being’s Yes, which empowers and liberates.” 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 is, has been received. Only through separation from the thou can the I appropriate itself and, in this act, affirm the origin of its own being (together with the Other).” Accordingly, however, “the more deeply and pristinely a gift comes from the heart, from the inwardness of the giver, the more clearly is his figure inscribed upon it, the more the origin of his gift is present and the more intimate is the primal unity of giver and gift. To see the gift of someone who thus shares his own life is to see, in it, its origin, that is, the giver.”⁹³

93. *TL*, vol. 3, 225n1, quoting *LELT*, 70–73. Further on, Balthasar cites another passage from *LELT*: “Although everything is given in the Word, who owes his being absolutely to the Father in an eternal obedience unto death, yet the uttering Father and the Word the Father hears are eternally surprising one another with life that is eternally new and ever-young. [He is] Spirit of the Word, by whom the Word conceals himself in silence in the Father and the truth of the divine love, which utters and unveils him as Word; he is Spirit of the Father, in whom the Utterer sets his Word free, separating from him in the separation of death; thus, God communicates himself. He is the ‘Spirit’ who proceeds from Father and Son, but he is not the Utterer as such, nor is he the Word as such. Rather, he is the positive fullness of his silence, the Father’s breath in the Word” (*TL*, vol. 3, 227). He refers to a much earlier text by Adrienne von Speyr that makes the same point: *The World of Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 49–50. On the “separation,” see Adrienne von Speyr, *John*, vol. 2: *The Discourses of Controversy*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 120.

Balthasar returned to the argument in the final volume of the trilogy in order to clarify the exact meaning of the concept of expropriation. "Being," he insisted, is never placed as such in opposition to a "nothing" that must be overcome. *Esse* is pure positivity. The goodness of being is indeed not on the order of a reality that "before" being communicated somehow possesses itself as a fixed property. That is why being is not a force deriving from a sort of dialectical negation. The good "precedes" all acts of disappropriation in being. "The pure fruit of a love that renounces self-sufficiency does not, as such, rest on a self-emptying but is the pure positivity of the Good."⁹⁴ Ultimately, to justify this affirmation, without which the theology of Holy Saturday would lack solid foundations, the theologian returned once again to the metaphysical categories by which his friend endeavored in the two aforementioned books to give an account of the mystery of the Origin without origin of the Logos in whom he expressed himself without reserve. The "expropriation" by which Ulrich explains the movement of love is rooted wholly in the character of the "good" of the being, which attests to its truth as inner "self-transcendence." "If the Good did not 'transcend' the kenosis of being," Ulrich argues, "if it lay entirely circumscribed within being's 'self-giving,' then the 'terminus' of being's trans-nihilation would be the pure, positive reality, . . . [and] being would collapse into the essence."⁹⁵ Considering the real difference as a Christian philosopher on the basis of its supreme archetype, the intratrinitarian love, Ulrich presents a vision of *bonitas* that is totally exempt as such from "self-emptying" in the sense of a "trans-nihilation" (*Durchnichtung*) of being. "Even though the good (and the necessary sense of being that is unveiled in it) exceeds the crisis of being (in its convertibility with the 'nothing' [in seiner selbigen Verwendung für das Nichts]), it nevertheless does not have its place 'next to' this crisis."⁹⁶ Ulrich shows well that disappropriation has the original character of a transparent opening up of self; it is the expression of the fullness always already communicated from love. In the more theological terms

94. *TL*, vol. 3, 227. See Tourpe, "La positivité de l'être," 92.

95. *HA*, 464. Balthasar refers to this passage in *TL*, vol. 3, 228.

96. *HA*, 465.

of his 1973 book, “The Father goes out of himself in the living Word to the extent that he offers to the Son all the richness and fullness of divine life. God is in himself eternally surrendered love: absolute unity of richness and poverty.”⁹⁷ Despite these clarifications, unfortunately, certain critics of Balthasar continue to see in his conception of kenosis a *theologia crucis* inspired not only by Karl Barth but even by G. W. F. Hegel.

CONCLUSION

The figure and work of Ferdinand Ulrich are intimately associated with Hans Urs von Balthasar, who as director of Johannes Verlag took responsibility for the publication of his great doctoral thesis and of almost all his other works. The theologian promoted their dissemination by all possible means, notably by soliciting his acquaintances to write reviews, and, through the intervention of well-known figures like Romano Guardini, effectively helped Ulrich to break into the academic world. In his own books, particularly in the trilogy, he greatly accentuated the anthropological ontology of the Regensburg philosopher, in which he immediately recognized the help of providence for their construction, as much if not perhaps even more than in the work of Siewerth.

Ulrich is an author who remains little known but who is acquiring a following not only in Germany and Italy but also in the United States.⁹⁸ In most cases, it is through Balthasar that scholars have reached him. “The more one delves into the philosophical implications of Balthasar’s works,” one of them wrote in 1998, “the more powerfully Ulrich enters into the center of

97. *LELT*, 122.

98. Take, for example, the symposium that the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, DC, organized to celebrate the publication of D. C. Schindler’s translation of *Homo Abyssus*: “Being as an Image of Divine Love: Introducing Ferdinand Ulrich’s *Homo Abyssus*” (April 5–6, 2019) with contributions from Bishop Stefan Oster, Martin Bieler, Marine de la Tour, Antonio López, John Betz, and William Desmond among others. Selected essays were published in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

one's field of vision."⁹⁹ This prediction seems to be coming true in our day. If Ulrich's philosophy supplied a major contribution to the metaphysical foundations of the trilogy, it is certainly because there existed between them a connaturality that was more than intellectual. This strong affinity surely stemmed from the fact that both of them were the protagonists, like Siewerth and Hans André, of the renewal at the end of the 1950s in the German-speaking world, where a form of Thomism reigned that had been rendered rigid by the positivist interpretations of such figures as Thomas Cajetan and John of St. Thomas. Their affinity, however, stemmed no less from the personal connections uniting them on account of a common belonging to the spiritual world of the Society of Jesus in German-speaking Switzerland and Germany. It would not be difficult to show the influence that Ignatian spirituality had on each of them, and in particular the notion of "indifference" understood both as active surrender to the divine will and as unreserved obedience to the gift, and thus to the task, that comes from heaven and is always particular and irreplaceable.¹⁰⁰ Ulrich relied on the same original sources as the theologian, who remained to the end a Jesuit in his heart.

In the case of Balthasar, it is certain that the understanding of this spirituality was vivified and enlarged by Adrienne von Speyr, whose mystical interpretation of the Johannine writings were decisive for him. He himself professed more than once his gratitude to the mystic, whose confessor and publisher he became in 1940.¹⁰¹

We still know very little about Ulrich's intellectual and spiritual history. He confided to his friends that, starting the day after his thesis defense in 1958 he applied himself to a diligent reading of Balthasar's work—*Wahrheit* had appeared in 1947, *Theologie der Geschichte* (*A Theology of History*) in 1950, *Die Gottesfrage des heutigen Menschen* (*The God Question and Modern Man*) in 1956—and that the first visit he made to Basel in January of the following year was the beginning of a long friendship. It is likely that he followed the publication of von Speyr's dictated

99. Martin Bieler, introduction to *HA*, xvi.

100. See *GV*, 437n. The same book contains other references to the saint that are far from parenthetical.

101. Cf. Balthasar, *Our Task*, 35–36; *My Work in Retrospect*, 105–07 passim.

works, which were undertaken under Balthasar's guidance, beginning with *Johannes (John)* and *Magd des Herrn: Ein Marienbuch (Handmaid of the Lord)* up to two volumes titled *Kreuz und Hölle (Cross and hell)*.¹⁰² It is also likely that he and Balthasar talked about Adrienne in the course of walks in the city streets or on the Rigi. Even though in conversations with friends Ulrich practically never spoke of Adrienne by name, I am convinced that he accurately read her works. In fact, I would go further and say that he relied on some of her important intuitions as a decisive source of philosophical inspiration. The final pages of *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* offer a meditation on the prologue of John's gospel and other Johannine texts in complete consonance with Adrienne's contemplation. For example, in the first volume of *Johannes*, where she explains the trinitarian sense of the Cross as the light of love shining in the shadows of the separation and the birth from this light of the new humanity that is the Church¹⁰³; or in the second volume, where she comments on John 12:24: "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies. . . ." As Ulrich explains with all the originality of his ontological language but not without similarities with this commentary, "Having fallen into the earth, the grain of wheat does not cease to obey the sower who was sent to sow: its death is an obedience to *this* one who was sent. . . . Its death carries the obedience out to the end."¹⁰⁴

The Father resurrects him by the Spirit, and this is an action of the Son, because He who vivifies is *his* Spirit. The unreserved surrender to him who eternally begets him, this revelation of the never "ended" (= interrupted) return of the Son to the Father, from the midst of the hell of lovelessness (= divine dereliction), that is the mortal poverty of the life of love: the death of death. He who is

102. In a chapter dealing with the "confession of sins made possible by love" (GV, 611), Ulrich mentions in passing Adrienne's book *Confession*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). He received her twelve privately published posthumous works, which Balthasar began sending to close friends in 1966, as they were released.

103. Adrienne von Speyr, *John*, vol. 1: *The Word Becomes Flesh*, trans. Lucia Wiedenhöver and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 57–58. Cf. *LELT*, 128.

104. *LELT*, 137. Cf. Speyr, *John*, vol. 2, 413–16.

disfigured, he in whom there is neither form nor beauty:
he it is who receives the glory of the Father in *truth* and in
act.¹⁰⁵

Ulrich's meditation, like von Speyr's, makes us see how, without ever letting go of the nucleus of the eternal, divine relations, the economic Trinity manifests the mystery of the immanent Trinity in a differentiated way in kenosis (Phil 2:6–8) and in glory (Mt 28:19). That is the message which Balthasar himself wished to convey to the Church. That is why he was so grateful to his philosopher friend for helping him provide a more adequate rational account of a mystery whose depths he glimpsed through Adrienne's mystical experience of Holy Saturday.¹⁰⁶—
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105. *LELT*, 136.

106. See Balthasar, *Our Task*, 16–17.