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Hans Urs von Balthasar's dialogues with  
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Clive Dennis Allnutt

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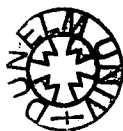
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Clive Denis Allnutt

**Theological Dramatics and Post-Christian Drama:**  
**Hans Urs von Balthasar's Dialogues with Twentieth-Century Theatre**

Master of Arts  
University of Durham, Department of Theology  
2001

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This thesis examines Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological dialogues with twentieth-century theatre. It locates them in the context of his vision of theo-drama, showing that they are grounded in a Christological intuition of what drama is. An account of Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics introduces his theatrical vocabulary, a scheme of two inter-related triads and consequent themes, in which the ultimate term of dramatic reality is theological. His hermeneutics appropriates theatre practice as a theological resource, in a way by which not only the practitioners' theological status but also their dramatic potential is exposed. I offer a model of Balthasar's understanding of life as drama in three dimensions, the natural-human, the ecclesial-personal and the eschatological-final, arguing that he requires twentieth-century theatre to be post-Christian in as much as it is dramatic. I focus on dialogues with theatre directors and show how Balthasar uses his theological standard for drama to interpret directors as post-Christian and then, in dialogue with that interpretation, to find them either protesting or parodic in respect of Christian theodramatic reality. A particular study of Balthasar's dialogue with Peter Brook outlines, on Brook's terms, the relationship between life and drama and considers Brook's rhetorical use of Christian imagery, especially that of incarnation and grace. This highlights the extent to which Balthasar selectively appropriates aspects of Brook's work as post-Christian and makes that appropriation, and not Brook's own stance, Brook's situation as his dialogue partner. From such specific considerations, I question whether Balthasar's is a strategy for genuine dialogue. I argue that Balthasar considers dialogue itself as a dramatic phenomenon internally relative to God's dramatic activity in Christ and conclude that his account and practice of dialogue is only sustainable within this perspective.

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## **Abbreviations**

Theological Dramatics = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols., trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-1998)

TD1 = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume I: Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988)

TD2 = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume II: The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990)

TD3 = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume III: The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)

TD4 = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994)

TD5 = Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. Volume V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998)

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## **Note**

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What does it mean in ... theatre ... to be creative in ways which not only acknowledge (in however implicit ways) that the first audience is Jesus Christ, but also participate in the 'ecology of blessing' which he generates?

David Ford<sup>1</sup>

Is Balthasar a writer who simply presents a superbly integrated pattern of Christian symbols, rich and satisfying, but offering no point of entry to the contemporary secular mentality?

Rowan Williams<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.268

<sup>2</sup> 'Foreword' in John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: Collins, 1990), p.ix

# **1: BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUES WITH THEATRE**

## **1.1: HANS URS VON BALTHASAR**

Hans Urs von Balthasar understood Christian theology to be a lived perspective, a discipline in which particular events can be appreciated in relation to a universal, networked reality. Such theological living informed his method and style and provided him with a stance from which to dialogue with culture, with other lived perspectives. I will outline Balthasar's theological life in order to relate it to his method and style, the three of which assume that the ultimate relationship between the particular and the universal, and thus the ultimate lived perspective, is theological. Then I will introduce two scholars' praise for Balthasar's theological dialogue with culture, in order to raise expectations against which to measure Balthasar's dialogues with twentieth-century theatre in his *Theological Dramatics*.

### **1.11: Theological Life**

Balthasar was born in 1905 in Lucerne, Switzerland to a Catholic family. He was a musical child and he studied literature, culminating in a doctorate on eschatology in German literature. He entered the Society of Jesus and found a pastoral, rather than academic vocation, including student chaplaincy at Basel. With Adrienne von Speyr, he founded a secular institute, in which members under vows continued in their professions. Consequently, he left the Society of Jesus in 1950. He wrote over seventy books, editing, publishing and translating many more.<sup>1</sup> Yet he considered writing secondary to the task of working in the Church. With others, he established the journal *Communio: International Catholic Review* in 1974. Its programme centred on the determination that 'Christianity today ... can claim universal importance precisely on the ground of its uniqueness.'<sup>2</sup> While it is suggested that, in his prime, the Church

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<sup>1</sup> See Cornelia Capol (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Bibliographie 1925 – 1990* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Communio – A Programme', *Communio* 1.1 (1974), p.3



under-rated Balthasar, he died more esteemed in 1988, ‘a few days before he was due to become a cardinal.’<sup>3</sup>

Many biographers share Angelo Scola’s opinion that it is ‘impossible in Balthasar’s case to separate [the] work of the theologian from the experience of the subject that produced it.’<sup>4</sup> Balthasar lived within the communion of saints and his influences reflect this perceived position. As biographers of Balthasar tend to introduce his theology from a perspective of shared communion with him in Christian life, considerable importance is attached to the network of formation around him. It is rare to see anyone not a Christian theologian cited. This is consonant with Balthasar’s well-known view that theology must occur within sanctity and with the importance he ascribed to personal encounter in this regard. Of course, the communion of saints need not be confined to the living. Past theological masters, most notably in Balthasar Ignatius of Loyola and Thomas Aquinas, stand among them. To be well read in Christian theology, for Balthasar, is an extension of personal theological encounter: participation in the ongoing communion. *Only* as textual influence on Balthasar, however, do non-theologians begin to appear.<sup>5</sup> And Balthasar’s notion of reading well beyond Christian theology seems to me not to share this sense of personal encounter. Rather, the cultured theologian, who reads in European literature and the arts, critically integrates his disparate findings into what would be their truth – the Christian centre of the universal whole. On Balthasar’s view, without such service to Christian reality any cultural discussion ‘may as well be literary gossip.’<sup>6</sup> True influences on Balthasar’s life, those of personal encounter, are thus theologically focused. A ‘divine formation in

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<sup>3</sup> John Riches and Ben Quash, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar’, in David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997), p.135

<sup>4</sup> Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.11

<sup>5</sup> This includes some theatre practitioners and theorists. However, I have found none cited as direct personal influence on Balthasar, either in biography or in Balthasar’s reflections on his work.

<sup>6</sup> Balthasar quoted Peter Henrici, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar: a Sketch of his Life’ in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p.25

the life of Balthasar' is reflected in 'innumerable personal meetings' and reflected again in his 'reading' and 'written work'.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of Balthasar on others is correspondingly centred in Christian community. Balthasar became known as a conservative Catholic theologian, but Mederd Kehl's view is that as theologians

avoid letting [their] picture of Balthasar be stamped just by his positions on certain inner-church questions and tendencies the cliché 'conservative' will get left behind very quickly, and [they] will hit upon a capacity of integrative breadth and penetrating meditative depth that is truly astonishing.<sup>8</sup>

And Brian Davies plausibly describes Balthasar as 'someone whose stature will doubtless continue to grow among Christians as time goes on.'<sup>9</sup> Outside the Christian theological communion there is very little appreciation or criticism. I am not aware of any comment made about Balthasar by a theatre practitioner or performance theorist; they do not appear to have encountered him. John Riches and Ben Quash summarise the 'agenda' set by Balthasar's theology by suggesting that 'for as long as [the] divine drama exerts its claim, Balthasar's meditations will have strange and compelling insights to offer.'<sup>10</sup> Balthasar's compelling insights, at least to date, have remained only strange to theatre practitioners who do not find themselves claimed by the Christian reality in communion in which they are offered.

Such biographical influences, on and of Balthasar, suggest that his is a theological life, with the place of theology being in the Church, fostering the Christian tradition. This is expressed in a 'word of thanks' he wrote on reaching sixty.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Henrici, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Cultural and Theological Education', in Thomas Norris and Bede McGregor (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ: A [sic] Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 10-22

<sup>8</sup> Mederd Kehl, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Portrait', in Mederd Kehl and Werner Löser (eds.), *The von Balthasar Reader* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), p.6

<sup>9</sup> Brian Davies, 'Editorial Introduction' in John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p.vii

<sup>10</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.149

All charisms of Christians are inextricably interwoven; everyone owes himself not only to God, but to the whole Church. ... Who is able to say thanks? To repay the immeasurable realm of the deceased and surviving individuals with the homage they deserve for the graces they have mediated? Where is the wonderful being known as Homer, that he might be thanked; where the chaste Vergil and the God-filled heart of Plotinus? Love and honour must suffice for them.<sup>11</sup>

Balthasar continues, thanking some theologian friends by name. But where does Homer, Vergil or any non-Christian end up? They cannot be thanked for graces mediated, however sincere Balthasar's love and honour may be. That quality of encounter is reserved among Christians in the Church, which in its divine formation is the living sacrament of God's love. Balthasar claimed that, in God's providence, 'the Church is the opening to the world that God has created' – as a community, it has been given universal scope as a body for the world and therefore needs no links that would make it a body with others in the world.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the Christian communion is to be itself, 'a simple presence in the dechristianised world.'<sup>13</sup> This presence, manifest in the communion of saints, should, and could, encompass all people. Yet, it is not open to all in a generic, anthropologically natural, sense but only through receiving shared encounter with each other in God through Christ. Little wonder, then, that Balthasar's true influences are among Christian theologians and not, say, non-Christian theatre practitioners.

In Balthasar's panegyric, Joseph Ratzinger quoted Paul's letter to the Philippians. 'For me to live is Christ': this phrase ... sums up in a final way his whole journey.'<sup>14</sup> Living amidst the influences of the communion of saints, and aware also of a dechristianised mass, Balthasar's life was governed by the 'task of renewing the Church through the formation of new communities [of] radical Christian life ... in the

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<sup>11</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'In Retrospect' in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), pp.218-219

<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p.92

<sup>13</sup> Balthasar quoted Henrici, 'Sketch', p.37

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Ratzinger quoted Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p.xx

midst of the world.’<sup>15</sup> The method and style of Balthasar’s written theology, particularly its approach to dialogue, evidence the tension of this theological life – a tension between the confidence of living in true, universally relevant communion and the challenge of such living amidst a secular, seemingly unattached world.

### 1.12: Theological Method

Balthasar is often grouped with the post-liberals, theologians who, John Webster fairly suggests, have a ‘lack of investment in method.’<sup>16</sup> Yet, much of Balthasar’s work is preoccupied with the way theology should be undertaken. He described his *Love Alone*<sup>17</sup> as a ‘synthesis of many ... efforts to express the meaning and form of theology.’<sup>18</sup> Meaning and form may not be quite the same as method. But these efforts can be considered a methodology, if only because they are so clearly polemical, in ongoing opposition to Karl Rahner’s. This study makes no attempt to evaluate Balthasar’s method in its theological context. Yet, the extent to which Balthasar understood his way of doing theology as a corrective against a perceived Rahnerian mainstream is so considerable that it is in this context that it is introduced below.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years – 1975’, in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), p.223

<sup>16</sup> John Webster, ‘Theology After Liberalism?’, in John Webster and George P. Schner (eds.), *Theology after Liberalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.58

<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Sheed and Ward, 1970)

<sup>18</sup> Balthasar, ‘In Retrospect’, p.202

<sup>19</sup> I will discuss Rahner’s methodology only as it is characterised by Balthasar. For a general introduction to the Balthasar/Rahner debate, see Rowan Williams, ‘Balthasar and Rahner’, in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 11-34. Williams discusses the distinctive epistemological approaches of Balthasar and Rahner. Balthasar begins in contingency, with contingency understood as finitude within infinity: particular interdependent contingencies centre human understanding and creative intention plays a unitive role. Rahner operates on the basis of formal pre-apprehension surrounding the strands of understanding; this formal pre-apprehension is transcendental and is not tied to any particular expression or vocabulary.

Balthasar concluded *Love Alone* by defining ‘reason which understands.’ Rational understanding is by ‘selection’ and ‘grouping ... round a chosen point of reference.’ He highlights two points that must not be the theologian’s reference: ‘cosmology (or religious ontology)’ and ‘anthropology.’ Rather, their focus ‘can only be found in revelation itself that comes from God and provides the centre.’<sup>20</sup> This revelation is concrete: the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection eucharistically present in the Church. Balthasar is not claiming that cosmology and anthropology are non-theological. His concern is that they must be ‘simply functions of that one [theological] centre’ and not ‘in the form of a monstrosity designed to hold up the eucharistic heart to our view.’<sup>21</sup> Balthasar’s theological method is one in which the particular narrative performed in the Church, rather than purportedly neutral anthropological categories, has purchase on universal reality.

Theology seems, for the most part, to be turning in directions very different from the one suggested here.<sup>22</sup>

For Balthasar, Rahner’s account of anonymous Christians stands out among all the unfortunate turns that attempt to support Christian truth in order that it might be seen by all. On Fergus Kerr’s analysis, Balthasar ‘attacked the notion of ‘anonymous Christians’ based on the thesis of the ‘supernatural existential’, supported in turn by ‘transcendental theology’.’<sup>23</sup> Any account of anonymous Christians suggested to Balthasar a capacity in the human spirit, without explicit prayerful recognition of the form of Christ, to live according to its created orientation. On Balthasar’s view, this requires the situation, in fact dramatically engaged, between God and humanity to be rendered statically existential. Humanity becomes conceptually supernatural: owning existentially qualities it can only receive dramatically. To support humanity thus, God becomes transcendental, grounding and guaranteeing a general appreciation of truth in life. Yet Balthasar’s Christianity offers truth in life only by dramatically personal

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<sup>20</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.119

<sup>21</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.123

<sup>22</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.122

<sup>23</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: SPCK, 1997), p.173

encounter. A generalised existentialisation of God and humanity combined in support of anonymous Christians is attacked, characteristically, in the Theological Dramatics:

God's merciful turn toward a lost world, in Jesus Christ ... - this fundamental dramatic act of God in his freedom - becomes the undramatic, permanent, essential constitution of a God who ... is (and always has been) the eternally radiant 'Sun of Goodness'. Accordingly, the picture of man is primarily determined, not by his frail finitude in which, nonetheless, he must accomplish things of ultimate value, but by a resignation with which he commends himself to the unfathomable mystery of his being.<sup>24</sup>

Balthasar does not confront Rahner by name here, although he does so frequently in more ephemeral writings and particularly in *The Moment of Christian Witness*, where he makes critical reference to Rahner's understanding of Christ as 'the unique *supreme* case of the essential performance of human reality.'<sup>25</sup> Balthasar disputes this theology as dramatic anthropology. Its impropriety lies in its essentialisation of the performance of God and humanity - God, transcendentally and humanity, existentially. This is reductive of the dramatic encounter between them. It reduces decision in Christ, primarily from God to humans and responsively from humans to God, to a point at which it is no longer necessary. For, in Rahner's scheme 'man does not owe his redemption actually to Christ, but to the eternal saving will of God, which is made manifest to him in the life of Christ.'<sup>26</sup> Here, Balthasar expresses the division between himself and Rahner in terms of performance. Fundamentally, what is at stake is the relation between nature and grace: Balthasar perceives in Rahner's theology a conception of the natural separable from decisive, relational grace and seeking to set the terms for that grace. Balthasar opposes any governance of theology by natural, humanistic and evolutionary, conceptions of anthropology. He forwards instead a theology of humanity as fragmentarily natural, to be taken graciously into Christological integration.

Balthasar considered the Rahnerian mainstream to have laudably universalist aims. Precisely in this regard, however, he found the methodology fundamentally

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<sup>24</sup> TD4, p. 76

<sup>25</sup> Karl Rahner quoted Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p.105

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar, *Christian Witness*, p.109

mistaken. He disputed the claim, which he saw as integral to Rahner's universalism, that soteriologically significant truth could be achieved formally without being known Christically: 'there is no such thing as an anonymous Christian, no matter how many other men – hopefully all! – attain salvation through the grace of Christ.'<sup>27</sup> Rejecting the suggestion that knowledge and achievement of truth could be separable, Balthasar understood creation as natural revelation, oriented towards grace with an orientation that could only be known and lived through grace. This critique of Rahner considers him to have forged an unacceptable distinction between living truthfully and living in grace and so unacceptably weakened the import of the latter. For Balthasar, only the explicitly Christian can do either: it is not possible to live a truthful spirituality without a Christian vocabulary, for thought and action must be combined in prayerful living in Christ as a function of revelation and grace. Balthasar does not dispute the creaturely orientation towards grace. It gives him theological resources. Yet, on Balthasar's view, Rahner's transcendental theology inverts the process of resourcing: the Incarnation becomes an exemplary resource for a purportedly broader anthropological reality. Balthasar would rather work from the Incarnation's specifics, positioning anthropological resources as 'emanations from the realm of genuine theology.'<sup>28</sup> Humanity, outside of the relationship with God in Christ, may be structurally oriented towards grace. Only the Christian, however, is theologically addressed, by the Word who - in giving himself - gives life's ultimate context. This being so, it makes no sense to say that a person appreciates the Word of God if he 'only hears the sound of the word, the ordinary human meaning it bears in the average framework of religion.'<sup>29</sup> Theology cannot be resourced from religious, spiritual or transcendental interpretations of extra-theological disciplines. For contact from and with God in Christ governs its truth. It is a relational reality that cannot be understood generically, even as an essential human performance, no matter how many more people it may thus appear to have included within its scope. Balthasar's Christian universalism requires more of the theologian: not to evidence a philosophical comparability between other ways of life and the Christian but to achieve a dramatic integration of those other ways of life so that they come to bear the name of specifically Christian reality. In Balthasar's

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<sup>27</sup> Balthasar, 'In Retrospect', p.201

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone*, p.124

<sup>29</sup> Balthasar quoted Victoria S. Harrison, 'Homo Orans: von Balthasar's Christocentric Philosophical Anthropology', *Heythrop Journal* 40.2 (1999), p.282

theological method, it is integration of all within particular Christian theological life that will achieve Christian universalism. Without this particular and universal aim, and '[w]hen everything goes well with anonymity, it is hard to see why a person should still be a name-bearing Christian.'<sup>30</sup>

### 1.13: Theological Style

Balthasar's method is not one in which a universal common ground supports the general ultimacy of Christian truth but rather one in which particular Christian acts and interpretations can integrate within themselves all others. This method fosters an expansively interior theological style: interior in that it remains focused on the truth of Christ's presence in the Church; expansively as by doing so it has implications for all reality. This written style complements a theological life style, both demanding 'the greatest possible radiance in the world by virtue of the closest possible following of Christ.'<sup>31</sup> Reflecting on his career, Balthasar considered there to be a 'connection between style and truth.'<sup>32</sup> Angelo Scola employs style as an interpretative theme for studying Balthasar, defining it as 'the expression of the impression ... which a form makes.'<sup>33</sup> Theological style is most intimately connected with truth because of the ultimate status of its in-formation. This in-formation is Christologically received in contemplation, adoration and obedience. Balthasar attempts theology in this style, which should channel active, relational grace, and by its implications discover the contours of the natural.

Subject to the God who encounters humanity in Christ, theological discourse is styled by prayerful contemplation, 'the only realistic attitude before the mystery.'<sup>34</sup> In John O'Donnell's interpretation, theology as contemplative is 'reflection on what has been seen by the eyes of faith.'<sup>35</sup> As such, theological contemplation is not a vague

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<sup>30</sup> Balthasar, 'In Retrospect', p.201

<sup>31</sup> Balthasar, 'In Retrospect', p.201

<sup>32</sup> Balthasar, 'Another Ten Years', p.223

<sup>33</sup> Scola, *Balthasar*, p.2

<sup>34</sup> Balthasar quoted Antonio Sicari, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Theology and Holiness' in (ed.) David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p.129

<sup>35</sup> John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p.19

spirituality. It is a specific response to the event of revelation in Christ. So it is neither purely subjective, nor purely objective. Rather it is a 'convergent moment',<sup>36</sup> overcoming distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity as the theologian is taken up into a relational truth.

Balthasar described contemplation's two roots as adoration and obedience. Adoration allows the theologian 'to see, in faith, the heavens opened' and obedience 'frees [him] to understand the truth.'<sup>37</sup> These roots grow exclusively from the revealed Form of Christ. Theology must develop from the Incarnation, the ultimate event. It must not view incarnation through preconceived philosophical, ethical, existential (or, indeed, dramatic) categories. Such categories can only be used as they are implied by the Incarnation itself. This resonates in Balthasar's well-known call for saintly, kneeling theologians.

In prayer he draws close to the mystery... In prayer he receives the supernatural revelation of God in Christ and so comes to see that God's natural revelation in creation and man's reason is also revelation in the true sense and it must be approached in the same spirit as the historical revelation itself – on one's knees.<sup>38</sup>

Prayerful adoration of both supernatural and natural revelation informs theological style. It debars theology from adopting a vaguely spiritual aura for it involves the reception of the impression of a Form, the Person of Christ. It also debars theology from appreciating its truth as reducible to categories in any other discourse. The style can continually be received but never owned. Theological obedience is the development of this reception in order to contribute in 'tradition that is truly contemporary.' This involves 'embracing theology as a living thing', entering the theological context, the Church, and reflectively renewing it.<sup>39</sup> The contemplative Christian theologian – in adoration and obedience – is 'complete', with lived

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<sup>36</sup> Aidan Nichols, 'Balthasar and his Christology', *New Blackfriars* 66 (1985), p.319

<sup>37</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'The Place of Theology', in *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*, trans. A.V. Littledale (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p.14

<sup>38</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity', in *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*, trans. A.V. Littledale (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p.83

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar, 'Place of Theology', p.22

spirituality and rigorous theology combined.<sup>40</sup> In true theological style, ‘something in the logic of the object testified to, above all the cross and resurrection of Christ, colors the logic of the expression.’<sup>41</sup> This logic, this style, of the particular act of Christ’s death and resurrection is life’s universal style. For the cross and resurrection is the pivotal action in a universal drama set up for it by God. Thus theology is coloured true in a relational truth: it expresses a particular formed encounter with God in Christ of such significance as to orientate the person in the universe of encounters and to have the potential to draw all encounters within itself. Again, it is the particular that has universal purchase.

Balthasar uses pouring as a metaphor for theological style. Together with doctrine and the sacraments, it is

an active agency for pouring the infinite riches of divine truth into the finite vessels in which revelation is given to us, so that the believer may be made capable of encountering this infinity in adoration and ... obedience.<sup>42</sup>

In describing theology as an active agency he is suggesting something participative: the ultimate active agency is Trinitarian Incarnation and this resonates in and through the successful theologian’s work. Theology should express the Glory of God and the corporate theological endeavour of the Church should respond to the thrust of the event of the Incarnation as this event, itself and solely, provides personal experience of humankind’s orientation towards grace. Balthasar is unequivocal about the superior judgement of theology: ‘theology is the expression of the verdict passed by the divine Word over the human.’<sup>43</sup> This claim must be understood in relation to his conception of theology as participative. It is not propositional judging, as if one sentence were to scold another. It is rather a judgement of lived perspective in which the fullness of the theological outlook criticises and remoulds the distortions of the purely human. Pure is a critical term in Balthasar’s vocabulary: human structures distort Christian reality if

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<sup>40</sup> Balthasar, ‘Theology and Sanctity’, p.57

<sup>41</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘The Implications of the Word’, in *Word and Revelation: Essays in Theology I*, trans. A.V. Littledale (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p.63

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar, ‘Place of Theology’, p.12

<sup>43</sup> Balthasar, ‘Place of Theology’, p.16

they are set up as pure, as independent of Christian theological reality. Balthasar's theology judges all human expressions that occur non-theologically, outwith the truth of God in Christ. It does not show how they in fact are theological, for the barrier erected by lack of relationship with God means that they are not, but it shows that they could be and pre-figures that reality in refashioned use. Judgement, in this regard, is one-way. '[T]hose whose thinking moves in this circle between love and gift cannot be judged by the outsider, though they themselves are able to judge the outsider'. Yet, if theology is styled proportionately to and responsively in the Incarnation, then the purchase grace has on nature renders 'this apparently closed circle ... the most vast and open of all circles.'<sup>44</sup>

What I call "style" is not necessarily culturally conditioned. It is a charisma – not deducible systematically from anything – which raises our thoughts to God's glory.<sup>45</sup>

Antonio Sicari describes the radical implications of Balthasar's theological style: formed by a 'speaking-listening' dynamic, 'the Christ-disciple, Christ-community, and Christ-hagiographer relation, is not only the extrinsic condition of revelation but also the "content" of revelation, a content into which each one should enter who wishes to treat of revelation as such.'<sup>46</sup> Theologians do not need to forge a link between grace and nature – revealed framework and normal framework. In Christ the normal, natural realm is taken up into revealed truth. Living relationally in truth, theologians use natural concepts, not linking them to revealed truth but superseding their purported pure normality, fashioning them as they are in revealed truth. Theologians speak from within the truth: because it is ultimate any categories are open to fashioning according to the truth; because it is relational the categories employed will differ according to context and gift. Balthasar desires, many would say achieves, a confident, all-embracing theological style that sets out its own parameters, well resourced, contemporary and articulate but not enthralled in its engagement with the concepts of its time.

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<sup>44</sup> Balthasar quoted Pedro Escobar, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: Christo-logian', *Communio* 2.3 (1975), pp.315-316

<sup>45</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Response to My Critics', *Communio* 5.1 (1978), p.71

<sup>46</sup> Sicari, 'Theology and Holiness', p.131

### 1.14: Theological Dialogues with Theatre

Balthasar's theological method and style are angled so as to contribute to theological life, with theological life understood as the ultimate lived perspective in which all could gather by joining it personally but which is not accessible naturally to all. Such theology has implications for dialogue with those who do not share such a life. As with Balthasar's method and style, his concept of dialogue will not be evaluated against theological alternatives in this thesis. Rather, I will place Balthasar's understanding of dialogue in the context of his theology, particularly his Theological Dramatics. After considering this context, I will examine particular dialogues with twentieth-century theatre before drawing together Balthasar's understanding of theologically dramatic dialogue. Dialogues with theatre are particularly appropriate for a discussion of Balthasar's theological dialogues' being dramatic. I will not detail his work on non-Christian religions, although this has been the focus of most debate over Balthasar's approach to dialogue.<sup>47</sup> However, my discussion will reflect Balthasar's 'doctrinal framework' for 'the dialogue with the non-Christian religions and the various forms of atheism'<sup>48</sup> especially in respect to his dialogical encounters with theatre practitioners.

Balthasar was more studied in literature and the arts than in world religions and his dialogues with culture were not only with theatre practitioners, although these are predominant in the Theological Dramatics, but also with poets, novelists, musicians and visual artists. Henri de Lubac described Balthasar as 'perhaps the most cultured man of our time.'<sup>49</sup> His breadth of learning in European culture is remarkable and his particular, universal method and style employs it to engender distinctively theological dialogues with cultural activities, including those of the theatre. His particularism is expressed by mounting many dialogues with individual practitioners over a generic

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<sup>47</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Response to my Critics', *Communio* 5.1 (1978), 69-76 and the preceding critical papers on dialogue with non-Christian religions. For more recent commentary see Bede McGregor, 'The Wider Ecumenism: Christian Prayer and Other Religions' in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ: A [sic] Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 193-212

<sup>48</sup> Henri de Lubac quoted McGregor, 'Wider Ecumenism', p.193

<sup>49</sup> Henri de Lubac quoted Henrici, 'Education', p.12

dialogue with dramatic trends. A universal determination is clear in his belief that theological dialogue with any particular theatrical activity will enable its interpretation within the ultimate theological framework. In this way, 'Balthasar penetrates the cultural life of Europe, not in order to find a residual Christianity, but in a belief that it must be able to be 'brought home' in terms of the Christian revelation.'<sup>50</sup> Dialogues will not access a shared, impartial reality but will enable the particular, limited cultural activity to be interpreted from within the particular, ultimate theological truth.

Thomas Norris and John O'Donnell are two Christian theologians who praise Balthasar's approach to and practice of theological dialogue with culture. I shall introduce these two aspects, the second from Norris and the first from O'Donnell. Norris finds one of Balthasar's seven theological 'movements' to be 'Theology in Dialogue with Culture.'<sup>51</sup> He claims that Balthasar

effectively appropriated the rich legacy of ... the whole of European culture, Christian and pagan, ancient and modern. ... [H]e conducted an incomparable odyssey through the European anthology. ... This literary ... attainment equipped him for an in-depth dialogue between faith and culture, between the once-for-all revelation of God's glory in the *Gestalt* of Christ on the one hand, and, on the other, the actual culture of the West.<sup>52</sup>

It is not only the breadth of Balthasar's cultural awareness that Norris admires but his practice of dialogue with culture, which is such that his work 'shows on every page this dialogical character.'<sup>53</sup> Even in a study of only Balthasar's Theological Dramatics I must be very selective in order to consider particular dialogues with 'actual culture'. Just its 648-page literary prolegomena is brimming with authors, directors, actors and plays from Ancient Greece to Modern Europe: all, to use Norris's terms again, 'appropriated' in dialogical relation to 'once-for-all revelation.' This breadth allows so many dialogues with specific dramatic styles and practitioners. It does not resort to

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<sup>50</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Foreword', in John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: Collins, 1990), p.ix

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Norris, 'The Symphonic Unity of His Theology: An Overview', in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ: A [sic] introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p.214

<sup>52</sup> Norris, 'Symphonic Unity', pp.245-246

<sup>53</sup> Norris, 'Symphonic Unity,' p.246

interpreting revelation with respect to a general notion of the essential human drama. Rather it gathers particular dramatic activities within revelation understood as the ultimate dramatic activity. Such an approach is admired as one in which theologians, in different times and different places, can continue dialogues with culture while maintaining the primacy of theological truth. O'Donnell praises it as Balthasar's 'dialogue through confrontation'<sup>54</sup>: an ecumenical society, which is 'not the eirenic ecumenism of watering down the truth but the serious confrontation of competing claims.'<sup>55</sup> Any dialogue supposes competition which itself supposes the potential victory of one united, catholic, horizon. And this fact is not hidden, but focused upon, in Balthasar's confrontational ecumenism. As O'Donnell puts it, echoing Balthasar, there is in life 'a choice of competing claims to catholicity and these claims can be reduced to two: either ... atheism ... or the God of Jesus Christ' and in theological dialogue the latter should show itself to be the greater perspective.<sup>56</sup> Balthasar understands dialogue as the confrontation of lived perspectives and practices dialogue from the ultimate lived perspective. This study will probe his theological dialogues with twentieth-century theatre.

A theological intuition of what drama is propels Balthasar into his particular dialogues with theatre practitioners and, in the second chapter, I will outline the structure of his *Theological Dramatics* and explain the centrality of the dramatic for his theology, showing how he gathers both anthropology and soteriology into a dramatic Christological whole. Life is imaged as a Christological relational and ontological dramatic reality, what Balthasar calls *theo-drama*. Only appreciable soteriologically, a Christocentric understanding of what drama is, and how it happens anthropologically, is the perspective from which Balthasar both accounts for and dialogues with the work of theatre practitioners.

In order to understand Balthasar's approach to dialogues with theatre, my third chapter will present Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutic: Balthasar interprets human dramatic expression, as symbolised in the theatre, as internally relative to God's

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<sup>54</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.15

<sup>55</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.14

<sup>56</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.16

ultimate dramatic expression in Christ. His methodology asserts that what it is to be dramatic, and thus the standard for dramatic activity, is ultimately only appreciable theologically. This plays out in a theatrical vocabulary, used on theological terms, that engenders a hermeneutic appropriation of theatre practice as a theological resource. As a participant in Christian theodramatic ontology, Balthasar can interpret theatre practitioners with a judgemental inclusion by which not only their theological status but also their dramatic potential is exposed.

In the fourth chapter, I will explain how this theodramatic hermeneutic informs Balthasar's specific dialogues with twentieth-century theatre with a model of three integrated dimensions to Balthasar's understanding of life as drama: natural-human, ecclesial-personal and final-eschatological. Here I focus on twentieth-century theatre and analyse the key term post-Christian, arguing that these three dimensions require twentieth-century theatre, in as much as it is dramatic, to be post-Christian. Balthasar finds all dramatic activity after the Incarnation relative to the ultimate Christian drama; in our post-Christian era the link is either protest or parody. As Balthasar's dialogues with twentieth-century theatre are so wide-ranging and numerous, and as direction is central to Balthasar's vocabulary of human theatre practice as analogous to the divine, I will consider only his dialogues with theatre directors, specifically Edward Gordon Craig, Bertolt Brecht and Constantin Stanislavsky. The dramatic standard for direction is set theologically and I will explain how Balthasar uses it to judge these practitioners with whom he dialogues. The predicaments in which he places them are theologically derived predicaments resultant on their work's being symbolic of post-Christian drama.

Craig, Brecht and Stanislavsky only appear costumed by Balthasar's dialogue with them. But my fifth chapter addresses one particular dialogue with a theatre director, that with Peter Brook. And in it I explore Brook's theatrical understanding of life as drama, of the immediate quality of theatre and of life, from Brook's own reflections before considering Balthasar's interpretation. I set Balthasar's theological dramatic dialogue with Brook's theatre alongside Brook's theatrical rhetorical employment of Christian imagery. More detailed consideration of Brook's rhetoric of incarnation and grace will raise some difficulties for theological interpretations of Brook's work. And Balthasar's dialogue with Brook will be analysed as a selective

appropriation that depends on interpreting Brook within the theodramatic context before entering into a critical dialogue with the stance evident in that interpretation.

These chapters will show, if implicitly, that I consider Norris's and O'Donnell's praise for Balthasar's approach to and practice of theological dialogue to be valid exegetically: fairly indicating what Balthasar offers as a theological account of drama and practices in dialogue with particular theatre practitioners. I shall conclude, in the sixth chapter, by drawing together the understanding of how dramatic dialogue works implied by Balthasar's theological dramatic dialogues with theatre. I shall consider the achievement of Balthasar's dialogues, the potential for continuing dialogues following after Balthasar and the extent to which Balthasar's selective appropriation of theatre directors as post-Christian in as much as they are dramatic can be said to involve genuine dialogue with twentieth-century theatre.

## **2: BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGICAL DRAMATICS**

### **2.1: THEOLOGICAL DRAMATIC INTUITION**

Balthasar's work is predicated on a theological dramatic intuition, understanding human life as dramatic in relation to a theologically derived appreciation of what drama ultimately is. The Theological Dramatics is structured in order to define human drama from within divine drama. While Balthasar considers that all human life is dramatic, the centrality of this concept in his work is not suggestive of any generic human capacity for drama independent of the particular divine dramatic action. Rather, human life as drama is a reality only fully appreciable as an implication of the prior divine dramatic life. I shall discuss the structure of Balthasar's Theological Dramatics and the centrality of the dramatic in his work in order to outline Balthasar's theological dramatic intuition, drawing especially on Rowan Williams's account of the importance of drama for Balthasar.

#### **2.11: The Structure of the Dramatics**

Balthasar's theological trilogy of Aesthetics, Dramatics and Logic was his life's main work; the first volume of the Aesthetics was completed in 1961 and a summary epilogue appeared in 1987.<sup>1</sup> Balthasar wrote many more popular works, meditations and sermons and essays on theological methodology. Some of these support sections of the trilogy, being written alongside them and presenting their themes in more manageable proportions. The Dramatics' firmest support comes from *Mysterium Paschale*,<sup>2</sup> a meditation on the Easter mystery that employs many of Balthasar's dramatic insights.

The Theological Dramatics has five volumes. TD1 is a literary *Prolegomena*, in which Balthasar attempts to 'elaborate a 'dramatic instrumentation' of the literary and lived theatre, and thus of life itself, in order to prepare images and concepts with which

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<sup>1</sup> Henrici, 'Sketch', pp.33-34

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Theology of The Easter Mystery*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990)

one can then work (with an adequate transposition).<sup>3</sup> A dramatic sense of life pervades the theology of the Dramatics. Yet, while connections can be drawn, there remains a clear distinction between the prolegomena and the four further volumes, in that the former is ‘predominantly literary’ and the latter ‘theological’.<sup>4</sup> It becomes clear that Balthasar’s literary understanding of the dramatic depends on his theological understanding: human drama is ultimately intelligible only as an implication of God’s drama. In TD2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, Balthasar explains why he takes a dramatic approach in theology and introduces life’s dramatic characters. The volume’s impression, in Angelo Scola’s terms, is of ‘a dramatic quality ... revealed even *in naturabilis*’<sup>5</sup> and it concludes with, what Aidan Nichols considers to be ‘a wonderfully compact theology of man – pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian.’<sup>6</sup> Balthasar offers an account of humankind’s dramatic predicament in which I find three shared features of life and drama particularly important. They both lay a claim on the spectator and demand meaningful engaged response. They each involve specific actions and over-arching horizons. They are corporate; inter-personal relations are essential to them. This second volume works on the understanding that the reason for and the purpose of life’s dramatic situation lie in the true drama – not the natural drama of *Man in God*, but the revealed drama of *Persons in Christ*, the title of TD3. While TD2 was anthropologically centred, TD3 treats Christology and reveals the rationale for the dramatic anthropology proposed previously. Balthasar’s worry about both volumes was that they approach the characters of the drama of God with humanity artificially, separated from the action: for him the reality can only truly be appreciated in the event. TD4, consequently, relates *The Action* of salvation. It moves away from conceptual themes to focus on the deeds of God in Christ as ‘a dramatic soteriology in which the cross, descent into hell and resurrection constitute a Paschal Mystery which affects not just the human struggle ... but also the very inner life of God.’<sup>7</sup> TD5 is eschatological.

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<sup>3</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.225

<sup>4</sup> TD2, p.9

<sup>5</sup> Scola, *Balthasar*, p.41

<sup>6</sup> Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p.81

<sup>7</sup> Gerard O’Hanlon, ‘Theological Dramatics’, in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Glory of the Lord: A [sic] Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p.97

Traditions of final repose and final vision are dramatically reoriented as *The Last Act*. The consummation of dramatic life is itself dramatic as ‘the world acquires an inward share in the divine exchange of life.’<sup>8</sup> In this way, Balthasar’s *Theological Dramatics* begins with a literary study of the theatre as symbol of life’s natural drama, continues through the characters and events of God’s action with people and concludes with a vision of the eschatological stage. Yet, Balthasar’s theological imagination proceeds from the end, a fact implicit throughout and signalled in the volumes’ various introductions. Life’s natural drama and its symbol, the theatre, are what they are as implications of the divine drama. Nature is grounded in grace and both are completed eschatologically.

The *Theological Dramatics* is more closely co-ordinated than this summary suggests. Each volume has sections divided into sub-sections, which then include chapters and sub-chapters. Its massive yet intricate structure impresses upon readers both a concern for the full scope of Christian theology – anthropology; Christology; soteriology; eschatology – and a belief that the particular dramatic tensions of Christian truth uniquely encompass the particular tensions of life’s dramas.

## 2.12: The Centrality of the Dramatic

Balthasar published three retrospectives on his theological work. The first of these was on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.<sup>9</sup> The second appeared in 1975, while the *Dramatics* was being completed and the *Logic* contemplated.<sup>10</sup> And, shortly before his death in 1988, he wrote a résumé for *Communio*.<sup>11</sup> Angelo Scola observes that ‘Balthasar’s concern in these [retrospective] writings is ... to explain the underlying logic which informs his work’<sup>12</sup> and in them the centrality of the dramatic is clear. He insists that the form of Christ is not ‘just to be ‘contemplated’ and ‘perceived’ as if God were ‘a solitary actor.’ Rather, ‘from the beginning [God] has provided for a play

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<sup>8</sup> TD5, p.521

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar, ‘In Retrospect’, pp.194-221

<sup>10</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, pp.222-233

<sup>11</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘A Résumé of My Thought’, in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life And Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 1-5

<sup>12</sup> Scola, *Balthasar*, p.13

in which we must all share.’<sup>13</sup> A dramatic style, in which the personal intuition of contemplation of the form of Christ is transposed as a universal, shared drama, is thus central to Balthasar’s theology. In 1975, he described the completed Aesthetics as the ‘prelude’ and the imagined Logic as ‘reflection’ with respect to the Dramatics.<sup>14</sup> The Dramatics stands between aesthetics and logic in his trilogy of

Theo-phany = Aesthetics

Theo-praxy = Dramatic theory

Theo-logy = Logic.

... [T]hree parts [that] cannot be totally separated from one another.<sup>15</sup>

On the right of each equation are the disciplines that each section of the trilogy radicalises as theological implications. Surrounding the Theological Dramatics, then, is aesthetics radicalised as theo-phany and logic radicalised as theo-logy.

Theo-phany is the glory of God and aesthetics is radicalised in the face of this, primarily by means of an analogy of formation with respect to the human and the divine.

Form is a totality of parts and elements that is conceived as ... standing in itself, yet requiring for its preservation not only an environment but ultimately the whole of being. The finite form is a contracted presentation of infinite being. By gathering together, unifying and ruling its parts it enables them to transcend towards the infinite.<sup>16</sup>

Thus aesthetic formation suggests an ultimate contraction by which reality is fully expressed but not contained. Such contraction cannot be achieved humanly but in it humanity is formed as creation of God in Christ. This ultimate formation overflows in the Incarnation, ‘an event which in a supereminent sense can be called an ‘appearance’

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<sup>13</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.225

<sup>14</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, pp.224-226

<sup>15</sup> TD1, p.15

<sup>16</sup> Balthasar quoted Jeffrey Kay, *Theological Aesthetics: The Role of Aesthetics in the Theological Method of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975), p.3

and an ‘epiphany.’<sup>17</sup> Quash and Riches present the two key analogous factors here: form is ‘self-disclosing and enrapturing.’<sup>18</sup> Beauty is not given to a form but breaks out from it in self-disclosure and thus forms have an attractive power. Response to a form’s beauty, as enrapture, can allow neither objective nor subjective detachment, for it involves being taken in to the form’s engaging power. God’s self-representation in the glorious form of Christ radicalises aesthetics in that it is the ultimate term of such attractiveness and engagement. The power of the form of Christ is the glory of God. As such it is structurally analogous to all aesthetic forms and uniquely, underivably incomparable in relation to them. Again analogously, Christian faith is a response to form such as ‘to be Christian is precisely a form.’<sup>19</sup> So the Christian form of life, internally related to Christ as form of God, stands among particular aesthetic responses but with a purchase uniquely universal. Balthasar operates with two modes of theological aesthetics, in respect to this Christian formation according to the form of Christ: perception of the form in vision and participation in the form in rapture.<sup>20</sup> And ‘the act of ‘perception’ is only the first step; it necessarily moves to the state of ‘being enraptured.’<sup>21</sup> Enrapture, necessarily entailed by the Aesthetics, presses towards the Dramatics as it transports one’s perception into ‘a drama already begun’ – one, indeed, a precondition of the perception itself. Theologians, expositors of ‘the encountering reality’, ‘must ... be drawn into its dramatic arena’ in order truly to appreciate its form or express its truth.’<sup>22</sup> Theo-logy, then, is the expression of God’s truth and logic is radicalised as such through revelation. In the Theological Logic,

[w]hat strikes us straightaway at the beginning of the second volume is the leap from a philosophical account of truth to the astounding claim of Christ: ‘I am the truth’ (*John* 15:6). Such a staggering claim can only be accepted on the basis of God’s revelation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of The Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. I: Seeing The Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), p.119

<sup>18</sup> Riches and Quash, ‘Balthasar’, p.138

<sup>19</sup> Balthasar, *Glory: I*, p.28

<sup>20</sup> See Balthasar, *Glory: I*, p.125.

<sup>21</sup> Kehl, ‘Portrait’, p.47

<sup>22</sup> TD1, p.15

<sup>23</sup> John O’Donnell, ‘The Logic of Divine Glory’, in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris (eds.), *The Beauty of Christ: A [sic] Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p.164.

This leap is made primarily from the Divine side, in the Person of the Spirit guiding the Church in truth. And theological truth can only be expressed having ‘experienced the dynamism of the revelation event.’ Following the Dramatics, the Logic considers the question, ‘how can human word and life witness credibly to this truth of God?’ This is a matter of showing how, through the Spirit, truth’s ‘philosophical form’ can ‘open itself to the incarnate form of Christ’s truth.’<sup>24</sup> As such, theo-logy is a reflective function of God’s dramatic engagement with humankind and not a progressive development from it.

Central to the trilogy and holding together the Aesthetics and the Logic, the Dramatics radicalises dramatic theory as theo-praxy. It provides ‘a network of concepts and images’ to enable the theologian to ‘hold fast’ in the dramatic arena of the divine action which has encountered him.<sup>25</sup> In this network, the theologian remains within ‘the central event: the encounter, in creation and history, between infinite divine freedom and finite human freedom.’<sup>26</sup> Theological dramatic theory will not enable a person to enter the arena. Only God’s encounter with humanity, graciously received, locates the person within life’s central event, the encounter between infinite and finite freedom that is ‘simply *good*.’<sup>27</sup> Here the ultimate activity is God’s theo-praxis and the person’s activity is responsive. The Dramatics provides but terminology to point out the contours of this event. It radicalises a vocabulary of praxis, of human dramatic interaction, by using it in respect to drama’s ultimate term, God’s inter-action with people.

Balthasar’s has been described as a project in which ‘all lines converge on *drama* as a consummate form of artistic expression.’<sup>28</sup> This is reflected in the three lines of aesthetics, dramatics and logic and also true in respect to the strands of theological thought so difficult for the contemporary writer to bind together. Balthasar highlights nine ‘trends of modern theology’, which suggest a theological need for a

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<sup>24</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.218

<sup>25</sup> TD1, p.17

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.224

<sup>27</sup> TD1, p.18

<sup>28</sup> J.B. Quash, ‘Between the Brutely Given and the Brutally Banally Free’: von Balthasar’s Theology of Drama in Dialogue with Hegel’, *Modern Theology* 13.3 (1997), p. 293

dramatic approach.<sup>29</sup> The ninth trend, 'freedom and evil', poses a question that pervades the Dramatics. 'What is the relationship between divine and human freedom?'<sup>30</sup> Trends one to eight are event, history, orthopraxy, dialogue, political theology, futurism, function and role. Balthasar finds each trend fragmentary. He notes that theologians tend to abstract them from Christian life and treat one as a governing theme, arguing that thematisation of trends creates theology without a unified focus. Balthasar outlines the extent to which he does and does not support the importance of each trend, the latter corresponding with its invalidating another of the trends by being treated as a governing theme.<sup>31</sup> He suggests that theological dramatic theory can overcome this thematic incompatibility of theological trends. For

the ... Catholic 'And' ... is not ... compromise or syncretism but rather the power to unite, once again in a 'dramatic' fashion, what to men seems desperately fragmentary. Jesus Christ is, in this sense, the Catholic One: God and man.<sup>32</sup>

Only a dramatically catholic theology could unify all theological trends without evading the questions entailed by each and, indeed, focusing on the interrogative challenge of the ninth trend, the relationship between divine and human freedom, a Christological relationship of God and man.

It is important to note that, for Balthasar, the dramatic does not provide a super-theme in order to integrate theological trends. However, it may be seen as an integrative 'supra-form.'<sup>33</sup> On this distinction, the dramatic is not one integrative theological idea, but rather an integrative way of doing theology. Quash has outlined the conceptual background for Balthasar's understanding of the dramatic in this regard. Balthasar's three options are lyric, epic and dramatic. The lyric is an interiorising mode of human expression, where a subjective totality assumes the flux of life and makes a personally integrated, and purportedly whole, presentation of it. Conversely, epic is an

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<sup>29</sup> TD1, pp.25-50

<sup>30</sup> TD1, pp.48-50

<sup>31</sup> Nichols summarises Balthasar's 'Yes, but no' to each of the trends in this regard: *No Bloodless Myth*, pp.13ff

<sup>32</sup> Balthasar 'Another Ten Years', p.228

<sup>33</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.140

exteriorising mode, where objective distance arranges the flux of life making an externally organised, and purportedly whole, presentation of it. Drama 'joins the dimensions of the epic and the lyric into a new whole.' The dramatic, thus, is the true approach to life, integrating subjective and objective in a unity that neither could achieve alone and in which 'the entire person is laid claim to.' Consequently, only in a dramatic sense can 'a participatory truth can be born.'<sup>34</sup> There is something truthful about drama beyond the truth that might be claimed for either lyric or epic and so the dramatic is the consummate artistic form. As God involves Himself in dramatic activity, its formal truth receives its true substance and theological appreciation of this expresses what can only be considered as the true truth.

The dramatic approach is, for Balthasar, the proper approach for Christian theology, appropriate to Christian revelation. Its centres his trilogy, pointing out a dramatic appreciation of Christian reality prerequisite for theological contemplation (aesthetics) or reflection (logic). It also unites theological trends by reflecting the manner of their participation in Christ's truth, itself dramatic, rather than providing thematic combination. His dramatically styled theology

by way of opposition ... to the customary School theology which takes as its themes such abstract notions as 'redemption', 'justification' and so forth, ... takes as its chief object the personal *concretissimum* of the God man who suffers 'for me', 'for us', descends into hell and rises again.<sup>35</sup>

Balthasar recognises that thematic and dramatic theology can be complementary, but only if the latter is primary and themes are not abstracted from but participant in their personal, dramatic context, as mediated by Christian life. His Theological Dramatics should both reflect the ultimate drama and encourage its participative redramatisation:

I am trying to ... express [what the Christian knows] in a form in which all the dimensions and tensions of life remain present instead of being sublimated in the abstractions of a 'systematic' theology.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ben Quash, 'Drama and the Ends of Modernity', in Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash and Graham Ward, *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 139-171

<sup>35</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.36

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, 'Another Ten Years', p.226

### 2.13: Theological Dramatic Intuition

Rowan Williams has outlined ‘the importance to Balthasar of the category of *drama* in explicating his theology.’ He explains that the dramatic dimension renders knowledge ‘essentially participatory’. Thus the human apprehends its being inter-dependently and responds truthfully to its own situation not by rational abstraction but by ‘encounter with ‘the stranger’’ in the ‘contingencies of relationship and reaction’ that constitute ongoing participation in a greater whole. Here we have a dramatic anthropology: there is an ‘inbuilt tension’ between ‘the imposition of meaning and the creation of meaning.’ As participants in greater reality, humans are both subjects and originators of meaning, precisely as they are dramatically inter-related. If we mean anything dramatically, then, we must value ‘recognition of a place within a network of relations’, for meaning, truthful or otherwise, is a matter of ‘active and receptive encounter.’ Dramatic meaning might be opened onto dramatic soteriology, where we appreciate, and are, our selves properly positioned in relation to *the* networked horizon by encounter with God in Christ. Balthasar’s Christian theology, reflectively expressing dramatic salvation for dramatic humankind, thus makes a

call to human subjects to enter into the dialogue of God with ‘the other’, which is grounded in his own Trinitarian life, and enacted in the drama of Jesus and his Father, and the drama of Jesus and the human world.

This is ‘truth manifest in dialogue, in a narratively-structured interaction which resists theoretical reduction.’ Dramatic Christology recognises the ultimate position of Christ as specific enactment from the Trinitarian boundaries of dramatic reality. All in all, eschatologically, by dramatic anthropology, dramatic soteriology, and dramatic Christology, is intimated *the* drama,

at one level determined by the form of revelation as ... a final source of meaning, yet ... also indeterminate in so far as it can only be realised and re-presented in the world of historical contingency, diversity and liberty.

Balthasar's Theological Dramatics has universal hopes for the final ultimacy of the Christian drama, but this is only achieved as all participate in the drama; it has no general guarantee.<sup>37</sup>

Given Balthasar's theological methodology and in the light of Williams's account of the importance of drama in Balthasar's theology, I suggest that Balthasar operates with a theologically intuited understanding of the dramatic to which the drama of God with humankind in Christ is the ultimate term. Thus the ultimate mode of dramatic activity is that of God in Christ and human life is dramatic by its participation in that mode. As the theologian's intuitive sense of dramatic life is derived from the consummate drama of Christ, so it is seen that 'one divine drama includes both God and ourselves in a differentiated way.'<sup>38</sup> This is theo-drama: reality as appreciated by Balthasar's theological dramatic intuition. Theo-drama, God's drama with humanity in Christ, is both ontological, involving the full framework of human existence, and relational, fostering and reflecting particular forms of personal life.

## **2.2: THEO-DRAMA**

In his Theological Dramatics, Balthasar expounds theo-drama in order to guide and encourage participation. The understanding of such participation as particular participation in the ultimate horizon is reflected by gathering both anthropology and soteriology within a Christological ultimate dramatic reality. Both soteriology and anthropology are configured as dramatic and combine in a Christological dramatic register.

### **2.21: Dramatic Christology: the Mission**

Balthasar moves away from 'the kind of purely extrahistorical, static, "essence" Christology that sees itself as a complete and rounded "part one" smoothly unfolding into a soteriological "part two"' and instead proceeds 'from Christ's overt *function* to Christ's covert *being* (which the former presupposes).'<sup>39</sup> The basic concept in his

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<sup>37</sup> Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', pp. 26-27

<sup>38</sup> O'Hanlon, 'Theological Dramatics', p.95

<sup>39</sup> TD3, p.149

event-based Christological vocabulary is mission. Mission entails an absolute sense of being sent that is Christ's and is identical with his person, 'so that both together constitute God's exhaustive self-communication.'<sup>40</sup> Broadly, the human becomes established in and through those dynamic relations in which she is placed. Balthasar describes such establishment as role. Role-playing expresses the individual's need to 'find himself by finding the whole.'<sup>41</sup> This is the desire to situate oneself in a full, and fully relational, appreciation of one's reality. Role does not close life in explanation. Rather, it is a dynamic and situational desire to live truly, situated inter-relationally with a proper communal horizon. It is primordially Christ who experiences, and only Christ who has, his role truly as mission. Non-Christologically, role-takers may be able to establish a formal truthfulness. This, in Balthasar's eyes, is seen most clearly in the stage actor who believes in the truth of his role and develops skills in order to confront the audience with his embodiment of the character in the context of the play and through that the play's communal horizon. In doing this might manage to 'move freely in his chains'<sup>42</sup> and, perhaps even make a presentation that 'has a claim' as something 'that has taken place ... for me.'<sup>43</sup> But he is operating with constructed character and fictional horizon – against and in these fakes he is truthful. In this sense the actor's 'truthfulness is only formal.'<sup>44</sup> For his context is partial, set up by a playwright for the good of the art. It is only 'in Christ [that] the "I" and the role become uniquely and ineffably one.'<sup>45</sup> Outside Christ, role becomes character, not personality, through engagement with a limited horizon. There is, necessarily, a difference between the person and the role in our acting – a difference accepted by most stage professionals but few players on the arena of life. In his theodramatic life, Christ alone is engaged with the ultimate horizon as the true Person. His '[m]ission fulfils, even in a sense creates, identity.'<sup>46</sup> In it role taking is superseded and fulfilled: the provisional claim on

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<sup>40</sup> TD3, p.150

<sup>41</sup> TD1, p.482

<sup>42</sup> TD1, p.290

<sup>43</sup> TD1, p.113

<sup>44</sup> TD1, p.292

<sup>45</sup> TD1, pp.645-646

<sup>46</sup> Mark A. McIntosh, *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: University of Notre Dame, 1996), p.44

others inherent in role is universalised and the limited ability to move within the role's horizon is perfected.

[H]ere we are presented with Someone who never was, and never could have been anyone other than the One Sent. ... [T]his is a "role" that cannot be exchanged for any other role, since it is a "mission" that has ultimately fused with the person and become identical with him.<sup>47</sup>

Balthasar's focus on mission avoids the essentialist question of substance: how to relate Christ's human and divine natures so closely with each other as to indicate their identity. It does so by refusing to make a prerequisite move of divorcing the nature and function of Christ. Holding nature and function together in one breath – 'he who says Incarnation, says Cross'<sup>48</sup> – Balthasar seeks an account of the uniqueness of Christ in dynamic terms on which it is not his substance that must be qualitatively different from all others, but his time and his space. Importantly, this does not resolve the Christological paradox. It merely transposes it into a more appropriately theological, dramatic register. The division between divine and human nature becomes the event-ridden chasm of the hour. John's meditation on the hour is the still centre of Balthasar's world. It permeates Balthasar's spatio-temporal, dramatic representation of the incomprehensible unity of Christ's divinity and humanity in the uniqueness of his mission. In his hour, Christ's qualitatively different time, expressive of the uniqueness of his life's actions, combines with his qualitatively different space, expressive of the uniqueness of his life's horizon. Action and horizon are thereby central to Balthasar's dramatic vocabulary in upholding Christ's uniqueness through an event-based Christology.

### ***2.211: Christ: Unique Actions***

An event-based Christology is a relational Christology. Balthasar's dramatic mode reveals, to theologians, the truth of 'God's loving work ... not *behind* but *in* the personal.'<sup>49</sup> Actions make meaning in an inter-relational web. Christ's actions are uniquely effective, being personally transformative for all contacted by them within the

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<sup>47</sup> TD3, p.150

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.22

<sup>49</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.142

web and informative as its outline strands, holding its horizon. In this sense, Christian truth is unique drama more than unique story – the interplay of action and horizon associated with drama is realised ultimately by it. Balthasar’s dramatic theology of Christ’s life recognises this, and at no point more so than at Holy Saturday, with the descent to the dead. If such a thing were possible, this would be the hour of the hour: it reveals utterly hour-ridden divinity. Three aspects of Balthasar’s appreciation of Holy Saturday as the ‘term and aim of the Incarnation’<sup>50</sup> give a sense of what it means to be dramatically related to Christ’s as unique actions.<sup>51</sup> Firstly, Christ’s going to the dead is utter activity only as it is utter passivity and it is uniquely both free and obedient in holding this tension. Secondly, Christ’s passage through death is through an incomparable depth, an abyss uniquely accessible to him. Thirdly, this hell is uniquely a Christological state: ‘no-one else could experience it.’<sup>52</sup> The uniqueness of the action makes it uncompromisingly exclusive. Yet, for Balthasar, it is concomitantly universally inclusive. With regard to each aspect of Holy Saturday, it is in the dramatic mode of theological reflection that Balthasar claims such a paradox.

Balthasar links obedience and freedom, understanding freedom not as autonomous but as participative, as a part played in a drama. Christ’s ultimate role in mission involves both complete freedom and complete obedience and only through this particular ultimate actor could the world be theo-drama. The action revolves around Christ’s going to the dead, in which he is at once utterly active (free) and utterly passive (obedient). Balthasar finds the Gospel silence on Christ’s descent appropriate to ‘the fact of being with the unredeemed dead.’<sup>53</sup> A dramatic mode of response holds the space open here in a way that narrative alone could not. A narrative theology may collapse at such ultimate silence, when story cannot be sustained. A dramatically

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<sup>50</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.64

<sup>51</sup> Holy Saturday deserves special focus, although not fundamentally distinct from other events of Christ’s life. It is special within Balthasar’s thought as the terminal climax of the incarnate mission. It represents Balthasar’s distinctive contribution to theological reflection on the life of Christ, an insight achieved through his dramatic mode. The exclusivity-inclusivity paradox that I discuss in relation to Holy Saturday is present in Balthasar’s accounts of Good Friday, Easter Sunday – indeed all events of Christ’s life.

<sup>52</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.167

<sup>53</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.161. Balthasar does not disown the active tradition of Christ’s harrowing of hell but sees it as mythological, projecting the event’s significance into its narration.

relational theology can find in silence the ultimate *peripeteia* that, of its own power, sustains the drama. It is, then, theology as dramatic that properly reflects the relational ties that carry Christ through hopelessness in to hope. Writing on Christianity and tragedy, Stewart Sutherland argues that tragic texts seem both to deny creation, presentation and appreciation and yet to demand performance. He finds a paradox in tragedy's refusal to be trivialised by metaphysical explanation and its constraint towards a transcendent experience in its being performed.<sup>54</sup> On Balthasar's view, that paradox of dramatic possibility - of meaning across the irreducibly banal through transcendent engagement - is fulfilled in Christ's death: 'in the tomb, he is in solidarity with the dead. ... Each human being lies in his own tomb. And with this condition ... Jesus is at first truly solitary.'<sup>55</sup> This possibility, of a death exclusively solitary and in universal solidarity, receives, in Balthasar's contemplation of the Christological depth of hell, a distinctive dramatic interpretation.

Balthasar describes God, in and through Christ, as 'living the world round' and considers that it is only in this context that belief in God is viable.<sup>56</sup> Living the world round finds its term in Christ's going to the dead, an event that 'englobes' all human lives, all sufferings and all joys, in its ever-greater depth – an englobing that 'sets the limits to the extension of damnation.'<sup>57</sup> In the Dramatics, Christ's passage through an incomparable death is presented as a recapitulation. The 'infinite distance' Christ traverses from pre-existence with the Father to solidarity with the dead 'recapitulates the sinner's mode of alienation from God.' All sin, rebellion or incomprehension on the part of humanity in relation to God is moved through and contained in Christ's mission. A dramatic Christology reflects the relativised inclusion within this activity drawn from the infinite horizon of all forms of human alienation from God. For the passion and resurrection is the trajectory from God through death and to God.

In Christ, the life of the Trinity is bent on reconciling the world to God. In this perspective, therefore, if a man tries to exclude himself from it in order to be in his own private hell, he is

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<sup>54</sup> Stewart Sutherland, 'Christianity and Tragedy', *Literature and Theology* 4.2 (1990), 157-176

<sup>55</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, p. 149. The word quoted as solitary here appears as solidary (sic).

<sup>56</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Only If', in *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery*, trans. E.A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 135-153

<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Pachale*, p.167

still embraced by the curve of Christ's being. To that extent, he is still determined by its ... meaning.<sup>58</sup>

Here, death and resurrection, as unified event, form the outer thread of life's web, the being to which all other being is analogical. It is the dramatic understanding of event that carries this reflection for Balthasar. Life's dramatic space, in the sense of the range of possibilities for action, is not neutral. Rather, it is formed by its inter-related characters. It is in relation to the priority of this unique actor that Thomas Dalzell finds an analogy of proportionality operative in Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics*: human life and human situation is proportioned to and within the drama of Christ.<sup>59</sup> The world stage, as dramatic space, is held open by its characters and principally by the first actor, Christ, who reveals the full scope of the acting space of life in Balthasar's theology.

Balthasar develops this in the related third aspect of Holy Saturday: hell itself is not neutral because 'before Christ' – ontologically speaking – 'there could be no hell.'<sup>60</sup> It is not only for the events of Christ's mission to inform existence as its outer thread, but also to transform existential relations by its unique actions. In this further dramatic sense, Christ's descent to the dead, as experience of hell, is his own as a Christological state. It is his own because only the One sent could experience this terminus of mission. Yet, a dramatic understanding of personality assumes relationality. Although, therefore, no other person could experience the descent to death as hell in the way that Christ did, yet Christ's death is open to be shared in. It is for this reason that a 'shimmer of light ... has ever illuminated the abyss', because a possibility of dying in communion and thereby in love, faith and hope is offered by Christ's descent, revealed as an event for all.<sup>61</sup> This is a dramatic implication of the unique action. Christ's death is an action 'most lonely', uniquely his. 'Yet, since he was the absolute answer, he could make it the most *communicable* death: all can share in it.'<sup>62</sup> Humanity poses its longing for the absolute in its and through its finitude; it cannot, however find a

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<sup>58</sup> TD5, pp.303-304

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Dalzell, 'Lack of Social Drama in Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics*', *Theological Studies* 60 (1999), 457-475

<sup>60</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.177

<sup>61</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, p.168

<sup>62</sup> TD4, p.133

satisfactory way to write the absolute into the relative. It is Christ's dramatic action, human and divine, dying in solidarity with absurdity yet open to completion in resurrection, which writes fulfilment into humanity from beyond. The infinite takes on finite gestures and writes, with them, relationally – not an imposition but a drama. The relational, communicable quality of Christ's going to the dead cannot be appreciated divorced from its being, for Balthasar, a Trinitarian event. All being is communication and God's ultimate being is ultimate communication, achieving 'the incorporation of godforsakenness into the Trinitarian relation of love.'<sup>63</sup> Thus Trinitarian theology points out the co-ordinates of Christ's unique horizon.

### ***2.212: Christ: Unique Horizon***

The Son's Person forms a mission, a perfect form of the actor forming a role, and it is a function of successful dramatic role-taking to achieve a higher task – that of pointing out and simultaneously bodying forth a dramatic horizon. The Son does this as he reveals the Trinity. When he is born, according to Balthasar, 'the heavens open up in a new way and reveal a three-fold life in God.'<sup>64</sup> This revelation of the Trinity, as higher task of the Son's mission, is both personal and ultimate. It is *the* universal horizon and so inescapably ultimate. As horizons are relative to actions, it is also personal by opening itself to be engaged with. As with Christ's actions so with Christ's horizon, the ultimate paradox is that of reality, both exclusively utter and inclusively all embracing. The Trinity as Christ's relational horizon is understood through Balthasar's pneumatology and Mariology, enormous subjects that I can but introduce here. The key dramatic point is that role, even in its ultimate form as mission, requires the phenomenon of the 'awakening *Thou*.'<sup>65</sup> It is a prerequisite of a dramatic understanding of personal identity that it occurs contextually, informed by others. If rather neat as a reflection of Balthasar's mission-centred contemplation of Christ inseparably human

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<sup>63</sup> TD4, p.232

<sup>64</sup> Balthasar quoted John Saward, *The Mysteries of March: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Incarnation and Easter* (London: Collins, 1990), p.7

<sup>65</sup> Scola, *Balthasar*, p.76

and divine, it seems not too much of a systematisation to discuss one foundational thou on either side: Mary and the Spirit respectively.<sup>66</sup>

In the drama of human life, some others have more influence than other others and, on Balthasar's understanding, the mother influences most of all.<sup>67</sup> Thus, while Christ's identity in mission will be formed in engagement with all those with whom he has contact, Mary has a vital role in informing his mission. She reminds the theologian of the humanity of that mission. She also provides Balthasar with a link between Christ and the Church, albeit a link of no easy transition. Her 'Yes' at the annunciation indicates her passivity to the will of God in Christ – a state that is implied by the impossible birth from a passive womb, itself analogous to the resurrection from hell. Mary, thus, is the focus of a Christological constellation in Balthasar's theology. This constellation is the outworking of the Incarnation among humanity, a miraculous interruption of God's life in human lives. By joining the Incarnation, not by comparative understanding but by passive reception, the Marian response shows the way to the Church. And so Balthasar describes Mary's magnificat as 'containing the world's salvation.'<sup>68</sup> The horizon stands ultimate yet in relation to human response.

The Person of the Spirit, also, is Christ's awakening thou. Unlike the contact with Mary, the theologian cannot conceive of this awakening having a beginning. In the immanent Trinity, it is forever the essential communication between Father and Son that is the operation of the Holy Spirit. These are constitutive 'pure relations': 'a giving

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<sup>66</sup> Aidan Nichols reads the Dramatics' dual Christology of consciousness and Christology of being in this way: *No Bloodless Myth*, pp.101-102. The Son's being and consciousness reflect the formal continuity in distinction of his relationships within God and among humanity. His unpreconceivable (Balthasar's neologism) consciousness reflects his self-understanding as forging a human identity, one in which he knows that his death relates to the judgement of God and he knows his sufferings to be for the others with whom he is engaged. His being, in relation in God, grounds this consciousness in its ultimacy and its universality. Consciousness and being are inseparable in Christ, human and divine, but a sense that Christ has both human and divine engagements remains.

<sup>67</sup> See Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Literature and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), pp.137,171

<sup>68</sup> Balthasar quoted Seward, *March*, p.7

and receiving of the ... divine nature within the immanent Trinity.’<sup>69</sup> In the economic Trinity this relationality is expressed as mutual awakening. The prerequisite of interpersonal awakening for identity lies behind the Theological Dramatics’ novel concept of Trinitarian inversion.<sup>70</sup> Meditating on the Johannine Jesus, who in death bowed his head and gave up his Spirit,<sup>71</sup> Balthasar suggests that this is where the Spirit is returned to the Father from the Son, as the mission is finished when humiliation is glorification. The Spirit, the awakening Thou of the Son’s mission is lost, inverted, to become an awakening Thou to the Father – and, precisely in this loss, holds together the Persons across the abyss of hell. Inversion occurs in the economic Trinity. It does, however, flow from the immanent Trinity, a reality that Balthasar – a theologian known for ‘daring to speak, in human terms, of God as He is in Himself’<sup>72</sup> – takes on in TD5. He does so on the back of a theological giant, making a Trinitarian link between Aquinas’s concepts of *analogia entis* and of real distinction. The *analogia entis* is the sense in which human being exists analogously, in dependent participation, with relation to divine being. Real distinction arises from holding both to the unity of all existing beings, because they share in Being, and to the separate nature of each as a particular existing being, experienced as inability fully to communicate oneself to another. Balthasar integrates these two concepts, so that the mystery of real distinction is analogous to the divine mystery of difference in unity. The theologian realises that real distinction, as humankind’s ultimate puzzle to itself, is ‘the marking of the creatures’ being with a *Trinitarian* stamp.’<sup>73</sup> As God’s being *is* God’s constitutive mutual relations so, analogously, is human being. The immanent Trinity, creator and goal of human existence, is an unparalleled event that, in the economy of salvation, marks its mystery on humanity. In itself, it surpasses philosophical distinctions – such as (im)mutability or (im)passibility – in a constitutive “‘blood circulation’”, a dynamic of

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<sup>69</sup> Seward, *March*, p.29. This aspect of Balthasar’s thought has received detailed critical commentary in Gerard F. O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

<sup>70</sup> See TD3, p.183ff

<sup>71</sup> John 19.30

<sup>72</sup> Donald MacKinnon, ‘Some Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology with Special Reference to Theo-dramatik II/2, III and IV’, in John Riches (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), p.174

<sup>73</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.195

‘absolute freedom, love and gift.’<sup>74</sup> The immanent circulation presses towards the economic spilling. The relations with humanity given in the economy of salvation reveal relationality in the horizonless horizon of God with Godself.

Talk of God as immanent and economic Trinity is talk after the Christological event. Balthasar states that the immanent and the economic Trinity are not identical. Nonetheless, they are related as ‘the laws of the economic Trinity arise from the immanent Trinity’ and so Balthasar does talk, in dramatic terms, of the ‘immanent-economic Trinity.’<sup>75</sup> The immanent Trinity is played out in the economic Trinity. By his personalised, classical understanding of an analogy of being between God and humanity located in the Son, Balthasar requires one to join the reality of the Son’s life, contemplatively and ecclesially, in order to appreciate either the creatureliness of humankind or the Trinitarian God. It is in the Son’s personal exposition of God that the immanent and the economic Trinity are continuous with each other and that the Trinity engages with created reality. The immanent Trinity is ‘plenitude’ overflowing into the ‘specific narrative actions’ in which the theologian traces the economic Trinity.<sup>76</sup> This Christological claim to relation in distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity is best summarised through Balthasar’s use of the classical terms, *processio* and *missio*. *Processio* is the sending of the Son from the Father in the immanent Trinity and *missio* is the economic sending of the Son into time. Balthasar maintains a distinction between *processio* and *missio* against any view that the *missio* is God’s complete self-mediation into the structures of the world and against any view that *missio* is a requirement, perfecting *processio*. *Processio*, on Balthasar’s view, does not need *missio* but rather *missio* is an unnecessary expression of *processio* as a gift within God, between Father and Son through the Spirit. Thus, although it has a real part in God’s drama, humanity’s involvement in the Trinitarian life does not add anything to God because humanity itself was created in the Trinitarian relations and by them is given back to them. Furthermore, the economic Trinity, in *missio*, does not drain God into the world’s soil but rather its kenosis is analogous to the eternal kenosis – the Being in self-giving as inter-relational Persons – which is the immanent *processio*. It is this kenotic

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<sup>74</sup> TD5, p.245

<sup>75</sup> TD3, p.535

<sup>76</sup> Williams, ‘Foreword’, p.xix

analogy that maintains God's trace through the world as a relational trace. Godness is not, thereby, naturally there in the world. Rather it is available, embracing all but experienced only in relation with it, as a gift of grace. In line with Balthasar's consistent emphasis on greater dissimilarity as integral to analogical talk of God, it is not by deduction but by reception of its glory, that the contours of the Trinity can be glimpsed. The ultimate horizon of Trinitarian processions, opening itself graciously through a particular mission, creates free space for living in true dramatic inter-personal situations.<sup>77</sup> As the dramatically engaged ultimate horizon, the Trinity renders life theo-drama.

### ***2.213: Participative Christology***

Defending Balthasar's account of Trinitarian super-event against concern that it renders God unstable or variable, Edward Oakes suggests that 'underneath [such] language, we must be ready to hear the Anselmian logic of 'it had to be so.'<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Balthasar employs Anselm's classic argument, re-locating it in its original, Trinitarian context. He states that 'the drama of God and man shows itself to be something "than which nothing greater can be thought."<sup>79</sup> This applies to its dramatic events and to its, necessarily related, dramatic horizon, which 'will prove to be the widest possible horizon ... inasmuch as it is able to recapitulate and integrate within itself all the ways in which man can possibly view himself.'<sup>80</sup> By its dramatic instantiation this widest possible horizon proves itself, revealing in revealing itself the impossibility of any other horizon's being dramatically instantiated with its ontological scope and import. Inherently relational, such dramatic revelation 'can only be ... demonstrated from within itself' and 'can only be experienced as the *truth* if we share in performing it.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Guy Mansini's discussion ('Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity', *The Thomist* 64 (2000), 499-519) of the dramatic revelation of the immanent Trinity in the economic and its implications for the involvement of humanity in divine conversation deserves consideration that, as it is so recently published, I have not been able to give it.

<sup>78</sup> Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p.243

<sup>79</sup> TD2, p.118

<sup>80</sup> TD2, p.9

<sup>81</sup> TD1, pp.19-20

The Christian God, in his identity, is able to be the “One”, the “Other” and the “Unifying”; even at the formal level, therefore, he is the most dramatic of all gods. Furthermore, when he produces a world out of himself and takes responsibility for it, this process, corresponding to the archetype from which it springs, is bound to be sublimely dramatic.<sup>82</sup>

The Dramatics also supposes an Anselmian Psalmist’s fool. Balthasar comments at the outset, and with reference to the previous section of his trilogy, that ‘[a]nyone who took seriously the encounter described in the *Aesthetics* was obliged to see that the phenomenon presented to him was one in which he had always been involved.’<sup>83</sup> With innate ability to appreciate the aesthetic and received testimony to Trinitarian glory, only the fool could fail to see in his heart that he has always been part of creation’s response, on the world stage that is as it is because of Christ’s ultimate drama played in it. Such foolishness fails to appreciate the Incarnation as ‘a dramatic action ultimately without parallel, because it constitutes the ultimate drama.’<sup>84</sup>

Scola finds Balthasar’s Christology ‘*elliptical*’.<sup>85</sup> It remains obscure unless one receives a way in. There is something conical to the reality it shapes, grace relating to nature as ‘the apex that cannot be derived from the base.’<sup>86</sup> Thus natural Christology, from below, and revealed Christology, from above, cannot really be separated, for nature is always orientated within its gracious completion. Balthasar does Christology both from below in his Christology of consciousness and from above in his Christology of being: the theological task is to engage with the play from within. And Mark McIntosh uses this idea as an interpretative key, opening up Balthasar’s theology as ‘an analysis of Christ from the perspective of those men and women who have mystically entered *within* the life of Christ.’<sup>87</sup> To his mind, this represents a shift from ontological to obediencial terms, although I would think it was more a conjoining of the two. Most importantly, McIntosh shows how Balthasar’s Christology both holds open the human acting space and enables particular human actions. There is a Christological ‘nuptial pattern’ in and through which the world is created and in that there are Christological

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<sup>82</sup> TD3, p.531

<sup>83</sup> TD1, p.15

<sup>84</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.226

<sup>85</sup> Scola, *Balthasar*, p.66

<sup>86</sup> Balthasar quoted Riches and Quash, ‘Balthasar’, p.144

<sup>87</sup> McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, p.2

individual existences, those of the saints, which continue to unfold the life of Christ by ‘participation in the mysteries.’<sup>88</sup> It is, therefore, not metaphysics that links the universal and the particular but participation. This is a vital move in the emphasis on Christology as dramatic. Appreciation of the truth, thereby, is no general elevation but a share in God’s personal existence. To assist the Church in performing the life of Christ, Balthasar requires a participative reading that does not dress a vague original Jesus in the fashions of our day, but ‘articulate[s] an original “form”, identify[s] its significance and reveal[s] its true outlines.’<sup>89</sup> A true reading of Christ will, of course, have to employ human terms, but in doing so it will reveal, obedientially, Christ’s ontological significance. In the end, this task of truthfully reading the figure of Christ *within* the ellipse is itself a mystery.

## **2.22: Anthropology and Soteriology as Christological Implications**

Personalisation of truth on the understanding that true personal existence participates in the ultimate relational horizon is central to Balthasar’s anthropology and soteriology as implications of his Christology. Balthasar believed that ‘theology can only ever perform its task by circular repetitions of that which is ever greater. Parcelling it out in individual tracts is its certain death.’<sup>90</sup> Anthropologies and soteriologies are, to Balthasar, the classic deadly parcels of the religious tract writers. As a theologian, he places both firmly within the figure of Christ by implicating them in the ellipse of his dramatic, ontological and obediential, Christology. What humanity is dramatically and how humanity should be dramatically (anthropology and soteriology) are functions of this Christological reality and are consequently only fully appreciated by those in Christ.

### ***2.221: Dramatic Anthropology: the Play of Freedoms***

[I]f we want to ask about man’s “essence” we can do so only in the midst of his dramatic performance of existence. There is no other anthropology but the dramatic.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, pp.18-21

<sup>89</sup> TD3, p.64

<sup>90</sup> Balthasar quoted Seward, *March*, p.xvii

<sup>91</sup> TD2, p.335

Balthasar's dramatic anthropology responds to a central question of the Theological Dramatics: how can God's infinite freedom relate with human finite freedoms? In non-dramatic terms, theological anthropology may find it difficult to show how space can be left for meaningful human freedom when God is infinitely free. A dramatic theological anthropology, however, recognises that the 'creation of finite freedom by infinite freedom is the starting point of all theo-drama.'<sup>92</sup> Mutual infinite and finite freedom, unsustainable in static terms, is considered by Balthasar to be dramatically viable.

In TD1 Balthasar contends that, as the human predicament is dramatic, anthropology cannot be purely naturalistic. Balthasar questions, 'who am I?' A question that he claims people cannot get around for it itself holds the rifle. It presumes awareness both of finitude, my role as a part of life, and infinity, the incalculable expanse in which I play. On his account, there are two modes of inadequate, purely naturalistic anthropology. Firstly, one in which we accept completely the limitation of role: the infinite context is of no concern and the every-day flux is all that we really are. Secondly, one in which our role is an unacceptable alienation and we leave it behind, merging in infinite reality. Balthasar offers an impressionistic history of anthropologies in which many fall into one or other mode. Both modes fail for the same reason. They find no necessary connection between finite role and infinite context. As a result they deny one of them, attempting to collapse the tension into the total reality of the other. On Balthasar's view this denies the constitutive human awareness of both and thus is inadequate anthropologically.<sup>93</sup>

In the dramatic alternative to naturalistic anthropology, humans are perceived as actors. The anthropological tension is held as they participate in an interplay of freedoms, experienced in terms of assent and choice. Assent reflects the sense in which humans are placed within the ultimate horizon and choice reflects the sense in which humans can decide their situation. Choice and assent combine in participation: interrelationally situated action that embodies a horizon. The import of the dramatic here

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<sup>92</sup> TD2, p.271

<sup>93</sup> TD1, pp.481-589. Balthasar's classic examples are Heraclitus for the first account and Parmenides for the second. Empiricism, first and Advaita Vedanta, second, are also common.

relates to the mutuality between horizon and action, human freedom is realised when particular chosen actions are relationally situated within an absolute horizon of mutual assent. 'Through the theatre', where practitioners set up the parameters, 'a challenge is issued to human freedom to realise itself in accordance with its higher meaning.'<sup>94</sup> Dramatically, humans experience the possibility of engagement with a horizon. But only Christologically are they 'enabled to take on a genuinely dramatic role in the realm, not of the theatre, but of life.'<sup>95</sup>

[A]nthropology ... ought to be treated as a function of Christology.<sup>96</sup>

Christology governs Balthasar's anthropology. The true mutual horizon is the infinite life of the Trinity and the necessary connection between it and genuine relational actions is Mission, primordially Christ's and receptively Christians'. In a Christology of Mission, thus, dramatic anthropology finds its ultimate term: human freedom finds its proper, personal place within divine freedom. A natural dramatic anthropology is an implication of God's dramatic actions in Christ. However, human drama can never find its ultimate term – it can never be what drama truly is. The ultimate dramatic truth can only be received soteriologically, in a relational reality through which a natural dramatic anthropology and a revealed dramatic Christology are 'not ... simply parallel, one beside the other: instead they are merged one with the other, intimately connected and indissolubly linked.'<sup>97</sup>

### ***2.222: Dramatic Soteriology: Life in Christ***

Balthasar describes 'for us' as 'the two fundamental words of all theology'<sup>98</sup> and his soteriology maps the Christological engagement of infinite freedom with finite

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997), p.114

<sup>95</sup> TD1, p.645

<sup>96</sup> TD2, p.428

<sup>97</sup> Ellero Babini, 'Jesus Christ: Form and Norm of Man according to Hans Urs von Balthasar' in David L. Schindler (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p.226

<sup>98</sup> Balthasar quoted Seward, *March*, p.39

freedom, as the engagement for us, the only one in which humanity can live properly in its constitutive tension between assent and choice. For ‘God himself has created us in such a way as we must hear the Word of God in order to be ourselves.’<sup>99</sup> And this hearing changes human perspective, revealing by engagement the true analogy between humanity and God. In the Theological Dramatics, this analogy is ‘understood ... as an *analogia libertatis*.’<sup>100</sup> The dynamically analogous nature of human freedom with respect to divine freedom renders soteriology a matter of participatory personhood. The priority of God in this analogy of freedom raises two questions to which Balthasar considers only Christian theology capable of adequate response. In what does the person participate? And how does participation offer personhood?

With respect to the former question, I look to the first two of the Dramatics’ five aspects of New Testament soteriology.<sup>101</sup> The first is a double surrender in Christ’s death: the Father gives up the Son to sin and the Son gives up his spirit in obedience to the Father. Both surrenders must be understood as for us all. This leads to the second imperative of appreciating the Son’s surrender as a wondrous exchange between Him and humankind. In these terms, Balthasar is very sympathetic to Anselm’s doctrine of vicarious substitution and Ellero Babini argues that it is this doctrine, interpreted as surrender and exchange, which enables Balthasar to forward a soteriology of ‘radical belonging.’<sup>102</sup> This is a telling paradox. It reflects Balthasar’s sense that salvation is finding one’s home, one’s true life, inseparable from the sense that salvation is not naturally accessible outside of reorientation in relationship with Christ. Christ as representative stands for both God and humanity in dramatic situation and thus the divine meets the human in exchange: God ‘enters created freedom, interacts with created freedom and acts *as* created freedom.’<sup>103</sup> Again in a commentator’s paradox, this renders the exchange ‘both forensic and ontic.’<sup>104</sup> In taking humanity’s place Christ effects an ontic transformation in which the whole of reality is theo-drama. Yet the exchange is also forensic in that it is given to individuals by their being placed in

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<sup>99</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p.35

<sup>100</sup> Babini, ‘Form and Norm,’ p.225

<sup>101</sup> See TD4, pp.240-244

<sup>102</sup> Babini, ‘Form and Norm,’ p.226

<sup>103</sup> TD4, p.318

<sup>104</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.171

relation with God, given a mission in their finite freedom. It is this Christic exchange in which humans participate soteriologically. Dramatic participatory salvation of the finite in the infinite is dependent on the prior substitutionary participation of the infinite in the finite. Thus salvation is analogical, with God's substitutionary act as the ultimate term of human substitutionary acts. Humanity is found primarily in Christ and salvation obtains in grace when individual recognises this primacy and it becomes her goal. In each particular case this takes a personal form. As such

every human fate is deprivatized so that its personal range may extend to the whole universe, depending on how far it is prepared to co-operate in being inserted into the normative drama of Christ's life, death and Resurrection.<sup>105</sup>

This soteriological co-operation must be distinguished from natural human co-operation and Balthasar does this by describing the former as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic interruptive imagery intimates salvation's unique relationality. Given Christ's Mission, human and divine, 'his life ... must follow an "apocalyptic" rhythm'.<sup>106</sup> This rhythm informs the soteriological action as it encompasses the stage and timescale of all heaven and all earth but yet is relative to particular events. Balthasar finds this imaged in John's Apocalypse, where the ultimate visionary canvass is engaged with seven specific communities. It is only in such engaged relations between ultimate horizon and particular churches that salvation attains its full shape. Salvation is, then, 'simultaneously a liturgy of worship and a battlefield.'<sup>107</sup> Its radical interruptive command and its prayerful meditative home are dependent on the apocalyptic contact of God with man, revealed as the universal framework when the Lamb, slain in glory before its foundation, steps in particular actions on the world stage. This will forever be a relational salvation demanding responsive participation.

The soteriological question of how such participation offers personhood relates to the next two New Testament aspects – liberation: firstly from sin and death and secondly for life in God. Balthasar claims that, theologically speaking, there is a distinction among human beings between those who are also persons and those who are

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<sup>105</sup> TD2, p.50

<sup>106</sup> TD3, p.110

<sup>107</sup> TD2, p.33

not. '[P]articipation [in the total mission of Christ] us what makes conscious subjects into persons in the Christian sense.'<sup>108</sup> On Balthasar's view, this distinction is a requirement of dramatic soteriology. He approaches the characters in theodramatic reality on the understanding that they are 'definable as persons within the total Person, as supporting roles to the title role.'<sup>109</sup> Thus, the individual becomes a person as she steps onto Christ's theological stage:

Jesus is a person. Others can claim to be persons only in virtue of a relationship with him and in dependence on him. In the case of other persons, we cannot speak of an identity between the "I" and the mission as it exists in Jesus; but we can say that their conscious subjects are endowed with a part or aspect of his universal mission. ... Accordingly, the greater the participation, the greater the subject's personal definition will become and the more universal his mission.<sup>110</sup>

This distinct concept of personhood, dependent on being called into the acting area, ensures a fully relational, dramatic conception of the soteriological move that takes place. On Balthasar's view, the theodramatic stage is Christ's 'personal realm of influence.'<sup>111</sup> As such it is not 'a mere fluid medium. It is a personal and personalising area, set up for the encounter with God in Christ.'<sup>112</sup> This encounter, in which one takes on one's mission in Christ, constructs both one's proper stage and proper role, in a move of personalisation. As actions in role and the stage horizon are mutually informative, without participation in relation with God in Christ the human cannot play her proper role, that of a theological person. Personalising is also socialising, a placing of the human among others in a shared form of life. Personal relations, on Balthasar's theological view, can only occur within this personalising encounter with Christ. Aidan Nichols presents the communal implication of this forcefully: if the Church is the only corporate theological person then 'the other ecclesial communities are not – for Balthasar – really on the stage.'<sup>113</sup> It is Balthasar's definition of personal identity as dramatically relational, coupled with a thoroughgoing location of salvation in the interplay between finite and infinite freedom expressed uniquely in the mission of

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<sup>108</sup> TD2, p.207

<sup>109</sup> TD2, p.270

<sup>110</sup> TD3, p.207

<sup>111</sup> TD3, p.246

<sup>112</sup> TD3, p.249

<sup>113</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.126

Christ, which leads him to require this specifically theological understanding of personality. In personalisation, human beings 'become what in God's sight they always are' in a Christic participation itself both concrete and universal.<sup>114</sup>

As '[t]here is room within the incomparable uniqueness of Christ ... for others to have analogous, unique, personal missions',<sup>115</sup> so - in Balthasar's fifth aspect of New Testament soteriology - salvation is a gift within God's Trinitarian love. God cannot be said to require it and it cannot be said to add anything to God. Christ reveals the contours of the ultimate Trinitarian horizon as he comes from it, plays it out in expositional engagement with both it and us, and returns to it. The Son needs the Father and the Spirit to be himself and thus the space for analogous personal missions is 'room within himself, that is, an acting area for dramas of theological moment involving other created persons.'<sup>116</sup> Between persons and God, 'the analogy as one of personality' is one of 'active readiness ... for every possible initiative on the part of God's will. ... This readiness was taken up and fulfilled in Christ which shows exactly what analogy here means.'<sup>117</sup> On this view,

[f]inite freedom cannot be located in a void, for there is no such void. It is "set loose" in the realm of infinite freedom and so finds itself, right from the start, in a realm of meaning governed by the infinite "idea" of the Son, which, as the prototype of creation, uniformly permeates it and, in so far as the creation is in dramatic motion, *accompanies* it.<sup>118</sup>

Christ 'has been given a mission not accidentally but as a modality of his eternal personal being.'<sup>119</sup> In this event, the eternal relations of God have engaged with the temporal relations of humanity and given life's structure its ultimate ground, a ground that can be related with and only in that way experienced. Francesca Murphy shows how a dramatic conception of soteriology enables Balthasar to hold anthropology and Christology together in this way. Balthasar neither objectivises salvation, making it so radical as to be pure Christological imposition, nor does he subjectivise salvation,

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<sup>114</sup> TD3, p.270

<sup>115</sup> TD3, p.207

<sup>116</sup> TD3, p.162

<sup>117</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', p.75

<sup>118</sup> TD2, pp.276-277

<sup>119</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.103

making it belong to us to the extent that it is the anthropological home. Rather, dramatic soteriology is ‘phenomenology upended’, where salvation is not imposed, either by humanity or by the divine, but created in the spaces between the two in interplay. It is phenomenological as a form of life, meaning that in Christian soteriology ‘we have to do, not with a fixed – linguistic or metaphysical – structure, which defines the positions of each character, but with the opacities of free action within a drama.’ It is upended by the presence of God, as the participation of the divine styles this form of life particularly.<sup>120</sup> Dramatic soteriology is personal and analogical. It allows Christian living both formal affinity and qualitative incomparability with respect to all other ways of living.

### **2.23: Theo-drama as Relational Ontology**

By combining ontology and relationality in a dramatic mode, Balthasar’s theology couples both a strong sense of communal formation and an inescapable focus on gracious interruption. Theological truth is inseparable from both the particular dramatic patterns of Christian life, the communal formation, and the apocalyptic distance from which Christ’s mission forms the ultimate dramatic arena, the gracious interruption. Balthasar’s Dramatics centres on Christological relations that can only be appreciated from within the ontological reality that those relations open up. Furthermore, a theodramatic, soteriological relationship with Christ reveals the unsurpassable limitations of dramatic anthropology, of all attempts at truly dramatic relations between humans outwith Christ’s personalising reality. And so ‘Grace for all depends on the form of life of Him.’<sup>121</sup> Balthasar’s Christian life is participation in Christ’s, with a shared form. The form (*gestalt*) of artistic presentation and response is a key idea in the Theological Aesthetics. And in the Dramatics it is dynamised to leave the impression of a ‘Pattern of Redemption’ in which the believer can pick up the style of the Gospel rather like the rhythm of a Shakespeare or the imagery of a Kurinawa.<sup>122</sup> This picking up of style is fundamentally responsive, as creation must be in respect to the creator. It is however active in being responsive, and the saints, thereby, are model interpreters of theological truth. They provide its material – ‘being as

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<sup>120</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, pp.146,184

<sup>121</sup> Balthasar, ‘In Retrospect’, p. 201

<sup>122</sup> Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption* – from which the example analogies are taken

experienced by actual living according to Christ and the Church' – and they exemplify its activity, as 'the life of the saints is theology in practice.'<sup>123</sup> Note the singular, life. Balthasar perceives the lives of the saints to be imitations of Christ's to the extent that they may be referred to as one communal life. In the Theological Dramatics, he relates the Christian form of life with the Primal Idea. The Primal Idea of God's creation of humankind is Christ. Consequently, the form of Christ is the form that all humankind should take as its origin and goal. But the Primal Idea remains relational, for God, ultimately primal, is ultimately relational. The same Spirit that holds the Trinity together as it forms its boundless love through cross and resurrection forms the Church in community and in that Spirit the Church is the body of Christ in the world. In this context, grace is not available by comparison with the form of Christ exhibited by the Church but only by joining it. This dramatic sense that one must be not merely in on the act, through comparative appreciation, but in the act, as participant, opens Balthasar's conception of communal formation to the necessity of gracious interruption.

One of the nine theological trends that Balthasar integrates dramatically is orthopraxy. It is interesting to note the weakness he considers inherent to a non-dramatic account of orthopraxy, that it cannot give a full enough account of the 'faith that precedes all personal initiative.'<sup>124</sup> It is the dramatic mode that rescues Christian orthopraxy from being construed as one way of life and renders it the way of life. As dramatic, the impetus to participate in Christian life is not derived from a supposed inner religious attitude but from being engaged by a wider horizon manifest in particular acts, the phenomenon of Christ himself. Epistemologically, there is no general religious sense, from which to appreciate the drama between God and humankind. The ontological correlate of this is that there is no being *per se* to validate the dramatic analogy of being. Rather God himself *is* dramatically – 'the *analogatum* is even more true of Him than it is of us!'<sup>125</sup> Our dramas, analogously, are included in his. 'It is a case of the play within the play: Our play "plays" in his play'<sup>126</sup> As the ultimate dramatic encounter is that with Christ, so dramatic reality – ultimately – exists

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<sup>123</sup> Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity', p.77

<sup>124</sup> TD1, p. 33

<sup>125</sup> Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, p.231

<sup>126</sup> TD1, p.20

relationally *within* the divine life that encompasses the lives of humankind. For Balthasar, all identity is relational and Christian identity is ultimate because it is held properly, responsively in the ultimate Trinitarian relations. Identity in relation is key to Balthasar's dramatic mode of theology for

[u]ltimately not even a fellow human being can tell another who the latter really is in himself. The most emphatic affirmation can only tell him who he is *for the one who values him* or loves him. And as long as the subject cannot discover his qualitative identity he cannot find any absolute meaning.

On this account, '[e]verything is stuck in a web of relative, reciprocal, provisional values and revaluation.'<sup>127</sup> Yet, a quality of identity that is unachievable from within this web still functions within in. It enters the web in the Incarnation. This brings the possibility of relation with God, of knowing oneself as the one valued by God, and concomitantly of receiving a mission from God whereby one's identity is dramatically fulfilled. Such identity remains relational and so does not break the structure of the web. Its governing form is eucharistic, 'a thankful allowing of oneself to be poured forth.'<sup>128</sup> It can be achieved only by personal, analogical participation in the primary pouring forth of God in Christ. Commenting on Balthasar's Christology, Donald MacKinnon describes the Incarnation as

an act without parallel, constitutive of a series of relationships which are, for all their multiple differences, transformed by that act into what otherwise they could in no sense have been.

And, regarding the truth of this transformation: 'as in any drama, it is the total action that is to supply the sense.'<sup>129</sup> This total action, the ultimate horizon, is engaged in the specific inter-related activities that participate in it. And to appreciate the ultimate horizon as such the person must herself be so engaged. Thus, for Balthasar, reality is a Christological combination of communal formation and gracious interruption.

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<sup>127</sup> TD3, p.205

<sup>128</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.167

<sup>129</sup> MacKinnon, 'Balthasar's Christology', pp.171-172

Gerard O'Hanlon makes a perceptive distinction when outlining the second and third volumes of Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics*. In TD2, *Man in God*, he finds Balthasar exposing the 'space of owed freedom' in which all humanity operates and which can only be fully appreciated theologically. TD3, *Persons in Christ*, 'clarifies' this as the 'graced context' in which 'we develop from the status of human being to that of true personhood by our association with the person Jesus Christ.' O'Hanlon concludes his discussion with this claim:

by being related particularly to Jesus Christ we are drawn into the event of infinite freedom and love which is the relationship between the Father and the Son in a way which reinforces our own freedom and the openness of our history.<sup>130</sup>

To my mind, O'Hanlon's distinction between owed space and graced context embraces the tensions of Balthasar's dramatic theology. These tensions are Christologically generated. There is the inscription of the form of the cross in created reality from eternity and yet there is the radical need for relational reorientation if humans are to open up and live in the salvific patterns this inscription allows. All humans live in owed space; there is nothing unnatural about relational patterning as a process; this is a dramatic anthropology. However, only Christologically, in the clarified graced context, does this natural process operate truly and constitute salvation. Ontologically, owed space and graced context are identical with an identity only recognised in Christ. Reception of his personalising mission is the relational precondition for appreciating, not only the graced context, but also the owed space. The human remaining in the owed space in no sense experiences it as a graced context. Furthermore, she lacks awareness of its true contours as owed space, misplaying its process of relational formation in freedom.

Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics* reflects a 'relational ontology'.<sup>131</sup> Reality is perceived relationally, theologically and in any other discipline. Nonetheless, only Christian relational patterns operate soteriologically and so only Christian theology offers a proper ontology, a viable understanding of being. Balthasar's powerful dramatic account of theological reality incorporates the human owed space within the

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<sup>130</sup> O'Hanlon, 'Theological Dramatics', p.96

<sup>131</sup> Dalzell, 'Social Drama', p.455

theological graced context. This is a hermeneutic process, interpreting all life's dramas from within soteriological participation in life's dramatic reality. Balthasar uses the Christian dramatic pattern both to judge and to integrate all other dramatic patterns. His dramatic vocabulary applies primarily to God's activity and secondarily to human activity and from this appreciation of drama's ultimate form he appropriates human theatre by a theological dialogue with it, an interpretative strategy I discuss in the next chapter.

### **3: BALTHASAR'S THEODRAMATIC HERMENEUTICS**

#### **3.1: THEODRAMATIC HERMENEUTICS**

Aidan Nichols notes that Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics* provides 'a new hermeneutic' in the following terms.

As is well known, in Catholic teaching the truth of revelation cannot be demonstrated through verification in the court of appeal of some higher and more comprehensive truth – for the simple reason that *no* truth can be higher and more comprehensive than revelation's. Indeed, the contrary is the case: revelation enables us to recognise distortions or narrownesses in all other truth claims we encounter. At the same time, however, certain rational indices ... can point to the credibility of [revelation's] unique truth claim – and ensure in this way that the act of faith is not misconceived as a denial or inversion of truth's extra-revelatory sources. Translating that into theodramatic terms, Balthasar argues that, on the one hand, the dramatic action which unfolds in its totality in the 'theatre' of Judaeo-Christianity is self-interpreting, and, on the other hand, that what – for those who have not yet heard the gospel – already 'seems ultimate within the human horizon, and is experienced as such' is taken with full seriousness in theo-drama, indeed with more seriousness than anywhere else.<sup>1</sup>

Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics interprets natural human dramatic expression as internally relative to God's gracious dramatic expression, consistently with a traditional Catholic conception of nature and grace. It is introduced in stage D of the first section of TD2, a section that bridges between the literary prolegomena behind and the theological volumes beyond. Balthasar leads up to D with three stages, each of which governs a sub-section. Stage A is to 'let the phenomenon speak for itself'. Stage B is to 'attempt a purely intramundane presentation of the drama of existence.' In stage C, 'the ultimate failure of this attempt will legitimately point ... toward a transcendent, theological drama.' A drama that, of a necessity shown by stage D, 'has the power to interpret and expound itself.'<sup>2</sup> I shall discuss this theodramatic hermeneutics with a view to its implications for dialogue with theatre practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.55, citing TD2, pp.94-95

<sup>2</sup> TD2, p.19

Stages A and C, which I will consider initially, outline Balthasar's theological dramatic approach. He interprets human dramatic activity as unsustainable without the prior gracious dramatic activity of God. Thus any attempt at purely intramundane drama, drama that does not acknowledge an ultimate dramatic horizon, will fail. Stage B, which illustrates this failure, explains the rationale for a theological dramatic appropriation of theatrical vocabulary: human dramatic activity can only be properly understood by those who participate in the ultimate drama. I will consider this stage secondly, and show how Balthasar finds theatre vocabulary - terms such as author, actor and director - to have its primary meaning in God's gracious dramatic action and to apply secondarily to the human arena. Stage D, which I shall consider thirdly, defines theodramatic hermeneutics explicitly as Christian ontology, dramatically integrating nature within grace.

As it relativises human dramatic activity within the ultimate dramatic reality of God in Christ, Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics implies a post-Christian, natural dramatic dimension for those who live in theo-drama's owed space without recognising its reality as graced context. Theatre, as a symbol of this dramatic dimension, 'yield[s] a whole set of resources' for the theological task.<sup>3</sup> Particular plays and practitioners are 'chosen for their theological fruitfulness – an admittedly one-sided approach.'<sup>4</sup> And theatricality is also a resource for theological style. It encourages good theological habits, especially the habit of looking for a higher meaning in a dynamic, corporate way<sup>5</sup> and 'invit[ing] the approach of a revelation.'<sup>6</sup> Its 'wealth of material, relationships and connections ... provide a complete, ready-made set of categories ... which can be used to portray God's action.'<sup>7</sup> This natural, human dramatic dimension - and the role of theatre in it - will be considered further in the next chapter. Here I outline Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics, the four-stage methodology in which he postulates such a dimension.

### **3.11: Theological Dramatic Approach**

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<sup>3</sup> TD2, p.9

<sup>4</sup> TD1, p.9

<sup>5</sup> See TD1, p.21

<sup>6</sup> TD1, p.12

<sup>7</sup> TD1, p.18

At stage A, the phenomenon that Balthasar determines to let speak for itself is ‘the phenomenon of the theatre – as a metaphor that is closely bound up with life’s reality.’<sup>8</sup> Life has a theatrical dynamic and the concepts with which this dynamic speaks (for itself, through Balthasar) are Form, Word and Election. Form is understood, as in Balthasar’s *Theological Aesthetics*, as a self-disclosing and enrapturing fullness of beauty manifest in an object of beauty. Its enrapturing dynamic is developed here as the ‘interplay of grace and gratitude.’<sup>9</sup> Such dialogical expression is the meaning of the form, moving between its giving and its being received. Thus theatrical meaning is a rhythmic measure intrinsic to that relation in which a person is carried by the form, and not an externally stable measure. Meaningful expression’s dynamic of giving and receiving is the reason for speaking of Word. Word is the ‘call ... from the form’, a call in which there is presumed a reply: either a ‘Yes of willing attentiveness’ or a ‘No which deliberately overlooks.’<sup>10</sup> Yes is the only dramatic reply. It opens the way for communal response in the form. A negative reply refuses the given dramatic dynamic, rendering it absurd. Word thus governs freedom, with dramatic freedom interior to response in the form. The phenomenon of theatre speaks Election in that the spectator, struck by a form, is ‘not simply placed in a universal perspective from which he can survey the totality.’ Rather she is placed in a relational situation through which her life must change; ‘henceforth’ she will ‘live in response.’<sup>11</sup>

This transition from a form’s perception to responsive communal intra-participation is the move from the static to the dynamic, *the* movement of experience in outline. Life exhibits this theatricality of which theatre practice is a metaphor. Balthasar traces this transition from perception to response, the theatricality inherent ‘even in the realm of intramundane drama’ and finds that the fact that it ‘only attains its full intelligibility ... when seen against the background of the divine revelation in Jesus Christ does not in any way alter the phenomenon...; it simply ... renders it optimally visible.’<sup>12</sup> *Theological Dramatics* explains the phenomenon of life’s theatrical reality

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<sup>8</sup> TD2, p.17

<sup>9</sup> TD2, p.24

<sup>10</sup> TD2, p.29

<sup>11</sup> TD2, pp.30-31

<sup>12</sup> TD2, p.23

and it is not theology from below. Balthasar does not build from purportedly extra-revelatory theatrical experiences to theo-drama. Quite the opposite:

[i]f the infrastructures prove useful, it is because the created world is oriented toward the world of redeeming grace, and the fragmentary nature of the former receives its unity and wholeness in the latter.

The 'infrastructures' are 'dramatic categories of worldly drama' and particular 'literary' accounts of theatre practice, such as Balthasar offers in the *Prolegomena*.<sup>13</sup> They are structural in that they exemplify the theatrical reality of life, a reality inherent to life and optimally visible only in Christian revelation. More precisely, they are *infrastructural*, in that they exist, necessarily, within that Christian reality. While being infrastructural of reality, they are not con-structural, for reality is itself a function of revelation. Theatrical experiences are fragmentary. As fragments of reality, they are only open to integrated understanding through revealed and participatory appreciation of the theodramatic Whole. The phenomenon of theatricality, that speaks for itself at stage A, is the formal transition from the aesthetic to the dramatic which can be illustrated through fragments of human theatrical experience but the full intelligibility of which is a function of revelation. Theatre performances, reflections and theories speak to Balthasar in this formal delineation. Revelation itself has dramatically structured nature and thus the elements of theatre, as metaphors of human dramatic expression, are presented by Balthasar (and, for Balthasar, are) 'in their relevance for theology.'<sup>14</sup>

From this perspective Balthasar can, in stage C, present Christian truth as 'The Unfolding Drama' using a theatrical vocabulary to 'enable us to get a better view of the content, the seriousness and the sublimity of the divine-human drama.'<sup>15</sup> Christian truth can be outlined from within but, in contradistinction from all other dramatic acts, it cannot be subject to interpretation as a theatrical phenomenon, for than it there is no greater standpoint. It is the single drama, lifting all that is natural and human beyond itself in its own unique and concrete reality. For Balthasar, the dramatic holds event

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<sup>13</sup> TD2, p.53

<sup>14</sup> TD1, p.268

<sup>15</sup> TD2, p.53

and horizon together, dynamically and relationally. Complete dramatic meaning would, therefore, hold life's ultimate horizon together with a particular event. This occurs Christologically. As Balthasar puts it boldly, the drama of reality has a 'central meaning called Jesus Christ.'<sup>16</sup> Such a claim could be extracted from many a vacuous sermon. In Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics* it has a sophisticated rationale. Meaning was previously defined, in Stage A when the phenomenon of life's theatricality spoke for itself. It was the dialogical expression of grace and gratitude that renders Form dynamic. Jesus Christ is himself the form of God's expression, the form of Grace in which is embraced the responsive form of humankind, the form of gratitude. Balthasar here has a dramatic understanding of Christ as representative. Dramatically, Christ represents God to humankind and humankind to God. This representative Christ is the ultimate term of the phenomenon of theatricality, expressive form of God and responsive form of humankind, concrete universal:

[a]s the perfect man with his peerless drama, he is the living framework within which every human destiny is carried out.<sup>17</sup>

Christ's unique actions form a single shape, and in their unique particularity dramatically render the ultimate horizon. Thus, Christ reveals the total drama: the ultimate theatrical occasion and the foundation of theatrical possibility in human life. Key terms of Balthasar's Christology – action; horizon; representative; concrete universal – are coming in here. And with Christ as the shape of the dramatic reality of life, the stage is very much set for the Christological meditations of TD3. But remaining with the dramatic methodology, Balthasar is concerned to emphasise that natural, human dramatic existence is neither 'overwhelmed' nor 'narrowed' by its ultimate Christological term. For it is already a 'presupposition' of such revelation as its '(ante-) room in which human freedom makes decisions.'<sup>18</sup> In this anteroom, for Balthasar, waits the theatrical vocabulary whose primary purpose is for exposition of the dramatic acts of God.

### **3.12: Theatrical Vocabulary**

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<sup>16</sup> TD2, p.63

<sup>17</sup> TD2, p.87

<sup>18</sup> TD2, p.86

[I]t is a basic Christian requirement that existence should represent itself dramatically.<sup>19</sup>

Stage B of Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics is called 'The Unfinished Drama.' It emphasises finitude as that through which human existence is dramatic. Finitude finds human freedom 'wrapped in many kinds of conditioning' and yet, precisely as it is 'provoked by conditions', a force through which 'man in his inner freedom is critically shaped.' Freedom and conditionality, in tension, render finitude dramatic. The main consequence of this is that no static framework can furnish a solving explanation for humankind, neither from above rendering humanity a function of a context, nor from below rendering humanity an expression of a rule. Rather, a human can only be understood dramatically, as an interplay of freedoms in a 'field of force he shares with others.'<sup>20</sup> A true account of humanity will be a dramatic account and Stage B presents the ultimate failure of any attempt at purely intramundane dramatic accounts of human finitude: an ultimate failure that points towards the transcendent theological drama as the only true dramatic account of humanity. It is vital to appreciate the vast difference Balthasar perceives between the intramundane and the purely intramundane.

Intramundane drama is understood by Balthasar as the appropriate theatrical behaviour of natural, human existence. In it humans reflect upon the mystery of their selves by constructing minor horizons and concomitantly provisional events. Such activity achieves a *formal* truthfulness and so is dramatic. It can be seen for the non-ultimate, intramundane phenomenon that it is from the greater perspective of participation in theo-drama. With respect to the purely intramundane, however, Balthasar plays the role of phenomenological pathologist.<sup>21</sup> For the purely intramundane is natural, human existence in as much as it tries to find its own universal, dramatic significance, alternative to personal relations with others in God through Christ. It tries to make for itself the ultimate term of its formal truth. Given that what it is to be dramatic is itself a function of Christian theodramatic revelation, if theatre attempts to take on its own ultimate dramatic significance, not only does it necessarily fail in that task but it fails to be dramatic at all. It collapses from dramatic expression either in to the lyric or the

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<sup>19</sup> TD1, p.22

<sup>20</sup> TD2, pp.37-38

<sup>21</sup> Aidan Nichols presents Balthasar's phenomenology as 'clinical', with human life a 'pathological' subject: *No Bloodless Myth*, pp.146-147

epic. In stage B, Balthasar presents a phenomenology of this potential for failure. He surveys the history of theatre – Ancient Greece; Thornton Wilder; Baroque; Noh; Christopher Marlowe – and intimates a predicament for all theatrical expressions. Will they stay in their intramundane place, where the hero does make a broadly tragic claim over the audience: thus being minor, if not self-aware, analogues of the Christological claim? Or, will they attempt to be purely intramundane? Will they try to offer their own universal, dramatic claim, based in a competing ontology, and so, as dramatic ontology is Christian theo-drama, reduce themselves from the dramatic to either an epic attempt to construct a world narrative or a lyric attempt to predicate reality on their own self-expression? Balthasar's survey shows a tension in his dual reading of human theatre as intramundane or purely intramundane. He does not want to own a precision, whereby a certain play, genre or practitioner is necessarily one or the other. He does, however, imagine a genuine competition, in the sense that at every instance a theatrical expression will be one or the other. Furthermore, both the intramundane limited success and the purely intramundane over-ambitious failure are internally relative to Christian dramatic truth. Balthasar operates with a theologically intuited understanding of natural, human dramatic reality to which the drama of God with persons in Christ is the ultimate term. Only from internal, participatory appreciation of this term, can human drama be properly understood. And that understanding divides theatrical experiences between the intramundane and so limitedly dramatic and the purely intramundane and so finally non-dramatic.

How does this analysis play out in theatrical vocabulary? Firstly, it is clear that the dramatic is primarily theological. Theology, through its participation in the ultimate drama, has true purchase on its categories. Yet, humans are dramatic and can be so in a natural, human sense - in an anteroom where the Incarnation is not appreciated. For

even before this final event comes to light, a play is going on "in front of the curtain": this play is not a purely secular one and can only be played with one eye on the Absolute.<sup>22</sup>

What counts as human play, in front of the curtain, is decided in terms of the final event. Theatre, as symbol of human play, cannot be purely secular (purely

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<sup>22</sup> TD1, p.129

intramundane) but only operates with one eye on the Absolute (as intramundane) opening an individual's horizon beyond themselves. Here we see the relation between theatrical activity and theologically appreciated dramatic reality. Theatre is, on Balthasar's view, 'an arcane symbol of the dramatic dimension of existence, in so far as existence, in its metaphysico-religious self-interpretation, assumes a horizon of meaning.'<sup>23</sup> As such the theatre is necessarily inconclusive; its 'multiplicity of ideas ... does not yield adequate clarity.'<sup>24</sup> For it symbolises the human dramatic reality, which is in a tension that it of itself cannot resolve. Indeed, Balthasar 'cannot reprove the theatre ... for its ambivalence, since the latter characterises existence itself and its self-understanding.'<sup>25</sup> It is important for Balthasar that 'theatre practice springs from existence and is characterized by it.' It is then an 'illumination' of existence. The tensions of dramatic reality that lead it to theatrical expression are highlighted 'under the spotlight of the stage.'<sup>26</sup> World theatre symbolises the (theologically appreciated) dramatic reality of the human situation without Christian awareness and so is bound into the inherent ambivalence of that situation. Consequently, from the outset of the Theological Dramatics, Balthasar insists that he 'shall not be making any direct transition from the stage to theology.'<sup>27</sup> His route runs from theology to the stage via the revealed appreciation of dramatic life in the natural, human situation.

In TD1, Balthasar introduces his dramatic resources. He takes two triads of theatrical vocabulary - Author/Actor/Director and Presentation/Audience/Horizon - and uses them as primarily applicable to theodramatic reality and secondarily to natural, human dramatic expression. They are both relational triads. They are also both formational, in the sense that they structure a reality, the former in rehearsal and the latter in performance. In the intramundane realm of world theatre, the former triad - Author/Actor/Director - operates as follows. The actor's real presence is the centre of encounter between existence and truth: existence in that the actor embodies a role in a concrete situation; truth in that by doing so the actor is related to and presents an ideality, the horizon of the drama as artefact. Consequently acting makes a claim on the

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<sup>23</sup> TD1, pp.249-250

<sup>24</sup> TD1, p.130

<sup>25</sup> TD1, p.249

<sup>26</sup> TD1, p.259

<sup>27</sup> TD1, p.11

audience. Its claim is communicated through its actualisation of the analogy between the play's horizon and the event on stage, allowing the audience imaginative entrance into it.<sup>28</sup> Balthasar's understanding of the horizon of the dramatic artefact informs his belief that the 'primacy ... in the author is ontological.'<sup>29</sup> The author provides that 'antecedent context of meaning', that horizon within which the performance develops. It will develop 'unhindered' if it stays within the context. Thus, on Balthasar's view, 'the author has already placed a particular perspective in the play.' The perspective requires actors for its realisation, and they could distort or ignore it, yet it still stands over their success by delineating their 'area for creativity.'<sup>30</sup> The director, similarly subject to the author's primacy, has a specific responsibility.

Between the dramatic poet and the actor there yawns a gulf that can be bridged only by a third party who will take responsibility for the play's performance making it present here and now.<sup>31</sup>

Such making present requires the director to graft the audience's horizon in to the author's context, forming free and meaningful relations between author's word and audience election. Here the former triad opens into the latter triad of Presentation/Audience/Horizon. As the 'three elements of dramatic realisation,' this latter triad offers the author, actor and director a scheme for success. In presentation, a communion between the stage and the audience is required. To achieve this both audience and actors must be open, expecting a revelation from a horizon beyond each alone. As the actor must be determined to communicate, so the audience must want to be transported by being open to the promise of a revelation. Audience expectation is thus integral to dramatic success. The conventionalisation of theatre, so that its revelation is so predictable as already to belong to the audience, leads to absurd discomfort or an air of disinterest. Truly, an audience is encountered by revelation, which is dramatic presentation and is itself the communion between audience and stage that drama achieves.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> TD1, pp.281-297

<sup>29</sup> TD1, p.269

<sup>30</sup> TD1, p.297

<sup>31</sup> TD1, p.298

<sup>32</sup> TD1, pp.305-323

Balthasar's triadic theatrical vocabulary models what, according to his theological dramatic intuition, it is to be dramatic. When it comes to differentiating styles within this model his terms are drawn not from performance theory but are theological: pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian. And he returns to his triadic schema in the Conclusion of TD1, where he is prepared to 'anticipate' that the 'two triads ... find their blueprint in Christian theo-drama.' He emphasises that this is the case, however, only 'from the vantage point' of relational participation in that drama.<sup>33</sup> He is not building from an account of natural, human dramatic activity to God's gracious dramatic activity but showing how the vocabulary of the former can resource an understanding of the latter because it is its implication. Consequently, it is not until the end of TD3, after some theology proper, that he feels he has 'vindicated' his triadic 'dramatic resources', even though when they were first presented 'every discerning reader was bound to see the underlying theodramatic action.'<sup>34</sup>

The triads are Trinitarian. The first is 'a perfect metaphor for the ... Trinity.' The Author is the Father, having ontological priority over the dramatic artefact of creation. The Son is the Actor whose role is identical to his person and who, in his Mission, acts with an ultimate claim. The Spirit, as Director, bridges the gulf between the actor and the author. Thus he 'translate[s] [the Father's play] into real life' and gathers the audience in with the stage in a communal response. The second triad, 'only partially distinguishable from the first', exposes the Trinity's theodramatic success. Fluidity between audience and stage is required for the intramundane possibility of audience participation in the play's Horizon such that revelation occurs. This fluidity is 'ultimate' in theo-drama, so that 'there is no such person as a pure spectator.' The analogical making visible of the horizon in theo-drama is 'the all-embracing "event" of the economic Trinity.' And the theodramatic Presentation is 'God's own bending down', where the Trinitarian relationship in its ontological priority endures peerless suffering by living the world round. Thus, metaphorically as theatre practitioners, the economic Trinity holds human (Audience) response within its own creative trajectory. The communion of intramundane dramatic presentation is here 'transformed into the

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<sup>33</sup> TD1, pp.645-648. Balthasar puts clear space between his triadic schema and what he perceives as Rahner's understanding of the Trinity present in human communities or activities outside the Church.

<sup>34</sup> TD3, p.531-532

Grace of co-atonement.<sup>35</sup> 'Thus', and only thus as to be fully intelligible the intramundane dramatic dimension must be viewed from a participatory theodramatic appreciation,

the two triads of the *Prolegomena* merge into each other. The first triad, lit up with inner radiance, reveals the immanent-economic Trinity; the second is simply the way in which this Trinity, guiding and fashioning the world drama, draws it into itself.<sup>36</sup>

In this sense, God's theodramatic activity is the ultimate term of human dramatic activity. Human dramatic activity can be used 'to draw a range of resources ... which can then be of service to the Christian theory of theo-drama.'<sup>37</sup> Nature, when it is appreciated from the vantage point of revelation, can illuminate Grace. And to be dramatic at all, human theatricality must remain in this provisional natural place, with formal truthfulness that is a limited analogue of the divine reality.

This triadic/Trinitarian scheme structures theatrical vocabulary in theological terms. What it means to be dramatic is located ultimately only in the drama of God with persons in Christ and from this perspective there are theatrical activities that find their final treatment theologically. Such activities are dealt with in a leisurely and allusive manner across TD1 and the first section of TD2 and circle around themes of morality, judgement and truth. Each theme can be related to one of TD1's three dramatic 'leitmotifs' of theatre in 'all its variations', which together make a fourth leitmotif of dramatic tension<sup>38</sup>, a tension that – it is revealed at stage B – is recapitulated in Christian theo-drama.<sup>39</sup> The first leitmotif relates to morality. It is the distinction between the 'finitude of the performed play and its non-finite meaning.' In it, the play's finite performance enables one 'to glimpse but not seize' its non-finite meaning. Morally, this is the conundrum of freedom and conditionality. For theatre suggests a transcendental concept of goodness. It expresses a simple human desire to achieve and perceive goodness in an action together with the conditioned complexity which appears

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<sup>35</sup> TD3, pp.532-535

<sup>36</sup> TD3, p.535

<sup>37</sup> TD1, p.130

<sup>38</sup> TD1, p.249

<sup>39</sup> TD2, pp.49-51

to make the desire unrealisable. This raises questions of judgement. In its second leitmotif theatre as symbol of reality distinguishes between I and role, between personal freedom and inter-constituted destiny. This reveals the full extent to which the dramatic dimension pushes one towards an ultimate judgement one can never make. Verdict becomes a natural expectation: as I, I should be able to judge my actions; but in the flawed, inter-constitution of role no judgemental perspective is available. Theatre's unfulfilled but unavoidable desires for goodness and judgement feed into the dramatic attempt at truth. A leitmotif of two-fold responsibility is left by the desire for a truthful performance – in this respect, the human actor has personal responsibility in his freedom and yet, simultaneously in his conditionality, he remains responsible to a directorial involved spectator. Thus he is 'answerable but free' and for his action to be truthful an interpenetration of these responsibilities is required. These three aspects of morality, judgement and truth (which theatre demands more than it can achieve) combine in the fourth leitmotif of dramatic tension. Dramatic tension requires theatre, as symbol of dramatic life, to be integrative and representational. A dramatically charged reality cannot include boundless plots but must allow standpoints to be integrated into a single, final one. Understanding, in that context, must be a representative process, where the final horizon in some sense represents itself so as both to engender and yet to gather together the tensions of dramatically constituted reality.<sup>40</sup> According to Balthasar, to the extent that theatre is dramatic it respects these contours, of dramatic categories, leitmotifs and tensions. To the extent that theatre respects these contours it is intramundane, operative within a greater dramatic reality (known only through revelation) that it does not purport to cope with itself. If it rejects these contours and attempts an alternative account of dramatic truth then it is purely intramundane, not only ultimately unsuccessful but not even truly dramatic.

Having collapsed purely intramundane drama, by arguing that all dramatic activity is an implication of God's dramatic life, Balthasar concludes stage B by addressing the leitmotif of dramatic tension to Christianity. In this he 'justifies' his

assertion ... that, in Christian terms, the dramatic dimension of human existence can only be taken in complete seriousness – and that, accordingly, the Christian revelation can only appear at its full stature – if it is presented as being dramatic *at its very core*.

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<sup>40</sup> TD1, pp.249-257

He shows Christian truth, as theo-drama, to be a 'recapitulation' of the human dramatic dimension in such a way that its tensions are fulfilled. This is true of both the dramatic tensions, integration and representation. Christian truth appreciates that one event reveals the ultimate horizon and integrates all human destinies within the claim of this one dramatic act. Thus Christ's drama is 'normative' but a response requires co-operative representation on the part of the person. Representation, then, is recapitulated sacramentally. For the Catholic sacraments 'continually make the one event present' and are the 'meaning of the Church' as the 're-presentation of the drama of salvation' once for all on each particular occasion.<sup>41</sup> The dramatic dimension of human reality, of which theatre is a symbol, cannot be fully understood without appreciating that it finds its ultimate term in the revealed drama of the Incarnation. Any reader who Balthasar calls discerning, will survey world theatre with him, and in communion intuit its ultimate dramatic term.

Stage B, 'The Unfinished Drama', is a short section of the dramatic approach dealing with the theological reality of the intramundane dramatic dimension, such as presupposes the failure of any attempt at purely intramundane drama. At first reading it may seem awkwardly situated in the massive structure of the Dramatics. Tracing its ideas back into the *Prolegomena*, however, enables the reader to appreciate its significance in rendering human theatrical activity internal to theodramatic hermeneutics. For,

[t]he reason Balthasar can so freely and sovereignly survey the results and artefacts of world drama from the Greeks to Bertolt Brecht and find them of ... theological use is because he sees them as already grounded in the prior drama ... established by God.<sup>42</sup>

Oakes, there, astutely links the sense in which Balthasar's finds theatre useful theologically with Balthasar's confidence in the theologian's capacity to survey world drama. The capacity to survey is a function of the fact that the theologian reflectively participates in the prior, ultimate drama of God with humankind. From this revealed dramatic reality, a scheme of dramatic categories is drawn and in respect to these

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<sup>41</sup> TD2, pp.49-51

<sup>42</sup> Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, p.220

categories, theatrical expressions are evaluated as limitedly dramatic or finally non-dramatic. Balthasar has claimed that what seems ultimate in the human dramatic horizon and is experienced as such theatrically is taken with full seriousness only in theo-drama. This applies both to intramundane and purely intramundane theatre but in different ways. Intramundane theatre is fragmentary and so appreciable as a phenomenon by the theologian from the perspective of the theodramatic Whole. In this, it cannot obtain the theodramatic ultimacy that implicitly, by formal parallel, it acknowledges. It is precisely in the limitation of its success that it is dramatic as it operates dramatically in as much as it is a formal miniature of theo-drama. The ultimate failure of purely intramundane theatre to be dramatic also points to the transcendent, again in a way only appreciable through an intuition of the dramatic given in revelation. From revelation it is seen that there is no dramatic reality other than the Christian and that theatre perceived to propose an alternative is as a distortion of the natural dramatic dimension. In the Theological Dramatics, what seems ultimate in both intramundane and purely intramundane theatre is put in its proper place: the former through appropriation as a limitedly dramatic resource and the latter through judgement as a finally non-dramatic aberration.

Theatre symbolises the natural, human dramatic situation. This situation is a theological implication, ultimately internal to the drama of God with persons in Christ. Balthasar finds it formally analogous to theodramatic reality. And so theatre practice, as its symbol, must have such similarity in greater dissimilarity in respect to theo-drama as its analogical place supposes. Theatre vocabulary and practice need not be *used* metaphorically; they *are* metaphorically. Balthasar is unequivocal on both the Christian origins and the universal implications of the dramatic categories that divide theatre into either intramundane dramatic success or purely intramundane non-dramatic failure, explaining how he can 'establish a kind of *system of dramatic categories*':

[u]ltimately, the Catholic "*dialectic*" between nature and Grace presupposes that such a system can be useful to theology: a natural dramatic dimension is presupposed by, and prefaced to, the supernatural drama which adopts it after first having clarified and transformed it, and brought it to its true proportions.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> TD1, p.128

### 3.13: Theodramatic Hermeneutics

Balthasar summarises his theodramatic hermeneutics at stage D.<sup>44</sup> It is a participative hermeneutics that provides regulations for what Balthasar terms ‘Inclusion and Exclusion’: the business of distinguishing between intramundane and purely intramundane theatrical expressions.<sup>45</sup> It works on two premises. First: ‘[a]ll theology is an interpretation of divine revelation. Thus, in its totality, it can only be hermeneutics.’ Second: ‘in revealing himself in Jesus Christ, God interprets himself and ... his plan for the world – and this too is hermeneutics.’ Balthasar determines that ‘[t]he first hermeneutics must be oriented and regulated by the second. ... For God does not play the world drama all on his own; he makes room for man to join in the acting.’ It is in the light of this theological necessity for theological hermeneutics to participate in a prior divine hermeneutics that Balthasar finds the hermeneutics itself to be a dramatic activity in which the Spirit ‘causes [man] to adopt God’s standpoint.’ This is stronger than Balthasar’s characteristic claims and he qualifies it to make it clear that such adoption is taking on a responsive and participatory stance within God’s standpoint: seeing within God’s sight by being within God’s act. Still, the key to the ‘overall situation of a theodramatic hermeneutic’ is that ‘man must involve himself with God’s drama.’<sup>46</sup> With respect to the implications of theodramatic hermeneutics for inclusion and exclusion, it is important to appreciate two related points: the ‘fundamental law according to which ... the phenomenon is self illuminating’<sup>47</sup>; related with the ‘structure of theological proof.’<sup>48</sup>

The fundamental law according to which the dramatic phenomenon is self-illuminating is the law of ‘unrolling a horizon.’ The dramatic performance, as Balthasar understands it, opens a shaped field of space for the audience, imaginatively, to enter. Thus the unrolled horizon is pertinent ‘not [as] a fortuitous instance of something long familiar’ but as a revealed context in which participatory knowledge can take place. In this sense the author’s own dramatic horizon unrolls itself through the actors and

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<sup>44</sup> TD2, pp.91-150

<sup>45</sup> TD2, pp.126-130

<sup>46</sup> TD2, p 91

<sup>47</sup> TD2, pp.91-92

<sup>48</sup> TD2, p.115

director. This is a hermeneutic act in which the responsive, audience hermeneutics participates.<sup>49</sup> Such natural hermeneutics, in which human drama and its symbol the theatre operate, is respected but transcended by theo-drama.

The horizon – not just any horizon – has been unrolled in the life and death of the man Jesus of Nazareth: it is manifest for all to see; all can follow the action. But, thus manifest, the horizon is transcended, in a movement that comes from God and goes to God ... by the ultimate lines of human destiny being drawn to a ... point of convergence. This point ... is called “resurrection on the third day”. Initially ... [the] point toward which the lines converge ... is a point purely within the individual drama of Jesus of Nazareth: only as such, as individual, does it become universal, relevant to all men.<sup>50</sup>

In God’s act in Christ, which is the ultimate, particular hermeneutic act, itself revealing and participating in the ultimate horizon, all human hermeneutic acts can be properly located.

This hermeneutic law relates to the structure of theological proof in that theological proof is a matter of ‘self-attesting fact’, fact that provides ‘pointers to the (ever-greater) totality.’ This recognises the sublimity of God, transposed through God’s initiative into the drama of God and persons. Thus theo-drama must be demonstrated ‘[i]n such a way that it ... shows itself to be something ‘than which nothing greater can be thought.’’ On Balthasar’s view, theological hermeneutics with a dramatic shape must point to the ever-greater totality. Its ‘starting point’ is ‘in relationship’: where human finite freedom is related to ultimate infinite freedom while both remain distinct, the human in its conditionality and the ultimate in its utter lack of external dependence. This remains the fundamental mystery and to maintain it theodramatic hermeneutics must uphold analogicality between the ultimate and the mundane, the infinite and the finite. It must not become pantheistic, where God is dissolved into the world, or dualistic where the world and God are isolated one from another. If this happens there is no interplay between the infinite and the finite and as such no dramatic ultimate reality. Creation, incarnation and redemption are God’s hermeneutic acts in Christ, God’s self-interpretation. It is by analogically hermeneutic acts of personal participation in God through Christ that the Christian shape is the ultimate shape of

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<sup>49</sup> TD2, pp.92-93

<sup>50</sup> TD2, p.94

dramatic truth. Its particular sacramental acts point out the ever-greater horizonless horizon of the Trinity.

The implications of theodramatic hermeneutics for inclusion and exclusion stem from this dynamic between God's self-interpretation and Christian responsive interpretation. God's self-interpretation in revelation 'does not throw partial, unconnected rays of light on individual truths, but is intended to communicate a complete orientation concerning God's guiding action and man's response.'<sup>51</sup> Responsive hermeneutics, in complete reorientation, is no 'allegedly overall view', for an overall view would 'destroy both this contemplation and its object.' Rather it is 'salvation', which 'takes the form of happening and letting happen.'<sup>52</sup> As such, this hermeneutic 'method of [theodramatic] proof is indivisibly two-fold':

it excludes all the one-sided views that refuse to accept that all things can be integrated into the free God/world totality, as interpreted by Christian revelation; and it includes everything that allows itself to be thus integrated. Thus it operates simultaneously by inclusion and exclusion.

The consequent question for theodramatic hermeneutics is whether a view being considered 'presses toward *communio*'; *communio* being

the primal mystery, namely, that God, out of his freely bestowed love, allows that which is not God to participate in ... his love; and this comes about in a reciprocity which, in Christian revelation, has again to be grounded in God (in the Trinity), yet without abolishing the creatureliness of the creature.<sup>53</sup>

Inclusion and exclusion does not require an objective view of totality, therefore, but it does presume a participative appreciation of ultimate reality in which the participation or otherwise of others can be judged. Such judgement is situational. It cannot be predicted in advance and it should not be held certain for all time. Nonetheless, there is no middle ground: at any given time any activity will be either included or excluded. Exclusion, however, is only provisional on account of what Balthasar calls the Johannine comparative.

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<sup>51</sup> TD2, p.124

<sup>52</sup> TD2, pp.126-127

<sup>53</sup> TD2, p.127

The Johannine comparative can exclude everything that refuses to submit to it. Everything that calls a halt at any point belongs to the “world” and is excluded, because in doing so it has already excluded itself. ... But such exclusion only serves to highlight and do justice to the stronger, inclusive power of God’s truth, which, when it is lifted up from the earth, draws all men to it.<sup>54</sup>

In respect of theatre practice, this process of exclusion within inclusion becomes exclusion as purely intramundane within inclusion as intramundane. In successful theodramatic hermeneutics, where unequivocal exclusion stands within ultimate inclusion, ‘the whole intramundane dialogue of standpoints, world views and perspectives is overtaken by an ultimate dramatic dialogue.’<sup>55</sup>

### 3.14: Christian Dramatic Ontology

I have left to this stage the issue of dramatic genre. Balthasar considered it possible to glimpse ‘a genuine Christian dramatic genre’ in the drama of the Incarnation, post-figured in the Church.<sup>56</sup> However, when considering the standard literary genres for drama, he insisted that the Incarnation’s ‘mystery eludes all literary categories and relativizes them.’<sup>57</sup> For Balthasar, theo-drama is both genuinely dramatic genre and beyond capture in terms of genre. And, in this tension, it is the ontological drama. As is his way, Balthasar treats genre in the *Prolegomena* (with a sub-section titled ‘Tragedy, Comedy, Tragicomedy’) but does not really cash in this literary discussion theologically until later volumes.

In respect to the discussion in the *Prolegomena*, it has been suggested that Balthasar’s theo-drama is tragic. Francesca Murphy proposes this in a critical line, arguing that Balthasar defines comedy from within tragedy and thus sees Christ as the ultimate tragic figure, with solely tragic precursors. It does not seem clear to me, as Murphy suggests, that Balthasar’s theological dramatics ‘presses analogy to univocity’

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<sup>54</sup> TD2, p.130, alluding to John 12.32

<sup>55</sup> TD2, p.128

<sup>56</sup> TD1, p.118

<sup>57</sup> TD1, p.429

in respect to the relation between tragedy and theo-drama.<sup>58</sup> In my view, Murphy underestimates the theological implications of what she considers to be a definition of comedy in tragic terms and what Balthasar's proposes as an acceptance that tragedy and comedy are intertwined. Balthasar considers theatrical talk of tragicomedies as a 'modern construct'. He suggests, however, that the phenomenon itself is not so new, for tragedy and comedy have always required each other. Thus he would dispute any suggestion that moderns invented tragicomedies; they merely focused on a mixture of style that was already there. Theo-drama cannot fit into any literary category – it transcends them all. With that proviso it seems that Balthasar's theo-drama is the original tragicomic drama, because of which tragedy and comedy could never be discrete. Undeniably, Balthasar insists that Christ's abandonment on the cross 'is more profound than anything we can imagine and, according to the Christian understanding, underpins everything in the world that can be termed "tragic".'<sup>59</sup> However, he insists that tragedy needs comic interruption or 'shorn of transcendence, shorn of "faith" it 'annihilates itself.'<sup>60</sup> Thus tragedy and grace are intimately connected. Finitude and flaw, which Balthasar takes to be the stuff of tragedy, are themselves, at the same time without priority either way, the comic stuff of interruption, joke and potential harmony.

[C]omedy ... is an equally valid approach to the unfathomable meaning of the "Whole" no less than tragedy. Each has its rightful place next to the other, not one within the other. It is beyond man's competence to dissolve one in the other or to cause the two to coincide.<sup>61</sup>

It is beyond man's competence to cause the two to coincide. Hence Balthasar's critical interest in modern tragicomedies. For, on his view,

tragi-comedy hovers between despising and accusing God and accepting that the world has a hidden meaning. This creates an insecurity that makes so much noise precisely because it wants to provoke an answer to the question of existence.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, pp.158-159

<sup>59</sup> TD1, p.429

<sup>60</sup> TD1, p.430

<sup>61</sup> TD1, p.437

<sup>62</sup> TD1, pp.449-50

Balthasar considers this to be a recent development - but not exactly an achievement for the answer is such that it can never be provoked but only received. Balthasar returns to genre in TD2 with a, characteristically, brief but considerable clarification.

If the once-for-all drama of Christ is to be exalted as the norm of the entire dramatic dimension of human life, two things must happen simultaneously: the abyss of all tragedy must be plumbed to the very bottom (which no purely human tragedy can do); and, in it and transcending it, we must discern the element of gracious destiny that genuinely touches human experience (and not merely *seems* to touch it).<sup>63</sup>

Thus occurs as Christ accepts the suffering of his death, which MacKinnon asserts is the 'point and place' for Balthasar's Christology to 'press from drama to ontology.'<sup>64</sup> It is the ultimate tragicomic moment where the desperate tragic abyss and the gracious comic hope coincide. And it reflects the eschatological last act, where 'however baffling it may be to the finite mind ... "tragedy" is played out [in] eternal blessedness.'<sup>65</sup> Human drama can be a fragment of, but can never achieve, such theodramatic coincidence. Theo-drama is the ultimate revealed term not of one particular dramatic genre but of the 'confusing plurality' of the whole business of dramatic genre.<sup>66</sup>

Balthasar makes a dramatic ontological claim, which is more than a literary ontological claim. In his early essays on revelation, Balthasar described the Incarnation as story, on the understanding that '[w]e cannot interpret this story in merely human terms' as it has a 'logic thought out ... ad hunc.'<sup>67</sup> Responsive, communal participation is already a theme in Balthasar's early essays on redemption, where Christians are participants in a 'dialogue between bride and bridegroom in the unity and communication of the spirit.'<sup>68</sup> This dialogue is corporately dramatic, beyond being merely storied. With respect to both revelation and redemption, the category of story is being pushed toward something more: being dynamically thought out towards humans

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<sup>63</sup> TD2, pp.83-84

<sup>64</sup> MacKinnon, 'Balthasar's Christology', p.172. His analysis is more attached to tragedy than mine.

<sup>65</sup> TD5, p.246

<sup>66</sup> TD1, p.424

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', pp.66-67

<sup>68</sup> Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity', p.78

and ultimately in participation with persons, Christian truth is dramatic more than it is literary. Balthasar's great work was designed to recognise, from within, this ultimate dynamic. That plan is reflected on in his final résumé.

A being *appears*, it has an epiphany: in that it is beautiful and makes us marvel. In appearing it *gives* itself, it delivers itself to us: it is good. And giving itself up, it *speaks* itself, it unveils itself: it is true.<sup>69</sup>

Balthasar's ontological claim is that the Incarnation as act is the ultimate term of this fundamentally dramatic process. This furthers theologically literary ontological claims. In such claims, the Gospel story is ultimate and the person should respond in an ultimate version of appropriate literary response. Entering the story is the soteriological requirement of much narrative theology. As such it is important, while accepting that the Gospel cannot be reduced to any one genre, for narrative theology to have a sense of its literary form. This is a way of knowing how to enter: grotesque surrealism and social realism, say, may have very different requirements. Post-Balthasar, however, a theology that shifts from story to drama attempts better to express the ontological status of the Incarnation by providing an inherent rationale for gathering in participative response. A dramatic model opens space for the analogicality between humankind and God. There is no need to stop at a soteriological aporia of the literary model: either divine and human stories are forever the same, and known to be such in salvation; or they are forever different with a soteriological step from one to the other. For, on a dramatic model, human responses – whether attentively positive or negatively overlooking – are analogical functions of the dramatic move from God to humankind. In theo-drama

· the starting point ... is that primal relationship between God and the world (man) that leaves God, the Creator and Redeemer (through his self-communication), free to allow free, created beings to exist. ... We can speak of the "*analogia entis*" here, in so far as ... [t]he possibility of distinguishing between God - who "is all" (Sir 43:12) and thus needs nothing - and a world of finite beings who need God remains the fundamental mystery. It grounds everything ... without being deducible from anything. To it there is no "greater" alternative.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Balthasar, 'Résumé', p.4

<sup>70</sup> TD2, pp.118-119

It is in respect of this understanding of dramatic analogicality that Balthasar offers what Victoria Harrison calls his 'crucial claim':

an explanation of the Christian life form cannot be provided within our mundane reality ... [for one] cannot ground it prior to personal participation.<sup>71</sup>

A dramatic, more-than-literary, Christology makes dialogical participation itself a function of the ontological claim. For it supposes the dramatic event, with its unique actor and ultimate horizon, itself to form the world 'stage [as its] meaning conferring space.'<sup>72</sup> Thus, on MacKinnon's account, Balthasar holds the 'ontological styles of the older traditional theology' with a dramatic dimension whereby 'the very being of God as he is in himself [is] transcribed into terms of an engagement with his creation, that is at once his own initiative and at the same time fulfillment and promise.'<sup>73</sup>

This analogical dramatic model supposes a relational ontology. The ontological reality – of both God and creation – *is* in terms of an engagement. As Murphy expresses it, both the divine and the human 'have ... their apprehensibility by being in relation' whereby, on God's initiative, a 'Trinitarian shape [is] extended into the world.'<sup>74</sup> A dramatic ontological claim lessens the attachment of soteriology to literary genre by presenting theological truth as the ultimate term of a dramatic dynamic, such as is necessarily relational and participatory. Salvation, then, is no literary elevation into an overriding story but a personal share in the ultimate drama. Raymund Schwager summarises such a Balthasarian approach to 'Drama and Theological Reasoning'.

[A] purely narrative theology runs into the dilemma of either abandoning itself to a narrative thread which leads on endlessly, dissolving the Christian memory of events into a sea of other narrations, ... or limiting itself, without any particular justification to the biblical narratives. ... A purely narrative doctrine of redemption [is thus] unsupported by a corresponding line of reasoning. ... [A] theology which takes drama as its model ... is clearly differentiated from a narrative-based doctrine in that it is able to integrate a genuine line of reasoning. Balthasar has

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<sup>71</sup> Victoria S. Harrison, 'Human Holiness as Religious *Apologia*', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46, 1999, p.65

<sup>72</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, p.170

<sup>73</sup> MacKinnon, 'Balthasar's Christology', pp.168-169

<sup>74</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, p.145

... convincingly demonstrated ... that the categories of drama ... are appropriate to Christian theology. The theological line of reasoning can be developed out of drama, since drama itself does not advance without end ... but expresses itself in conflict and its corresponding resolution. In the case of biblical drama, moreover, we are not dealing with just any conflict. The event of the cross proves so radical, and the subsequent denouement ... so overpowering, that "greater than these cannot be thought".<sup>75</sup>

Theodramatic hermeneutics participates in God's own hermeneutic act of self-interpretation in Christ. It appreciates, by dialogue with it, this ultimate dramatic reality in which all other dramatic expressions can be judged. Theatre symbolises natural, human dramatic expression and thus is open to judgement. Theodramatic hermeneutics encourages dramatic dialogues with theatre practice from the perspective of a prior dramatic dialogue with God in Christ. Balthasar finds that theatre achieves dramatic success in as much as it is a limited, formal analogue of God's dramatic activity and fails to be dramatic in as much as it attempts an alternative version of dramatic reality. He does not shy of using this theological hermeneutics of life's dramatic reality to make specific interpretations of individual theatre practitioners and the next chapter will offer a three-fold model of Balthasar's understanding of life as drama from which to consider his dialogues with particular theatre directors.

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<sup>75</sup> Raymund Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, trans. James G. Williams and Paul Haddon (New York: Crossroad, 1999), p.12

## **4: BALTHASAR'S DIALOGUES WITH TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEATRE**

### **4.1: LIFE AS DRAMA<sup>1</sup>**

Balthasar dialogues with theatre on the understanding that life is dramatic. In the second chapter, I show that Balthasar has a theologically intuited sense of drama that pervades his Christocentric soteriology and anthropology. In the third, I outline Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics, which by a process of exclusion within inclusion dialogues with human dramatic expressions as internally relative to the divine. I show how, for Balthasar, the figure of Christ forms the shape of theo-drama and discuss the methodological priority Balthasar ascribes to theo-drama as it reveals the ontological reality of drama. In the first section of this chapter, I draw together Balthasar's understanding of life as drama as one grounded in a theatrical eschatological vision. It seems to me that the Theological Dramatics assumes three dimensions of dramatic reality, which I will call natural-human, ecclesial-personal and eschatological-final. I will suggest that Balthasar's dramatic integration of these three dimensions indicates the priority of the eschatological-final dimension and renders the (current) natural-human dimension necessarily post-Christian.

#### **4.11: Three Dramatic Dimensions**

##### ***4.111: The Natural-Human Dramatic Dimension***

Balthasar found nature fragmentary, unable to appreciate itself and only completed in Grace. Natural-human existence cannot set standards for theological expression of Grace and indeed non-theologically is not able fully to understand itself. For the natural realm *is* as it is oriented by God in Christ and so open to judgement and fulfilment only when it is read theologically. Such reading will not allow humans merely to appreciate their natural reality, but require and enable them to transcend it as new humanity in Christ. Thus 'man', at the purely natural level, 'achieves his full stature in failure.'<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, in the natural-human dimension, it is 'a basic Christian

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<sup>1</sup> A sub-title used by Nichols: *No Bloodless Myth*, p.11

<sup>2</sup> Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, p.187

requirement that existence should represent itself dramatically.’<sup>3</sup> This representation occurs as relative actions and absolute horizons are mutually related. The performance of inter-relational actions of claim and response supposes participants to have an absolute, although neither static nor necessarily shared, horizon. This is a requirement for meaningful exploration of life, as a dramatic reality, and exposes ‘what’ – as Balthasar puts it – ‘seems ultimate within the human horizon.’<sup>4</sup> There is no reason why what seems to be ultimate should be the same for all in the natural-human dimension, however its appreciation will necessarily take a dramatic form. For the natural-human dramatic dimension is one in which as ‘God desires all men to be saved, there is no room for a “purely natural” event.’<sup>5</sup> That humanity is not purely natural but dramatically natural, with relative and absolute combined, is an implication of its theologically appreciated situation of being open to integration in Grace. An anthropological account that defined humanity with governing reference to either horizon or event would not reflect the dramatic openness implied by the divine soteriological will. Yet, the various acknowledgements of a dramatic relation between the relative and the absolute in natural piety or in religions provide ‘no evidence of intrinsic movement toward the extraordinary and unique event of Christ.’<sup>6</sup> Only gracious theo-drama can eschatologically effect the ultimate dramatic reality of salvation, and the analogical natural-human dramatic dimension is stunted by its similarity in greater dissimilarity.

#### ***4.112: The Ecclesial-Personal Dramatic Dimension***

This natural-human dramatic dimension is only properly appreciated in Grace – the personal dramatic relationship between individuals and God through Christ towards which it is oriented and in which it is as it cannot be elsewhere. Thus Balthasar appreciates ‘osmosis’ between Grace and nature:<sup>7</sup> a ‘fluid relationship between [the] ensemble of the Church and the total human community.’<sup>8</sup> This osmosis is the

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<sup>3</sup> TD1, p.22

<sup>4</sup> TD2, pp.94-95

<sup>5</sup> TD3, p.410

<sup>6</sup> TD4, p.226

<sup>7</sup> TD4, p.418

<sup>8</sup> TD1, p.647

integration into itself that Grace effects in respect to nature and is only known from the Christian perspective. In the fluid relationship between the Christian ensemble and the human community, the gracious dramatic truth in the ensemble is the ultimate term of human community in its natural-human dramatic dimension.

Gracious dramatic reality, the ecclesial-personal dramatic dimension, is sacramental. Balthasar opposes natural sacramentality - a belief that sacramentality unites, by being integral to, a variety of dramatic expressions. This is one example of his opposition to what he called 'integralism': a 'debilitating mechanical attempt to hold together a disparate collection of individual truths and traditions.'<sup>9</sup> His general concern is that integralism offers human nature a disposition with respect to the divine such as would constitute a 'longing after grace and the vision of God, a longing that includes a latent claim to these.'<sup>10</sup> In Balthasar's theodramatic context, there is no room for general explanations of sacramentality in which it is a natural-human, biological or sociological, impulse and through which sacramentality as Christianly expressed is comparable with other modes of sacramentality under a unitive rubric, such as the dramatic. It makes no difference, on Balthasar's view, whether or not Christianity is seen as best, or ultimately, expressing nature's (dramatic) sacramentality. Still sacramentality is located in a human capacity, by implication sufficient to encompass our experience of finitude and infinity. Instead, theo-drama reveals integrational sacramentality: one in which sacramental activity has universal implications but is yet located solely within the particular inter-personal community of Christ's Church. There

[t]he individual is a real part of the total sacrament, which is not simply the Church *per se* (for the Church does not exist *per se*) but the Church as an extension of Christ. For Christ himself is the real primal sacrament: he is God's embodied and distinctive offer of salvation to mankind.<sup>11</sup>

With Christ as real primal sacrament, Balthasar's concern is to outline sacramental, specific, figural mediations of God as Trinity to persons in Christian community. In their revealed specificity, they do not confirm the dramatic rhythms of natural humanity, but can reorient them by gathering them into an ever-greater rhythm.

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<sup>9</sup> Balthasar, 'Another Ten Years', pp.230-231

<sup>10</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', p.75

<sup>11</sup> TD3, p.434

Balthasar would not deny that a sacrament, such as the Eucharist, is a dramatic event – with appropriate themes such as sacrifice and sharing. However, in being sacramental, it takes the new apocalyptic, soteriological rhythm. In the natural-human dimension, it is ‘impossible to find that rhythm’,<sup>12</sup> but as it is given ‘the Christian rhythm between the individual and the community becomes a concrete metaphor of trinitarian life within God.’<sup>13</sup> The sacramental rhythm cannot on Balthasar’s view be separated from the content of a sacramental act. Christian sacraments mediate the Trinity dramatically, in a way that renders it impossible for them to be comparable with other dramatic occasions, for this rhythm cannot be achieved elsewhere. Consequently, non-Christian non-sacramental drama cannot be pertinent to Christian sacramental drama in an integralist sense. The apocalyptic, theodramatic rhythm of the latter alone is the one in which God is both ever-greater and involved and so it heightens the stakes and engulfs other rhythms. Sacramentally, the human dramatic search for actions and horizon properly related is answered by the ultimate actor from the ultimate horizon – with specific universality whereby it is impossible that the explicit answer should have been implicit in the question.<sup>14</sup> In their particular formed occasions, which are inter-fused with this rhythm, sacraments make their meaning. They ‘are gestures and gifts from God to us. We are primarily recipients and only because we have received are we in a position to give to others.’<sup>15</sup>

The fluid relation between the ecclesial-personal and the natural-human dramatic dimensions does not represent a capacity of natural community but rather its openness to receiving the sacramental reorientation that has been given to the ecclesial ensemble. Such reception is the soteriological move of personalisation and the fact that it is itself dramatic indicates the importance of drama to Balthasar. ‘The “natural” drama of existence (between the Absolute and the relative) is consummated in the “supernatural” drama between the God of Jesus Christ and man.’<sup>16</sup> The potential for the ecclesial-personal dramatic dimension, the *communio*, to integrate within itself the natural-human dramatic dimension depends not on its sharing the rhythm of other

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<sup>12</sup> TD4, p.227

<sup>13</sup> TD2, p.415

<sup>14</sup> TD3, p.422

<sup>15</sup> Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, p.100

<sup>16</sup> TD1, p.130

dramatic acts in an integralist sense, but on its analogical relation to them as the ultimate performance in which they are but limited fragments.

#### ***4.113: The Eschatological-Final Dramatic Dimension***

Since in God there is eternal life and hence “eternal surprise”, we too shall experience this surprise. Since ...there is a kind of eternal “ever-more”, “everything in heaven seems to be growing”; but this takes place ... in the mode of being of eternal Love.<sup>17</sup>

Heavenly relationships, on Balthasar’s account, retain ‘the fundamental “distance” which alone makes love possible.’<sup>18</sup> The dramatic mode of existence here results from the general judgement where God recreates all of existence corporately and consequently it cannot be fully imagined but only partially pre-figured. Still, the eschatological-final reality will be dramatic, for it will represent all in the mutual self-giving of Trinitarian life. In this ultimate drama the inter-personal distance that is required for intimacy remains while yet all is gathered in.

The final, heavenly shape of the *communio* as the reciprocal openness of the redeemed is so much a part of the mystery of the Trinity that there are hardly words and concepts to describe it. ... What is difficult to grasp is that the triune divine freedom, which provides scope for each Hypostasis to exercise its own mode of seeing and deciding, similarly does not absorb all created freedom into itself but *freely* and *generously* gives itself to all. In the harmony of all freedoms the freedom of each individual retains its own timbre. The divine freedom is so all-encompassing that it makes room, within its single Truth, for countless aspects; thus it does not ... infringe the area of mystery of each individual’s creaturely spontaneity. In the community that comes into being through the Son’s eternal *communio*, everyone is utterly open ... to each other ... [as] free persons freely available to each other on the basis of the unfathomable distinctness of each. What is offered to the other is always ... [a] surprising gift. ... God’s will, embracing the entire, infinitely diversified heaven, is so generous that it draws into itself all the fullness of redeemed human freedoms, pride of place being given to that of the incarnate Son.<sup>19</sup>

Balthasar accepts that it is difficult to express this dimension without biblical imagery. And he finds no need to do so, able instead to ‘discern’ the ‘inner connection’ between

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<sup>17</sup> TD5, p.400, citing Adrienne von Speyr

<sup>18</sup> TD5, p.105

<sup>19</sup> TD5, pp.485-486

eschatological distance and intimacy in the vision of “the marriage feast of the lamb”, an invitation to which means blessedness.’<sup>20</sup> Balthasar uses the imagery of meal and marriage to show the priority of the eschatological-final dramatic dimension. Meal and marriage, both dramatic events, have always been fulfilled in the nuptial feast of the Lamb. Thus it is the Lamb who governs the imagery: the Lamb being the Son who ‘in the descending analogy from the triune God, is offered to the world both as the “seed of life” ... and as the “bread of life.”’<sup>21</sup> The Son’s descent informs the dramatic quality of both the ecclesial-personal and the natural-human dimensions. In the former, there is a “vertical” communication’, whereby in Christian meal and marriage - both of which are sacramental and eucharistic in a ritual and ethical sense - people respond dramatically to God’s dramatic communication in inter-personal events that pre-figure the eschatological drama. In the latter, meals and marriages involve ‘gestures and needs’ that in their ‘natural ... necessity’ open into a creative intimacy that is inter-relational and presumes a distance of otherness: ‘even in earthly life they are situations of self-surrender, reciprocal nurturing, fruitfulness and joy.’ Meals and marriages here intimate an absolute in and with the relative, which is the requirement of natural-human dramatic existence. When their theodramatic heavenly term is recognised, both dramatic dimensions in differing ways ‘point to’ the priority of heavenly life ‘fulfilling (and overfulfilling) the dimension of human intimacy with God.’<sup>22</sup> Ecclesial-personal meals and marriages pre-figure heaven’s nuptial banquet and natural-human meals and marriages are analogues of it. Neither is comparable with their heavenly completion but both intimate it, from their respective dimensions, to those who in Grace intuit the eschatological-final dramatic dimension.

#### **4.12: Eschatological Integration**

Balthasar encouraged theological integration of the natural and human as a ‘spontaneous art of aiming always at the Whole through the fragments of truth discussed and lived.’<sup>23</sup> This is an ecclesial art; it occurs in the Christian community in received pre-figuration of the eschatological-final dramatic reality. The Christian

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<sup>20</sup> TD5, p.471, citing Rev.19.9

<sup>21</sup> TD5, p.475, citing 1Jn.3.9 and Jn.6.35

<sup>22</sup> TD5, pp.470-475

<sup>23</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.231

community should open onto the natural world, witnessing by being itself. And the theologian, reflecting in that community, should give an account of how in it might be gathered all life in pre-figuration of God's eschatological-final dramatic glory. This account is what Balthasar terms hypothetical universalism. Christians have a duty to hope that all will be saved, and they can elucidate the openness for dramatic integration in the natural-human dimension. However, this integration can only occur personally and dramatically and so it is inappropriate to believe in any static guarantee.<sup>24</sup>

O'Donnell understands Balthasar's universalism as a 'lifelong concern to show how Jesus Christ in his person and mission incarnates the meaning of catholicity.'<sup>25</sup> I wonder whether Balthasar, always wary of abstraction, would be associated with a Christ who incarnated the meaning of anything. Yet O'Donnell's gloss of Balthasar's Christ as Concrete Universal rings more true: '[h]e who bypasses this concrete man will never find Totality.'<sup>26</sup> Rather than saying that Christ incarnates the meaning of catholicity, I would draw on Balthasar's *Word and Revelation* and say that Christian universalism is implied by the Incarnation. For there Balthasar defines the theological task as 'bringing out the cosmic presuppositions that the Word of God implies.'<sup>27</sup> Implications are 'the conditions which revelation pre-supposes for the integration of man to God through Christ.'<sup>28</sup> And one such implication is Christian universalism, whereby currently both nature and *ecclesia* are dramatic in differing dimensions of the ultimate, eschatological dramatic reality and ultimately God will be all in all.

Given Balthasar's understanding that 'God's word in Christ arranges a participation'<sup>29</sup> and his related claim that the Church is 'the only community that is unrestricted in scope',<sup>30</sup> how will this integration occur? Eschatologically: then natural-human drama will become universally integrated into theo-drama. This reality is pre-

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<sup>24</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare we Hope: "That All Men be Saved"?*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

<sup>25</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.9

<sup>26</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.52

<sup>27</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', p.60

<sup>28</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'In Retrospect', *Communio* 2.3 (1975), p.205

<sup>29</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', p.75

<sup>30</sup> Balthasar, 'Communio', p.7

figured in the Church and Balthasar's exposition of such theodramatic integration is four-fold.

Christian 'exclusivity' demands precisely the inclusion of all human thinking: as something judged ... it is 'broken', realigned and reset.<sup>31</sup>

Balthasar plays on words here: the initial term *gerichtetes* (judged) is developed in the following *ab- aus- ein- gerichtet* ('broken', realigned, reset). This reinforces the translation's impression of judgement as the governing concept, operative in the other three. O'Donnell considers that such judgemental, universal inclusion, 'does not entail radical rejection of [non-Christian traditions]. Their elements of truth must be preserved and integrated into the Christian vision.'<sup>32</sup> Again, I think Balthasar would be wary of abstraction. Talk of 'elements' suggests that aspects of non-Christian forms of life are susceptible to direct transference into truth. Riches and Quash put it better when they suggest that Balthasar shows a 'respect for the way human nature finds expression in a great variety of *forms*' as something to treat 'with seriousness as having ... *relation* to the revelation centred in Christ.'<sup>33</sup> This more effectively couples Balthasar's acceptance that humanity can develop dramatic forms, including forms of life, with the thoroughgoing re-orientation he requires of all non-Christian forms if they are to be reformed in the dynamic of Grace. Balthasar's Christian universalism, then, sets 'definite terms on which ... inclusion ... can take place'<sup>34</sup> and these are very much terms of engagement. Inclusion supposes a relational repositioning in becoming engaged with the ultimate horizon, an engagement that Balthasar describes as 'trammelled'.<sup>35</sup> The horizon is trammelled in the contours of its Trinitarian acts of infinite love; in inclusion the Christian person in community is trammelled in participation in that love. This has been described as Balthasar's 'fundamental meaning of Tradition, which is the sharing in the divine life.'<sup>36</sup> From this perspective non-theological disciplines are subject to judgement. Yet they are valuable in as much as

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<sup>31</sup> Balthasar, 'In Retrospect', p.204

<sup>32</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.7

<sup>33</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.136

<sup>34</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.136

<sup>35</sup> Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, p.9

<sup>36</sup> John R. Sachs, 'Hans Urs von Balthasar: 1905-1988', in Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (eds.), *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.501

they represent nature, which only points to grace by its *broken* 'inchoate character'<sup>37</sup> - human endeavours, unable to achieve what they set out to do. This brokenness is known from appreciating its radicalised alternative, in Christian reflection on that particular endeavour. Theologians thereby *realign* a particular human, dramatic endeavour by reflecting on how it might pre-figure eschatological fulfilment, if it were radically drawn into the apocalyptic rhythm. Thus the theologian expresses the reality of the endeavour in the whole ecology of God with the world, showing its term as Christological implication. For in the final analysis, universal inclusion through judgement will obtain only eschatologically. The harmonious, and still relational, *resetting* will occur when God becomes all in all.

This realigning and resetting, as eschatological integrative inclusion through judgement, is itself dramatic. So drama becomes Balthasar's 'field of analogy'<sup>38</sup> in respect to the great theological analogies of heaven and earth, grace and nature, God and humankind. In dramatic fields, humans explore their boundaries and beliefs, corporately inter-related. These fields are analogical in respect to the divine, inter-personal exploration of the world in Christ, an exploration that is ultimately dramatic, forming the ultimate dramatic field. Human dramatic activity is then the widest of its analogical capacities, its inter-relational, field-making activity whose ultimate term is God. Being dramatically presupposes a horizon for properly situated meaning: a horizon engaged with the dramatic activity within itself. Natural-human drama operates between relative and absolute poles. It can be met by the personal drama from the ultimate horizon: the meeting, itself dramatic, offered in theo-drama. The infinite eschatological-final dramatic rhythm of the Trinity grounds the possibility of finite, analogically dramatic activity in the natural-human dimension and directly opens up to include finite, pre-figuratively sacramental dramatic activity in the ecclesial-personal dimension. There is thus an analogy of theatricality, of dramatic dynamic, from God to humankind.

#### **4.13: Post-Christian Drama**

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<sup>37</sup> Balthasar, 'Implications', p.75

<sup>38</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.141

It is a requirement of Christian dramatic, eschatological inclusion through judgement that there is ultimately one dramatic Trinitarian horizon. In as much as this could be appreciated from the natural-human dramatic dimension, every human dramatic relative action supposes an absolute horizon and so all dramatic relative actions have an ultimate horizon. This is an intuition, not an argument, and Balthasar accepts that not everyone sees it – although his hope is that everyone will. The intuition itself is dependent on appreciating the interruptive reality of the eschatological horizon in particular events: that “God” ... steps onto the stage of life’s play as “a person” in the action’ making theo-drama possible.<sup>39</sup> The Incarnation is ontologically dramatic in revealing, and effectively creating, the human acting area as the stage that ‘has been designed for the *one* drama that is to be played on it.’<sup>40</sup> This plays out in Balthasar’s three categories for analysis of drama: pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian. Post-Christian drama is twentieth-century theatre appropriated theologically as symbolic of the natural-human dramatic dimension after the Incarnation. As such, it is the category to focus on in order to study Balthasar’s dialogues with twentieth-century theatre.

In the background lies the pre-Christian dramatic achievement, which was to relate anthropology and ontology and thus in various ways to articulate humanity as both natural and yet a-cosmic and propose possibilities for harmony that respect this dramatic tension.<sup>41</sup> Christian theological anthropology, as I have discussed in Chapter Two, heightens this dramatic tension by exposing its ontological Trinitarian ground. Thus, it opens up both con-crucifixion and joy in communion with a revealed and responsive rhythm that goes beyond humanity’s own style. Given the ontological significance of the Incarnation ‘post-Christian anthropology differs essentially from pre-Christian anthropology because of the presence (or former presence) of the Christian element.’<sup>42</sup> Balthasar considers that humans cannot return satisfactorily to pre-Christian dramatic anthropology once its ontological meaning and destiny have been revealed. Thus, in a commentator’s summary, there are ‘post-Christian gropings to find a new vision of the human.’ For, after the Incarnation,

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<sup>39</sup> TD2, p.189

<sup>40</sup> TD2, p.173

<sup>41</sup> TD2, pp.346-355

<sup>42</sup> TD2, p.417

the plight of post-Christian people is that they are ... unable to re-establish the ... harmony of pagan antiquity. Hence they are left with the burden of carrying their own freedom which now has a weight they are unable to carry.<sup>43</sup>

Christianity 'releases' the person from this religious 'burden by inserting him, right from the start, into the dramatic dialogue with God, so that God himself may cause him to experience *his* ultimate definition of man.'<sup>44</sup> As salvation, this interruption 'signals the end of the other religions.'<sup>45</sup> And by religions Balthasar means all non-Christian 'mythical or religio-philosophical anthropology.'<sup>46</sup> Christian dramatic anthropology thus renders all other anthropological accounts as burdens.

In this system, post-Christianity can be dramatic in two ways: parody or protest. Both possibilities are respective of Christianity and grounded in the reality of competing catholicisms, best expressed by quotation from the Dramatics: the Incarnation 'is the moment at which the two universalisms or "catholicisms", that is, that of Christianity and that of mankind, begin to enter into dramatic competition with each other.'<sup>47</sup> This conflict results from a

titanic rejection on man's part: he resists being embraced by this very mystery of the Cross. This anti-Christian aversion is something new; it has only existed since the coming of Christ. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin." It is only when heaven is wide open that hell too yawns at our feet.<sup>48</sup>

In this reality there is 'no medium ... between atheism and Catholicity.'<sup>49</sup> Natural piety is passé; there is only stark choice. And '[t]his is no mere battle of words and ideas between human beings: here mankind is drawn into the theodramatic war that has broken out between God, in his Logos and hell's anti-logos.'<sup>50</sup> Such battle-lines may not seem obviously drawn, and this is because the anti-Christian side gathers various

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<sup>43</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, pp.55-56

<sup>44</sup> TD2, p.343

<sup>45</sup> TD3, p.420

<sup>46</sup> TD2, p.343

<sup>47</sup> TD4, p.210

<sup>48</sup> TD4, p.11

<sup>49</sup> Norris, 'Symphonic Unity', p.246

<sup>50</sup> TD4, p.412

protesters and the Christian side is variously parodied. It is such protest and parody that sustains the post-Christian dramatic dimension.

In the theodramatic context, atheism is anti-Christian. This is because atheism, on Balthasar's view, abstracts Christological claims and makes them secular human capacities. Trends such as Marxist economic messianism, Nietzschean divinisation of man, and communist hope for absolute community evidence this claim. Islam and Judaism, as non-Christian theisms, are considered particularly susceptible to such abstraction. Balthasar uses such examples to support his claim that

[m]ankind only becomes conscious of its unity in breaking loose from, and protesting against, the claims of the Church to be the ... form of unity willed by God ... and [this] is bound to lead to a kind of *entente cordiale* between all non-Catholic forms of religion.<sup>51</sup>

This protesting existence reveals a post-Christian dramatic predicament; for

attempts to take the Christian heightening of tension in created nature and reduce it ... will only be alive ... as long as they manifest the element of protest. Once separated from what they are resisting they collapse, because they draw their power to transcend ... solely from themselves, and so are bound to ruin the finite human being.<sup>52</sup>

Any human dramatic relationship, the sort which is alive, is ultimately sustained by the Trinitarian relationship that is its ontological ground. If post-Christianity lost sight of the Christian dramatic reality against which it was protesting, it would lose its capacity to be dramatic. Balthasar considers this dependence 'proved ... by the collapse of the dramatic in the post-Christian age.'<sup>53</sup> Thus, perversely in protest, anti-Christian trends in the natural-human dimension draw their sustenance for dramatic living from theodramatic reality and thus meet the 'requirement of Christianity that existence should represent itself dramatically.'<sup>54</sup>

'Post-Christian parodies of ... the Christian Church', such as positivist, humanist political hope where it is believed that 'the common good can be implemented using ...

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<sup>51</sup> Balthasar quoted Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, p.268

<sup>52</sup> TD2, p.424

<sup>53</sup> TD3, p.532

<sup>54</sup> TD1, p.22

immanent resources', are the other style of post-Christian dramatic possibility.<sup>55</sup> Further parodies, both humanistic and religious, can be gathered from the Dramatics. An example is the 'dialogic principle' in its humanistic form, which values communication and sincerity in inter-human encounter where my reality is perceived as in some sense given through the other. Yet

however much philosophical dialogism exerts itself to understand how the "I" becomes a person through the "thou", it simply cannot give that precise answer. For however much a genuinely fulfilling encounter with a "thou" may seem, to the individual, to have a quality of "destiny", it remains ultimately fortuitous and is at most transitory. For one "I-thou" relationship can be followed by a second ... In each of these the "I" is endowed with a different name and nature: Who am I, then, in the end? ... [T]he philosophers ... take up residence in this precarious inter-human area.<sup>56</sup>

Human encounter remains parodic on theodramatic encounter - it is a version that mimics but cannot meet that theodramatic scale or depth without which it cannot properly be understood. For human others cannot give the definition and destiny that a Divine Other does. Religious trends are also parodic in respect to Christianity. After the Incarnation, any reading of the *Bhagavad Gita*, 'remains stuck fast in contradictions' as the text draws the battle of the world drama into a unity within divine stillness. This religious drama fails to be ultimately dramatic because its term is univocal reception into divine unity, yet it is dramatic in a minor way, a way that correlates with the extent to which it is parodic on Christian truth. Contemporary Judaism and Islam have the converse problem in their understanding of the world drama as a battle; their ultimate term is univocal action, rather than reception, on the part of the divine.<sup>57</sup> Religious parodies of Christian truth need not be deliberate, but after the Incarnation their existence is indicative of a search to attain dramatically what can only be given in theodrama. Thus their parodic drama will never fully succeed. Religious and humanistic dramatic parodies may indulge in 'plagiarism and looting' from Christian truth,<sup>58</sup> and may offer an 'anthropological correlate for every theological aspect of the definitive word of God'. Still,

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<sup>55</sup> TD2, p.425

<sup>56</sup> TD1, pp.628-629

<sup>57</sup> TD2, p.34

<sup>58</sup> TD3, p.420

the sum of these fragments would not amount to the indivisible unity we see in the Word-made-flesh, “full of grace and truth.” There has to be a leap in which we leave the sum of fragments and embrace the unity; this corresponds to the stumbling block in ... Christ’s call for conversion.<sup>59</sup>

Post-Christian parodies of theo-drama cannot achieve what theo-drama does and in as much as they are dramatic remain fragments in its Trinitarian ontological ground. They are the activities of ‘post-Christian man, who ... in passing through Christianity, has grown used to the heightening of his creaturely rhythms and wants ... them as if they are his personal hallmark, a gift that now belongs to him entirely.’<sup>60</sup> Only such sad parody is left for human dramatic searches. After the revelation of ultimate dramatic truth, parodic theatre can ‘provide us with a preliminary understanding, they cannot offer anything like a complete grasp.’<sup>61</sup> Not only does it not attain the status of theo-drama it cannot even meet its full dramatic form.

What Balthasar calls post-Christianity is both an ontological and a temporal reality. It exists after Christ and its character is defined by Christ’s ontological significance.

The totality of [Christ’s] accomplished work can confront, head-on, every religious myth or ritual, every figure claiming to mediate salvation and every path that aims to purify and enlighten man. ... Objectively, since it fulfils all the ... seekings of mankind, it signals the end of the other religions, even if they continue to exist for a few hundred or thousand years and even if they join forces against the intruder.<sup>62</sup>

This parodic continuing to exist or this protest of joining forces is the post-Christian *dramatic* search. Both its parody and its protest are parasitic on Christianity and it is clear that the extent to which they are thus parasitic corresponds with the extent to which they are dramatic. These polarised possibilities affect even the vocabulary of performance theory: ‘the conceptual categories of secular drama ... remain at the level

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<sup>59</sup> TD3, pp.421-422

<sup>60</sup> TD2, p.417

<sup>61</sup> TD1, p.18

<sup>62</sup> TD3, p.419-420

of image or metaphor, as is clear from their ultimate ambiguity.<sup>63</sup> Our drama, in as much as it is, is post-Christian.

## 4.2: TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEATRE

The reason for Balthasar's 'longing to write about' the theology of the theatre<sup>64</sup> may be found in relation to his understanding of theatre as 'an arcane symbol of the dramatic dimension of existence, in so far as existence in its metaphysico-religious self-interpretation assumes a horizon of meaning.'<sup>65</sup> Theatre, as such a symbol, provides a triadic dramatic vocabulary for transposition into talk about God's dramatic act. Furthermore, the participatory theodramatic perspective enables Balthasar to survey twentieth-century theatre, appreciating the parodies of and protests against theo-drama that it must spotlight as symbol of post-Christian dramatic existence. Proper awareness of what it is to be dramatic is revealed through participation in Christian truth. From this awareness, the natural-human dramatic dimension is appreciated analogically. Balthasar expects theatre to symbolise the natural-human dramatic dimension as the theologian knows it to be and, when he dialogues with twentieth-century theatre, Balthasar is bringing the ultimate dramatic dialogue between God and persons in Christ to bear on theatre's provisional dramatic dialogues between absolute horizons and relative actions.

Commentators are beginning to examine Balthasar's appropriative analogy between drama in the theatre and theodramatic reality. For example, Dalzell looks at acting, a component of Balthasar's first triadic analogy, and suggests that Balthasar's account of the Son as first actor fails to take account of sociality inherent to acting and thus distorts human drama through a theological conception of proportionality.<sup>66</sup> In relation to the second triad, Quash's work plays with Balthasar's concept of an analogous dramatic horizon. He suggests that an overemphasis on harmony and resolution in the final horizon of theo-drama renders the inter-action of it and the person more stable and predictable as a middle ground between God and humanity than

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<sup>63</sup> TD1, p.18

<sup>64</sup> Balthasar quoted Henrici, 'Sketch', p.33

<sup>65</sup> TD1, p.249-250

<sup>66</sup> See Dalzell, 'Social Drama'; also *Dramatic Encounter*

a theatrical model should allow.<sup>67</sup> Such commentators seem to me to probe and question the analogicality Balthasar finds between divine and human modes of drama. Their shared concern is to suggest that Balthasar's account of what I call the ecclesial-personal drama is weakened by the limitations in his expression of this analogy. I will look at this analogy with respect to Spirit and director. Spirit/director links Balthasar's two theatrical triads, as the Person/practitioner who is responsible for the dramatic success of the Play/production, and so might prove an incisive point at which to probe and question. I intend to consider the analogy not in relation to the personal-ecclesial drama but in relation to the extent to which the theologian, appreciative of theodramatic reality, can be said to dialogue with the work of the natural-human theatre practitioner. The ontological priority accorded to theo-drama has significant implications for the way in which theatre practice is appreciated and Balthasar's Spirit/director analogy exemplifies this. Balthasar makes clear judgements over particular twentieth-century theatre directors on the basis of his pneumatological standard and these provide cameos of his analogical approach, sustained enough to reveal how it works by polarising post-Christian dramatic possibility as either protest or parody.

#### **4.21: Dialogues with Post-Christian Theatre Directors**

In Balthasar's dramatic analogy between the theatre director and the Spirit they both, the Spirit ultimately and the theatre director provisionally, bridge the gap between author and actors and bring the play alive. This implies an analogy of skill whereby the 'mystery of a play's perfect direction cannot be disassociated from pneumatology.'<sup>68</sup> The skill is transposing the play's horizon into particular actions through which to draw the audience's horizon into the play's. Balthasar found that '[e]very transposition embarked on by man has a theological a priori: the Holy Spirit, whose task it is to universalise the drama of Christ.'<sup>69</sup> A successful director's transposition will, then, be a formal miniature of the Spirit's. I summarise Balthasar's account of the director's transpositional skill as mediation of a transcendent horizon in a particular representation. Taking each phrase in turn, I will show how Balthasar's pneumatology

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<sup>67</sup> See Quash, 'Ends of Modernity'; also 'Theology of Drama'

<sup>68</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.32

<sup>69</sup> TD2, p.96

sets the standard for human theatre direction and judges post-Christian practitioners accordingly.

#### ***4.211: Mediation***

[T]he Father entrusts his play to [the Spirit] to be translated into real life ... and ... the Church must entrust herself to [the Spirit] if her mission ... is to succeed. As for the individual, either he would never find his “person” or he would subsequently lose it and its authentic freedom if he did not have the humility to submit himself to the Spirit's “direction”.<sup>70</sup>

The Spirit's work in the Church sets the standard for the director's mediation. The Spirit engenders personalising, socialising mutual engagement with the ultimate horizon. The Spirit mediates this horizon in forms of worship and forms of life that are true to the play entrusted. These forms - finally eucharistic, both ritually and ethically - ensure that supporting actors, Christians, are participant in the reality of Christ as lead actor and enable them to witness to that reality.<sup>71</sup> The Spirit ensures this relational, inter-personal participation that moves from and reveals the ontological horizon and thus his work is ultimately dramatic. The main implication of this for the human director is that by ‘penetrating the dramatist's mind’ he must ‘keep before [the actors] the creative goal which they all share.’ To keep the creative goal before the actors presumes that the director engages them in it, as it cannot be brought into life without their intra-participation. It is only if the director mediates through elicitation in this way that the actors in rehearsal and the characters in performance will ‘form an ensemble in the spiritual sense.’<sup>72</sup> And only in ensemble can a dramatic horizon be appreciated and then bodied forth. As a requirement of dramatic success, this has significant implications for theatre direction:

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<sup>70</sup> TD3, p.534

<sup>71</sup> Christ as lead and Christians as supportive is key to Balthasar's theodramatic account of acting, with theatre performances understood in terms of one lead into whose destiny other characters fit. In ‘Social Drama’, Dalzell argues that this reflects an analogy of proportionality that distorts the dramatic resource of theatre acting, it being more social than this allows. Balthasar's understanding of acting informs his judgements on directing, with no consideration of what directors do with plays that do not have a lead-supporters structure. Given that ‘theodramatic theory is ... primarily concerned ... with acting and the ability to act’ (TD2, p.13), if, as Dalzell reasonably claims, this presumed structure itself distorts dramatic sociality this represents a significant problem.

<sup>72</sup> TD1, p.301

[i]t is a sad fact that in this century there are star directors who have forgotten their function of simply mediating and eliciting; they conduct themselves like virtuosos and act as if they themselves were the real creators of the performance. The director's book, which should be nothing more than a fluid collection of the most diverse notes, becomes a kind of full score.<sup>73</sup>

Balthasar goes on to criticise Edward Gordon Craig's employment of the actor as supermarionette. Craig viewed the actor as a scenic individual purposed towards expression of the director's vision: the 'stage' as whole theatrical performance was 'the pure artefact of the director.'<sup>74</sup> Such theatre, on Balthasar's view, is not dramatic because it does not allow for the mutuality among actors that reveals a dramatic horizon and can open that horizon to include the audience. Such mutuality is revealed to be theatre's proper dramatic aim in the opening of God's Trinitarian relations around the world in the Incarnation. The Person of the Spirit ensures that a dramatic horizon, greater than He could have alone, is mutually experienced, primordially in the Trinity and soteriologically in the Church. So the natural-human theatre director, to be dramatic, must open up the play's horizon by mutual creative engagement and not by expressing her own individual vision. Balthasar's Craig determined to impose, vertically, his directorial vision and in this determination he denied the horizontal, communal embodiment required for dramatic success.

#### ***4.212: Transcendent Horizon***

In the Trinity, the Spirit mediates between the Father and the Son by holding always before the Son the transcendent horizon of the ontological drama, to the point where the Son appreciates this horizon by living it round and so gives up the Spirit to the Father. As such,

the Son of God, in order to carry out his mission does not look at himself (his "divine ideal", his "conscience") but at the Father's will, which is set before him anew at every moment by the Holy Spirit, or - using the stage metaphor - at the Holy Spirit's "prompting".<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> TD1, p.300

<sup>74</sup> TD1, p.300

<sup>75</sup> TD3, p.533

Beyond the implication that the theatre director's mediation must be corporate rather than individual, the transcendence of the horizon requires him to use his intermediary power in such a way as to 'keep to the "hierarchy" of antecedent powers.'<sup>76</sup> Theology shows that 'theatre is only meaningful when seen against the background of a given, absolute meaning.'<sup>77</sup> And so, to be dramatic, the director must recognise the given-ness of the play's authored horizon standing over the company horizons in order that the performance will graft the audience horizon into the play's. For

[Constantin] Stanislavsky is surely right: "If you force contemporary reality on to an ancient ... classical work, you are putting proud flesh onto a magnificent body and distorting it beyond recognition." If, on the other hand, a modern approach is prepared to insert itself organically into the "higher task" of the older play and thus enrich it, developing it inwardly in a particular direction, a valid *aggiornamento* can be brought about.<sup>78</sup>

Thus the theatre director is responsible to the transcendent horizon of the authored play: transcendent in the sense of being greater than the action yet expressed in the action, natural-human analogue to divine transcendence. Balthasar considers this responsibility to involve entering a reality that is vertical as well as horizontal. The critical deduction Balthasar makes from this is that what he calls propagandist theatre direction cannot be dramatic because it deals only in the horizontal. Balthasar's named representative of this is Bertolt Brecht, whose work 'signals the abdication of drama in favor of a narrative philosophy of history.'<sup>79</sup> In the dramatic event of the Incarnation 'absolute Goodness and Beauty choose for themselves an ultimate, definitive shape, a definitively incarnate Word.' Because Brecht's productions did not operate with absolute horizons but found that all horizons, all conditions, can be changed, they are not appropriately dramatic in respect to the Incarnation.<sup>80</sup> On Balthasar's view, this non-dramatic, epic theatre occurs because, according to Brecht's alienation effect, the actor is to be 'beside not in the role' and for his didactic and political aims theatre illustrates the social situation, rather than represents inter-relational events. Brecht's direction is 'purely "horizontal"', lacking the vertical presence required for dramatic

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<sup>76</sup> TD1, p.299

<sup>77</sup> TD1, p.74

<sup>78</sup> TD1, p.302, citing Stanislavsky

<sup>79</sup> TD2, p.40

<sup>80</sup> TD2, p.33

freedom.<sup>81</sup> Thus he ‘reduces all personal destiny to that of a puppet’ as ‘the individual person ... is not to be presented for its own sake; rather it is a peg on which to hang the urgent demand for the “conditions” to be “changed.”’<sup>82</sup> ‘In terms of world view, Brecht and Christianity are in close competition.’<sup>83</sup> And when Brecht’s theatre did attain dramatic moments, it was despite not because of his intentions, and resultant on his protest against the Christian perspective. This, at least, seems to be Balthasar’s analysis in TD2 where he comments that the moral, dramatic significance of Brechtian theatre occurs

not, let it be said, through “alienation effects” and the various measures employed to prevent the audience becoming involved, but by all the “spectators” being impressed by the explosive nature of *election* and the scent of their ultimate collapse, in such a way that everyone is obliged to breathe in something of the spirit of this having-been-chosen for the Good. The instance par excellence of this is where absolute Goodness and Beauty choose for themselves an ultimate definitive *form*, a definitively incarnate *Word*.<sup>84</sup>

For Balthasar, Brecht’s theatre, when it is dramatic, is playing against the director’s theory and instead playing from the sustaining theodramatic reality – of form, word and election – with which it attempts to compete. Balthasar reads both the cry of *Mother Courage*<sup>85</sup> and the ‘outburst ... with its shrill succession of question marks’ at the end of *The Good Person of Szechwan* in this way, as dramatic events that go against Brecht’s theory and suggest that ‘there is still a horizon emitting something like a light of meaning.’<sup>86</sup> To Balthasar, the repeated questions about what we are to do and the demand that the audience find among themselves a good person, represent an attempt to make goodness and hope, which *are* Christologically, a natural-human capacity. As the audience breathes in this demand, they participate in the dramatic, protesting process of abstracting from Christian truth. This illustrates what it is for the human dramatic dimension to be sustained in protest. For fundamentally it remains the case that one cannot achieve a field of dramatic tension

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<sup>81</sup> TD2, p.331

<sup>82</sup> TD2, pp.48-49

<sup>83</sup> TD1, p.86

<sup>84</sup> TD2, p.33 (my emphasis)

<sup>85</sup> TD1, p.331

<sup>86</sup> TD1, p.322

in “epic theatre” [where] the unfolding action is only an “instance” of “... conditions”, and these conditions are not really metaphysical but merely economic; ... [and where] the character’s story must never become so engrossing as to acquire a significance of its own, cut loose from and transcending the “conditions”. This, at least, is the theory; fortunately Brecht the poet does not always follow it.<sup>87</sup>

As the Spirit reveals the ultimate, transcendent horizon in the Incarnation, so the director should reveal a provisionally transcendent horizon in human theatre. ‘It is possible to detect an eschatological theme emerging here.’<sup>88</sup> The required vertical presence is analogous to the vertical communication of the apocalyptic, soteriological rhythm. The soteriological rhythm is unique to God’s dramatic act in Christ and solely pre-figures the ultimate eschatological drama where the divine, while beyond, is all in all. But a limitedly vertical dynamic from a transcendent (greater, yet involved) horizon is thus made essential to the dramatic as all dramatic moments are analogous to the Incarnation. ‘The director who fails to recognize this fundamental impulse of all mainstream drama and tries to adapt it to political propaganda has in fact betrayed the dramatic dimension.’<sup>89</sup>

#### ***4.213: Particular Presentation***

Theatre must, then, be both horizontal and vertical – a communal participation in a transcendent horizon – and the particular presentation achieved in direction is at the heart of its pneumatological mystery. Balthasar points to the Spirit as

the socializing ‘between’, rooting human fellowship in a (trinitarian) personal depth that cannot be realized by purely earthly means.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> TD2, p.93

<sup>88</sup> Dalzell, *Dramatic Encounter*, p.122

<sup>89</sup> TD1, p.305. Clearly, Balthasar’s analysis depends on his theological account of drama and there are many comments that Brechtian practitioners would question. For example, even if one accepts that verticality is a dramatic requirement, it would seem that the distance between actor and role, which Balthasar finds non-dramatic, itself provides verticality alternative to the style that Balthasar considers normative. Balthasar on Brecht is a complex study in itself. Here I have considered Brecht as director - it would be possible to discuss the way in which his theology of theatre contrasts Brecht and Eugene Ionesco as playwrights.

<sup>90</sup> TD1, p.647

Aidan Nichols comments that the Spirit ‘renders us participants in a process of divine formation.’<sup>91</sup> He is true to Balthasar’s claim that indwelling is insufficient as an account of the Spirit’s relation to the person for it does not indicate the ‘insert[ion] into ensemble’ that the Spirit effects.<sup>92</sup> The Spirit guarantees the Church’s corporate pre-figuration of the ultimate eschatological drama as an ongoing processional participation; he does not itemise Christian life by stamping each individual with an independent, static guarantee. He *is* between. The Church is a community of true action in its sacramental relationship with God in Christ precisely through this self-effacing mediation of the Spirit. Analogically, making a particular presentation of a transcendent horizon in the natural-human dimension, the theatre director should ‘devote his energies to rendering himself superfluous.’<sup>93</sup> It is vital that the audience should not see the director’s struggle with the text, as if the director was interpreter. Such Director’s Theatre, on Balthasar’s view, places an obstruction between the audience’s horizon and the horizon of the action into which it should be directly grafted. Constantin Stanislavsky’s classic method is respected by Balthasar because of Stanislavsky’s determination to enable the actor to embody the truth of the role so that the spiritual life of the play is on stage not in visible directorial interpretation but immediately substantiated by the physical life of the action. Balthasar understands Stanislavsky’s aims in the terms above and also outlines in broad-brush strokes the method’s techniques: relaxation exercises to enable gesture; observation tuning to enable attention; a combination of physical technique and emotional empathy to develop and sustain total activation of character. This total activation is *disponibilité*: the availability whereby the actor in character is able to receive the impact of other characters in the cast and so in rehearsal contribute to an integrated corporate development of roles in the play. And Balthasar concludes, astonishingly given his stance on sacramental theology, that

[t]here is something sacramental about Stanislavsky’s method.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.237

<sup>92</sup> TD1, p.647; see TD4, p.418

<sup>93</sup> TD1, p.300

<sup>94</sup> TD1, p.289

To what does this statement amount? I think it is grounded in a feeling for “disponibilité” (and the training that aims at it).<sup>95</sup> As a director, Stanislavsky employs both observational development of physical technique and imaginative development of emotional empathy to enable this availability, in which each actor will develop a character and interactively, without the directorial influence remaining obtrusively, the engagement of characters will become formed roles. The Spirit operates also both through the technique of observable eucharistic structures and through imaginative saintly empathy in generating the Church. And his is ultimate inobtrusion in that he thus enables formation in truth, where role is person, known inter-actively without any special stopping-point in him. For Balthasar, Stanislavsky’s work is an intra-human analogue of the Spirit’s. Stanislavsky’s avowed focus on truth, but truth as occasioned in dramatic art as opposed to any broader philosophical account helps Balthasar here. Particularly appealing to Balthasar is Stanislavsky’s belief that the actor’s embodiment of poetic truth requires his acceptance of the author’s purpose for his character by ‘entering into the horizon of meaning that encompasses the role.’<sup>96</sup> Safe as artistry, the formal truth of Stanislavsky’s work is so striking that it can be considered to have something sacramental about it, a fictional analogue of sacramental reality only occasioned in fact through the Spirit in the Church.

#### **4.22: The Pneumatological Standard**

I have shown that Balthasar judges the creation of drama by theatre directors through a pneumatological understanding of what dramatic success is.<sup>97</sup> As the Spirit sustains one theo-drama, on the one ultimate stage of the one ultimate actor, there is one way to be dramatic; the theatre director can only sustain natural-human drama according to this dynamic.

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<sup>95</sup> TD3, p.533

<sup>96</sup> TD1, p.279

<sup>97</sup> Whether Balthasar’s interpretations would be persuasive to those who do not share his theological dramatic approach is another question. I have avoided introducing reflections on what drama is from the relevant theatre directors or from performance theorists and merely presented Balthasar’s evaluations. However, I have mentioned points of potential discussion - for example, performance and dramatic truth in respect of Stanislavsky and the actor and dramatic role in respect of Brecht.

The director must sensitively listen for the text's spirit and infuse it, in its integrity, into the troupe's multifarious organism. ... Here it is possible for an "impure spirit" to usurp a major role and spoil everything (like many a modern director). ... [T]his shows us how important it is for the director to be a - modest - reflection of the operation of the Holy Spirit on the world stage.<sup>98</sup>

Balthasar's pneumatological standard for theatre direction is one that no human director can exactly meet. For

a dramatic dimension that comes from God's heaven and is implanted in the world, comprehending and judging everything in the world and leading it towards its redemptive meaning, is so unique and exuberant that it can only be reflected in a fragmentary and broken way on the stage.<sup>99</sup>

In the unique, ultimate status of its characters and action, theo-drama alone is dramatic ontology. And, as with all aspects of the dramatic analogy, to relate 'the divine Spirit and the director' is a 'poor metaphor'; in employing such natural-human practices 'we need to complement them and go beyond them.'<sup>100</sup> In its analogical weakness, which from a theological perspective is its ontological reality, natural-human theatre direction is polarised as either parody or protest with respect to the theodramatic standard. In the Theological Dramatics, Stanislavsky exemplifies the former pole and Brecht the latter. In either case, the director, in their responsibility for the performance, is placed in a predicament that they may not appreciate themselves with regard to what a performance's dramatic success is. This evaluative polarisation of theatre direction is an example of Balthasar's theology judging other disciplines. It goes beyond a literary judgement, where a play's themes may have their ultimate term theologically, into a theatrical judgement of the ways that particular practitioners work, from the theological perspective. As God's is theatrical activity, experienced by the theologian, so the theologian is in a position to judge theatre practice and its techniques. As Balthasar dialogues with theatre directors, their processes of making theatre are relativised within a theological understanding of dramatic success.

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<sup>98</sup> TD3, p.533

<sup>99</sup> TD1, p.320

<sup>100</sup> TD1, p.17

Alongside the great twentieth-century theatre directors already mentioned, Balthasar's *Theological Dramatics* gathers one other. He is still working: creating theatre, as one commentator puts it, 'as many ways as possible.'<sup>101</sup> Balthasar's dialogue with him illuminates this polarised appropriation. His work is, apparently, both parodic and protesting, polarised both ways. He is Peter Brook.

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<sup>101</sup> Shomit Mitter, *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*, (London: Routledge, 1992) p.4

## **5: BALTHASAR AND BROOK**

### **5.1: BALTHASAR'S DIALOGUE WITH BROOK**

#### **5.11: Peter Brook**

Peter Brook's memoir, *Threads of Time*<sup>1</sup>, puts his career into three phases. The first is that of the new man at the Royal Shakespeare Company, where Brook was a director before he turned 25. His pioneering, ensemble approach to both performance and rehearsal of theatre and opera peaked with his famous 1970 production, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', and is reflected in *The Empty Space*<sup>2</sup>, a series of lectures published in 1968. The second phase begins when, later in 1970, Brook founded CICT, an international theatre group mainly based in Paris but travelling through Africa and the Middle East. They performed large scale and often ritualised productions, notably 'Orghast', but also engaged in village improvisations seeking cross-cultural communication in a more intimate style. Something of an unresolved conflict between the two activities emerges, and accounts of this phase are found in *The Shifting Point*.<sup>3</sup> This second phase closes with the late 1980s theatrical adaptation of *The Mahabharata*, which toured internationally, closing at the *Bouffes du Nord* in Paris, where Brook has been based since. In the third phase, Brook's concern has been to appreciate the theatrical moment. Productions have been on a smaller scale and he has published a series of lectures that complement and develop themes from *The Empty Space*, *There Are No Secrets*.<sup>4</sup>

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to make a unity of Brook's career; it is hard to know what that would mean. There is no common style: theorists whose ideas stand opposed are combined in

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Brook, *Threads of Time: A Memoir* (London: Methuen, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972)

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration, 1946 – 1987* (London: Methuen, 1988)

<sup>4</sup> Peter Brook, *There are No Secrets: Thoughts on Acting and Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1993)

<sup>5</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.11

Brook's practice. There is no constant theme, in the sense of an overt political or philosophical agenda - although Brook's anti-Vietnam production, 'US', made his mark as a socially relevant director. And, of course, there is no normative performance space. Brook has worked in Iranian quarries, Parisian hostels and African villages; while he may have settled at the *Bouffes du Nord* his love is for it as a 'chameleon space' and he tours where he is invited and where the space has the quality that the production needs.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be no line: Brook's work, as his reflections, suggests patterns rather than progress. Brook's reflections never stray far from specific experiences of rehearsals or of performances. They are anecdotal - drawing points from, rather than imposing schemes on, practice. Nonetheless they have the coherence of firm, flexible principles, which inform and are formed by his determination to meet this calling he voices in the first line of his first book, that any empty space can become a bare stage.

I will focus on Brook's reflections on theatre rather than his productions.<sup>7</sup> His reflections resist systematisation but one key insight of his early lectures, *The Empty Space*, can be combined with one from his later lectures, *There are No Secrets*. In the former Brook outlined his aim of immediate theatre, and in the latter this is developed through his commitment to quality as both the activity and the aim of theatre practice. I shall consider the implications of these ideas for an understanding of life as drama. In respect to Balthasar's theodramatic dialogues with Craig, Stanislavsky and Brecht, I did not discuss the practitioners' outlooks directly but merely illustrated Balthasar's approach. Here, I consider Brook's understanding of theatre and life first, after which I shall outline Balthasar's dialogue, his polarised appropriation of Brook's theatre as parody and protest. This will enable me, in the next section, to develop my account of Brook to discuss his use of Christian imagery, particularly that of incarnation and of grace, in relation to theatrical activity. Analysis of Brook's Christian rhetoric will question whether his work suggests both protest and parody, in the way that Balthasar

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<sup>6</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.193

<sup>7</sup> A chronology of Brook's productions up to 1993 prefaces Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves, *Peter Brook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). They offer clear production-by-production analysis. David Williams (ed.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook* (London: Methuen, 1988) includes a chronology of work up to the late 1980s, more detailed especially in regard to venues and collaborators.

and other Christian theologians have interpreted it. It could rather represent an informed, viable a-Christian understanding of theatre and life.

### 5.12: The Quality of Immediate Theatre

In *The Empty Space* Brook outlines four types of theatre: deadly, rough, holy and immediate. Deadly theatre is theatre with predictable, stereotypical characterisation, theatre that is designed to run for too long and so ignores the daily modifications of truth, theatre that reconfirms expectations and offers no revelation. It is 'a real deadly theatre man' who comes as director to rehearsal with all the moves mapped out for the show.

The problem of the Deadly Theatre is the problem of the deadly bore. Every deadly bore has head, heart, arms, legs; usually, he has a family and friends; he even has his admirers. Yet we sigh when we come across him - ... somehow he is at the bottom instead of the top of his possibilities.<sup>8</sup>

Holiness and Roughness, which are theatrical metaphors as well as events, develop Brook's reflection away from the ever-present danger of deadliness and towards immediate theatre. Brook's concludes *The Empty Space* with a poetic account of immediate theatre.

In everyday life, 'if' is a fiction, in the theatre 'if' is an experiment.

In everyday life, 'if' is an evasion, in the theatre 'if' is the truth.

When we are persuaded to believe in this truth, then the theatre and life are one.

This is a high aim. It sounds like hard work.

To play needs much work. But when we experience the work as play, then it is not work any more.

A play is play.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Brook emphasises the fact that theatre plays with life. It does so by shaping life in a way strong enough to bring the audience into its representation but open enough to allow their assistance as a requirement to render the event immediate. As the theatre

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<sup>8</sup>Brook, *Empty Space*, p.45

<sup>9</sup>Brook, *Empty Space*, p.157



narrows life down, corporately, its contingent events become not evasions of life's infinite complexity but moments of truth within life's unending web. Such theatre requires collective integrity and in order to express truth it must achieve 'freedom ... within the highest discipline.'<sup>10</sup> For this combination, the practitioner begins always in the free empty space.

In order to start one must always create a space, both internally and externally. The emptier the better. One has to keep coming back to the basic imperative of having nothing at all to start with. In an empty space everything can become an event.<sup>11</sup>

The empty space has no form: no narrative, theme or scenery. From it the company becomes disciplined by texts, ideas or properties. With the assistance of a director in rehearsal, and an audience in performance the freedom is focused, generating the sparks of immediate theatre.

When immediate, the theatrical event overcomes any distinction between holiness and roughness. Brook's sympathetic critique of holy theatre is particularly pertinent for relating his work with Balthasar's Theological Dramatics. On Brook's account, successful theatre engages in a process of 'tapping the forces that are swirling around us.'<sup>12</sup> When tapping the forces, in life or in theatre, moments of truth can be revealed. But, in the context of the empty space, revelation with an already defined channel and rhythm is an unhealthy pre-narrowing of what is on offer from an infinite source. Holy, commune theatres offer a total way of life. They draw the audience completely into the company. With small means, intense work, rigorous discipline and absolute precision they open in the theatre 'a possibility of salvation.' Praise from Brook, but praise undercut: '[t]hese theatres explore life, yet what counts as life is restricted.'<sup>13</sup> Soteriological performance takes holy theatre too far. Salvation, both in theatre and life, represents the obsession with the holy such as would deny the rough

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<sup>10</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.127

<sup>11</sup> Georges Banu, 'Brook's Six Days: Theatre as the Meeting Place between the Visible and the Invisible', in David Williams (ed.), *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Responses* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.270.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Brook, 'Search for a Hunger', *Encore* 8.4 (1961), p.14

<sup>13</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, pp.66-68

and so limit the possibility of immediacy. It projects an encounter out to encompass the whole and thus is 'hollowly holy,' unable to achieve 'the most vivid relationship between people.'<sup>14</sup> Without a lively roughness, it is bound in a universal projection of one purportedly sacred occasion. This is the danger of tradition and it informs what Brook calls the 'declining decadence of religion' where the sacred is seen as a form and consequently the sparks of quality become frozen in predictable patterns that do not give.<sup>15</sup> Soteriological tradition, where the contours of truth are outlined before one discovers them, generates a pure theatre that lacks life. This is because it denies the rough context required if one is to attain the sparks of quality. In Rough Theatre any object and any form can be transformed by the investment that is made in it. So, as Brook explains in *There are No Secrets*, a plastic bottle can become a baby through the relational investment that the actor makes and in which the audience assist. The bottle's roughness ensures that 'the sacred is a transformation of that which is not sacred at the outset.'<sup>16</sup> If holiness is left to its own tradition, purity will spread, objects or actions themselves will come to hold the sacred and theatrical encounter will be redundant.

To be successfully immediate, theatrical encounter requires the rough along with the holy and Brook expresses this in relation to wider society as well as to the stage.

In Coventry ... a new cathedral has been built. ... Honest sincere artists, the 'best', have been grouped together to make a civilised stab at celebrating God and man and Culture and Life through a collective act. So there is a new building, fine ideas, beautiful glass-work - only the ritual is threadbare - ... sadly inadequate here. The new place cries out for a new ceremony, but of course it is the ceremony that should have come first. ... [T]he outer form can only take on real authority if the ceremony has equal authority - and who today can possibly call the tune?<sup>17</sup>

This sense that old forms are being imposed where they can no longer have resonance is the starting point for the claim that traditional purity is fossilised. It does not convince theatrically. Brook does not want simply to refashion soteriological theatre for new times. He accepts that 'we need to stage true rituals ... and for rituals that could

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<sup>14</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.74

<sup>15</sup> Brook quoted Banu, 'Brook's Six Days', p.272

<sup>16</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.60

make ... an experience that feeds our lives true forms are needed.' Yet, he denies that humans can create new, improvised, soteriological theatrical traditions from where we are now. Such theatre is shallower than any communal encounter. For then 'the artist ... imitates the outer form of ceremonies, pagan or baroque, unfortunately adding his own trappings - the result is rarely convincing.'<sup>18</sup> Human genius will not produce our form of theatrical salvation in some new old-fashioned way. Part of the reason for this is that people have come to appreciate their situation as 'electrons of living, belonging to no system, no order', finding nothing which tells us that it stands out.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, 'we do not know how to celebrate because we do not know what to celebrate', a fact which is the 'barometer of ... irredeemable isolation.'<sup>20</sup> While accepting the need to operate within rhythms that are given, Brook's response to this is not to offer one new form that stands out. Rather, by seeking immediate theatre, thus, Brook disassociates himself from what he perceives as a non-theatrical, pre-narrowing tendency inherent in all soteriological drama, whether humanistic, Christian or other-religious. In the immediate - 'case-by-case ... depending on the needs' - theatre, 'all questions of style and convention explode and one finds oneself before an extraordinary richness, because everything is possible.'<sup>21</sup>

[Brook] has made one law his own - the law of fresh beginnings.<sup>22</sup>

Brook's theatrical 'if' of immediacy assumes that there is revelation from beyond the individual, only through which one can experience theatrical truth where gesture and response combine in representation. It also assumes that, as this beyond is formless, there can be no predictable pattern to such revelation. It is not guaranteed through trust in a given tradition or through trust in one's power of self-expression but only in trusts

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<sup>17</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, pp.50-51

<sup>18</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.51

<sup>19</sup> Brook, 'Search', p.14

<sup>20</sup> Peter Brook and John Lahr, 'Knowing What To Celebrate', *Plays and Players* 23.6 (1976), p.18. The first quotation is from Brook. The second is Lahr's suggestion that 'the absence of ceremony is the barometer of ... irredeemable isolation'. Brook responds simply: 'Quite so.'

<sup>21</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.61

<sup>22</sup> Banu, 'Brook's Six Days', p.270

between the particular company and the particular audience in front of the formless mystery that is greater than both of them. And so, revelation must be continually re-sought, in every different company, on every different space, with every different audience. This re-seeking propels theatre, which begins always with the recognition of the ultimately formless context of the empty space. Thus '[t]ruth in theatre is always on the move.'<sup>23</sup>

In his memoir, Brook explains that through his career as a theatre director he has 'reached only one luminous certitude.'

Quality is real and has a source. At every moment a new and unexpected quality can arise within a human action - and just as quickly it can be lost, found and lost again. This unnameable value can be betrayed by religion and by philosophy; churches and temples can betray it; the faithful and the unfaithful betray it all the time. Still, the hidden source remains. Quality is sacred, but it is also in danger.<sup>24</sup>

In this notion of quality, Brook expresses the aim and activity of theatre, the moments where gesture and truth combine. Theatre searches for 'the movement and flow that is life itself'<sup>25</sup> in which the immediate coincidence of gesture and truth is the mark of success, of what Brook calls quality. Quality remains, as all terms, an inadequate name for the event and Brook is never able to do more than guess at the source of quality. Moments of theatrical truth are like 'golden fish' that come, 'we guess', from somewhere in the 'collective mythic unconscious, that vast ocean whose limits have never been discovered.'<sup>26</sup> Particularly in his earlier work, Brook understood this ocean as a trans-personal archetype. He argued that theatre is legitimated in as much as it searches for this archetypal reality, claiming that 'we are each only parts of a complete man'<sup>27</sup> with theatre as the space in which 'this great jigsaw can be played.'<sup>28</sup> Commentators associate this stage primarily with 'Orghast', where gesture and language drawn from 'archetypal ideograms' were intended to 'produce images

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<sup>23</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.157

<sup>24</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.225

<sup>25</sup> Brook, 'Search', p.10

<sup>26</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, pp.84-85

<sup>27</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.129

<sup>28</sup> Peter Brook, 'The Complete Truth is Global', *The New York Times* (20.1.1974), p.D13

corresponding to the same archetypes in the minds of the audience.’<sup>29</sup> In *The Shifting Point* Brook suggests that a universal theatre ‘tr[ies] to relate the smallest ... detail to the widest framework’ and that to relate to the universe in this way it is essential to share between individuals.<sup>30</sup> ‘A true performance has some of the same values as a meeting with strangers.’<sup>31</sup> In this sense, he has always seen the collective archetype as in some sense relative to encounter. Brook’s cross-cultural theatre attempted to start from zero with no shared assumptions in order to see, through encounters, how widely the archetype stretches. Brook increasingly understands the global reality as inter- (rather than trans-) personal. And the universal boundaries of theatre, once intimated as undiscoverable through the image of the complete man, are considered more to be infinitely flexible in every slight change of relations. Here it is contacts with others that are quality. This plays out in his presentation of the actor’s three fidelities. The actor must keep a triple balance between fidelity to himself, his partners (the company) and the audience substituted for in rehearsal by the director. This balance in contact ensures that theatre is a mystery; it requires an inter-relational superfluity that ‘can be found and lost each time [the actor] steps.’<sup>32</sup> Whether the source of quality is construed as archetype or contact its occasion remains a mysterious process because it is never relieved by a given person, rhythm or style. Such relief would be relief from engagement with an unknowable archetype in the ongoing tension of inter-personal contact. Brook’s theatre must remain without relief, for it exists by distilling the ‘idealess intensity of life’<sup>33</sup> through experiment, error, listening and finding – and by crafting the company and through them, the audience into this representative process.<sup>34</sup> Success in this art is the momentary coincidence of gesture and truth.

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<sup>29</sup> Philip Auslander, ‘‘Holy Theatre’ and Catharsis’, in *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Post-Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.19

<sup>30</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.133

<sup>31</sup> Brook, ‘Global’, p.D3

<sup>32</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.34

<sup>33</sup> Peter Brook, ‘Theatre with a Message? The Very Idea!’, *Independent on Sunday: Sunday Review* (28.10.1990), p.24

<sup>34</sup> See Brook, *No Secrets*, pp.97-119 for a case study with regard to his 1991 production of *The Tempest*.

Brook's reflections on theatre and life circle around the claim that theatre is 'life in a more concentrated form,'<sup>35</sup> 'more readable ... because it is more concentrated.'<sup>36</sup> This concentrate is created through the company's groundwork in focusing the empty space into particular events, but it is completed only by the assistance of the audience. As in the theatre the practitioner is dependent on mutual and ever-changing patterns of trust, which give the production its greater purpose, so in life 'we only begin to exist when we are serving an aim beyond our own likes and aversions.'<sup>37</sup> In the theatre, Brook distils ever-greater, unbounded possibility into specific gestures and acts. In his memoir he articulates the spirituality that surrounds this theatre practice. Practising in the theatre, developing rhythms for encounters, poses a question of life: '[h]ow can one live one single day in its true rhythm, a day composed of a multitude of finely intertwining rhythms?'<sup>38</sup> Brook acknowledges that this question cannot be answered; but it can be responded to in moments of quality that occur even in the formless reality of life itself. Quality can be found in life among people who have learned to open themselves to the rhythms surrounding them; 'remarkable men and women do exist, remarkable because of the degree to which they have worked on themselves in their lives.' In both the theatre and life, this manifestation of invisible quality in visible action is 'not a question of a permanent truth, since it is constantly in search of itself; it's simply a series of true moments.'<sup>39</sup> Brook maintains that 'truth can never be defined, nor grasped, but the theatre is a machine which enables all its participants to taste an aspect of truth within a moment.'<sup>40</sup> While the carefully narrowed contours of the theatrical event offer people such an engagement, it is not impossible for the person or community who devote similar care to their lives to experience such moments in the everyday. Brook would not suggest that theatre is necessary or even directly helpful for a spiritual life, but he does find theatre an active 'metaphor [for life] that can give one the force to go into life knowing that it's going to be much more difficult once you get

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<sup>35</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.111

<sup>36</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.10

<sup>37</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.226

<sup>38</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.132

<sup>39</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.234

<sup>40</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.86

outside.’<sup>41</sup> The implication here is that the experience of the theatre involves interpersonal contacts and shared touchings of mystery, which will inspire - and possibly assist - the person towards something similar in life. In this line, Brook claims that ‘[t]heatre is life. And at the same time, one cannot say that there is no difference between life and theatre.’<sup>42</sup> And in this context ‘theatre’ is a fundamental human need, while ‘theatres’ and their forms and styles are only temporary and replaceable boxes.’<sup>43</sup> The need for immediate quality, the coincidence of gesture and truth, is more easily satisfied in the concentrated moments of theatre but not impossible to meet in the free-flow empty space of life itself.

### 5.13: Balthasar’s Dialogue with Brook

Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves employ theatre as search as a governing metaphor for studying Peter Brook. At the outset they admit that ‘the precise object of the search is hard to define’ and in conclusion they question such questions as ‘where ... has the search led him?’<sup>44</sup> It is unsurprising, perhaps, that Balthasar finds such theatre - open-ended, perhaps inherently unfulfilled, search – ready as a dialogue partner, material for theological appropriation.

In a paragraph’s discussion in TD1, Balthasar considers himself ‘heartened’ by the ‘basic position of Peter Brook.’<sup>45</sup> Here Brook is being appropriated as limitedly dramatic and so parodic. It is important to consider the position of this discussion on the Dramatics’ theological co-ordinates. Balthasar is considering objections to contemporary theological dramatics resultant on the claim to the death of the drama, specifically that the dramatic sense of a spiritual horizon has been irretrievably eroded. With modern sociology is lost a spiritual relational framework and with modern psychology is lost spiritual personal heroism: the sense of the dramatic is dead.<sup>46</sup> If this

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<sup>41</sup> Brook quoted Dale Moffitt (ed.), *Between Two Silences: Talking with Peter Brook* (London: Methuen, 2000), p.149

<sup>42</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.9

<sup>43</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.92

<sup>44</sup> Hunt and Reeves, *Brook*, pp.1,272

<sup>45</sup> TD1, pp.78-79

<sup>46</sup> See TD1, pp.70-87

claim were upheld, Balthasar would only be able to employ pre-modern theatrical forms as resources for expressing theo-drama. Among the practitioners Balthasar marshals against the claim, Brook opposes the purported psychological erosion of the dramatic. In dialogue with Brook, Balthasar comments on the famous opening lines of *The Empty Space*.

“I can take any empty room and call it a bare stage. One man walks across the room while another watches him; that is all that is necessary for theatrical action.” Life manifests a fundamental urge to observe itself as an action exhibiting both meaning and mystery.<sup>47</sup>

Balthasar relates this with Brook’s belief that theatre does not need to mimic the scenery, structure and plot of its various classical hey-days but should instead accept that it exists ‘only fragmentarily’ and use its current indefiniteness to ask ‘the one crucial question ...: Why theatre? What is it for? ... Does the stage have a real place in our lives?’<sup>48</sup> Thus Balthasar contends that in its attempt to embody a dramatic horizon, theatre has not found itself bound to past forms but has occurred in contemporary patterns. To do so requires the contact between actor and audience signalled in Brook’s opening lines, representing inter-relational mystery rather than illustrating psychological factors. This theatrical concern for mystery over psychology is central to Brook’s reflections beyond the classic Balthasar quotes.<sup>49</sup> Of particular relevance is Brook’s programmatic essay ‘Search for a Hunger’. Here Brook describes an ‘old-fashioned,’ ‘psychological’ understanding of character as ‘pitifully inadequate’ for theatre. He claims that because practitioners ‘still think of people in naturalistic terms’ rather than as ‘a flow ... in and out of interaction,’ theatre remains ‘complacent, safe, dull [and] lifeless.’<sup>50</sup> Balthasar is heartened to feel that some twentieth-century theatre still parodies the mystery in relation that is Christian theo-drama and so remains dramatic: Brook, for example, is concerned for mystery in an open relational context rather than the closure of dramatic arts into rigid psychological explanatory structures.

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<sup>47</sup> TD1, pp.78-79

<sup>48</sup> Brook quoted TD1, p.78

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps Balthasar wisely avoided further reference to Brook in this regard. Brook consistently presents this position in direct opposition to Stanislavsky’s psychological approach to action. Such contradictions among limitedly dramatic practitioners may muddy Balthasar’s theological waters.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Brook, ‘Search’, pp.12-13

Brook's claim that his theatre is 'fragmentary'<sup>51</sup> must have jumped off the page at Balthasar. For Balthasar, all parodic, human dramatic searches can be but unaware fragments of theodramatic reality.

Through forceful allusion, Balthasar makes Brook's incompatibility with theodrama clear.

The world is the stage which has been set up for the encounter of the whole God with the whole man - stage not as an empty space, but as the sphere of encounter of the two sided form which unites in the encounter.<sup>52</sup>

The context of empty space is fundamental to Brook's theatre. It recurs throughout his reflections, variously transposed: the space for theatre must be free, theatre must begin at zero and, recently, '[o]ne basic area out of which all theatre comes and to which it returns, which is silence.'<sup>53</sup> Silence, zero, freedom, emptiness is the formless reality pre-requisite for theatrical success by its distillation into the stage concentrate. However, as Raymund Gawronski explains, 'Balthasar rejects an ultimate silence ... because it is not true.'<sup>54</sup> For Balthasar the possibility of success in the natural-human dramatic dimension depends on there not being such a formless start but on there being ultimately one dramatic horizon, as human dramatic fields are formal miniatures of the ultimate theodramatic field. In the theodramatic field, silence is not empty because it is formed within the conversation of Trinitarian inter-relations that carry Christ through death. As Gawronski shows in his discussion of Balthasar's encounters with Eastern religions, Balthasar considers it natural for human, non-revealed searches to end in Absolute silence. They cannot get further than a natural, stunted "'empty" spiritual tradition' in which 'a silent void is beyond all relative, individual being.'<sup>55</sup> However, in theodramatic terms

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<sup>51</sup> Brook quoted TD1, p.78

<sup>52</sup> Balthasar quoted Norris, 'Symphonic Unity', p.248

<sup>53</sup> Peter Brook, Jonathan Miller and Oliver Sacks, 'Six Hemispheres in Search of ...', in Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage (eds.), *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.316

<sup>54</sup> Raymund Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.217

<sup>55</sup> Gawronski, *Word and Silence*, p.218

[f]inite freedom cannot be located in a void, for there is no such void. It is “set loose” in the realm of infinite freedom and so finds itself, right from the start, in a realm of meaning governed by the infinite “idea” of the Son.<sup>56</sup>

On Balthasar’s view dramatic meaning and dramatic freedom are incompatible with contextual emptiness; Brook’s theatre requires such an empty space and thus must ultimately be judged non-dramatic. How then does Brook’s theatre sustain itself dramatically? Only in as much as it attempts to form this greater emptiness into specific moments of truth. It does not end, as it naturally should, in emptiness, but attempts to begin there. From Balthasar’s perspective, attempts to form reality are human claims to a Christological capacity. Implicitly, they protest against the ultimate Trinitarian formation (behind which there is no emptiness) that already gives the form in which drama plays. Only bound up in such protest could a theatre that searches from the empty space be dramatic.

Balthasar’s dialogue appropriates Brook. I suggest that it does so by rendering his direction both parodic and protesting, polarised both ways. I have shown Balthasar’s account of Brook to be brief, allusive but reasonable enough for further illustration from Brook’s writings. Perhaps a performance theorist would find it amateur. But then, as Balthasar comments when outlining his methodology, ‘a man can no longer be a specialist in all fields of study.’ Consequently, Balthasar focuses on revelation’s ‘truths derived from the centre’ in order to ‘inform whatever formable material he may receive’ from other disciplines.<sup>57</sup> It is clear that, in this dialogue, Balthasar has selected appropriate aspects of Brook’s search. The anti-psychological bent can be appropriated theologically as it is seen to be a parody, deliberate or otherwise, of ecclesial relations. The prerequisite empty space can be judged theologically to require a protesting denial of the Trinitarian formed horizon. However, by developing Brook’s understanding of theatre and life through his own rhetorical use of Christian imagery, I will question the extent to which such theological appropriation represents a dialogue with Brook’s searching theatre.

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<sup>56</sup> TD2, p.276

<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone*, pp.124-125

## 5.2: BROOK ON THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY ON BROOK

### 5.21: Brook's Christian Rhetoric: Incarnation and Grace

I can't make the simple statement that theatre is religious with the faintest hope of communicating what I mean.<sup>58</sup>

A 'tendency to choose an evocative word and then to leave it hanging characterises Brook's use of terminology.'<sup>59</sup> It is this tendency that leads me to talk of his rhetorical use of Christian imagery. He uses Christian imagery distanced from the Christian narrative. In this sense, Brook's theatrical project is not soteriological but it employs a Christian rhetoric and finds theatre events to be in some sense religious. Brook's stated aim in using any religious rhetoric was to intimate contact with 'alive-making elements' and suggest theatre's potential to express 'concrete realities so thrillingly above our everyday experience that we have to use a word of a different flavour.'<sup>60</sup> What he finds difficult about religious rhetoric is its association with those, 'fundamentalists' as he calls them, who say 'this is our story' and do not wish the universal 'meaning' of that story to be expressed in a different 'form'.<sup>61</sup> On Brook's

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<sup>58</sup> Brook, 'Search', p.20

<sup>59</sup> Paul B. Cohen, 'Peter Brook and the 'Two Worlds' of Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* 7.26 (1991), p.147

<sup>60</sup> Brook 'Search', p.20

<sup>61</sup> Peter Brook, 'Peter Brook', in Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage (eds.), *In Contact with the Gods? Directors Talk Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.51. This comment is made with reference to some critics of Brook's production, 'Mahabharata'. Brook felt that the Hindu epic contained universal dramatic themes of loyalty, heroism, fate and destruction and in that sense was an Indian story that belonged to the world. He wished to express this dramatic kernel in a new theatrical form. His collaborator, Jean-Paul Carriere, made it clear that the theological truths of the epic were controversial and separate from its universal dramatic truth, which the production would embody. The most heavily criticised example of this approach in the production was the inaudible whisper of Krishna's pivotal self-revelation – the perceived implication, substitute your own truth. Brook has found it difficult to respond to those critics who claim that the universal dramatic truth of the epic is its theological truth; it is the claim of Krishna. As David Williams puts it, 'he seems unwilling to confront the dangers of applying a culturally non-specific, ... humanist aesthetic to such material.' The production and the ongoing responses to it, both sympathetic and critical, provide insights into the relation between Brook's spirituality and the Hindu religion, which could be developed in relation to other traditional

view, these fundamentalists conflate the particular form of their own theatre with the infinite reality of theatricality and so betray the infinite source of ever-possible quality to the predictable limitations of traditional forms and patterns

While he does not mention Brook as one of his examples, Rowan Williams notices how difficult it is for Christian theologians to engage with such rhetorical 'appropriations of the Christian narrative at or beyond the boundaries of the Church.'<sup>62</sup> It is hard to maintain a theological distinction between the text of faith and the text of culture in the face of such appropriations, for they presume an alternative relationship between the individual and universal truth of which the Christian narrative is but illustrative. The theatrical, rather than narrative, mode of Brook's appropriation transposes this difficulty into a more demanding register. For, as a practitioner, Brook is not employing aspects of the Christian narrative in a non-Christian narrative understanding of life. Rather, he is making rhetorical use of Christian imagery in the service of a non-Christian and non-narrative understanding of life's drama, concentrated in the theatre. Brook shares what Irena Makarushka calls a contemporary 'frustration with linearity'.<sup>63</sup> His reflections value the inexplicable interruption of one by another and the infinite possibilities for reshuffling the fragments of existence, generating an unending variety of theatrical experiences, rather than total drama that traps the imagination in one narrative interpretation of life. It is from this ostensibly a-Christian perspective that Brook makes rhetorical use of Christian imagery.

Brook's reflections on theatre can be seen as both protest and parody if read back into a Christian dramatic ontology, such as Balthasar's. Then they stand as hints at what one might call 'post-Christian, Christian' theatre.<sup>64</sup> they invite theatre to become

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religions including Christianity. David Williams (ed.), *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Responses* (London: Routledge, 1991) describes the production and introduces the debate.

<sup>62</sup> Rowan Williams, 'The Judgement of the World', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.30

<sup>63</sup> Irena Makarushka, 'Redemption and Narrative: Refiguration of Time in Post-Modern Literature', in David Jasper and Colin Crowder (eds.), *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century: Ends of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.147

<sup>64</sup>The term 'post-Christian, Christian' is taken from Ed Block, 'Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* as post-Christian, Christian Drama', *Literature and Theology* 14.2 (2000), 189-207. Block considers *Faith*

revelatory by appropriating Christian imagery; thus they are parasitic on the one revelation of God in Christ, transposed through protest and parody into a non-Christian frame. However, Brook's accounts of his theatre practice do not fit easily with the assumptions of such an appropriation. This can be highlighted by considering Brook's own rhetorical use of Christian imagery of incarnation and grace. I relate incarnation to Balthasar's understanding of Brook's theatre as protesting and grace to Balthasar's understanding of Brook's theatre as parodic. In each case, I will firstly introduce Brook's rhetoric. I will then discuss difficulties inherent in a Balthasarian, protesting or parodic, interpretation of that rhetoric and illustrate the problem from a theological commentator on Brook, Max Harris in respect of protesting incarnation and T.J. Gorrige in respect of parodic grace. I will conclude by drawing on Paul Cohen's analysis of Brook's understanding of theatrical communion to propose that in Brook's own reflections, even when they employ a Christian rhetoric, his practice stands as viably alternative to - and not dependent in protest and parody on - any Christian theodrama and to argue that Balthasar's appropriative dialogue with Brook is only sustainable from prior acceptance of the Christian context in which it is made.

### ***5.211: Incarnation***

In *The Empty Space*, Brook describes holy theatre as the 'theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible', 'the yearning for the invisible through its visible incarnations.'<sup>65</sup> His sympathetic critique of holy theatre rejects any purely holy understanding of incarnation. When the actor 'sets out to capture something, to make it incarnate,'<sup>66</sup> he does so in a theatrical process of repetition, representation and assistance. Repetition is paradoxically tedious and life giving, as the actors go over the text, in each rehearsal never the same but never different. The director hones down these repetitions, drawing them into a 'formless hunch', in a process of representation. This process reaches completion only in performance: at the hottest point is formed the

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*Healer* as post-Christian, Christian through a Balthasarian lens in order to use its 'parodic ... religious references' (p.200) to argue that it 'portrays the human mystery as it shadows forth fragments of the Christian mystery' (p.207).

<sup>65</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, pp.47,79

<sup>66</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.156

final shape.<sup>67</sup> Here the director's guidance is replaced by the, equally necessary, audience assistance. A performance can be 'lifeless or incarnate' and for the latter the audience, in assistance, must be taken into the repetition to representation process.

Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them. ... The audience too has undergone a change. It has come from a life outside the theatre which is essentially repetitive to a special arena in which each moment is lived more closely and more intensely. The audience assists the actor and at the same time for the audience itself assistance comes back from the stage.<sup>68</sup>

In this account of theatrical action the reciprocal assistance between stage and audience renders theatre incarnate, as it transcends repetition in representation. To achieve reciprocal assistance, there must be a rough context as well as holiness, for such theatre is immediate.

The term incarnation re-appears developed in *There Are No Secrets*. Here it is clear that incarnation, as a theatrical reality, is temporally and spatially limited. Brook elides incarnation with the 'ancient Hindu' term sphota: sphota 'can be called an 'incarnation'.' And Brook prefers the Indian concept, one that is

magnificent because its actual meaning is already there in the sound of the word. Between the unmanifest and the manifest there is a flow of formless energies, and at certain moments there are kinds of explosions which correspond to this term: '*Sphota!*'<sup>69</sup>

Such moments of incarnation presume a contextual formlessness in the unmanifest. If the unmanifest is considered to be formal, as in Balthasar's Trinitarian Theological Dramatics, then the possibilities for sphota, for explosions of truth in the theatre, are pre-limited. This does not mean that a performance with Christian themes is necessarily unsuccessful. But, if the forms of faith are held for all time, then one is caught in the trap of purity. The forms for that particular moment - the particular gestures in rehearsal as they combine into performance must be trusted but never owned. Brook puts it well, in maxims that apply both to theatre and life.

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<sup>67</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, pp.3-5

<sup>68</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.156

<sup>69</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.50

I have never believed in a single truth. Neither my own nor those of others. I believe all schools, all theories can be useful in some place, at some time. ... I have discovered that one can only live by a passionate, and absolute, identification with a point of view. ... Yet at the same time there is an inner voice that murmurs: "Don't take it too seriously. Hold on tightly, let go lightly."<sup>70</sup>

Incarnations can be held to rhetorically, by Brook, but one incarnation, whether human or divine, must not govern as an ultimate form for all time, for this would deny the open sparks of new theatricality.

Brook's discussions of Ta'azieh find incarnation as a theatrical phenomenon to be spatially, as well as temporally, limited. An eclectic, spiritually-minded travelling director, Brook was drawn by unexpected accounts of a Muslim performance tradition, the Iranian Ta'azieh. The main performer, the holy man, sang with

emotion ... no way his own. It was as though we heard his father's voice, and his father's father's, and so on back. He stood there ... powerfully, totally convinced of his function, and he was the incarnation of that figure that for our theatre is always the most elusive one of all, the hero.<sup>71</sup>

As the play continued,

[a]n event from the very distant past was in the process of being 're-presented', of becoming present; the past was happening here and now, the hero's decision was for now ... and the audience's tears were for this very moment. The past was not being described or illuminated, time had been abolished. The village was participating directly and totally, here and now in the real death of a real figure who had died some thousand years before.<sup>72</sup>

Here, in the village, the spiritual role is incarnate in the performance. However, in further recollections, Brook suggests that the internationalisation and cross-culturalisation of incarnation is doomed to mediocrity. He describes the Shiraz International Festival of the Arts, where the Ta'azieh was 'present ... to the world.' The

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<sup>70</sup>Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.xiii

<sup>71</sup>Brook, *No Secrets*, p.39

<sup>72</sup>Brook, *No Secrets*, p.41

finest actors were gathered from villages across the world, the village props were smartened and, well lit, in front of an audience in gala dress, 'the long trumpets hooted, the drums played, and it meant absolutely nothing.' Everyone smiled, enjoyed the performance, and followed on 'towards the buffet.'<sup>73</sup> These recollections of Iranian heroic incarnation provide a sort of parable of the necessary limitations of particular theatrical events given the ultimate formlessness of life's theatrical space. Not accepting any given anthropology, Brook does not conceive of the possibility that this, or any, spiritual theatre will resonate with everyone - or will provide such a challenge that everyone may be changed. Of course, it does not help that the rough style has been rarefied, the scruffy scenery tidied up and especially not that the particular companies have been combined. But the point remains that, for Brook, theatrical incarnations involve developing bonds of trust between actors and audience and depend on the truthfulness of the former and the assistance of the latter. These bonds cannot be universalised, and the attempt to find a focal point for all space pre-limits the boundless possibilities.

Brook's rhetoric of incarnation reveals difficulties for a Balthasarian dialogue with Brook, which appropriates his theatre as protesting against Christian dramatic reality. For, in Brook's direction, an understanding of incarnations as spatially and temporally limited, and not instantiating a greater form, lies

at the heart of the problem. Nothing exists in life without form: we are forced at each instant ... to look for form. But one must realise that this form may be the ultimate obstacle to life, which is formless. One cannot escape from this difficulty and the battle is permanent: the form is necessary, yet it is not everything. Faced with this difficulty there is no point adopting a purist attitude and waiting for the perfect form to fall from the heavens, for in that case one would never do anything at all. This attitude would be stupid. Which brings us again to the question of purity and impurity. The pure form does not come down from the sky. The putting into form is a compromise that one must accept whilst at the same time saying to oneself: 'It's temporary, it will have to be renewed.' We are touching here on a question of dynamics that will never end.<sup>74</sup>

An eclectically incarnational spirituality is used to express and encourage ongoing representations of and searches for truth in theatre's empty space. I would not deny that

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<sup>73</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.43

<sup>74</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, pp.53-54

Brook's rhetoric of incarnation is well beyond Balthasar's theological understanding of the term. In the light of the importance of the form of Christ and the attachment to biblical imagery in the Dramatics, a claim that it is stupid to expect a perfect form from the heavens can hardly be read favourably. Indeed, Brook finds it inherent to theatrical success that 'one must not confuse the virtual form with the realised form.'<sup>75</sup> Any particular show is a realised form - the rhythms and gestures of performance that must be developed with care. Yet the virtual form, the opportunities arising from the text of a play or the theme of an improvised piece, has no limits. A dramatic, ontological Christian theology operates on the basis of the transposition of holiness from immanent to economic Trinity played out in particular eucharistic forms of personal community. This involves a transposition from virtual form to real form, which Brook would consider their confusion and thus reject.

Although alternative to theo-drama, Brook's understanding of incarnation may not be a protest against it in Balthasar's sense. Discussing the relationship between theatre and life, Brook comments that

for there to be a difference between theatre and non-theatre, between everyday life and theatrical life, there needs to be a compression of time that is inseparable from an intensification of energy. That is what creates a strong link with the spectator.<sup>76</sup>

Theatrical incarnations effect this compression, both temporally and spatially, in the context of formless openness. That incarnational revelation is necessary for theatre work is emphasised through a parallel Brook draws between rehearsal and performance. If you, as an actor, will accept that your part is greater than you are, then 'the character comes towards you and says "No, there is something that you never thought you could understand but you're beginning to find it."' A parallel process of revelation occurs in the audience. 'Each person is taken beyond himself and feels "Ah, this is something about my own deepest feelings that I've never known and this person standing there is speaking for me and helping me to know something I could never

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<sup>75</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.51

<sup>76</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.30

have known without that.”<sup>77</sup> In such theatre the invisible source of revelation is formless and so not susceptible to complete expression in the visible event. Theatrical incarnations reveal some aspect of this formless reality in the moment but it is inherent to the theatrical dynamic that no one theatrical moment could ever express the whole. Brook’s process requires that incarnational reality is not of universal import. In Brook’s non-soteriological strategy, theatrical incarnations are not expected to have a similar effect to that of Christ’s incarnation. According to Balthasar, theatrical activity that is sustained in protest claims a Christological capacity as a purely human one. It does not seem clear that Brook intends to achieve an incarnation parallel to Christ’s on the stage. Indeed, Brook ridicules the view that ‘theatre is a religion’ as ‘lunacy [and] hubris’: ‘people with their limited human experience setting themselves up in direct rivalry to Christ, Mohammed and Buddha.’<sup>78</sup> Brook makes no rival claim to a Christological capacity in a purely natural, secular context and the revelatory dynamics of Brook’s theatre, expressed in his rhetoric of incarnation, do not clearly protest against theodramatic incarnation.

A theological commentator on theatre, Max Harris, interprets Brook’s understanding of incarnation as incompatible with the Christian ‘evaluative stance’ towards the theatrical themes of time and space, celebration and escape, and conflict and resolution.<sup>79</sup> He believes that ‘the Christian God may be understood to have declared his commitment to a fully theatrical and not merely verbal mode of addressing his people.’<sup>80</sup> Consequently, he considers human theatrical events in terms of ‘whether they endorse or not ... the testimony of the Incarnation to the value of the flesh and of human time and space as a proper dwelling for God and therefore for humankind.’<sup>81</sup> Harris focuses on Brook’s production of Ted Hughes’s *Orghast*, commenting that

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Brook, ‘Peter Brook’ in Royal National Theatre, *Platform Papers, 6: Peter Brook*, (London: Royal National Theatre, 1994), p.10

<sup>78</sup> Brook quoted Edward Trostle Jones, *Following Directions: A Study of Peter Brook* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), p.199

<sup>79</sup> Max Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.xi

<sup>80</sup> Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.11

<sup>81</sup> Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.xi

theatrically [‘Orghast’] was in many respects a *tour de force*; philosophically, it was an instance of what Nathan Scott has called the ‘stifled panic’ of the modern literary imagination in the face of time.<sup>82</sup>

Harris’s problem with ‘Orghast’ is that it will not be content in the ambivalence of human time and space but attempts to unite humanity through a mystical archetypal reality. This relates to his concern over ‘the kind of ‘incarnational’ theatre that Brook has in mind.’<sup>83</sup> He argues that

[i]t is one thing to suggest that God chose a ‘theatrical’ mode of self-revelation and quite another to propose that human art may conjure up an incarnation in the theatre.<sup>84</sup>

Harris makes a viable distinction between Brook’s understanding of the theatrical event and the Christian, particularly in as much as his comments are limited to reviewing the particular production, ‘Orghast’, rather than evaluating Brook’s theatre more widely. But, as with Balthasar, the formless and ever-changing context in which Brook perceives himself to be working does not impact upon Harris’s analysis of Brook’s understanding of the mystery of the theatrical process. In judging Brook’s understanding of theatrical incarnation, Harris rests with an account of holy, rather than immediate, theatre as if it were Brook’s ideal.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, while he recognises that Brook signals a variety of incarnational possibilities,<sup>86</sup> he treats Brook’s understanding of incarnation as if Brook were continually encouraging theatre to body forth one truth from one overarching if invisible reality. The context of Brook’s incarnational rhetoric is elided with the Christian context before the comparison of evaluative stance takes place. This parallels Balthasar’s move of reading Brook’s reflections as written with direct pertinence to the theodramatic context, the move that renders it possible to consider Brook’s theatrical endeavour as protesting.

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<sup>82</sup> Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.79

<sup>83</sup> Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.114

<sup>84</sup> Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.109

<sup>85</sup> See Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.78, where he suggests that in *The Empty Space* Brook is making a ‘model for a new ‘holy theatre’’.

<sup>86</sup> ‘...whether it take the form of the gods flying in from Africa to possess the Haitian dancer or the ‘abstract notion of mercy’ sliding down the ‘voodoo pole’ of Isabella’s silence...’ (Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p.114)

### 5.212: Grace

I have suggested that as Brook's reflections on theatre develop inter-personal encounter takes prominence over trans-personal archetype. One way this can be seen is in an emerging rhetoric of grace. Rather than grounding the fragmentary nature of theatre in a universal archetype *through which* communication occurs, fragmentariness itself enables contacts within a company and between a company and an audience. In an article entitled 'The Complete Truth is Global', Brook expresses a growing realisation that 'a true performance has some of the same values as a meeting between two strangers, which is lifeless if it mechanically follows a ritualistic formula, and only has meaning if each time there is a new, human variation.'<sup>87</sup> Improvising in European hostels, Brook focuses on the specific gestures that catch on and form links required for that performance.

[T]hemes almost always arise by themselves. ... Andreas fiddles with the television set - it has been broken for months - the audience laughs, complicity is established, and immediately a story develops. ... Or Miriam Goldschmidt, in a Portuguese hostel, without thinking, raises her thumb and suddenly discovers from the audience reaction that she is in fact thumbing a truck ... and this naturally develops into a saga of immigration that involves everyone in the room.<sup>88</sup>

Such inter-personal trust was what was required away in Africa, although the gestures may have taken longer coming. 'We had become used to meeting the spectator on his own ground, taking him by the hand and setting out on an exploration together.'<sup>89</sup> In this endeavour, stylised, ritualised gestures, such as might contact archetypal collective reality fell away to be replaced by the ordinary in which the sparks of, what he might later call, grace will more readily ignite.

[W]alking became the obligatory opening routine; one after the other, this disparate collection of eleven actors would present themselves to the audience, accompanied by a percussion beat onto which each laid his own particular rhythms. Then they would hover, trip, leap, tease or oppose each other playfully, until the sense of a game would emerge and a situation would start

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<sup>87</sup> Brook, 'Global', p.D3

<sup>88</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.174

<sup>89</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.197

to evolve. How to begin is a lesson that can only be learnt by daylight, when there is nothing to hide the performers. ... [I]t is because the audience sees and begins to trust the actors as ordinary human beings that it opens to their imagination and willingly enters their play.<sup>90</sup>

The 'central observation' that 'nowhere in the world is there a complete theatre but only fragments of a theatre' does not lead Brook does to yearn for total performance so much as to engage as fragments on 'a basis of trust.'<sup>91</sup> It is precisely because they are fragmentary, not able ever fully to gather in the formless whole, that theatre events can be moments of grace. Brook's metaphor for the transition from rehearsal into performance is a fisherman making and using a net.

As he works, care and meaning are present in every flick of the finger. He draws his thread, he ties the knots, enclosing emptiness with forms whose exact shapes correspond to exact functions. Then the net is thrown into the water, it is dragged to and fro, with the tide, against the tide, in many complex patterns. A fish is caught, an inedible fish, or a common fish good for stewing, maybe a fish of many colours, or a rare fish, a poisonous fish, or *at moments of grace* a golden fish.<sup>92</sup>

This shows the formation of initial emptiness through careful repetition that, as it moves in representation, can catch truth in its patterns. Here, the concern is not to understand the ocean of our humanity - which is taken on trust - but rather as fragments within it to meet, to make and receive contact, with others.

[I]mprovisation means that actors come before an audience prepared to produce a dialogue not give a demonstration. ... We have learned that improvisation is an exceptionally difficult and precise technique and very different from the generalised idea of a spontaneous "happening." Improvisation requires great skill on the part of the actors ... and also great generosity. Genuine improvisation, leading up to a real encounter with the audience, only occurs when they feel that they are loved and respected by the actors. We have learned for this reason that improvised theatre must go to the places that people live. ... The greatest tact and sensitivity are needed to avoid giving the impression that their intimacy is invaded. If there is no sense of an act of charity, only the feeling that one group of human beings wants to make contact with the other, then theatre becomes life in a more concentrated form.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.184

<sup>91</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.125

<sup>92</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.84 (my emphasis)

<sup>93</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, pp.111-114

The refusal to engage in charity distances Brook's rhetoric of improvised grace in encounter from the Christian source of the imagery. He does not work for a spontaneous happening, but neither is his theatre a clear analogue of theodramatic performance. Brook's experiments in communication have led him to trust a silence that is beyond all tradition, which offers as crumbs from a table, 'scattered moments of grace.' He gives examples from his life - including opening a car door, snow on Christmas Day, digging in an orchard, seeing a statue of the Buddha - and examples from his theatre work.<sup>94</sup> The intimate connection between theatre and life is grounded in tradition-less silence, given which people can connect in innumerable ways when 'chaos' is developed into a 'field' of 'common ground' through the 'basic material' of a 'story' or a 'theme' and so shared experience of quality in the moment is achieved.<sup>95</sup>

Developing a relational possibility for inter-personal grace depends on the foundational chaos, on 'the reality of zero.' Brook describes beginning theatre from the reality of zero, beyond geography or history, in which 'can come an infinity of forms.' This zero is dependent on recognising 'the qualities each person brings', their fragmentary baggage, in the context of utterly open possibility.<sup>96</sup> Thus 'the life within zero is relational' and you can 'open yourself to the grabbing by what God gives at that moment' only 'if you are in the state of improvisation, having no concept whatever to start with.'<sup>97</sup> A similar idea of gracious deity emerges in Brook's myth of God's ancient Sanskrit document on the theatre, 'As The Story Goes':

God, seeing how desperately bored everyone was on the seventh day of creation, racked his overstretched imagination to find something more to add to the completeness he had just conceived. Suddenly his inspiration burst even beyond its own limitless bounds and he saw a further aspect of reality: its possibility to imitate itself. So he invented theatre.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.121

<sup>95</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, pp.82-83

<sup>96</sup> Peter Brook and Richard Schechner, 'Talking with Peter Brook: the Reality of Zero', *The Drama Review* 30.1 (1986), p.55

<sup>97</sup> Brook and Schechner, 'Reality of Zero', p.58

<sup>98</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.241

Brook begins thus with God's invention of the theatre, focuses on the one word with which God helps the theatre practitioners when their art turns to dust in their hands and ends with a realisation. 'With this word we could go very far...'<sup>99</sup>

The word is 'interest'.<sup>100</sup>

Mutual interest feeds the immediate theatre, and fabricated interest kills it. Sometimes human theatrical encounter images the bursting of the limitless bounds of infinite imagination. These times seem to deserve to be called God-given and in recent writings Brook has called them moments of grace.

Balthasar's parodic appropriation of Brook might run into difficulties with this rhetoric of grace. Brook requires fragmentariness for any such gracious moment. This informs his ever-eclectic approach to theatrical style: 'I refuse to allow a consistent style to emerge because I dread the idea.'<sup>101</sup> Brook's company have 'worked on all styles' of theatre and thus 'striven for ... an absence of style.'<sup>102</sup> A theological account of grace presumes a tie to a particular style (a key term for Balthasar) of encounter. But Brook believes theatrical creativity must not be stylistically bound. Brook's is grace without holiness, grace without purity. Grace is style-free encounter because the revelatory quality of theatrical experience is not governed by an over-arching form but occurs within a contextual formlessness. In fragmentary grace, Brook cannot conceive of such a moment occurring in a universal, once-for-all, sense. This would narrow down the boundless unmanifest, the boundlessness of which enables theatrical fragmentariness and resultant grace. Brook conceives of 'theatre as a meeting [of] ... actors and audience together in a single space – empty except for their unique transaction.'<sup>103</sup> And it is a condition of such moments of encounter that their space began empty, with no inviolable scenery. Balthasar finds human fragmentary searches to be components of one construction, God's dramatic story, and suggestive of an

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<sup>99</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.243

<sup>100</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.242

<sup>101</sup> Brook quoted Mitter, *Systems of Rehearsal*, p.137

<sup>102</sup> Brook quoted Margaret Croydon, 'Peter Brook: the Centre', *Canadian Theatre Review* 31 (1981), p.27

<sup>103</sup> Brook quoted Jones, *Following Directions*, p.207

aspiration to be properly positioned. Brook, by contrast, sees fragmentariness as organic: tangled twigs, branches, leaves and stems, the sun through which enables one to 'revel in ... inexhaustible patterns.'<sup>104</sup> So Brook's understanding of fragmentariness is not one that recognises a need for completion. He aspires, not for a position in one over-arching pattern but for ongoing moments of true participation in ever-changing patterning. For this reason, Brook will not have any governing instance, form or rhythm to the particular gracious interactions that make a theatrical event. The fragmentariness of Brook's theatre is not a weakness that parodically intimates openness to the Person's grace. Rather fragmentariness itself generates gracious inter-personal mutuality. Whereas Balthasar read Brook's account of theatre as indefinite fragment as indicative of a lack, fragmentariness has become Brook's potential for contact. In respect to Brook's rhetoric of grace, it seems difficult to claim that Brook's theatre is an unaware parody of theo-drama. His reflections on theatrical encounters as moments of grace, the conditions for them and their import are articulated, and in such a way as to differ significantly from a theodramatic understanding.

T.J. Gorringer finds Brook's techniques in directing a theatrical production analogous to those of the Christian God directing the world. He reads Brook's account of his first rehearsal at the Royal Shakespeare Company as 'a marvellous parable of God's activity' in Christ.<sup>105</sup> Brook prepared sweatily all through the night before with stage model and promptbook until every first scene move was blocked. But he found the rehearsal itself impossibly muddled. By the end of move A not one actor was where he was supposed to be for move B: actors and models, stage and book proved not to be interchangeable. And, as Brook famously puts it,

my whole future work hung in the balance. I stopped and walked away from my book, in amongst the actors, and I have never looked at a written plan since.<sup>106</sup>

Gorringer draws out three further analogies. Firstly, he cites Brook's distaste for the director who leaves everything to the actors' autonomy and integrity: the director must

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<sup>104</sup> Brook, *Threads*, p.10

<sup>105</sup> T.J. Gorringer, *God's Theatre: Towards a Theology of Divine Providence* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p.78

<sup>106</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, p.120

intervene in order to find in the actors the source of energy from which the actor can develop the patterns of speech and actions for that particular performance. Gorringe compares this with God who intervenes without manipulating for 'pressing Brook's analogy, we believe that without divine direction there would really be 'no speech nor language'.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, Brook's insistence on mutual exploration rather than directorial governance deepens the sense in which a director God can be thought of as ultimately responsible for while not dictator over creation.<sup>108</sup> Here Gorringe can draw on a metaphor of Brook's own.

It is a strange role, that of director: he does not ask to be God and yet his role implies it. ... In a sense the director is always an impostor, a guide at night who knows not the territory, and yet has no choice - he must guide, learning the route as he goes.<sup>109</sup>

In the final analogous theme, Brook's sense that direction limits as well as creates opportunities appeals to Gorringe, who finds in it the makings of particular, ongoing community as the goal of direction<sup>110</sup> - a goal well suited to the formation of a holy people and a glorious city. Balthasar's appropriation as parody amounts to such an analogical reading. There may be viable comparisons between the theatrical and the theological in respect to the particular techniques of Brook that Gorringe selects. However, the analogical method in which Gorringe finds Brook so 'profoundly suggestive'<sup>111</sup> brackets out the context in which Brook perceives himself to be working and thus appropriates isolated techniques directly into a Christian theodramatic situation. A director God, who narrows down in advance is fundamentally incompatible with both Brook's essential insistence that 'in the early stages of rehearsal everything is open'<sup>112</sup> and the idea of God present in Brook's own use of the term. This incompatibility informs Brook's critique of holy theatre. He emphatically rejects tradition-bound holiness and his spiritual alternative is one of a boundless horizon that liberates the company, in mutual trust with the audience, to fashion the formless

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<sup>107</sup> Gorringe, *God's Theatre*, p.79

<sup>108</sup> Gorringe, *God's Theatre*, pp.80-81

<sup>109</sup> Brook, *Empty Space*, pp.43-44; cited Gorringe, *God's Theatre*, p.77

<sup>110</sup> Gorringe, *God's Theatre*, p.81

<sup>111</sup> Gorringe, *God's Theatre*, p.78

<sup>112</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.3

swirling of life in infinite possibility of ways. For '[a]ny object can serve whatever you invest in it.'<sup>113</sup> A traditional pre-narrowing of the options represents form as an obstacle to expression of truth and thus to theatre as gracious meeting place. This is not to say that truth will be expressed whatever you do, but that it is the contacts and not the forms of actions that are decisive. 'An infinite quality of unexpected forms can appear from the same elements, and the human tendency to refuse the unexpected always leads to the reduction of a potential universe.'<sup>114</sup> If you close off options before you begin and live within predictable patterns, you limit the potential for contact. Deadly theatre is your end; your beauty, Brook might say, is that of a dying bird that dared not leave its cage. Brook's theatrical practice, especially when it employs a rhetoric of grace, is not the unaware parody of inter-personal relations with God in Christ, which Balthasar's theodramatic dialogue and Gorringer's analogical reading conceive.

### 5.22 Brook on Theology and Theology on Brook

I have taken an atypical focus on Brook's Christian rhetoric of incarnation and grace in order to respond to the theological agenda of Balthasar's theodramatic dialogue, and the similar approaches to Brook taken in more detail by Harris and Gorringer. This had led necessarily to the introduction of more major terms in Brook's theatrical vocabulary such as empty, truth and quality through which I have tried to convey something of the shifting sense of Brook's vision of the inter-relationship between theatre and life. I have introduced (rather than systematised) Brook's vocabulary in order to suggest that, in respect to Balthasar's, Brook's is an alternative, a-Christian version of the relationship between theatre and life. If it is not read directly back into a Christian dramatic ontology, Brook's theatrical desire for quality, graciously incarnate through distillations of the empty space, raises variant challenges for truthful living.

Paul Cohen has studied the rhetoric of 'communion' in Brook's reflections. As I have found with incarnation and grace, so Cohen comments that it is difficult to trace

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Brook *et al.*, 'On 16 May 1993 in the Cottesloe Theatre...' in Royal National Theatre, *Platform Papers: 6. Peter Brook*, (London: Royal National Theatre, 1994), p.31

<sup>114</sup> Brook, *No Secrets*, p.53

communion through the phases of Brook's career. Brook uses language in a process of shifting paraphrases in order to intimate something that he feels cannot be expressed. Rarely does he clearly repudiate or precisely develop what he has previously said, but rather he continues in his repertoire of images with unsystematic enthusiasm. Cohen recognises that Brook's use of communion is, in part, 'borrow[ed] ... from theological parlance.'<sup>115</sup> It is suggestive of what Cohen calls total commitment on the part of the actors and the audience, a commitment required for theatre to be revelatory and to allow the participants to be 'actually all within one thought and within one feeling.'<sup>116</sup> However, Brook also uses communion in what Cohen calls a pluralistic sense: there is 'no formula' for attaining these moments and for precisely that reason there is 'always possibility.'<sup>117</sup> Communion 'is a dynamic process; it is not something that happens once-for-all.'<sup>118</sup> Cohen finds various patterns in Brook's rhetoric of communion and each of them replays this tension between commitment and pluralism, a tension that Brook himself articulates in his maxim: '[h]old on tightly; let go lightly.'<sup>119</sup> This tension can be appropriated in theodramatic terms: belief in the ability of human commitment to engender communion protests against what can only be given by God in Christ and the pluralistic variety of communal possibilities parody the true Christian communion. However, such appropriation judges the ongoing tension that Brook's reflections articulate not to be existentially coherent or viable. This judgement is made by interpreting Brook's theatre out of its formless context and within an ontological theodramatic context, which itself sets Brook's dramatic standard. Critical dialogue is then with that theodramatic interpretation.

Even within theology it is suggested that Balthasar 'tends to impose his categories and use the details [of the other's life] as illustrations' because he 'assumes something like an overview of the drama, judging [another's] performance according to his criteria' and can miss their "'mini-dramatic' mode' by subsuming their face into 'generalities concerning sancity'. In this critique, David Ford advises 'detour[s]

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<sup>115</sup> Cohen. 'Two Worlds', p.149

<sup>116</sup> Brook quoted Cohen, 'Two Worlds', p.156

<sup>117</sup> Brook quoted Cohen, 'Two Worlds', p.157

<sup>118</sup> Brook quoted Cohen, 'Two Worlds', p.153

<sup>119</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.xiii

through the details' to achieve better encounters.<sup>120</sup> Beyond the theological communion, where the dialogue partner is (ostensibly, at least) engaged in an alternative play, rather than a differing performance, the problem may be more severe. It is not clear that Balthasar dialogues with Brook if that suggests that Brook speaks on his own terms and in his own context. There is engagement with Brook's theatre vocabulary: the accounts of theatre as fragmentarily non-psychological and theatre as grounded in the empty space become theological resources. But the theodramatic reality in which - for Balthasar - Brook's theatre plays has already rendered it protest and parody, before dialogue begins. Any attempt at a genuinely dramatic alternative is considered unsustainable from the start.

Rather than construct a dialogue partner by outlining Brook's own approach to theatre and life, Balthasar dialogues by selecting from Brook aspects that illustrate where Brook is in post-Christian relation to the dialogical reality of theo-drama. While the former option might seem more respectful of Brook, Balthasar would consider it a weakly patronising (and dangerously secular) approach to dialogue: treating the other's view as if it were sustainable. In my conclusion, I will explore the implications of Balthasar's location of dialogue within theodramatic reality. Here, however, I have shown that Balthasar takes a selective approach to dialogue. He does not allow the possibility of a viable a-Christian context for the other in dialogue, but appropriates post-Christian partners as they represent distortions ('various defective instances'<sup>121</sup>) of Christian theodramatic reality. In Brook's a-Christian context, Brook's reflections and practice may express life as drama in a way alternative to the Christian theological account. Perhaps the alternative has more force than is recognised when it is designated as both protest and parody?

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<sup>120</sup> David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.234 - discussing Balthasar's interpretation of Thérèse of Lisieux.

<sup>121</sup> TD2, p.315

## **6: BALTHASAR'S THEODRAMATIC DIALOGUES**

### **6.1: CONCLUSION**

Balthasar's dialogues with theatre directors occur within his theological dramatic perspective and are consequently, as I have argued particularly in relation to Peter Brook, selective and appropriative. Can this be dialogue? I conclude that on Balthasar's theological terms it is, and consider the achievement and potential of such an account of dialogue.

#### **6.11: Balthasar's Theodramatic Dialogues**

There can be no drama without dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

As one of nine trends that converge on theo-drama, Balthasar understands the phenomenon of dialogue as a theodramatic implication. Consequently, it operates in each of my three dramatic dimensions (outlined in the fourth chapter) in a way by which its ultimate reality is found in the dramatic act from God to humankind. *Finally*, there is a 'necessary', 'unfathomable', 'primal dialogue in God himself.' *Personally*, the Incarnation reveals God the Son become man, 'so that there may be a genuine dialogue between God in heaven and God as human being on earth.' Christ as representative of both God and man effects a representative dialogue between the two into which people can enter as co-actors. And, for the *human* dimension, this Christian theodramatic revelation 'puts the internal human dialogue of mankind in an entirely new light.'<sup>2</sup> Formally, across these three dimensions, dramatic dialogue is defined as 'the interplay of grace and gratitude'<sup>3</sup> in which knowledge 'is no longer a mere commodity, it is fused with the knowing person, people "communicate", "share themselves".'<sup>4</sup> Theodramatic dialogue provides the ultimate term of dramatic dialogue and any humanistic understanding in which both participants dialogue respective to open-ended possibilities on which neither of them has special purchase is rendered

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<sup>1</sup> TD1, p.36

<sup>2</sup> TD1, p.34

<sup>3</sup> TD2, p.24

<sup>4</sup> TD1, p.35

undramatic. For dramatic dialogue is properly illuminated from the theodramatic perspective and this illumination reveals two important aspects. Firstly, successful dramatic dialogue occasions a priority. There is one governing form, that of grace, in which the dialogue partner, in gratitude, is formed. Consequently, the responsive partner in dialogue operates with polarised possibilities. She can maintain the dialogue by accepting in gratitude the form offered by the governing partner. Or she can collapse the dialogue by absurdly – as far as its dynamic is concerned – rejecting the governing form. There is no sense that a third outlook can be constructed from dramatic dialogue.

Balthasar believed that in a dialogue involving a Christian and a non-Christian the Christian should be the governing partner. For he is participant in the personal theodramatic dialogue, which in reaching through death into the mystery of resurrection provides a hope that ‘may be more absolute than that of his dialogue partner who is ... concerned for the (earthly) future of ... humanity.’<sup>5</sup> As governing partner, the Christian can expect two alternatives from dialogue. One: ‘[d]ialogue can achieve something when both partners are looking in the same direction’ - he can find the non-Christian’s perspective limitedly dramatic, interior and inadequate to his, even in such a way as she may experience conversion. Two: dialogue ‘can fail when the horizons prove to have no common ground’ - he can find the non-Christian’s stance to be ultimately non-dramatic, bound in protest; this leaves the Christian with only ‘the testimony of his existence – or his blood.’<sup>6</sup> Balthasar’s *Theological Dramatics* was ‘deliberately concerned with [a] premiss ... for the dialogues with all the non-Christian visions of the world.’ This premise is that ‘the Catholic must first of all be prepared for it. He cannot enter and take part in it with a purely empirical and theologically dilettante awareness of what Catholicity and the Catholic Church ... are.’ As a result of this, the Catholic must ‘acquire’

[a]uthentic Catholicity ... before he can afford to engage in dialogue with other ... visions of the world. Otherwise he runs the risk of his Catholicism being considered as one ‘confession’ among others and then of attempting, along with these other confessions, a higher synthesis.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> TD1, p.36

<sup>6</sup> TD1, pp.36-37

<sup>7</sup> Balthasar, ‘Another Ten Years’, p.229

Balthasar's theodramatic understanding of dialogue presents Catholic Christians as participant in the true, personal dramatic dialogue with ultimate horizon and unique act combined. The Dramatics exemplifies the way in which Catholic Christians should then dialogue with others, including twentieth-century theatre directors. In being engaged with as dialogue partners, they are treated as those of provisional horizon, either parodic or protesting in respect to Christian truth. By outlining a dramatic, relational Christian ontology, Balthasar reminds Catholics that dialogue between Christianity and other confessions is itself intra-systemic – it happens within Christian theodramatic, dialogical reality. The Christian should speak in dialogue with a governing voice because she lives in dialogue with the governing form. In the Dramatics Balthasar reiterates his concern that most Christians, having lost this sense, hope for dialogue in an increasingly secular manner. For dialogue has come to mean

an attitude that remains open to further listening, that allows the other his "otherness" ...; it is the attitude that refuses to give up, that is, it is closely related to hope. At this point, however, the Christian must consider the *shape* of his hope.<sup>8</sup>

Balthasar's intention is to reposition dialogue with others as a theological trend *within* the 'truth manifest in dialogue'<sup>9</sup>, the Christian dramatic dialogue with God in Christ that is the ontological, relational shape of Christian hope.

Dialogue, then, operates as do all other dramatic trends. It occurs primarily within God and is exhibited ultimately in the Incarnation, the dialogue between Christ as representative of God and Christ as representative of humankind, and the resulting drama of God with persons in Christ. To participate in Christian truth is the only way to experience dialogue personally and the Church opens this possibility to the world. Nonetheless dialogue does occur in an analogous but stunted way in the natural-human dimension. And, consistently with his general approach to theatre, Balthasar finds theatre practice symbolic in respect to his theological appreciation of natural-human dramatic dialogue. He views theatre as an 'ecumenical institution.' It is

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<sup>8</sup> TD1, p.36

<sup>9</sup> Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', p.27

a public act in which, through the participation of the audience, something like a “communion” is brought about. One could think of the theatre as a kind of ecumenical institution: it does not get too close to any particular denominational form, nor yet does it aim at a watered down common version; it points the different beliefs onwards and up, toward a unity that is at present unattainable. This unity lies in the larger-than-life content of the performed play. “Freely consenting to the dramatic fiction, the various forms of belief converge towards the proposed universe, forgetting personal ideologies and opinions.” ... They are by no means levelled out ... but here is a place where every proposal ... has to re-examine itself in the face of the publicly posed question.<sup>10</sup>

Aidan Nichols glosses Balthasar’s concept of ecumenical theatre as follows:

just as in good ecumenism partial versions of Christian truth are propelled towards their Catholic fullness ... so, even in a self-consciously secular theatre, well-posed questions are nudged towards the most ‘open’ of all horizons.<sup>11</sup>

I am not quite persuaded by this interpretation. I agree with the reading of how Balthasar understands good Christian ecumenism. However, I do not find Balthasar suggesting that theatre practice can be nudged towards the theodramatic (‘most ‘open’’) horizon in this way. Balthasar insists that theatre cannot replicate the Incarnation in being personally dramatic. Theatre practice itself will not push people towards personal encounter with the ultimate horizon. Rather, the claim that theatre is analogously ecumenical reflects Balthasar’s belief that theatre symbolises the natural-human dramatic dimension and that dialogue in that dimension is analogous to in form, although distinct from in effect, the dialogue between persons and God in Christ. The horizon of the theatre play (its ‘proposed universe’) is any humanly constructed, provisional and fictitious, one: not the ultimate one. Nonetheless, the form of the ultimate dialogue governs the form of dialogical engagements in any dramatic performance. Thus there is an analogy of ecumenical dynamic between theatre practice in the natural-human dramatic dimension and theo-drama as experienced in the Church. Theatre practice supposes a governing horizon of the play that is made particular in the action and thus dialogue partners in the audience who must be prepared to submit their horizons to that of the play if there is to be dramatic success. A ‘spiritual horizon [is] the precondition for a meaningful play’ and it must be a transcendent horizon that

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<sup>10</sup> TD1, p.323, citing A. Villiers

<sup>11</sup> Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, p.35

dialogues with the audience's horizons by interrupting, judging and gathering them in. Theatre as ecumenical phenomenon symbolises the reality that natural-human dramatic dialogue does not take place in a neutral free-flow manner such as Balthasar understands a humanistic, purely natural, account of dialogue to assume. Rather, it operates in a dynamic analogous to that of theo-drama, where one horizon must submit to another - the audience horizon must accept in gratitude the gracious presentation of the play's horizon if there is to be successful dramatic dialogue between them. No sense that this phenomenon of theatrical ecumenism can be nudged towards the personal theodramatic horizon is required by the analogy. Instead, theatre as dialogical remains similar in greater dissimilarity with respect to theodramatic dialogue. Theatre operates an analogous dynamic, in which all elements (including the transcendent, governing horizon of the play which dialogically engages the audience's horizons) remain naturally stunted, 'ephemeral, this-worldly roles on a closed world stage.'<sup>12</sup> Balthasar claims to have

indicated the Christian breadth and depth of the horizon, which shows that the post-Christian perspectives are only fragments of it. [He] can go farther however and suggest that true ecumenism - however anonymous, unconscious or rejected it may be - takes place within this most open of horizons.<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion farther does not give license for natural-human dramatic dialogue to consider itself pertinent to the ultimate personal dramatic horizon. Rather it is a claim that the natural-human dramatic phenomenon is completely interior to the ultimate theodramatic reality. Every component of human theatre's dramatic dialogue is formally analogous to dialogue's theodramatic reality, sustained in ('anonymous, unconscious') parody or ('rejected') protest. In effect it remains naturally stunted and unable to achieve the ultimacy within which it can, by the theologian, be appreciated.

Balthasar's Theological Dramatics is significant for a theological understanding of dialogue in three senses. Firstly, it claims that Christian truth is itself a dialogue: the ultimate dialogue between God and persons in Christ, appreciation of which is necessary for the Christian who wishes to dialogue with non-Christian views. It shows,

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<sup>12</sup> TD3, p.258

<sup>13</sup> TD1, p.343

secondly, how the Christian is to treat the non-Christian dialogue partner. She should make an appropriative engagement, such as Balthasar exemplifies with twentieth-century theatre practitioners. Thirdly, it outlines how, in the natural-human dimension, dialogue operates analogously to the dialogue that occurs ultimately in theo-drama. People may believe that dialogue is free-flow, constructing a third position, but theatre – an ecumenical institution that symbolises the natural-human dramatic dimension – shows that it is not. Ultimately, then, true dramatic dialogue is Christological, completing ‘all meaning’ in ‘the realm of an infinite dialogue.’<sup>14</sup> This occurs in the polyphony of Christian truth where the formal dramatic unity comes from God’s eschatological reality and opens up into a multiplicity of particular ecclesial-personal dramas.<sup>15</sup> It is incompatible with humanistic pluralism in as much as such pluralism claims that dialogue requires no ultimate ontological contours but rather an open space. For the Incarnation reveals such a concept of dialogue to be non-dramatic and concomitantly unsustainable in a world which *is* dramatically. Christian polyphony, however, is ultimately dialogical in that its participants are many (hopefully all) but they are gathered into unity by their dialogue with one governing form. This dramatic dialogue, just as all other aspects of theodramatic reality, opens up personally only as the eschatological-final drama opens into the ecclesial-personal drama. Yet it has fragmentary analogues in the natural-human dramatic dimension, spotlighted in the dynamics of the dialogical – ‘kind of ecumenical’<sup>16</sup> – institution of the theatre.

### **6.12: Achievement of Balthasar’s Theodramatic Dialogues**

This study shows that Balthasar’s dialogues with twentieth-century theatre have much by which to commend themselves to those commentators, such as O’Donnell and Norris, who stand with Balthasar in the communion of theodramatic reality. In my first chapter, I have shown that Balthasar’s theology remains focused on an intuition of the dramatic that is drawn from revelation. Thus drama is Christocentric and this is expressed by gathering dramatic anthropology into dramatic Christology through dramatic soteriology. By this dramatic ingathering the theological imagination is

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<sup>14</sup> TD2, p.19

<sup>15</sup> See Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, where this line is explored through the metaphor of music.

<sup>16</sup> TD1, p.323

committed to a relational ontology, which is key for constructing a concept of dialogue that is itself a theological implication. Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics, which I discuss in my second chapter, then provides a methodology for distinguishing between human dramas that are properly natural and parodically dramatic and human dramas that purport to be purely natural and so are ultimately non-dramatic except in their protest. Balthasar employs a theological interpretative scheme of two inter-related dramatic triads and consequent dramatic themes, which assists the theologian in this engagement of inclusion through judgement with respect to dramatic expressions of human life (and, as a symbol of that life, human theatre). By theodramatic hermeneutics, Balthasar appreciates human dramas from participation in the Christian ultimate term of what it is to be dramatic. Thus, theodramatic reality itself presses for dialogues with theatre practice: the dialogical imperative is not a response to present-day pluralism but it has its own theological rationale. In my fourth chapter, I set out the grandeur of Balthasar's conception of life as drama, with what I call the natural-human and ecclesial-personal dramatic dimensions dependent, in differing ways, on the eschatological-final dramatic dimension, which God, in Christ, promises to his creation. I show that within this all-embracing, ontological dramatic scheme, Balthasar comments very specifically on theatre directors, with clear alternatives of protest and parody through which to make an evaluation. The theodramatic approach to dialogue remains Christocentrically focused and precisely by being so, looks for universal inclusion through judgement of particular dramatic activities. My sixth, concluding chapter highlights the fact that, for Balthasar, the form of dramatic dialogue is itself a theological implication, with its ultimate term in the Incarnation. Balthasar's achievement is to offer a consistent theological approach to dialogues as specific functions of ontological and relational truth. Balthasar's concept of dialogue is such that, accepting the all-embracing theological reality, the Christian theologian is encouraged to be both open and confident in the face of the non-Christian dialogue partner.

The Theological Dramatics provides both a methodological account and exemplary occasions of appropriative dialogue with theatre in the context of Christian dramatic ontology. I outlined this process in respect to dialogues with the theatre directors Stanislavsky, Brecht and Craig. My fifth chapter gives a more critical account in respect of Peter Brook. Dialogue with Brook appeared to be more a reading than an

encounter. Brook's own understanding of the relationship between theatre and life received little voice, except in as much as it might be read relative to Christian dramatic ontology as protest or parody. Probing in this way, however, offered few, if any, opportunities for critical commentary that gets under the skin of Balthasar's Theological Dramatics, for he succeeds in drawing the phenomenon of dialogue itself within his theological dramatic ontology. One might sense that his discourse is totalising; but Balthasar can claim, in the invocation of the dramatic, a relational openness that goes beyond any such structuralist agenda. One might feel that non-Christians as dialogue partners are being defined, whether approvingly or disapprovingly, in Christian terms with which they would not relate; yet theodramatic ontology recognises personal orientation and relationality as a phenomenon itself respective to ultimate Trinitarian relations and so it would be expected that the non-Christian would not properly appreciate the place in which they stand. One might sense that alterity is stifled by the one ontological play; yet Balthasar can claim that its tension is in fact heightened by recognition of human polarisation with regard to the ultimate horizon, rather than its being let loose to drift in a purportedly free-flowing arena.

### **6.13: Theological Dramatic Dialogue after Balthasar**

Not all theological commentators share the unequivocal admiration for Balthasar's theodramatic dialogue with culture shown by Norris and O'Donnell. Some are concerned by such a stifling, totalising and other-defining atmosphere in the Dramatics and their commentary can be considered in two respects. Firstly - I will exemplify this in Francesca Murphy's commentary and develop it through remarks of Max Harris - there are commentators who are sympathetic to Balthasar's understanding of dialogue but wish to clarify it to ensure that it makes proper acknowledgement of non-Christian stances. Secondly there are commentators who find Balthasar's approach to plurality unacceptable and consequently press for significant modification of his theological stance on dialogue, a response recently expressed by Victoria Harrison and which I shall develop by considering David Haberman and Frank Burch Brown. What potential in Balthasar's theodramatic understanding of dialogue is suggested by these two critical strands?

### 6.131: Francesca Murphy and Max Harris

Murphy's clarification is to distinguish between Balthasar's ecumenical methodology and his ecumenical dialogue, praising the former while questioning the latter. On the latter she is quite severe: 'on the level of *dialogue* Balthasar does not give plurality its due' because

the objective givenness of the Christian drama is so deeply dyed into [his] imagination that he can forget that every non-Christian thought form is not a conscious contribution to that drama.

She recognises Balthasar's tendency to read the other directly into Christian categories and she considers that this risk, of not giving plurality its due at the level of dialogue, is an inherently human risk. For if 'we commence by making a general survey of the *gestalten*, of each art form – or religion – we shall not imaginatively grasp the meaning of any. Understanding is by analogy: it must be oriented or localised by an accepted image.' The general survey, as alternative to Balthasar's approach to dialogue, is a dead end for the imagination. Thus, on Murphy's view, it is natural to human understanding to begin with some colour dyed in, by analogy with which other shades and different colours can be appreciated. The source of the stifling atmosphere in many of Balthasar's particular attempts at dialogue is that the accepted (Christian) form is read too far into the partner in dialogue before, or without, engaging with their self-interpretation. Nonetheless Balthasar's 'methodological recognition that one only sees the forms through a form gives Christian ecumenists a method of speaking with 'the faiths' through a faith.' Murphy supports Balthasar's methodology through appealing to analogicality as the natural mode of imagination, which requires us to begin reflection on others from what is already given (revealed) to us. She finds Balthasar's dialogical confidence anthropologically appropriate, in that humans must appreciate others through their own defining concepts. However, she questions Balthasar's implementation of this methodology in surveying non-Christian forms and, with presumptuous ease, gathering them so readily into a Christian whole.<sup>17</sup>

In a discussion of 'Incarnation and Other Dialogues', Harris takes a similar line. He is not directly indebted to Balthasar, but his Barthian stance makes his approach

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, pp.177-178

comparable. He applies a dialogical principle, whereby one must accept that one is a subject in another's world view as well as their being a subject in one's own, alongside a view that continuing a performative tradition, such as Christianity, requires one to perform both the text of one's faith and the text of one's culture. His model for dialogue is incarnational. He draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of live entering (*vzhivanie*) to suggest that, in encounter, there is a surplus of seeing whereby one can appreciate simultaneously both empathy and outsidership with respect to the person or culture one is encountering. For Harris, the

most startling illustration that Bakhtin offers, albeit in passing, for his concept of 'live entering' ... is the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. 'One way to imagine Christ', Bakhtin suggests, ... 'is to see the incarnation as an act of *vzhivanie*. According to this analogy, Christ did not empathise with people; rather he became one of them while still retaining his divine outsidership.' 'Christ's descent', Bakhtin wrote, is 'the great symbol of activity' that conforms to the pattern of *vzhivanie*. 'The world from which Christ departed' had been enriched by his living into it, and 'could no longer be that world in which he had never been.'<sup>18</sup>

Harris builds on Bakhtin's fragmentary remarks to suggest an analogy: Christ performs God's life in the world; Christians perform the biblical text in culture. Balthasar rejected the idea that dialogue operates in a free space, and proposed instead the Christian dramatic horizon as the ultimate term of all proper dialogue: for him, then, a Christian partner is essential to the possibility of true dialogue. Developing a Christian understanding of dramatic dialogue through live entering, Harris seems to offer non-Christian others more scope: his

theatrical model grants to others equal freedom to act as missionaries on behalf of their own religion. Muslims, for example, may live into European or American culture ... simultaneously performing their own scriptures and the local cultural text. They may tell the story on which their own distinctive performance is based, and they may offer the Quran for independent performance by Christians.

Harris suggests ways in which Christians may respond to such an offer and asks, rhetorically, whether Christians can 'object if their neighbours of another faith model

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<sup>18</sup>Max Harris, *The Dialogical Theatre: Dramatizations of the Conquest of Mexico and the Question of the Other* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.162, citing Mikhail Bakhtin

their own cross-cultural outreach on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation?’<sup>19</sup> In this remark, it seems to me, a line is drawn. Harris’s model of dialogical encounter does not depend on a single horizon. The Muslim tradition is presented as validly and distinctively dialogical, and Harris is at pains to stress that variety of ways of performing (and concomitantly some variation in what Balthasar would term horizon) is integral to performing even any one of life’s dramatic texts. With so many neighbouring performances in contemporary multi-religious and multi-cultural societies this variety is stronger. Still, there is the suggestion of a uniform dynamic of performance of a textual faith in a textual culture. When non-Christians make a dialogical, encountering presentation of truth, they do so on such an incarnational dynamic. On Harris’s Muslim example, the Quran represents the text, Europe or America the culture, and the performance in being dialogical between the two is open to being re-performed and shared in, in new ways. However, Islam - in this example - has nothing that represents the Incarnation, the ultimate term of this dynamic, and thus the validity of the dialogical dynamic from the partner’s side remains Christian.

Murphy’s and Harris’s understandings of the dramatic dialogical dynamic, which, when avoiding directly theological terms, Murphy calls analogical imagination and Harris live entering, is not itself neutral. If one says that the dialogical dynamic is one of seeing forms through a form, then with the rhetoric of Christ as form of God one grounds the dynamic in Christian truth. Similarly, live entering modelled on the Incarnation has a dynamic that is ultimately Christian. The practical importance Murphy attaches to the fact that every non-Christian activity is ‘not a *conscious* contribution’ to theo-drama<sup>20</sup> is not justified against Balthasar’s harsher stance: it *is* such a contribution, whether consciously or not, and so should be treated as such. Harris’s account kindly offers others their right to perceive themselves as a governing partner in dialogue. The manner of dialogue is as it is, however, on grounds of the Incarnation and so the possibility that the dialogue partner may break with this Christian dialogical rhythm and encounter one in a new way remains difficult to maintain. While Murphy and Harris may appear more pleasant, it is not clear that they

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<sup>19</sup>Harris, *Dialogical Theatre*, p.169

<sup>20</sup> Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, p.178 (my emphasis)

have made many significant advances from Balthasar's position by compromising his rigorously Christian account of dialogue.

**6.132: Victoria Harrison, David Haberman and Frank Burch Brown**

Harrison's response to dramatic dialogue is a more radical modification of Balthasar's stance on plurality. She suggests that on Balthasar's account '[n]on-believers ... appear to have been put into a 'Catch-22' situation'<sup>21</sup> and proposes that, in order to avoid this, Balthasar's 'intuition' that human holiness apologises for Christianity must become 'equally applicable to all religions', even though 'it is extremely doubtful that he would have agreed to any such extension.'<sup>22</sup> Given Balthasar's ascription of a special dramatic status to the Christian form of life, in that it is responsive to revelation and so inherently attractive, Harrison examines Balthasar's claim that the saint is an apology for the Christian religion. She accepts Balthasar's intuition in as much as it finds rationality to be coherently intra-systemic and so agrees that Christian apologetics emerges in and with the intentional acts by which the Christian increasingly resembles the form of Christ's life. But her question, '[i]n short', is

what is to prevent ... Balthasar's intuition about the apologetic value of human holiness being applied to other belief systems and providing proof for a very different God? Perhaps the experience of human holiness in any religious tradition has apologetic value for that tradition, and perhaps it would be rational to accept any faith-stance on the grounds of one's experience of human holiness? If we allow that human holiness can be apologetic for Christianity, why should we not allow that it can be apologetic for any religion?

Having argued, against Balthasar, that 'Christianity is, in its essence, a world religion, no different from other types of religion', Harrison concludes that

it is difficult to see how the apologetic value of human holiness is not equally applicable to other religions, and hence how those sharing ... Balthasar's core intuition can, on pain of inconsistency, avoid religious pluralism.

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<sup>21</sup> Victoria Harrison, 'Human Holiness', p.68

<sup>22</sup> Harrison, 'Human Holiness', p.78

In Harrison's critical account, Balthasar's theological claims are perceived to be separable from the dramatic dynamic that he outlines in respect to Christian religious activity and his idea that the dramatic phenomenon of human holiness apologises for Christianity is replaced with the sense that it can provide proof, with equal application, for the world view of its practitioner. In this move, rational proof remains performative but particular faith-specific ontological claims are removed from its dynamic.

Balthasar's limitations for a pluralist interpretation, such as Harrison's, lie in his intuition of the Incarnation as the ultimately holy dramatic act by which all others are judged. An intuition that he would not perceive as separable from what Harrison infers as his core intuition of the apologetic value of human holiness, because of the link he makes between relationship with God in Christ and becoming a person. Thus, on Balthasar's view, only in Christ, with the specifically Christian dramatic dynamic, does human holiness achieve the personal holiness that might provide apology for faith. This is his specifically Christian theological anthropology, as Harrison acknowledges. Yet she claims that Balthasar's dramatic apologetics can still find 'deployment'

in the service of religious pluralism. For even though ... Balthasar's philosophical anthropology is specifically Christocentric, there is no reason, in principle, why his insights about human holiness (suitably abstracted from his Christian beliefs) could not be extended to other religions.<sup>23</sup>

Such deployment would implicitly reject Balthasar's theological anthropology, which seems to me to be dramatic as much as it is philosophical; or, at least, would find specifically Christian theological anthropology to be separable from the possibility that a holy form of life can attract people into itself. What is lost from Balthasar's account is his sense that what it means to be dramatic - thus apologetically attractive in holiness - *is* relative to the ultimate dramatic event of the Incarnation and so Christian performance has an apocalyptic rhythm of its own which may find analogues elsewhere but is non-transferable as far as generating real lived proof for holy living is concerned. Harrison considers it 'strained' to say that all human holiness is relative to that of 'Jesus of Nazareth', given the existence of non-Christian holy figures.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that she perceives a stifling, totalising atmosphere in the theodramatic ontology that

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<sup>23</sup> Harrison, 'Human Holiness', pp.77-78

<sup>24</sup> Harrison, 'Human Holiness', p.76

finds the holy dramatic dynamic evidenced in only one, however polyphonous, Christological form.

From this perspective, Christian thought could take a religious, and possibly comparative religious, rather than Balthasarian theological approach to the dramatic dynamic. Such an approach might be similar in style to Haberman's *Acting as a Way of Salvation*. Haberman considers that

[t]he recognition that we can experience a multiplicity of realities poses a serious religious problem. ... The human being as *homo religiosus* is not satisfied to occupy just any reality, but instead thirsts for the "Real". The religious person seeks to participate fully in a reality that stands qualitatively above all others. He or she strives not just to perform any acts, but acts that place him or her in harmony with the paramount reality. To act in accordance with what is considered the "ultimate reality", a reality which exists against the backdrop of a variety of ways of being, the religious individual also has need of guides to channel conduct in a manner conducive to what is believed to be real.<sup>25</sup>

The implications for dialogue of this model of dramatic, religious activity are most clear in Haberman's concluding chapter where he relates the Hindu bhakti tradition and the Christian Cistercian tradition. His 'comparative model of religious action' is presented diagrammatically, with stages of action accompanying changes in status from lay to holy to saint to paradigmatic individual.<sup>26</sup> Here, '[t]he holy actor is a religious practitioner who strives to enter the Ultimate Reality - or "live a myth" - by enacting a transcendent role defined by a paradigmatic individual.' Both in bhakti and among the Cistercians

the quest of the holy actors is a search for freedom and meaning in a transcendent reality beyond the social reality of their own limited time and space. Thus "living a myth" may be the ultimate act of freedom.<sup>27</sup>

A religious dramatic dynamic, with freedom and discipline ultimately harmonious, is transposed across faith traditions, 'on to different stages.'<sup>28</sup> Traditions could dialogue

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<sup>25</sup> David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Raganuga Bhakti Sadhana*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.6

<sup>26</sup> Haberman, *Way of Salvation*, p.148

<sup>27</sup> Haberman, *Way of Salvation*, pp.150,155

with each other as versions of this dramatic soteriological dynamic. Pluralism need not, however, claim that all aesthetic dynamics are fundamentally similar. And an explicitly non-Balthasarian, religious approach finds impressive, nuanced expression in Brown's *Religious Aesthetics*. Brown rejects Balthasar's claim that theological aesthetics can develop a theory of beauty from revelation itself through theological methods. It is 'patently false':

Christian theology may indeed want to say that no truth can be inconsistent with fundamental Christian understanding of self, others, world and ultimate reality - truth having its source in the very God that is made known in Christ. It should be obvious, however, that Christian revelation is not ... the sufficient means by which we can discover all the truths pertaining to art and aesthetics.<sup>29</sup>

Brown sees aesthetics as a discipline that can be used by theology, study of religion or philosophy but not a discipline that can be an implication of any one. It is for this reason that he rejects the revelation based theological approach of Balthasar, while arguing for 'the right of any religion ... to employ criteria in some ways distinct from those of the philosopher ... and accordingly to formulate certain aesthetic theories appropriate to [its] own religious understanding.'<sup>30</sup> This rhetoric of rights is interesting. Brown is suspicious of the comparative religionist who might distort the particular practices of the religions by unifying them under (in this case) aesthetic structures. Yet, by distancing himself from a revelation-based approach, he has also 'stopped short of full-fledged theology.'<sup>31</sup> It is in order to assert the right of a variety of religions to develop theological aesthetics that Brown needs to reject revelationist aesthetics such as Balthasar's. What he wishes to effect is a situation in which a variety of religions can develop theologies drawing, in part, on aesthetic tools. How do they dialogue with each other? They treat others' theologies as 'potentially fruitful fictions' that may 'engage us wholly and make for us a kind of meaning.'<sup>32</sup> Thus the theologian can, 'like ... Balthasar', believe that 'certain truths come from God' and still hold to a 'credible' and

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<sup>28</sup> Haberman, *Way of Salvation*, p.145

<sup>29</sup> Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.20

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Aesthetics*, p.186

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Aesthetics*, p.187

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Aesthetics*, p.194

‘relatively autonomous’ aesthetics.<sup>33</sup> Brown assumes that, in having the right to its own relatively autonomous aesthetics, a particular theology must allow others a level ground on which to have theirs also. This denies that what it is to be aesthetic is patterned into reality by one particular aesthetic activity, that of God in Christ. As Brown acknowledges, this is opposed to Balthasar’s revealed aesthetics. He does not explain quite how a theologian like Balthasar will work in a context in which Balthasar’s theological method is patently false.

A concern for many versions each retaining their soteriological challenge, rather than a Balthasarian theological polarisation within one Christian soteriology is a shared feature of the approaches of Harrison, Haberman and Brown. In the case of Brown and Harrison, the concern is expressed with relation to aesthetics and performance generally and particularly in contradistinction to Balthasar. Haberman does not discuss Balthasar but his work shows how such an approach might operate in a specifically dramatic register, with acting becoming a resource for appreciating the radical soteriological character of religions, without having an ultimate term in any one particular faith tradition. From these positions, claims of theological anthropology (in the case of Christianity, Christocentric claims) are bracketed out of the dramatic dynamic. They are not considered to bear on the dynamic itself. Rather a general dynamic is being instanced (or non-specific tools are being used) in versions, one of which is the Christian. This may allow for a more constructive dialogue between those who recognise that they work on shared ground, with a common style. These three approaches have a soteriocentric tendency, in so much as they presume that dramatic or other aesthetic activity forms an appealingly meaningful bond between people. However, in disputing Balthasar by considering the aesthetic dynamic to be separable from any particular dramatic ontological claim, they seem to suggest that human

behaviour might ... be viewed as having apologetic value for whatever belief system it is that seems to motivate it directly, whether it is religious or secular.<sup>34</sup>

#### **6.14: Theodramatic Dialogues with Theatre Practitioners**

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Aesthetics*, p.191

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, ‘Human Holiness’, p.78

These considerations of theology and dramatic dialogue after Balthasar have done little to revive a significant casualty of his approach. The possibility of viable contemporary a-Christian, rather than post-Christian protesting or parodic, dramatic versions of living is denied by Balthasar. Murphy's sympathetic commentary consciously attempts to allow a greater space for non-Christian perspectives, but makes only slight modifications.<sup>35</sup> And more radical interpretations, such as Harrison's, accept a break with Balthasar's theological presuppositions in order to allow an alternative account of plurality. The casualty thus seems inevitable in Balthasarian theodramatic dialogue. Whether this casualty is acceptable determines whether Balthasar's understanding has the potential to conduct genuine dialogues with those twentieth-century theatre practitioners who might consider their work to be a-Christian.

Intra-systemically there is a clear rationale to Balthasar's dialogical approach to theatre practitioners and it can be considered a genuine dialogue. He gives priority to a theological account of what it is to be dramatic. The strengths of this account are clear. It offers novel and yet traditional, compelling dramatic interpretations of key events in Christ's life and achieves a formidable integration of theological anthropology and soteriology within a dramatic Christology. It informs a distinct Christian universalism, grounded in theodramatic hermeneutics, and it offers insights for theological methodology, particularly in terms of relating nature and grace. It also furnishes theologians with a clear rationale for dealing with trends in the natural-human dimension: provisional exclusion within ultimate inclusion. In respect to theatre practice, it is particularly noticeable that in being included or excluded from Christian reality such trends are also being included or excluded from the possibility of being dramatic. This shows the extent to which Balthasar's approach is governed by a

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<sup>35</sup> I have not considered Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In chapter 5 he makes a 'theo-dramatic response to pluralism' in which ecclesiology moves beyond a dichotomy between inclusivist and post-modernist accounts of plurality in respect to dialogue with others. I associate Healy with the sympathetic commentators on Balthasar. Indeed, his claim that the context for dialogue cannot be one over against the Christian context has some affinities with Murphy's argument for seeing faiths through the faith. And his arguments for difference and encounter as integral to dramatic truth would relate to Harris's work. At first reading, this chapter seems to me to retain Balthasar's perception of a-Christian stances as ultimately not viable. So recently published, I have not been able to give it serious consideration as a post-Balthasarian strategy for dialogue.

theological intuition of what it is to be dramatic. When he dialogues with theatre practitioners, their drama is 'taken seriously by Balthasar in the belief that all human drama ... opens on to the drama of God himself.'<sup>36</sup> This belief also colours the dialogical analysis he makes. Balthasar may be considered to set up Christianised interpretations of theatre practitioners with which to dialogue. By defining the natural-human dimension of existence in Christian theological terms and seeing theatre as symbolic of the polarised dramatic possibilities open in that dimension, he reads what theatre practitioners do theologically and considers the theological reading to be what they actually do. From outwith the theological perspective, an ontological impossibility in theodramatic terms, this may not be considered genuine.

Balthasar describes his dialogues with theatre practitioners in the *Theological Dramatics* as a process by which he can 'put together' a 'set of dramatic resources' for theological expression of the ultimate drama.<sup>37</sup> The idea of post-Christian theatre as a theological resource recurs throughout Balthasar's work, for example with Brook where Brook's opposition to psychological interpretations of dramatic role suggests that there is still twentieth-century theatre that could resource theo-drama. The dialogue with Brook exhibits a tendency in this approach to construct the terms of engagement so as to interpret the theatre practitioner as post-Christian and thus to stand them ready to resource theology, whether via the parodic or protesting route. Balthasar makes no attempt to consider how Brook himself might try to combine the purportedly protesting and parodic poles, nor how Brook might incorporate Christian imagery in his own projects: this would be a concession to the possibility of a-Christian dramatic activity. Rather, the bizarre ambivalence in which Brook is appropriated is itself a theodramatic implication: a result of the incapacity of the natural-human dimension to have its own fully dramatic existence. Balthasar's double-edged response to his own critical exposition of Brook as a post-Christian practitioner is an example of what O'Donnell praises as Balthasar's method of 'dialogue through confrontation.'<sup>38</sup> Balthasar's belief that human drama 'can only be played with one eye on the Absolute'<sup>39</sup> and consequently that one cannot have a purely secular theatre informs his critical

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<sup>36</sup> Riches and Quash, 'Balthasar', p.141

<sup>37</sup> TD3, p.532

<sup>38</sup> O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, p.14

<sup>39</sup> TD1, p.129

dialogues with theatre practitioners. It also informs his accounts of what these theatre practitioners do, the very accounts with which he dialogues. Even the categories into which he groups non-Christian theatre (post- and pre- Christian) reveal the fact that it is being described from a Christian dramatic perspective. Balthasar faces this boldly, by proposing that to be dramatic theatre must occur analogously to the Christian dramatic perspective, which is ultimately the only one. Whether or not the dramatic dialogue between a Christian theologian, such as himself, and a post-Christian theatre practitioner, such as Brook, is considered genuine may depend on one's standpoint concerning that dialogue. Whether or not it is genuine does not. For, on Balthasar's account, the phenomenon of dialogue itself is not neutral but a theodramatic implication. 'Balthasar's vast gallery of ... dramatists ... are' (indeed) 'marshalled by him and assigned roles in the 'theo-drama''.<sup>40</sup> But for Balthasar, the non-Christian partner's *dramatic* voice *is* as it speaks parodically within or protesting against theodramatic reality and so there is no need for the practitioners on view to speak independently, outwith Balthasar's interpretation of them, for Norris to praise 'every page' as 'dialogical'.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.15: Conclusion

Drama is a powerful but difficult model for dialogue. Brook describes one of his theatrical aims as 'trying to relate the smallest specific detail to the widest framework'<sup>42</sup> and Balthasar proposes that it is only a dramatic mode of Christian theology that can make the 'necessary connection ... between ... life ... and this particular 'I'.<sup>43</sup> Theatricality highlights an ongoing inter-relation between particular act and universal framework, which suggests that life is a continual process of dialogical re-negotiation. However, when two differing rhythms of dramatic life (such as Brook's immediate theatrical concentrations of quality within an ultimately formless space and Balthasar's ecclesial instantiations of the ultimate, formed dramatic horizon) are placed together, it seems difficult to avoid an appropriative tendency. For the particular act is interpreted differently depending on the understanding of the universal

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<sup>40</sup> Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p.238

<sup>41</sup> Norris, 'Symphonic Unity', p.246

<sup>42</sup> Brook, *Shifting Point*, p.133

<sup>43</sup> TD1, p.571

framework and the perception of the manner in which the two relate. Thus, dialogue between alternative models tends towards representation of the universal framework of the other in terms relative to one's own. And from this, an appropriative employment, which elides the dramatic rhythm of its alternatively inter-related universal horizon and particular event into one's own, seems likely. Dialogue is vital within both Brook's and Balthasar's dramatic models but between the two appears a dialogical impasse.

**Audience Member**

I have a feeling that I'm in a church service. Can you tell me why I feel that? I feel as if I've come to communion.

**PB** Is that a pleasant or an unpleasant sensation?

**Audience Member**

It's very restful, very peaceful, and I have a very intense feeling of colour, of space, and of being held in a spell. I'm moved and I don't really know why.

**PB** Then perhaps another door should be opened. When I said that we started to work with very simple things, perhaps the simplest thing of all was to see that silence is as real as noise. In a way you have to go to the middle of the Sahara and sit among the dunes to have the sense of what silence really is. Then one realises that there are two absolute silences. The silence of going into a vault or a tomb, which is like an anaesthetic - completely lifeless. And another silence, which goes under the same name, which you can find in certain rare places but once you have experienced it you will realise that it is everywhere. You know that there isn't just noise, less noise and non-noise. ... You used the word communion, and that means very precisely the sense of being together. The true sense of being together at its finest is when one is sharing a silence. But you can't do that all the time.

**Audience Member**

There's a very strong feeling that our minds and thoughts are blending together, and I immediately thought of the religious communion - the wine and the bread. It seems to have cleared my mind of all other thoughts.

**PB** Like everything else, there are very strict hidden rules. One of the rules of silence is that it can't last too long. One can go into it, but if one tries to stretch it out or even to talk about it, gradually it goes, and one has to go along with that. That ... is one of the most marvellous things in the theatre - to go into a silence and then come out of it....<sup>44</sup>

This dialogue between a Christian and Peter Brook illustrates the difficulties of theatrical engagement between two perspectives. There appears to be a clash between

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<sup>44</sup> Brook *et al.*, 'On 16 May', p.30

the particular symbols that fill the audience member's horizon when considering the spiritual community effected in the theatrical workshop on which they are reflecting and the thematic approach of Brook, which is grounded in the belief in empty, tradition-less silence. The two interpretations interact awkwardly in discussion. Brook is concerned that one should not try to stretch the moment out by verbally attaching it to a symbolic tradition of wine and bread. The audience member is reluctant to allow Brook's thematic, in his terms precise, meaning of communion – the sense of being together – to substitute for that specific imagery. Whether the two individuals were united in the preceding event it is difficult to say. It seems, at least, that the inter-play of encounter between them generates meaningful difference, which Balthasar's theodramatic scheme (and perhaps Brook's theatrical spirituality also) would smooth over when left to its own interpretative agenda.

Balthasar has undertaken to integrate into Christ all that is of value in the history of Western culture and thought.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to dispute with Balthasar's achievement in constructing a theodramatic concept of dialogue in which he engages with, among others, twentieth-century theatre directors. In no small measure this is because of the appropriative tendency of the achievement itself. With rigorous internal consistence, the dialogue partner is defined against theodramatic reality. If one appreciates theodramatic reality, an appreciation that from within is seen to constitute ultimate personal and social transformation, then one accepts its implications for the phenomenon of dialogue and acts accordingly. By definition, the non-Christian partner does not have such an appreciation. Concomitantly, they are not aware of the full potential of dialogical reality and do not properly appreciate their own situation in respect to Christian truth that encounters them through the Christian dialogue partner. Balthasar grounds this concept of dramatic dialogue intra-systemically: the final-eschatological, intra-Trinitarian dialogue is played out through the Incarnation in personal-ecclesial, sacramental dialogues and effects judgmental inclusion over the natural-human phenomenon of dialogue. Thereby, Balthasar gathers dialogicality itself within his Christocentric dramatic ontology. The

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<sup>45</sup> Escobar, 'Christo-logian', p.316

Theological Dramatics' dialogues with post-Christian theatre directors make up one tiny section of Balthasar's 'program notes'<sup>46</sup> for the drama in which 'the whole intramundane dialogue of standpoints, world views and perspectives is overtaken by an ultimate dramatic dialogue.'<sup>47</sup> For Balthasar this is the genuine dialogue, a dialogue that others can only know to be such by personal reorientation within it. His theodramatic dialogues draw clear lines under Balthasar's theological achievement.

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<sup>46</sup> TD3, p.11

<sup>47</sup> TD2, p.168

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