

## HANS URS VON BALTHASAR: THE NATURE AND TASK OF FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

FIRST MEETING  
OF THE NORTH AMERICAN VON BALTHASAR SEMINAR

With the growing interest in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar—furthered in part by the ongoing publication in English of his major work, the trilogy *Herrlichkeit/The Glory of the Lord*, *Theodramatik/Theodrama*, and *Theologik/Theology*—we thought the time opportune to provide a place for the discussion of his work, both in itself and in its connection with contemporary theology. We deeply appreciate the encouragement and cooperation of the officers of the CTSA in making this first seminar a reality. The “we” who make up this panel are three members of the North American editorial board of *Communio*. It is not surprising that there exists a high degree of interest among board members of the more than a dozen language editions of this international review, since von Balthasar, along with Henri de Lubac and others, was a founder of the journal and made it one of his principal interests from 1972 on. There is, however, no proprietary connection with *Communio*, and all who are interested in the study and discussion of von Balthasar’s work are welcome. During the session a list of those present and interested was drawn up with the purpose of consultation and communication regarding the future shape of the seminar. About thirty were in attendance and participated in the discussion that followed the presentations.

The overall topic for this first seminar was “Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Nature and Task of Fundamental Theology.” The first presentation, by Professor David Schindler, University of Notre Dame, proposed to situate von Balthasar’s theology between two contemporary trends, specifically between the critical correlationism of David Tracy and the anticorrelationism of George Lindbeck. The “between,” however, is not mere accommodation but the result, rather, of von Balthasar’s rejection of the fundamental presuppositions that are common to both positions. Schindler concentrated his remarks upon von Balthasar’s understanding of what it means to see with the eyes of faith, and drew mostly but not exclusively upon the first part of the trilogy *The Glory of the Lord*. Von Balthasar characterizes the relation between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology as a relation between a theory of vision on the one hand, and a theory of rapture on the other. That is, in the realm of theology “seeing” the “object” already requires some initial “being affected by or taken up into” that “object.” There are no bare facts in theology. Schindler concluded his presentation by indicating how von Balthasar developed an analogue (*Vorverständnis*) for his claim on behalf of faith (“enrapture”) as a necessary presupposition for apologetics (“seeing”). The an-

alogue is to be found in beauty: in the intrinsic interplay of object(ivity) (species: form, sign) and subject(ivity) (lumen: splendor, interior light) required for the perception of beauty.

The second presentation, by Rev. Marc Oullet, Grand Séminaire, Montréal, drew chiefly upon the second part of the trilogy *Theodrama*, and took up the question whether it is possible for a human being to do something in and with, but also for God. Father Oullet offered an exposition of the Christian and human search for freedom, for solidarity, and for meaning through the dialogue of man-woman with God in Christ. Emphasis was laid upon the importance of the analogy of being for von Balthasar, on the grounds that—for him—if there were no analogy of being there would be no analogy of freedom. But if there were no freedom, there would be no drama, and it is precisely the dramatic element in theology to which von Balthasar draws our attention, since it provides a key to the deeper understanding of action, both human and divine. This great drama takes place in the interplay between God's freedom and human freedom, in which the human creature has an indispensable role to play. The drama is seen, however, not merely as a human story but as God's own drama, freely undertaken, in no way compelled, but entered into for our sake and His glory.

A spirited discussion took place with allusions to the work of Karl Rahner, and with the possibility of drawing upon von Balthasar for work in the contemporary philosophy and theology of religions. A good part of the ensuing discussion was taken up with the relation between von Balthasar's thought and that of St. Thomas and the traditions that flow from him.

We intend to hold further seminars. All those interested in helping to shape future sessions are asked to write to David Schindler, Program of Liberal Studies, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Indiana USA 46556.

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