

**Response to Dr. Danielle Nussberger, “The Spirit of Truth: Receiving and Communicating the Word in Dialog”**

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I wanted to first of all thank Dr. Nussberger for her evocative and challenging lecture. It is an honor to be a part of this colloquium. I especially thank Bob Doran for his invitation and gracious hospitality.

**1. Conversion and the Mystery of the Other**

I will focus my first set of remarks on this extremely rich passage from Danielle’s paper: “Applying this method to interreligious dialog would mean that the Christian emphasizes her conversion to the way of Christic obedience and all the challenges that this entails so that the Christian dialog partner is putting herself forward in all the vulnerability of her struggle to accept the Spirit’s gift of Christic embodiment. A focus upon this never-ending process of conversion would remove any temptation to monopolize the dialog with a plea for the conversion of the Other that would diminish or complete eradicate the Otherness of relationship in dialog.” I would like to discuss this passage under two headings: (1) Comparative Theology and (2) The role of conversion in Lonergan’s theological method.

***Comparative Theology***

In the “Forward” to volume 1 of the *Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar writes: “The overall scope of the present work naturally remains all too Mediterranean. The inclusion of other cultures, especially that of Asia, would have been important and fruitful. But the author’s education has not allowed for such an expansion, and a superficial presentation of such material

would have been dilettantism. May those qualified come to complete the present fragment.”<sup>1</sup> In the spirit of Balthasar’s suggestion and in light of the passage from Danielle’s paper, I would like to suggest an element, in a kind of Balthasarian frame, that might contribute to an encounter with a variety of religious traditions as one does systematic theology, something akin to a comparative theological moment.

Balthasar’s use of *Gestalt* in *Glory of the Lord* 1 and his account of truth in *Theo-Logic* 1 both emphasize a kind of nuptial moment in the knowing process.<sup>2</sup> That is, the comprehensibility of an object lies in part with the light shining forth from the object and not simply the active performance of the subject. In *TL* 1, against both naïve realism and deductive idealism, Balthasar argues that a “proportion has to be achieved between subject and object.” Although the “decisive measure of the proportion lies with the object” the “purpose and mission of the subject is not simply to be a kind of machine for recording objective states of affairs. Subjectivity in the full sense includes freedom, self-determination, and creativity...”<sup>3</sup> Yes, truth is about grasping, but is first about letting-be, an unveiling to be grasped truly. There are parallels to be found, I think, with Bob Doran’s account of “Reception from Above” and “Reception from Below” in his book *What is Systematic Theology?*<sup>4</sup>

Balthasar’s challenge here is to nurture a kind of aesthetic surrender to the concrete particularity of forms. There are connections to be made here, I suggest, to Lonergan’s discussion of intersubjective, incarnate, and artistic meaning.<sup>5</sup> The implication is that any notion

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<sup>1</sup> *Glory of the Lord*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1, “Balthasar and Dialogue,” in Rodney A. Howsare’s helpful book *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of his Theological Style* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005): 9-41. See also, my review of Howsare’s book in *The Heythrop Journal* 49.1 (January 2008), 157-158.

<sup>3</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> See Doran, *What is Systematic Theology?*, 124-133.

<sup>5</sup> Lonergan distinguishes these types of meaning in many places throughout his corpus. For our purposes, I would simply point to chapter three of *Method in Theology*. For my own reflections on Lonergan’s account of artistic meaning, see Rosenberg, “The Drama of Scripture: Reading Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics through Bernard

of dialogue would be impoverished without a starting point that respects, in the words of Dr. Nussberger, “the Other in all the beauty of such Otherness...” It seems to me that there are interesting, and maybe even counterintuitive, parallels to be discovered here in the field of Comparative Theology. I have in mind here thinkers like Frank Clooney and James Fredericks. Comparative theology aims is to cherish the distinctiveness and particularities of religious traditions, and challenges us to know the other as other in all his or her distinctiveness. The pluralist, exclusivist, and inclusivist options “inoculate Christians against the power and novelty of other religious traditions.”<sup>6</sup> Comparative theologians live the tension between a deep vulnerability to the transformative power of the other and a sincere loyalty to the Christian tradition.

In his recent reflections on writing a Christian commentary on a Hindu text, Clooney refers to this commentarial practice as an intellectual and a spiritual activity: “...in understanding, learning, appreciating, appropriating slowly and over a long period of time, we become what we read and, ambiguously or not, become part of the tradition of the text... We learn to re-read the tradition to which we already belong, and thus renew...the values we began with.”<sup>7</sup> (There are possible parallels to be discovered in Balthasar’s understanding of “Theodramatic Hermeneutics” in *TD 2*).

Granted, this is not systematic theology as such. But, what if systematic theologians read, on their way of discovery, some of the great texts of other religious traditions with the kind of sympathy with which Balthasar read Brecht, Wilder, Shakespeare, Ionesco, Arthur Miller,

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Lonergan’s Reflections on Art,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11:2 (Spring 2008): 126-148 and “Lonergan on the Transcendent Orientation of Art,” *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* (Spring 2009): 141-151.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 167.

<sup>7</sup> Francis X. Clooney, “Christian Readers, Hindu Words: Toward Christian Commentary on Hindu Prayer,” *Theology Digest* 53.4 (Winter 2006): 303-319; here at 305.

Tennessee Williams? In dramatic works, in theater, in literature, Balthasar sought parabolic openings to Christian revelation. Dr. Nussberger cited Augustine's *Confessions* as an example. What if our thinking was also shaped by the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Tao Te Ting* or Islamic poetry? This kind of deep reading of religious texts, writes Clooney, "proceeds by specific acts of learning and not by raising and resolving large theoretical issues" and has the potential to promote "a richer interreligious exchange..."<sup>8</sup> Of course, Lonergan's understanding of systematics challenges us not to dismiss the larger theoretical questions that arise. In my estimation, this kind of deep interreligious reading does not indicate a watering-down or compromising of one's faith. Rather, as an exercise nourished over time, the implication might be that we, as we perform our systematic-theological tasks, cannot help but think of the other and the images provided by these texts and interpersonal relationships -- just as Aquinas could not help but think of Aristotle and Maimonides, just as Balthasar could not help but think of Brecht, Nietzsche, and Goethe.

Lonergan's contribution to this question of comparative theology and the theology of religions can be situated with reference to the recent work of Jose-Luis Salazar.<sup>9</sup> Salazar argues that Lonergan has the resources for providing some order to the confusions and impasses that exist in these fields. In terms of ordering, he holds up Lonergan's foundational methodology, his ordered differentiations of consciousness, the worlds of meaning they open up to, and the impact of the various conversions on these worlds of meaning. Lonergan's work challenges comparative theologians to make use of, in a more differentiated way, Research, History, Interpretation, and Dialectics – and also to appropriate their own authentic subjectivity and

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<sup>8</sup> Clooney, 311.

<sup>9</sup> Jose-Luis Salazar, S.J., "Conspiring unto the Good: Lonergan's Critical Contribution to Theology of Religions," a paper prepared for the West Coast Methods Institute, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA in April 2010.

interiority by fidelity to the demands to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving.<sup>10</sup> I would also reference Nick Olkovich's paper "Beyond Radical Particularism" as a way of exploring Lonergan's potential contribution.<sup>11</sup> Lonergan challenges us not to overemphasize particularity at the expense of discerning the transcultural dimensions of human knowing, choosing, and loving, which includes religious experience.

Nevertheless, this vulnerability to the particularity of the Other, this aesthetic surrender seems to be an indispensable part of the interreligious exchange. As Nussberger beautifully writes, "we are to become the humble, vulnerable, childlike Christ who meets the Other in order to wholeheartedly embrace her as Other and to build a relationship of unity in difference that patterns itself after the relationship that the triune God has established with all of humanity through the incarnation."

### ***Lonergan and the Priority of Conversion***

Dr. Nussberger emphasizes ongoing conversion as a way of avoiding a prideful dismissal of the otherness of the other. I simply want to make a connection to Lonergan's starting point in the "mediated" phase of his theological method and would just point out here the movement operative in Lonergan's account of foundational, doctrinal, systematic, and communicative theology: theologians mediate theological truths in light of their own faith commitments and religious, moral, and intellectual conversions (foundations), work to specify the mysteries of faith to be affirmed (doctrines), understand these mysteries by working out natural analogies and interrelating doctrines in a coherent system (systematics), and communicate these beliefs creatively to people within diverse cultures (communications). This movement articulates, in a

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<sup>10</sup> Salazar, "Conspiring unto the Good."

<sup>11</sup> Nick Olkovich, "Beyond Radical Particularism: A Lonerganian Response to S. Mark Heim's 'Pluralistic Inclusivism,'" a paper prepared for the West Coast Methods Institute, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA in April 2010.

more differentiated way, a theology rooted in the principle “Faith seeking understanding.” In other words, a theologian’s attempt to understand and communicate ought to be rooted in a converted life of faith. Perhaps, Lonergan’s contribution here is to give some order and differentiation to this theme of conversion. Perhaps, Nussberger’s extension of Balthasar’s work in this paper challenges Lonergan scholars to even further differentiations. Recognizing that conversion is at the heart of Lonergan’s method, Roch Kereszty still suggests that “it appears too Christian for other religions and too vague for Christian theology.”<sup>12</sup> One only need to consult Lonergan’s theological treatises – *De Verbo Incarnato*, *Grace and Freedom*, *The Psychological and Ontological Constitution of Christ*, and *The Triune God*, etc. – for a glimpse of his commitment to the distinctively Christian doctrinal tradition. Nevertheless, in this light, instead of a dismissal of Lonergan’s account of the foundational roles of faith and conversion in the theological task, perhaps Danielle challenges us to make some things more explicit. Edward Braxton, for instance, has argued that theistic, Christian, and ecclesial conversions are implicit in Lonergan’s account of religious conversion:

In the Catholic context the theistic, Christian and ecclesial conversion implicit in religious conversion must be made explicit. *Theistic conversion* comes about when we grasp that the true origin of our sense of “the Holy” is the reality of a personal God. It is only within an explicitly theistic horizon that the mystery of the Trinity...can be affirmed. *Christian conversion* is the personal acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord. Without this Christo-centric horizon it is not possible to apprehend the unique salvific work accomplished by the life, teachings, deeds, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. *Ecclesial conversion* is the embrace of the Church as one’s true spiritual home, the locus of both grace and freedom on the road to salvation. A theologian, whose

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<sup>12</sup> “Toward the Renewal of Theology and the Theologian,” *Communio* 35 (Summer 2008), 284, note 11.

horizon is not explicitly ecclesial, cannot account for a faith community's beliefs about the nature and structure of the Church... (*Origins*).

## 2. Balthasar's Christology: Some Challenges from Lonergan

Since this is a colloquium with a concentration on Lonergan's work, I thought it would be fitting to raise a few questions – from the perspective of Lonergan's Christology and Soteriology – about some key themes that Dr. Nussberger presupposes and even employs in her presentation. I do so in the spirit of dialogue, and would add that my own positions are imbued with a great deal of “not-knowing.”

### *Kenosis and Christology*<sup>13</sup>

The theme of “kenosis” occupies a central place in Danielle's paper and in Balthasar's work. The importance of kenosis is pointedly evident in his Christology and Soteriology. In her presentation on Balthasar's Christology, Danielle focused on Christ's human and divine wills. As a complement to her focus on wills, I also suggest that at the heart of Balthasar's Christology resides his account of Christ's consciousness, which is rooted, in part, in his presentation of Trinitarian kenosis. Alyssa Pitstick concisely captures this connection: “Since the Son's procession is His Kenosis in grateful self-gift back to the Father, a like emptying of self will initiate His becoming man and continue during His mission until His return to the Father through the Descent. In other words, Christ's existence is necessarily kenotic because it is the procession of the Word in human flesh and the Trinitarian processions are kenotic by nature.”<sup>14</sup> Within the Trinity, “the Son's self-awareness as God” is “inseparable from His obedience.” According to Pitstick, for Balthasar, Jesus' “self-understanding is not, ‘I am God, and the Son of God,’

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<sup>13</sup> I raise similar questions in my forthcoming article, entitled “Christ's Human Knowledge: A Conversation with Lonergan and Balthasar,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010).

<sup>14</sup> Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 149.

because the plenitude of divine knowledge has been ‘deposited’ with the Father as part of the Son’s self-emptying in becoming incarnate.”<sup>15</sup>

To say that Jesus emptied himself, argues Lonergan, should not imply “a laying aside of the divine person or of the divine nature or of the consciousness that belongs to a divine person and nature.” Rather, Jesus’ kenosis “consists in a certain acquisition, in that he who is God has also become human in the true and proper sense.” This kenosis, for Lonergan, is twofold: ontological and psychological. His ontological kenosis was brought about by the assumption of human nature, by the fact that he is truly and properly human. The psychological kenosis is predicated on the ontological. That is, not only is he human, but he experiences himself as human.<sup>16</sup> Lonergan captures the connection between the ontological and psychological kenosis:

...since in Christ, God and man, the divine and human natures are neither changed nor mixed, the divine and human consciousnesses are likewise neither changed nor mixed as a result of the hypostatic union. Hence as the Son of God is aware of himself in his infinite perfection through his divine consciousness, so also the same Son of God is aware of himself through his human consciousness in the poverty of human nature.<sup>17</sup>

As Frederick E. Crowe has commented, Lonergan’s basic explanation of kenosis is fully Thomist, namely, that this self-emptying is “an addition rather than a subtraction,” that the divine

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<sup>15</sup> Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 158. As Bob Doran suggested yesterday evening, Lonergan argues, in contrast to Balthasar, that “Christ as man, through his human consciousness and his beatific knowledge, clearly understands, and with certainty judges, himself to be the natural Son of God and true God” (*The Ontological and Psychological Consciousness of Christ*, 204).

<sup>16</sup> *The Ontological and Psychological Consciousness of Christ*, 223. In his essay “A Threefold Kenosis of the Son of God” in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989) Frederick E. Crowe has suggested a third kind of kenosis, a *historical* kenosis: “...the Son of God not only *is* human in the ontological *kenosis*, not only *experiences* humanly in the psychological *kenosis* the self he is, but also lives in a particular sociocultural situation, with the accompanying limitations that constitute the historical *kenosis*” (320).

<sup>17</sup> *OPCC*, 223.



Son “emptied himself, not by laying aside the divine but by adding the human.”<sup>18</sup> The distinctiveness of Lonergan’s approach is his extension of Chalcedon’s ontological claims into the psychological realm: that Jesus *experienced* himself from infancy to adult on the side of the subject. His *understanding* and *judgment* of his identity are further moments in the knowing process, and are attributed to his beatific *knowledge*.

There is more emphasis on “subtraction” in Balthasar than in Lonergan. Although both thinkers attribute certain elements of “not-knowing” in the Son, Balthasar speaks more freely and more often about Christ’s loss of knowledge than Lonergan. It is a real question to what degree this is conditioned by the different way “kenosis” operates in their respective Christologies.

### ***Soteriology***<sup>19</sup>

For Balthasar, the content of Jesus’ consciousness is knowledge of his mission. Present in his consciousness, then, was knowledge that his life was moving toward the “hour.” In other words, he was aware that he must bear the totality of the world’s sin (Jn 1:29) by being made sin (2 Cor 5:21). For Balthasar, the essential soteriological theme with regard to Christ’s consciousness and knowledge on the Cross – from his analysis of Scripture to his own dramatic soteriology – is the *admirabile commercium*, the wondrous exchange of places between Jesus and sinners. For Balthasar, Aquinas, in his theory of satisfaction, fails to do justice to the implications of this exchange. The insistence that Jesus keeps the beatific vision of the Father contradicts the possibility of Christ as the total “experiencer” of sin. Balthasar stresses the real assumption of the sinful being of all sinners. One finds a strong influence from Luther, with a corrective in Adrienne von Speyr. For Balthasar, Jesus experiences a sinful state deeper and

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<sup>18</sup> Crowe, “A Threefold *Kenosis*,” 318.

<sup>19</sup> This section summarizes some findings of an article of mine that is currently in progress, titled “Christ’s Knowledge on the Cross: A conversation with Lonergan and Balthasar .”

darker than the distance of the sinner from God because it takes place within the infinite distance of the Trinity. Balthasar holds that Christ becomes the diabolical contradiction of sin and hence experiences absolute meaningless and utter forsakenness on the Cross and in his descent into hell. For Balthasar, Christ's experience on the cross is characterized by both absolute faithfulness to his mission and an absolute lack of grounding in knowledge.

The question is, Is it theologically plausible to call Christ the "experience" of sin? According to Lonergan, Christ suffers vicariously on our behalf. Yes, Christ took on, as Dr. Nussberger put it, "the vastness of human sin." But is it plausible to say that he "experience(s) the fullness of human separation from God." Because he was free from original and actual *culpa*, it seems reasonable to argue that Christ took on sin, but did not *experience* sin – he did not assume anyone's *culpa* or guilt. Therefore, Jesus did not pay a penalty under God's retributive justice, but made condign and superabundant satisfaction rooted in the union of love between Christ the Head and his members. He suffered out of love, obedience, and friendship. This included not only bodily suffering, but interior sorrow and detestation for all sins and every offense against God. He was able to have the utmost sorrow and detestation because he knew in an ineffable way the sins that grieved him. Because of his ineffable knowledge he not only knew God through the divine essence, but knew also the damaging nature of all sins as a secondary object of this beatific knowledge. Christ's mindful taking on of sin in no way reduces the drama of his physical and interior suffering, but rather heightens it as alluded to Aquinas' *ST* q. 46.