

Matthew Levering, The Achievement of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Forward by Cyril O'Regan

- Introduction to famous trilogy of von Balthasar
 - Prioritizes first volume of each part
 - Prioritizes von Balthasar's discussions with Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche
- Levering aims to provide series of threads so we don't get lost in labyrinth of seven thousand pages
 - Offers advisory that (in line with Aquinas and Catholic tradition) theology's dialogue with philosophy is central
 - In line with *Fides et Ratio* **philosophy is plural**
 - Much in modern philosophy has gone awry
 - Forms of modern philosophy offer Catholic philosophy and theology opportunities
 - ***What Levering discourses is blanket condemnation of modern forms of philosophy***
 - Recommends encounters with forms of philosophy which demonstrate definite signs of grasping passionate and rigorous inquiry cannot satisfy a finite object residing on the immanent plane
- Plea for unity between ressourcement theology and Thomism
 - Catholicism faces challenges from within
 - Mainly byproduct of desire to accommodate Catholic faith to modern world
 - Also find deeper unity in theological disagreement
 - Basic inspiration = listening that opens *Rule of St Benedict* and its basic template the theological performance of Benedict XVI
- Justifying the choices of Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche
 - Basic intuition
 - Introductory books failed to think through importance of volumes introducing each part of the trilogy
 - There is a place for methodological reflection
 - But counterproductive to consume one's career reflecting on condition of possibility of practicing "craft of theology"

- **Best way forward in theology is to practice it with energy, discerning, unlearning bad habits, acquiring good ones**
- Focus on three prolegomena
 - They serve as forms of orientation inciting theological reflection without determining outcome
 - Activate + make present the Catholic tradition
- ***In these prolegomena von Balthasar shows himself an intrinsically dialogical theologian***
- Levering does not deny conversation with literature
- Asks deep question ***whether there is in each of the three introductory volumes a philosophical interlocutor sufficiently first among equals that around this figure other dialogue partners constellate***
- ***And von Balthasar's dialogue with this thinker establishes the fundamental horizon of the text and point of orientation with respect to further volumes***
- This is striking and not obvious
 - The three crucial interlocutors are Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche
 - Kant specified by *Critique of Judgement*
 - Hegel in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*
 - Nietzsche in articulation of ecstatic erotic self
 - Preeminently in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 - Choice of Hegel in and for *Theo-Drama* is intuitive and justified
 - Hegel is important in positive and negative ways
 - Hegel's reason functions imperialistically and colonizes Christian faith
 - The "drama" of faith is eclipse in a philosophy against gratuity, mystery, obedience (xiv)
- Choice of Kant is less obvious
 - Two important interpretive principles

- Actual influence of Kant
- Necessity of contesting him
- Kant's philosophy important for positive and negative reasons
 - Turn to self-constituting subject" = crisis of Catholic thought
 - Von Balthasar prioritizes *Critique of Judgement*
 - Attempt to bind beautiful + moral after model of ancient *kalokagathon*
 - What Kant gets wrong as well as right constitutes his selection as primary interlocutor
- Startling choice of Nietzsche
 - Usually has been Heidegger
 - ***In first volume of Theo-Logic von Balthasar offers a phenomenological reading of the self-transcending self which refuses to install and sustain a horizon of nothing rather than God***
 - Levering sees von Balthasar unafraid to take on Nietzsche's nihilism and anxious to put Christian will to love in opposition to Nietzsche's will to power and allow a phenomenological philosophy to decide merits of each
 - Choice of Nietzsche was inspired
 - Nietzsche as "father" to Heidegger
- Virtues of Matthew Levering and this book
 - One will discover the presence of a master teacher
 - Levering producing books illustrating that charisma
 - *Find an entrance point into the opus of a thinker doing justice to the complexity and richness of his work while maximizing communicability out of love for the reader who loved the truth first*
 - Evidence in tracking relations between introductory volumes of his trilogy and philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche
 - Allows his interlocutors to speak for themselves
 - Invites the reader to be co-traveler on voyage of discovery

- More Thomistic than Balthasarian pedagogy
- The theological figure to whom I return is Benedict XVI
 - Pointed to crises of knowledge, authority, reception while being Church's comprehensive, incisive, subtle catechist
 - In Levering one finds *simplicity and translucency*
- Second aim of text = overcoming fracture among theologians and theologically literate
 - Second aim = reconcile contending theological parties in contemporary Catholic thought
 - Levering effectively performs this reconciliation from side of Thomism
 - Levering (a Thomist) has lovingly embraced a proximate but separate other
 - Promote repetition on Thomist side
 - Calls for answer on Balthasarian side
 - ***What lovers of von Balthasar will respond to calls of this text to embrace their proximity to their separated other?***

Introduction

- *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*
 - "To criticize modernity + its philosophies cannot involve any unproblematic return to the pre-modern"
 - ***Perspective of von Balthasar***
 - Preeminent modern philosophers helped blind us to beauty goodness truth of Jesus Christ
 - Von Balthasar considered path forward would require discerning what has proven attractive and abetted the culpable modern forgetfulness of Christ
 - "Everything depended upon the Church coming to grips with modernity on her own terms (not on terms modernity sought to impose)" (1-2)
 - ***This was the work to which his trilogy sought to contribute in creative retrievals and reconstructions of Catholic tradition in light of most influential thinkers of modernity***

- One cannot sum up von Balthasar's critical acquisitions easily
 - **Most importantly his trilogy engages critically with three preeminent German fathers of modernity**
 - **Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche**
 - He aims to overcome modernity's false choice "between revelational positivism and anthropological reductionism" (Rodney Howsare)
 - Author hopes to display his achievement along lines new even for expert Balthasarians and will introduce readers to richness of his trilogy
 - Seeks to get around aftereffects of Catholic struggle between *ressourcement* theology and neo-scholastic theologians
 - Too often the choice is "all or nothing"
 - "The relationship between emerging forms of Thomism and *ressourcement* tradition has not been entirely polemical affair. They at times show similar aims such as in the *Ressourcement* Thomism project"
 - Theologians sometimes forget their agreements on doctrine and morals (4)
 - Recent course on thought of von Balthasar in which he assigned introductory volume of each part
 - What he found impressive is the way his argument unfolds slowly in brilliant conversation with array of important poets philosophers theologians
 - Three three volumes offer engagement with Kant Hegel and Nietzsche
 - Rationale for author's approach
 - (1) contemporary theologians will benefit from "thinking with" rich and wide-ranging conversations present in the trilogy
 - First volume of each part = entrance point to appreciate the achievement of the whole
 - Trilogy is fruitfully read as constructive and critical response to Kant Hegel and Nietzsche
- Kant

- He finds insight into perception of beautiful form and “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” via universally valid aesthetic judgment that is “recognizable by means of any universal concept”
- Modern justification for seeking ground of all this-worldly forms
 - For von Balthasar *Christ crucified*
- Hegel
 - Insight into how evolving spirit encounters and resolves contradictions in infinite quest to know
 - “Every otherness must be posited in the Absolute in order to be integrated”
 - Help for appreciating value of history
 - Deepens reflection upon Christ crucified
- Nietzsche
 - Insight into rationalistic pretensions of human knower
 - Relationship of truth-claims to our desire for growth in life, health, power
 - Enriches appreciation of truth’s relation to life-giving love
- His “aim of shaking modernity from pursuit of its tidier and more hubristic ‘ends’” von Balthasar engages these insights *from the inside* and exposes their fruitfulness when stripped of erroneous aspects
 - Explores spiritual perception and judgment of faith (aesthetics)
 - History and spirit (theo-drama)
 - Truth and love (theo-logic)
 - ***Takes up and redirects influential modernity of Kant Hegel Nietzsche***
 - (summaries of his engagement with Kant Hegel Nietzsche)
- ***To a modern world forgetful of God and Christ von Balthasar proclaims the beauty of things, the goodness of history, the truth of love***
 - God is love 1 John 4:8
 - Destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ Ephesians 1:5 and we live according to measure of Christ’s gift Ephesians 4:7

- **Von Balthasar seeks to overcome modernity's forgetfulness of (self-)gift of love (Antonio López and David Schindler)**
- "The theology of von Balthasar is a theology of love" and "essence of love is identified as gift"
- **Introducing von Balthasar**
 - Author simplifies some of his contributions and neglects others (8)
 - Seeks to avoid reductive oversimplification by setting forth concrete argument von Balthasar makes in programmatic first volume of each part of trilogy
 - Introductory books help identify and illumine keys of his project
 - ***In a real sense von Balthasar's work cannot be introduced***
 - *Impossible to survey or introduce a "genealogical trial" in all its dimensions (8-9)*
 - Paths needed to traverse any full introduction to his trilogy
 - Attention to von Speyr's writings and relation to his
 - Influence of Sergius Bulgakov and other Russian thinkers
 - Debts to Greek + Roman literature and philosophy
 - Other classic to modern writers
 - Indebtedness and criticisms of historical-critical biblical interpretation
 - Interaction with Barth, Kierkegaard, Erich Przywara, Rahner, Origen, and others
 - Various theological topics would need treatment
 - (colossal bibliography in the footnote)
 - Contributions made by his shorter books + collections of essays
 - Also his expanded doctoral dissertation
 - A number of praiseworthy introductions to his achievement have been written
 - ***Aiden Nichols summarized the entire trilogy in three manageable volumes***
 - Edward Oakes 1994 *The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*

- Michael Schulz *Hans Urs von Balthasar* begegnen
- ***Most introductory students will want to turn to these more traditional introductions to his writings before attempting to follow his more focused approach***
- Author focuses on first volume of each part of trilogy for two main reasons
 - Exhibits main lines of trilogy in way that allows for introductory volume of manageable size
 - Avoids more controversial volumes
- Hopes to contribute to healing of internecine conflicts
 - ***Despite sharing strong belief in faithful mediation of divine revelation through scripture and the church many Catholic theologians find themselves at loggerheads while classically liberal theologians enjoy unanimity with each other and proceed relatively unopposed*** (16)
 - *Ressourcement* and Thomistic combatants share commitment to theo-aesthetic beauty, theo-dramatic goodness, theo-logical truth of Christ's revelation of Trinitarian self-surrendering love as our source + goal *and* shared rejection of philosophical modernity's immanentism historicism and power-centered voluntarism
 - "To say no to secular culture that says no to Christianity" (O'Regan)
- My task
 - His trilogy can be understood as dialogic response to modernity of Kant Hegel and Nietzsche
 - Overarching aim of *Theological Aesthetics* = Kantian critique of Kant
 - Von Balthasar reject "aesthetic theologies" showing influence of Kantian immanentism
 - Yet contemporary Catholic theology has much to learn from Kant
 - *Theo-Drama* = Hegelian critique of Hegel
 - Shaped in preeminent ways by engagement with Hegel that is first a *critique*

- *Theo-Logic* = Nietzschean critique of Nietzsche
 - Critique of his understanding of truth as will-to-power
- ***It is beauty goodness and truth of Christ's self-surrendering love that von Balthasar wants us to remember***
 - Kant Hegel and Nietzsche all deny that the *transcendent* God's radical self-surrendering love is salvifically revealed in the particularity of Jesus Christ
 - Has seeped into popular consciousness
 - ***From within philosophical modernity von Balthasar combats our forgetfulness of beauty goodness + truth of Christ and the Christian tradition***
- Author's approach and observation by Rowan Williams
 - "Objection to Rahner is protest against whole tradition of European 'mainstream' philosophy between Kant and Heidegger
 - Clear choice for future of Catholic theology =
 - ***Either the God of Jesus Christ in perfect discipleship or his substitution and elimination by man-made secondary realities*** (19)
 - Need to follow these philosophers onto their "home ground" in order to respond to them
- Von Balthasar's task
 - Positive criticism of von Balthasar's trilogy advanced by R R Reno
 - Von Balthasar does not give enough space to church's need for "a standard theology ... broad agreement to accept the general framework of a theological system"
 - Reno is correct that task of measuring von Balthasar's achievement cannot mean attempting to oil down insights of this trilogy to systematic form of a textbook
 - Von Balthasar ***could have offered a new system as the church's theology but his project was different*** (22)
 - "It is our concern to get sight of what cannot be securely grasped and this must remain the event of Jesus Christ"

- O'Regan appreciates von Balthasar as theologian who sought to “respond to modernity characterized by forgetting”
 - Von Balthasar insists on two way dialogue
 - 20th century modernity has forgotten source and summit of all reality = the beauty goodness and truth of Christ’s self-surrendering love
 - It has forgotten ... has forgotten ... has forgotten
- *So why not say a pox on philosophical modernity?*
 - Because a response that is adequate (itself an act of self-surrendering love) must be response that listens to and hears modern concerns
 - ***The Christian tradition itself will emerge from this dialogue positively affected since in its human elements the Christian tradition always needs some reform and renewal (24)***
- After completing his trilogy von Balthasar published *Epilogue* in 1987
 - More intricate and dense than the trilogy!
 - Unfolds the central theme of his work
 - **The particularity of Christ’s self-surrendering love for us sinners a love grounded in eternal triune self-surrendering love**
 - Von Balthasar’s simple radical goal = *invite us moderns shapes by Kant Hegel Nietzsche into the absolute self-surrender in love to God and neighbor made possible by Christ’s absolute self-surrender in supreme love for us, through the Spirit who draws us into the ever-greater love of triune beauty goodness and truth*
- From the beginning God shows man he is constructed according to a kenotic principle

1. Theological aesthetics - a Kantian critique of Kant

- a. “Kant is very present in first volumes of the *Aesthetics*” (Vincent Holzer)
 - i. Critiques Kant’s failure to recognize the “givenness of being” existence as a gift

- ii. Ah but in *Epilogue*
 - 1. The image points to real essence being expressed in them can only be grasped on basis of unity of what Kant called ‘transcendental apperception’”
 - 2. ***Gestalt is crucial concept in Theological Aesthetics***
 - 3. “Transcendental apperception” helps us appreciate *Gestalt* is more than an image - it is unity encountering the perceiver that is also simultaneously manifest in the experience of self” (27)
 - 4. **This will have Christological implications**
- b. Von Balthasar again refers to Kant positively
 - i. “Theological aesthetics must be developed in two phases
 - 1. Theory of vision
 - 2. Theory of rapture
 - ii. The beautiful is symbol of the morally good
- c. Von Balthasar is no Kantian and refutes his immanentism and so on
 - i. The transcendentals including beauty are part of fabric of being
- d. Von Balthasar engaged Kant in positing a “transcendental epiphany of entirety of world’s Being”
 - i. ***The unifying ground of all phenomena is found in perceiving the Gestalt of Christ’s self-surrendering love***
 - ii. ***Its focus on revelation and perception of divine beauty in Christ (and all created by Christ) the Aesthetics aims to transform theological apologetics and fundamental theology***
- e. Contributions from Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*
 - i. Kant’s notion of “transcendental perception” in *Critique of Pure Reason*
 - 1. Begin with his examination of “Transcendental Analytic”
 - a. Not analyzing content of concepts but “faculty of understanding itself”
 - b. Whether *a priori* concepts are possible
 - ii. First chapter “On the clue to discovery of all pure concepts of the understanding”

1. Faculty of knowing exhibits concepts or categories of understanding
 2. They are conditions for possibility of experience
 3. The task is *to understand the connection and unity of these "pure concepts of understanding"*
- iii. Kant reflects on the mind the "non-sensible faculty of cognition"
1. Distinguishes understanding from intuition
 2. Conceptual cognition rises above sense impressions
 3. *In thinking we make judgements on the basis of concepts*
 4. Judgment = attainment of concept holding many and that among this many also comprehends a given representation which is related immediately to the object"
- iv. For example, the phenomena one perceives are divisible
1. = judgment that "all bodies are divisible"
 2. Through concept of divisibility we draw many concepts into one
 3. One thinking leads to higher concepts that pertain to a judgment
- v. Kant distinguishes various logical judgments
1. (list) (32-33)
 2. Three "moments" in thinking
 - a. One first judges something problematically
 - b. Then assumes it assertorically as true
 - c. Finally asserts it to be inseparably connected with the understanding (as necessary and apodictic)
 - d. The essential ground is the categories or pure concepts of the mind***
- vi. Kant describes the process of "synthesis" by which different representations are put together and comprehended "in one cognition"
1. Takes place in intuition and in judgment
 2. Pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding contains in itself *a priori*
 3. (categories)

4. These categories are “true ancestral concepts of pure understanding”
 5. Contrasts a priori concepts with “derivative concepts of predicables”
- vii. Kant understands he updates and improves upon Aristotle
1. Moves toward fullness of his “plan for whole of science insofar as it rests on a priori concepts”
 2. Transcendental properties of being not listed by Aristotle = being, one, true, good
 3. These have been misinterpreted by metaphysicians
 4. They are “nothing other than logical requisites and criteria of all cognition of things in general”
 5. *The four classical transcendentals have to do with thought about things not with the things themselves*
 6. (important end paragraph top page 34)
- viii. “On the deduction of pure concepts of the understanding” (second chapter of “Transcendental analytic”)
1. Some concepts destined for use *a priori*
 2. But how???
 3. “Transcendental deduction” = how use of concepts can be justified where their relation to objects has no basis in empirical experience
 4. Two kinds of concepts that relate a priori
 5. Rules out Locke’s effort to find in sense experience the causes of concepts of the understanding
 6. ***The use of a priori concepts or categories of the understanding cannot be justified on experiential grounds because a priori concepts and categories of our minds do not arise from experience***
- ix. So how can they be justified vis-a-vis phenomena?
1. Space and time are easier to defend
 2. *In undertaking this defense we cannot appeal to a posteriori experience*

3. We might have a priori categories of understanding that belong to our thinking but do not relate to experiential phenomena
 4. ***How to bridge this through a properly transcendental deduction?***
- x. In response Kant argues “the objective validity of the categories as a priori concepts rests on the fact that through them alone is experience possible (as far as form of thinking is concerned)”
 1. *This view that the (a priori) categories of understanding originate our experience is Kant’s solution to Humean skepticism*
 - xi. Kant needs to explore “the subjective sources that comprise the *a priori* foundations for possibility of experience” (36)
 1. Three sources =
 - a. Intuition
 - b. Imagination
 - c. Conceptualization
 2. ???
 - xii. ***Why must a necessity be grounded by a transcendental condition?***
 1. If there were no a priori ground we would have to hold either Locke’s or Hume’s position
 - xiii. **We approach the point von Balthasar in *Epilogue* cites as crucial for the project of his *Theological Aesthetics***
 1. *That the image points to a real essence being expressed in them can only be grasped on basis of the unity of what Kant called the “transcendental apperception” which alone does full justice to the full concept of Gestalt*
 2. ***What is this? And why is it so important for von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics?***
 - a. Provides basis for all unity of concepts including unity of *a priori* concepts
 - b. “Apperception” = in its unity + priority as consciousness “grounds all concepts *a priori* just

- as manifoldness of space + time grounds the intuitions of sensibility”
- xiv. Consciousness grounds the unity of concepts
 - 1. Kant emphasizes it grounds the synthetic unity of all phenomena
 - 2. “In accordance with the concepts” (38)
 - a. Makes clear scope of synthetic unity of all phenomena
 - b. *The a priori concepts or categories of understanding establish the “rules” that justify us in holding that phenomena are regularly not simply because custom tells us but because they are “necessarily connected” and constitute a determinate “object”*
 - xv. All possible appearances of phenomena are a unity because of the transcendental or a priori “unity of apperception”
 - 1. ??? (39)
 - xvi. Transcendental apperception therefore give a priori ground for unity of all experience
 - xvii. *The key point here is transcendental apperception grounds the synthetic unity of all appearances, all phenomena*
 - 1. **Due to transcendental apperception - pure and unchanging unity of consciousness that underlies our experienced self-consciousness - we can know all appearances, all phenomena, all unity**
 - xviii. Transcendental apperception “alone does full justice to the full concept of *Gestalt*” (von Balthasar)
 - 1. This is because it allows the encountered and the “I” to truly communicate in the all-one depth of reality
 - 2. The terms used are at heart of his theological aesthetics
 - 3. *Which seeks through reflection upon Gestalt to penetrate into deepest unchanging unifying ground of communion in “the all-one depth of reality”*

4. ***Transcendental apperception must instead seek pure and unchanging divine ground of human consciousness***
 5. The “unity” is found in divine consciousness
 - a. ***The divine self-surrendering triune love as revealed by the Gestalt of Jesus Christ***
- xix. In first volume of *Theological Aesthetics* von Balthasar holds a proper theological aesthetics must include a “theory of vision” or “aesthetics” in the Kantian sense as theory about perception of the form of God’s self-revelation (41)
1. Beauty = “the form of *purposiveness* in an object so far as this is perceived in it *apart fro representation of an end*” (Kant *Critique of Judgement*)
 2. The “beautiful is the symbol of the morally good”
 3. **This connection between true beauty and moral goodness is crucial for aesthetics**
 4. Negative and positive points of Kant’s framework
 5. Positive = von Balthasar’s emphasis on interiority
- xx. In *Epilogue*’s summary of intent of *Theological Aesthetics*
1. “From this transcendental epiphany of the entirety of the world’s Being we can already catch glimpse of structures of revelation, that revelation of the absolute reality in whose midpoint stands figure of Christ”
 2. ***Christ is the revelation of the primal ground that unifies all appearances***
 3. ???
 4. Christ alone is perfect *Gestalt* and makes possible our communion through his Spirit in “all-one depth of reality”
- xxi. *Epilogue*
1. In order to ensure Christ’s appearance not be counted as one among appearances that comprise “nature” the risen Christ ascends to the right hand of the Father
 2. Outpouring of divine Spirit makes clear Christ’s appearance, his *Gestalt*, has not disappeared

3. Holy Spirit interprets Christ to the world and reveals the *Gestalt* of Christ = “uniquely definitive appearance of the Absolute now dwelling in Church and world”
 4. By revealing love of the Father Christ reveals the divine consciousness that grounds the unity of all appearances and contains (analogously) difference in itself
2. Von Balthasar’s Kantian critique of Kant: *Seeing the Form*
- a. Author restricts himself to *Seeing the Form*
 - i. Makes clear his project is preeminently (not exclusively) a Kantian critique of Kant
 - ii. His theology of revelation and faith extracts good from Kant while sharply critiquing him
 - b. Von Balthasar makes positive and negative observations
 - i. Three positive
 1. The human being is a form that reflects analogously the form of the Creator
 - a. Through the human body
 2. The beautiful is marked by “disinterestedness” in that we cannot control or use it for our purposes
 - c. Other explicit references are negative
 - i. Johann Georg Hamann writes in opposition to Kant
 - ii. Johann Gottfried-Herder stands against Kant’s dry “formalism”
 1. Contributes to split between existential faith and historical reason
 - d. Challenges Kant’s limitations in three overarching ways
 - i. Theocentrism
 - ii. We can know the *esse* of beings not only the appearances of beings in our concepts or categories
 - iii. Priority of Christ and Holy Spirit in every Christian reality
 1. Christianity does not merely arise from religious impulses and inventions
 - iv. His account of “seeing the form” distances itself sharply from Kant
3. Von Balthasar’s introductory reflections

- a. He wishes to “confront the whole truth - not only man’s truth and that of the world but the truth of God who bestows himself on man, the truth not only of the historical Gospel and of the Church that preserves it, but truth of the growing Kingdom of God” (45)
 - i. Begins with beauty
 - ii. Because truth is not an abstraction but “transcendental property of Being” and “living bond between God and the world”
 - iii. In Western culture beauty has been neglected and ignored because beauty is intrinsically “disinterested”
- b. Without beauty Christianity withers away
 - i. Prayer + love require we perceive the world as “penetrated by God’s light” and not mere matter
 - ii. ***Without recognizing beings as beautiful we cannot value them as good or appreciate them as true and the lure of evil becomes strong***
 - iii. Stripped of transcendental beauty we no longer treat existence with wonder
 - iv. ???
 - v. The unity of diverse aspects is crucial
 - vi. Criticizes Kant + other giving us false problem of how the soul can break out and enter the “exterior world” (46)
 1. (Rw - Contra Gnosticism and Marxism?)
- c. About beauty - necessary to speak about “form”, figure, shape
 - i. We are confronted with the figure and what shines forth from the figure
 - ii. Rejects Kantian autonomy or self-sufficiency
 - iii. Humans are not source of Being or Beauty but image, expression, response, mirror
 - iv. Our form is conferred by another who grounds our freedom
 - v. Cites Origen - unity of oral and spiritual meanings of divine revelation
 - vi. No “beauty” or “form” standing outside the ethical
 - vii. We can besmirch our spiritual beauty
- d. He describes human “form” as body-soul unity but also as freely chosen and “uniquely personal” pattern of life

- i. To do so well we need to perceive truth + goodness of life
- ii. A “vision for wholeness”
- iii. In contemporary culture we don’t recognize paths to human wholeness
- iv. Need to perceive the “primal form” again
 - 1. = the unchanging ground of the unity of all phenomena which is divine (self-surrendering) love
- e. Primal form as “form which is identical with existence, a form beyond ‘open’ and ‘closed’, beyond ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ (since it encompasses both), beyond autonomy and heteronomy since it unites God and man in unimaginable intimacy”
 - i. Living as “Gospel’s Humiliated Fool” may be our path back to our true “form” (47)
 - ii. As deposed members of the modern world
- f. He unfolds his understanding of Christian life by means of example of marriage which provides a stable “form” into which the man + woman grow, a form that can compel such growth
 - i. The “form” does not enslave but liberates
 - ii. The Christian life is a “form” given by God (48)
 - iii. The Christian will realize his mission only if he truly becomes this form willed and instituted by Christ”, a form that possesses radiant beauty, and is most beautiful thing found in the human realm
- g. Purpose of his *Theological Aesthetics* = explore “form of divine revelation in salvation-history, leading to Christ and deriving from him”
 - i. We need supernatural illumination
 - ii. Sharpen our natural eyes
 - iii. God’s Incarnation perfects whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being
 - iv. *Jesus expresses God (whom Jesus is) and at same time expresses the Father (whom Jesus is not). This combination of identity and difference “stands as fountainhead of the Christian aesthetic and of all aesthetics” (49)***

- h. Illumined by the Holy Spirit the inspired authors conveyed “Spirit’s testimony concerning the Word, which springs from indissoluble bond and marriage between the Spirit and eyewitnesses who were originally invited and admitted to the vision”
 - i. The “form” of Jesus Christ + form of Christ expressed in Scripture are the same
 - ii. Historical methods which break up or dissect this form never “recapture the living totality of the form”
 - iii. We must return to scripture’s text and treat it as “aesthetic contemplation that steadily and patiently beholds those forms which nature or art offers to its view”
 - i. When we contemplate the beauty of the form of Christ we see in it unchanging ground of unity of all phenomena supernatural and natural
 - i. We see in it the perfection of the “ethical”
 - 1. The “purposiveness” of free self-surrendering love at heart of God + all creation
 - 2. **Kant’s positive contributions are present in all three of these aspects**
4. Aesthetic theology versus theological aesthetics
- a. Von Balthasar addresses question of relationship of “God’s revelation with its own form” to “this-worldly aesthetics”
 - i. Former must not be subordinate to the latter
 - ii. Affirms “theological aesthetics” but warns against “aesthetic theology”
 - iii. Do we affirm with Fathers + medievals that beauty is a transcendental rooted in doctrine of God so all shines with splendor of the divine light
 - b. Attention to Protestant and Catholic efforts to eliminate aesthetics from theology from fear of human- and world-centered theology and desire to underscore transcendent inbreaking of God’s Word
 - i. Von Balthasar’s appreciation for and critique of Luther
 - ii. Examines Kierkegaard’s rejection of aesthetics because of its resurgence in liberal theology
 - iii. ***The credit for restoring aesthetics to proper place goes to Karl Barth***

1. God is Beauty
 2. Unique form of God's glory found in beauty of crucified Christ
 3. ***Key to whole problem is recognizing beauty is a transcendental***
 4. Definition derived from God
 5. And from God's self-revelation in history and in Incarnation
- c. Theological aesthetics similarly rejected in modern Catholic theology
- i. When these fields become simply domains of historical study the connection with God becomes obscured since God exceeds the empirical bounds of the historical method
 - ii. Once faith's graced participation "in the intuitive saving knowledge of God himself and of the Church" is eliminated no theological aesthetics is possible
- d. He seeks to clarify precisely what he means by "aesthetic theology" which is opposite of theological aesthetics which he rejects
- i. One common kind is trying to understand scripture as artistic or poetic narrative
 - ii. Lutheran Johann Georg Hamann is model to set forth such a relationship (between theological beauty and beauty of the world)
 1. God's glory + beauty are found in his *kenosis*
 2. Hamann's opaque style was not understood by contemporaries
- e. Johann Gottfried Herder unfortunately produced exemplification of aesthetic theology
- i. *Poetry and theology as one*
 - ii. Such theology begins with human construction and centers upon the human
 1. The Bible = communication of our highest human possibilities
 2. So Christianity is not God breaking into history
 3. Rather is humankind ascending to pinnacle and fulfillment of its resources

4. Christianity as merely optimistic humanism
- f. Also Catholic apologist René de Chateaubriand
 - i. Contrasts Catholicism of dogma ethics + institution with effects of Catholicism on culture + arts
 1. *Everything is measured by this-worldly form + this-worldly nature*
 2. **Immanentism** insufficiently aware of transcendence of God + truly radical inbreaking of God's love for us in Christ
- g. In critiquing aesthetic theology von Balthasar critiques one of main theological ways of responding to Kantian immanentism
 - i. *That we can have no knowledge of God other than "symbolic" knowledge*
 - ii. *Our knowledge of world is solely knowledge of phenomena in our concepts*
 - iii. Aesthetic theology was encouraged by Romantic reaction to Kant
- h. Von Balthasar chooses as ally Matthias Joseph Scheeben
 - i. "Did us service of replacing 'aesthetic theology' of Romanticism with outlines of methodologically founded 'theological aesthetics'"
 - ii. **Scheeben did this by insisting upon utter transcendence of grace vis-a-vis created nature**
 - iii. For Scheeben the mysteries of grace are "glories of God himself ... infinitely superior and more sublime than natural beauty + dignity"
 - iv. Only problem in his theological aesthetics = remains somewhat ahistorical especially with regard to impact of sin
- i. In light of these sources von Balthasar sets forth principal elements that should belong to a renewed theological aesthetics
 - i. We need to appreciate that the beautiful involves form *Gestalt* and splendor - or species and light
 1. "The appearance of the form, as revelation of the depths, is indissoluble union of two things . It is real presence of

the depths, of the whole of reality, *and* a real pointing beyond itself to these depths”

2. ??? (54-55)

- j. The ultimate theophany is Christ the incarnate Word
 - i. When we see Christ with eyes enlightened by grace we see his beauty + the splendor of divine self-surrendering love pouring forth from his form
 - ii. ***At the root of our ascending movement is God’s descending kenosis filled with self-surrendering divine Eros for his creatures whom he elevates beyond their natural capacities***
 - 1. *We cannot deduce God’s beauty from the transcendentals, from the harmony of his divine attributes, or from the Trinitarian relations*
 - k. Von Balthasar proposes two steps that should be present in theological aesthetics
 - i. “Theory of vision”
 - 1. Focuses on evidence of God’s descending in the visible form of Christ and on the Spirit who illumines our eyes
 - ii. “Theory of rapture”
 - 1. *Dogmatic theology*
 - 2. Incarnation of the Word and grace elevation of human beings to share in God’s life through Christ and the Spirit
 - iii. ***“A double and reciprocal ekstasis” or self-surrendering in love on the part of God and of human beings***
5. The light of faith
- a. Eighty pages on analyzing the light of faith
 - i. Faith cannot be reduced to simple act of believing subject but depends on God’s revelation and on the grace of the Holy Spirit
 - ii. God makes himself known
 - iii. Faith = “act of total self-surrender” responding to God’s making himself known through his act of total self-surrender
 - iv. The liberal denigration of place of knowledge in faith and neo-scholastic “disincarnating act of faith from context of a man’s life + spiritual development” are a mistake

- v. ***It is the authority of the glory of God's self-revelation and the light of divine Reason (Logos) and is only secondarily the authority of the church that faithfully mediates + proclaims the Gospel***
- b. Von Balthasar explains attitude of faith is prepared for by "the quality of 'being-in-itself' which belongs to the beautiful, the demand the beautiful makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand therefore that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it"
 - i. We cannot truly know Christ's unique form is we do not perceive his divinity shining through his humanity, the infinite in the finite
 - ii. We can do this only by God's grace
 - iii. Philosophy prepared us for this in that truly philosophical thinking discovers in itself "the opening up of infinity" the "rapture" of perceiving "the fulness of this fountain which bestows itself"
- c. There is a philosophical "faith" rooted in "love's gravitational pull" or "pull of Being itself" that prepares for supernatural faith
 - i. ***For theology truly to be theology it must arise from participation in this light of love which builds upon and elevates the natural light of reason***
 - ii. ***Faith = "an experiential apperception by the whole person" in union with the pure and unchanging ground of the unity of all things and therefore constituted by "even more total surrender" and "ever more radical abandonment" to the triune God who is infinite self-surrendering love***
- d. Von Balthasar speaks again in Kantian terms (in a way that explodes Kant's immanentism) of the "religious *a priori*"
 - i. Ultimate *a priori* ground = consciousness's "ability to understand all existents in the light of Being, which is analogous to and points to God"
 - ii. All humans can choose to accept or reject
 - iii. ***Warns against sinful obscuring of "expressive form of God's genuine light"***

- iv. *Whether people in non-Christian religions choose to stand “in attitude of pure self-surrender and abandonment to God” rather than cleaving to some form of self-redemption*
- v. Christ = “measure in judgment and in redemption of all other religious forms in mankind”
- e. Finite yearning for infinite can be understood only when mystery of the Trinity is revealed in Christ
 - i. In the form of Christ only here a form becomes visible in which everything makes sense for the light that beholds it (59)
 - ii. Requires light of faith but is not irrational
 - iii. *Humans could not have invented this salvation-historical form*
- f. Against Kantian formalism von Balthasar puts forward insights of Pierre Rousselot who drew on Aquinas, Maurice Blondel, John Henry Newman
 - i. Rational quest for a priori ground of unity of appearances leads human spirit upward to point here the spirit recognizes this ground can only be a supernatural one
- g. “Rousselot still remains too close to Kantianism he is trying to surpass”
 - i. Lacking in his work is emphasis on God’s power in concrete descending in Person of Jesus (?!?)
 - ii. *When subjective light of faith is exaggerated it leads to modernism for which interiority is everything*
 1. Definition of modernism or Catholic liberalism (60)
 2. Modernism’s fundamentally Kantian perspective on dogma finds in the subject (human being’s interiority) the existential truth of dogma whereas dogma’s existential truth is found in the realities to which it testifies
- h. Von Balthasar suggests attending to progress of the aesthetic act can be helpful (61)
 - i. Begins with assortment of objects deemed beautiful to which young person responds with enthusiasm
 - ii. Gradually learns discernment
 - iii. Also in philosophy

1. Begins with desire for “totality of vision” and needs to be trained in disciplined contemplation of the Being of existents
2. Same happens in realm of faith
3. We begin with desire for God
4. But seek “the correct form” of what we believe and find this only outside ourselves in God’s action in history (in particular historical form of Christ) and through supernatural interior light we cannot give ourselves but Christ gives us
5. ***Ultimately what is required is graced self-surrender to Christ through power of Christ who revealed the self-surrendering triune God to us***
 - i. Christ presents himself not as teacher of wisdom ut as wisdom present in our midst
 - i. In the form of divine revelation
 - ii. Christ’s “form” can be perceived as a unity filled with seeming contradictions
 - iii. As we contemplate Christ we realize these contradictions or tensions are in profound balance and unity
 - j. In Christ we are called to this same self-surrender in love
 - i. *Faith-filled embrace of the form of Christ reveals that absolute Being is love and humans are created to be “elevated and incorporated into the Trinity’s Being-as-Love”*
 - ii. “The trinitarian aspect alone encompasses every event in salvation history as its essential ground and goal”
 - iii. Everything finds its pure and unchanging ground of unity in glorious and radiant “act of the divine Eros which goes out of itself in order to become man and die on the Cross for the world” (62)
6. The experience of faith
 - a. Topic of experience of faith (in section of more than 200 pages)
 - i. ***Main point = interior act of faith as a response to beauty of Christ “requires the reaction of the whole man” rather than single isolated act of mind or will***

- ii. In faith the whole of our existence must be attuned and configured to self-surrendering love characterizing the Trinity as revealed in Christ
 - iii. Faith is not self-congratulation but self-emptying in love of God and neighbor
 - iv. ***Faith is other-directed***
 - v. **True Christian experience consists in experiencing self-surrendering love** a weakness through which God's strength is manifest (2 Corinthians 12)
 - vi. Faith = configuration of whole person to form of Christ by the Holy Spirit
- b. This love represents an aesthetic
- i. ***In the form of Christ we see intradivine self-emptying love***
 - ii. Aesthetic judgment unites particular and universal
 - iii. ***Nothing accomplishes this more than the form of Christ***
 - iv. Everything shines with reflection of this beautiful form of divine self-surrendering love
- c. When we see this form the aesthetic and ethical are inseparable (as in Kant)
- i. In John contemplation of the Beloved is an aesthetic and ethical act
 - ii. "Seeing" this form in faith means we are configured to self-surrendering love - to the form of Christ
 - 1. Indeed to form of all divine and created reality once we have eyes to see properly
 - iii. ***From this perspective "truth" is identical with "love" since "truth" consists "in unconditional abandonment of what is one's own for sake of the Beloved"***
- d. About Christian experience von Balthasar states it is found where persons have been configured to form of Christ's self-surrendering love
- i. In "sacrificial abandonment"
 - ii. Measured not by world's standards but by Christ
 - iii. ***We know we have had Christian experience when we experience transformation***

- e. He explains what is meant by being attuned to Christ, being a person in whom Christ lives, being a “member” of his body the church
 - i. Involves sharing through the Spirit in the “form of the divine love” found “in transfiguring whirlpool of love of the mystery of divine expression between Father and Son, Ground and Image”*
 - ii. We give ourselves up entirely in love to be at the disposal of our self-surrendering Lord
 - iii. On earth the path will be one of suffering
 - 1. Treats this path as described in scripture in Eastern patristic tradition culminating in Maximus the Confessor and in the West culminating in Aquinas’ theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in Ignatius of Loyola Spiritual Exercises*
- f. Von Balthasar warns against desire to see God more clearly than we see in Christ (65)
 - i. No beatific vision unmediated by humanity of Christ*
 - ii. God’s perceivable form in Christ fulfills entirety of God’s revelation in history*
 - iii. Perceiving this form involves corporeal seeing hearing touching
- g. Von Balthasar discusses Jesus’ experience of God which “furnishes the form that conditions all other experiences both before and after” (66)
 - i. Ultimately it is a mission consciousness - the mission of the expression (Word) of the Father*
 - ii. Jesus knows himself to be his mission
 - iii. In his going forth from the Father to surrender himself in love for sake of the world he expresses the Father’s divine self-surrendering and his personal distinction from the Father*
- h. Von Balthasar pays attention to Old Testament experience of God and Virgin Mary’s distinctive experience as well as apostles’ experience
 - i. (Mary and the apostles) ~ archetypal vocations or ways of being the church that function as “foundation of the life-form of believing man”

- ii. *Everything spiritual in Christianity is mediated by physical and historically concrete*
- i. Section on Christian experience concludes with discussion of relationship of senses + spirit in Christian anthropology
 - i. “The split between senses + the spirit rests on sin” (with Barth) (67)
 - ii. Dialogue with Romano Guardini, Gustav Siewerth, Paul Claudel
 - iii. ***Seeing the form of Christ is never merely a matter of the spirit***
- j. The revelation of the form of Christ brings the “end” of divine revelation but the activity of this revealed form continues with greater intensity
 - i. Holy Spirit brings out fullness of this revealed form through the church
 - ii. *Participating in the biblical modes of archetypal Christian experience makes revelation present in the forms of the church across generations thanks to working of the Holy Spirit*
 - iii. ***At heart of Christian experience is “surrender of one’s experience to the experience of Christ - and Christ’s experience is kenotic humiliation and self-renunciation in love - rooted in his mission as Son***
 - iv. This self-surrender is an eschatological foretaste of the “beauty of the New Age”
- k. Such experiences are not for an elite but belong to whole church (68)
 - i. Insofar as believers allow Christ to shine in them
 - ii. “If Christ is the image of all images it is impossible he should not affect all the world’s images by his present arranging them around himself”
 - iii. ***The whole of creation is irradiated by the form of Christ***
 - iv. (Rw - the “enchantment of the world” theme again)
- l. This is most true for the church participating in biblical archetypal moes of Christian experience
 - i. “Continuity between Mary’s spiritual experiences in the body and Church’s maternal experience” through which church

teaches believers meaning of incarnate Word in “its whole incarnational concreteness” (69)

- ii. Liturgical and sacramental ways in which we participate in the form of Christ
- iii. *Love (real love for neighbor) “bears within itself in sensory fashion the quintessence of dogmatics” because it contains the form of Christ as “the love and glory of God bleeding to death and forsaken”*

7. Objective revelation

- a. Von Balthasar devotes next section to “the objective evidence” with subsections
 - i. Central point = *whereas for Kant the unchanging ground that unifies all phenomena in our concepts is our consciousness, for von Balthasar it is the divine Persons’ self-surrender in love as manifested by the objective form of Christ*
 - ii. Emphasizes a seeing of the form in which the aesthetic and the ethical are united
 - iii. *Completely explodes Kant’s immanentism, separation of mind and body, and claim we can know things only as they appear in categories of our understanding*
- b. In discussing need for objective form of revelation von Balthasar focuses on God’s infinitely free subjectivity
 - i. *God can never be known comprehensively even when he fully reveals himself*
 - ii. Our surrender to God must be unconditional in the sense we recognize we do not stand on an ontological level with him
 - iii. **We are not dealing with a big being among beings** (70)
 - iv. *Since Christ is the Creator and the head who unites heaven and earth, the cosmos or ‘form of the world’ is revealed to be a temple in and above which God’s glory dwells*
 - v. The revealed form of Christ = “an infinitely determined super-form” uniting divine image and divine archetype
 - 1. The form of Christ is “crowning recapitulation of everything in heaven and on earth”

- c. May still be unclear what this “form of Christ” or “form of revelation” is given that Christ exists in diverse states
 - i. Christ is expression of God not simply as self-surrendering love but as self-surrendering love *for us*
 - 1. Which is why his pouring out of himself in the Eucharist = what we should expect from Christ’s pouring out of himself for us on the cross and why our future resurrection and everlasting “marriage feast” with risen Christ make sense
 - 2. (Rw - ???)
- d. “If in the manner of Kant and his followers we construct a concept of knowledge + science by first bracketing out the unknowable” the result will be rationalistic impoverishment
 - i. Against Kant - *beings manifest themselves objectively*
 - ii. The vanity of finite beings ensures the self-manifestation of beings always points to their creative ground
 - 1. Von Balthasar interprets this in terms of self-surrender
 - 2. This is necessary at the human level
- e. The incarnation of the Son is most perfect manifestation of God and at same time the deepest hiddenness of God since the Son takes the form of a servant
 - i. This grounds central claim we expect from von Balthasar
 - 1. *Our task consists in coming (with John) to see his ‘formlessness’ as a mode of his glory because a mode of his ‘love to the end’, to discover in his deformity (Ungestalt) the mystery of transcendental form (Übergestalt)*
 - 2. *The “divine aesthetic” is the radiance glory harmony of the absolute kenosis of self-surrendering love that for us bears and overcomes all sin and ugliness*
- f. Von Balthasar aware this might sound like mere talk
 - i. *Where is “objective evidence” Christ is what the church says he is?*
 - ii. Criticizes Kant’s subjectivism - refusal to grant beings any objective manifestation

- iii. “In theology, even the most existential form of Kantianism must distort and thus fail to see the phenomenon” (72)
- iv. *The figure which Christ forms must have in itself an interior rightness and evidential power such as we find in a work of art or in a mathematical principle*
 - 1. In order to illumine + transform us
- v. ***Each detail of Christ in the Gospels depends upon the other details and forms and integrated whole with the others***
 - 1. Every element of his existence and mission fits together
- g. Contra Schweitzerian attempts to dismiss Jesus as failed eschatological prophet whose followers reinterpreted/rehabilitated
 - i. *Jesus’ ethical teachings are not presented as merely given for a short period of a few years*
 - ii. Nor his coming death as contradicting his claim to divine power
 - iii. ***In Christ’s ultimate silence on the cross we perceive love and obedience and absolute attunement to God (73)***
 - iv. Could not have been done by invention by community or evangelists
- h. ***God in Christ acts to relieve human misery and does so by entering into the depths of our misery thus showing that Christ acts in perfect accord with divine love***
 - i. ???
 - ii. There must be some analogous intra-Trinitarian obedience of the Son as Son
- i. Christ’s form therefore supremely expresses God’s love and shows itself to be incomparable measure of all finite form or beauty
 - i. God conceals himself in love which humbles itself for our sake
 - ii. If forced then not divine love
 - iii. Consider Paul’s theological exuberance and sober instruction (74)
 - iv. Christ proves his truth by his relatedness to other religious founders but also by crucial differences from them
 - 1. The way he “draws the form of his teaching + the form of his life together into a strict identity”
 - 2. Possible because of cross and resurrection

- j. The problem of unity + difference is transformed by Christ through revelation of the Trinity
 - i. Otherness of creatures ~ otherness within identity of God
 - ii. Cosmos expresses trinitarian love
 - iii. *Divinization is sharing in love of the Trinity we receive in + through the incarnate Son*
 - iv. Ensures our created humanity is not subsumed into the One
 - k. Von Balthasar addresses failure to see the objective form
 - i. Notably heresy
 - ii. ***Because the form of Christ is a complex one, cutting off any of its aspects destroys the whole***
 - iii. Christ conceals his identity so his audience does not misunderstand the fulfillment + radical transformation he brings to office of Messiah
 - l. In looking at Christ we become part of his church by acknowledging our sins / our need for redemption / his supremely gracious love in his suffering for us
 - i. Christ imprints this form upon us so we participate in his form
 - ii. He selects Scripture that bears true witness
 - iii. Gathers his church also in his eucharistic form
8. *Can we trust scripture + the church both of which involve sinful humans mediating the Christ-form to communicate the Christ-form intact?*
- a. The Bible is involved in messiness of history
 - b. Historical-critical method takes on limitations of Kant
 - c. *Bultmann paves for faith a path whereby it criticizes + limits itself and thus admits its inability to come to see the object of faith namely an 'historical Christ'*
 - d. **Once faith is bracketed, faith's object cannot be seen**
 - e. *We are not meant to cling to scripture or to mistake it for Christ but scripture truly mediates Christ's glory and cannot be separated from the form of Christ*
 - f. Praises historical criticism for showing scripture's historical layers
 - i. Transcends any human testimony (Rw - !?!)
 - ii. But cannot tell us meaning of scripture or who Jesus is of what is developing in the Old Testament

9. Relationship of scripture and the church
 - a. Keeps the focus on Christ
 - b. Scripture manifests the “canon” which is Christ’s work of salvation and our new creation
 - c. *The key is the form of scripture is the form of Christ and so scripture “serves the Spirit as a vehicle through which it constantly actualises, with grace and as grace, this total historical form of the revelation of salvation”*
 - i. Draws upon Henri de Lubac
 - d. **Dogma serves to protect the form of Christ that scripture manifests**
 - e. Theology then interprets scripture in light of “full sweep of the Church’s thinking” through a contemplative act
10. The church has no autonomous form but always points (eschatologically) to the fullness of Christ that is “transparent to Christ”
 - a. Form of Christ is seen more strongly in Scripture than in the church although form of Christ governs + shines forth in both
 - b. Von Balthasar has in view Kantian project of turning Christianity into merely a generally intelligible expression of religious relationship between God and man no longer grounded in historically specific form
 - i. Employs aesthetic grounds to insist upon necessity + centrality of concrete form of Christ
 - ii. And upon Marian form of the church in her conformity to Christ (78)
11. No need to conceal the “deformations of the Church” caused in every period by sinners
 - a. The Holy Spirit ensures the church mediates and manifests Christ’s form so holy people in the church will endure humiliation
 - b. ***Eucharist as formative ongoing encounter between self-surrendering Christ and his church***
 - c. The sacraments conform us to Christ’s form by power of Christ and his Spirit
 - d. The truth of faith (its fundamental dogma) is “Jesus Christ is the only Son of the Father”

12. Gospel of John especially shows how “Jesus is himself the Father’s assumption of form, the Father’s *eidōs*”
- a. This form is true good beautiful
 - b. Most importantly because the free “surrender of the Son becomes manifest as the love of the Father for the Son” and thereby as “indivisible essential love of God himself”
 - c. Christ invites us to become interior to the radiant space of self-surrendering divine love that is at the root of all nature + grace
 - d. Old Testament forms do not come together except in sense it delivers God’s judgment and makes human failure apparent
13. For von Balthasar the unchanging ground that unites all appearances, all of nature, is divine triune self-surrendering love manifested in Christ
- a. Does this conflate orders of nature + grace? No place for natural created structure of things?
 - b. Reply = there is a natural structure of creatureliness requiring the world’s surrender to its Creator
 - c. ***The world cannot possess itself autonomously***
 - i. *The world has to surrender its most sublime fruit in sacrifice so God may consume and fulfill it ... this is a submission which lies in the world’s essence as creature but which is actually an overtaxing of its being (in a power of obedience that it has in God)*
 - ii. ***Surrender of Christ reveals the foundations of creation (by revealing what the creature owes) and explodes those foundations by going beyond them in supernatural love***
 - iii. This love of God is the mystery into which angels long to look
1 Peter 1:12

14. Conclusion

- a. In *Critique of Judgement* Kant argues the fine arts must be “brought into combination with moral ideas which alone are attended with a self-sufficing delight” (80)
 - i. A ground for universality of aesthetic judgment
 - ii. Finds it in our aesthetic ideas themselves
 1. Ideality is fundamental

2. We recognize beauty in universally valid way when we possess well-formed moral judgment

iii. Perception of beauty is key to a good life

b. Von Balthasar agrees with *some* of this

- i. Warns against “aesthetic theology”
- ii. Cross as mark of human sin + ugliness

iii. But we perceive the form of Christ’s love whose goodness manifests the harmony + radiance of beauty

1. = the self-surrendering love of the Father imaged for the fallen world by the incarnate Son
2. This beauty reveals the unchanging ground - Trinitarian love - *which accounts for + gives unity to vast outpouring of finite beings over space + time as well as to various forms of Old Testament and of the religions*
3. (Rw - so a kind of general explanation for all human religions?)
4. Kant’s quest is here transformed

5. The ground for unity of all forms and the truly beautiful form is the divine consciousness - the self-surrendering love fo the Father and the Son incarnate on the cross

c. The beauty of Christ does not deny destruction or death nor glamorize them as good

- i. Reveals that ground of all created being is infinite unfathomable Trinitarian love for us sinners
- ii. + the beauty of created being is self-surrender in imitation of the triune God’s own life
- iii. (remarkable paragraph 81)

d. This is the central message of his Theological Aesthetics which deploys Kant’s notion of transcendental apperception + his aesthetic theory of vision to mount a “Kantian” critique of Kant

- i. *He thereby retrieves the revelatory beauty of Christ and of all reality in a way that speaks to moderns while overcoming (through critique of Kant and through creative retrieval of*

Christian tradition) the Kantian limitations of modernity's vision (82)

Theo-Drama - a Hegelian critique of Hegel

1. Cyril O'Regan shed light on "the comprehensive, deep, and complex relationship between theology of von Balthasar and the philosophical and religious thought of Hegel which is one of the major cruxes of modern theology, and one theology must pass through to gain possibility of a future" (83)
 - a. Any contemporary theology that does not pass through Hegel has cut itself off from resources the church today needs
 - b. Partly because Hegelian views of progress + history are still with us
 - c. And Hegelian views of Christianity are essentially about progressive unfolding of spirit
 - d. **Key claim of Hegel's philosophy = when absolute thought occurs in man the axis of Being runs through him and his concept comprehends absolute totality within itself**
 - e. *Modern debates are often framed by Hegel's anthropocentric sense of absolute spirit's historical unfolding (84)*
 - i. Christology in Christian sense never has a chance to breathe within the circle of Hegelian Spirit's monologue with itself
2. Yet von Balthasar refuses to dismiss Hegel as an enemy
 - a. Theology can learn from him
 - b. "Hegel is both mentor and foe" (Ben Quash)
 - c. Can help Catholic theology be dogmatically richer + more persuasive
 - d. *Theo-Drama* "takes the baton Hegel proffered and runs with it"
 - i. ***Quash focuses on distinctions by Hegel between epic, lyric, dramatic*** which von Balthasar engages
 - ii. Von Balthasar also uses Hegel's insights into identity and role and into relationship of individual characters to the ends of the action as a whole
 - iii. *His approaches to collision of finite freedom + infinite freedom, to the immanent and economic Trinity, exhibit influence of Hegel's insights into spirit's interior encounter with its opposite*

1. A contradiction that involves self-surrendering sacrifice and ends in definitive resolution

3. Although von Balthasar draws on Hegel in positive ways his project is also strong critique
- a. Subtle but devastating critique
 - i. *The Aesthetics is virtually no more than portrayal of awareness of radiant blessedness of absolute knowledge itself which can comprehend all things justify all things and approve all things (?!?!?)*
 - ii. Obviously not all things can be justified or approved
 - iii. Hegel's project as "most blatant form of misfiring of memory or misremembering in post-Enlightenment era" (O'Regan)
 - iv. Critical proximity to Hegel
 - v. ***Hegel offers no room for truly personal or transcendent infinite spirit***
 - vi. Nor value to human bodiliness or individuality or to Christ's real humanity in historical context
 - vii. Hegel cannot be called dramatic because lacks what makes drama possible

1. Dialogue between two personal centers of freedom

- b. O'Regan sets forth von Balthasar's "apocalyptic" theological answer to Hegel
 - i. In his *Theo-Drama* von Balthasar offers Hegelian critique of Hegel for advancement of Catholic theology today
4. Contributions of Georg W F Hegel - Philosophy of religion
- a. Hegel's 1827 lectures on "The Revealed (or Christian) Religion"
 - i. "The consummate religion"
 1. Religion ~ "consciousness of God as such, of absolute essence"
 - ii. *Spiritual things cannot be verified by sensible things - can be verified only interiorly in the self-consciousness or spirit*
 - iii. Spirit comes into its own through "philosophy according to which the concept envelope the truth purely as such from itself without presuppositions"

- b. Spirit seeks in this development “to become the truth + proper Spirit, the Holy Spirit, which comprehends the divine and knows its content to be divine”
 - i. Today *philosophy* carries forward real orthodox truth - the true propositions constituting Christianity
 - ii. Ultimately spirit determines itself infinitely as absolute subjectivity
 - iii. God is “absolute activity, creative energy”
 - iv. God is Trinity because self-determination of God is God’s entire idea, identical to God
- c. Hegel derives assistance from category of “person”
 - i. Persons are free subjects
 - ii. Person surrenders its isolation and separateness in love (88)
 - iii. Doctrine of Trinity has ground in reason even if revealed
 - iv. Appeals to Jacob Boehme’s Trinitarian mysticism and triadic patterns of thought in Kant
- d. From biblical story of original sin Hegel obtains idea that in totality of spirit humans are “immortal free and good”
 - i. As natural beings we are in state of antithesis in relation to “God” and are mortal and “evil” (89)
 - ii. This caused us anguish + unhappiness
 - iii. Locked in antithesis of “humiliation” and inwardness
 - iv. Spirit = synthesis that reconciles and sublates the antithesis
 1. Hegel tries to draw out meaning of incarnation
 2. ***God and man are one - something God revealed - and something that is necessary conclusion of reason***
 3. Christ reveals “the consciousness of absolute reconciliation” of antithesis of humanity in relation to “God”
 4. “Kingdom of God” = consciousness that we are one with God
 5. Christ has overcome finitude and evil
- e. In so doing Christ reveals finitude to be a moment within God, within absolute spirit
 - i. Otherness - the negative - is moment of divine nature itself

- ii. Death is part of this “moment”
 - iii. God overcomes all otherness in movement of Spirit
 - iv. *This reconciliation is possible only because God is Trinity*
 - v. In the Trinitarian process spirit differentiates itself + overcomes this differentiation
- f. We finally arrive at unification brought by outpouring of the Spirit
- i. Hegel associated this with community of all people “in the Spirit of God”
 - ii. To be “in the Spirit” each needs to undertake process of consciousness by which s/he recognizes the truth of the synthesis or reconciliation (overcoming of finitude through attainment of infinite spirit) as manifested symbolically in Christ’s reversal of “fall”
 - iii. ***Divine spirit and human spirit are now identical since Spirit exists in human spirit which brings forth divine Spirit***
 - iv. *Something something about reconciliation of community of finite spirit in infinite Spirit (Rw - ?????)*
- g. The human person attains this self-conscious unity of finite + infinite when through “process of the subject within and upon itself” the person recognizes “the pure self-consciousness that knows and wills the truth is precisely the divine Spirit within it” (91)
- i. Human person becomes “actual as spirit” the truth of humanity
 - ii. Vocation for freedom must be appropriated
 - iii. The goal = ***universal spirituality, the recognition of the “eternity of spirit”***
 - 1. Eternal truth of world becomes clear as rational freedom
 - iv. ????????????
- h. For *Theo-Drama* what is notable in this part of Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is his account of God’s self-differentiation (which produces the “Son”) encompassing finitude negativity (including death) + otherness
- i. These elements cause humiliation + anguish
 - ii. Yet belong to God in a moment of his history because they belong to dialectic emergence of universal spirit

- iii. In a “moment” in God’s history (moment of “sacrifice” according to Hegel) these are sublated
- iv. ???
- v. Through unfolding of history of God free human persons find fulfillment in unity of spirit
- vi. Key = *the intradivine place of contradiction*
- vii. God’s activity = posit himself in contradiction but eternally to resolve and reconcile this
- viii. *God himself is resolving of these contradictions***

5. Aesthetics

- a. From first volume of Hegel’s *Aesthetics*
 - i. Hegel’s positions bear on themes in *Theo-Drama*
 - ii. “Romantic art explores absolute inwardness or spiritual subjectivity with its grasp of its independence and freedom”
 - 1. Romantic art knows only *one* God, one spirit, one absolute independence which remains in free unity with itself”
 - iii. Absolute spirit actualizes itself by entering into otherness and making infinite spirit explicit within finitude - showing that finitude is overcome within God himself
 - iv. *The finite + infinite are revealed as identical***
- b. This emphasis (absolute spirit manifesting itself through finite spirit) makes clear the fruit is the realization of absolute spirit
 - i. From this Hegel addresses figure of Jesus
 - ii. *In events of Jesus’ life we perceive what absolute spirit is*
 - iii. Jesus’ life reveals eternal + infinite spirit
 - iv. So do all whose finite consciousness or finite spirits express infinite spirit
- c. Hegel emphasizes absolute spirit cannot be revealed without otherness + death as moment within unfolding of absolute spirit
 - i. The spirit detaches itself from itself in order to win totality and freedom
 - ii. In this actualization there is an opposition, anguish, presence of “evil” that must be overcome through a form of death
 - iii. *Only thus can finite spirit be elevated to infinite spirit***

- iv. Christ therefore reveals the history of “God” (94)
- v. Death does not have last word because it is only a perishing of *natural* soul and *finite* subjectivity
- d. For such art (romantic art) the many persons + events of the world can be “gathered up into *one* ray of the Absolute and its eternal history of redemption
 - i. Heroes of this history (of redemption, eternal history of absolute spirit) display a heroism of submission or self-surrender
 - ii. In this we find inner battle of man in himself and his reconciliation with God
 - iii. This submission is a constant but diversity of human characteristics + surroundings make the self-surrender ever unique, distinctive
- e. Hegel addresses whether the content he ascribes to romantic art arises from romantic art itself
 - i. The content it seeks belongs to “religion” rather than arising from romantic art
 - ii. “Religion” = his own account of true meaning of Christianity
 - iii. Romantic art cannot achieve the full reconciliation “religion” attains
 - 1. Leaves us with two unreconciled worlds
 - a. Spiritual realm
 - b. And realm of the external as such - disconnected from the spirit
 - 2. Only “religion” or philosophy can accomplish unity sought by art
- iv. *Art cannot be its own endpoint***
- f. Hegel draws on tragedies of Shakespeare to reflect on connection between action + character in romantic art
 - i. A person’s fate expresses aso a development of his/her internal character
 - ii. In Shakespeare everything has a place, all phenomena can/do appear

- iii. Artists should seek deeper unity of artist's subjectivity and world's objectivity
- g. Conclusion section of 2nd volume of *Aesthetics*
 - i. Treats drama "highest stage of poetry and of art"
 - ii. Speech
 - iii. Drama unites subjectivity of lyric poetry with objectivity of epic poetry
 - iv. Drama goes beyond... by grounding the action in "self-conscious and active individual" without separating person's inner life from external realization
 - v. Main character's inner dynamism of spirit drives the action - expresses his/her interior spirit and takes objective form in external world
 - vi. ***The unity of inner life + external realization stands at center of what dramatic poetry can achieve***
- h. In an epic the events of world history govern the development of the play
 - i. In drama the inner life of the hero governs unfolding events
 - ii. ***Drama has special ability to portray the expression of the human spirit in concrete external events***
 - iii. Drama shows how human spirit molds + informs events
- i. Hegel adds "drama has to fix our eye steadily on *one* aim and its accomplishment" (97)
 - i. The agent's spirit seeks one goal that will express his/her spirit
 - ii. Others will oppose and their actions will influence the outcome
 - iii. *At stake is truth + goodness (the "Divine") but not the "divine" in the form of gods*
 - iv. Rather humans generate truth + goodness and so "divine" is brought into existence as something concrete - summoned into action + put into movement
 - v. ***Drama is absolute truth generated by inner life of spirit in action in the external world in relation to goals of other agents***
 - vi. *The ultimate outcome does not lie in hands of humans*

- vii. Rather “the Divine, totality in itself” works to accomplish resolution + reconciliation
- j. Another element in drama Hegel values is “tighter consistency” due to “individual interconnection which is basis of their existence in the dram”
 - i. Requires focusing on one locality + short space of time
 - ii. *The truly inviolable law is the unity of the action*” (98)**
 - iii. The “true unity” of dramatic action is “total movement” in which collision is display as conforming with characters + their ends and finally their contradiction is annulled and unity is restored”
 - iv. How???
 - v. “Only when the aim + interest of the action is identical with individuals and absolutely bound up with them”
- k. This identity between aim + actors is difficult when one is dealing with multifaceted plot
 - i. Shakespeare wraps up subplots at end of play
 - ii. Key = “the *one* collision which is at issue must find its settlement in that one independently finished work”
 - iii. Drama properly has three acts
 1. Emergence of the difference
 2. The resulting collision
 3. Finally the resolution
 - iv. Collision is often subdivided into three acts -> five acts in all
 - v. Good drama = *exposition of inner spirit of action in respect of also the dramatic personae and their passion, pathos, decision, mutual involvement and working on one another*
 - vi. *The “inner spirit of the action” has its power in light of collision of “dramatis personae” who will appear in the end to be intrinsically bound up with aim of action as a whole***
- l. Hegel points out in a “perfect drama” the author does not recede in importance
 - i. Exhibits “self-conscious and original creative activity and therefore also the art and virtuosity of an individual author”

- ii. Action of great drama must connect with quest of human spirit and bring real resolution
 - iii. Spirit of dramatist must possess “most profound insight into essence of human action and Divine Providence”
 - m. Action has two components (according to Hegel)
 - i. Given his understanding of spirit he considers every action to include an element pertaining to absolute spirit
 - 1. In individual’s character and aim we must look for “Divine actualized in the world, as foundation of everything genuine and absolutely eternal” in the individual agent and in the action
 - 2. There is also the subjectivity + freedom of the individual in his finite spirit
 - 3. *These two elements define the worth of action*
 - n. On this Hegel basis Hegel defines tragedy as involving “the Divine” as it enters the world and individual action” in which a collision occurs involving a substantial truth on both sides but which destroys the deeper “unity of ethical life” through one-sided focus
 - i. This places person in the wrong
 - ii. Tragedy refers to divine reconciliation which will not allow imbalance + disharmony to stand
 - iii. *Comedy arises when individual subjectivity acts in a manner that stands in some way above or athwart eternal truths + values*
 - iv. Comedy also must end with resolution
 - o. *A central difference between tragic and comedic drama consists in tragedy’s emphasis on the substantial truth in its characters and aims - contrast with comedy’s emphasis on character’s individual subjectivity*
6. Philosophy of history
- a. In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel gives special dramatic role to the German people
 - i. (Rw - oh really???)
 - ii. “The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination

of Freedom - *that Freedom having its own absolute form as its purport*" (101)

- iii. ***The realization of freedom (for Hegel) occurs through human spirit knowing its identity with infinite spirit while at same time knowing its own finitude and otherness - and perceiving these latter are included within the history of infinite spirit moving through sacrifice toward the reconciliation of the objective and subjective in the unity of absolute spirit***
 - 1. **This is the true meaning of doctrines of Trinity, Christ, outpouring of Spirit, kingdom of God**
 - 2. Destiny of German peoples is to bear the Christian principle
- iv. Something about achieving freedom by surrendering oneself to absolute truth
- b. Hegel's position revolves around discovery that infinite spirit is found in finite spirit which belongs to every human
 - i. We each must interiorly discover infinite spirit, absolute truth and freedom, to which we must devote ourselves
 - ii. We can do this when we surrender ourselves, our finite particularity
- iii. ***Subjectivity Spirit gains emancipation in Truth, abnegates its particularity and comes to itself in realizing the truth of its being. Thus Christian Freedom is actualized*** (102)
- c. Brief note from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*
 - i. The lover realizes the following - *I am not isolated on my own but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence*
 - ii. Two "moments" in love
 - 1. Love recognizes he does not want to live for himself alone
 - 2. Love finds himself in the beloved and vice versa
 - 3. **Crucial theme = discovering oneself through self-surrender**
- d. Essential contours of Hegel's thought have been set forth
 - i. **Seven crucial elements**

1. God's self-differentiation encompasses all possible otherness and contradiction
2. World's history reflects absolute spirit's eternal history
3. Key to world's history = submission or surrender to the law of life death + resurrection
4. Persons realize or actualize themselves by experiencing the anguish of finitude and surrendering this in sacrifice
5. Dramatic action is a unity involving many actors that involves a "collision" between finite + infinite freedom that ends in resolution and reconciliation
6. Dramatic action that displays virtuosity of its author must show identity between individual subjectivities and aim of the whole action
7. Drama is about the divine as actualized in the world and requires a notion of providence leading the whole action to resolution

7. Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Prolegomena* to his *Theo-Drama*: A Hegelian Critique of Hegel

- a. *Prolegomena* contains the material which when assembled will take shape as "a Christology, doctrine of Trinity, Christian doctrine of how to live"
 - i. *In world of theatrical drama he aims to find resources that when modified can be deployed theologically*
- b. Begins by recalling *Theological Aesthetics*
 - i. The form of revelation (Christ's self-surrendering love) = form in which all reality participates since the ground of all reality (natural + supernatural) is found in self-surrender in love
 1. Therefore the perception of the form involves participation in the dramatic action since we are called to reciprocate God's self-surrendering love
 - a. God's action calls forth action of his free creatures
 2. ***We cannot interpret or contemplate revelation as observers***
 3. Once we see form of revelation we respond existentially

- c. Theologians therefore cannot do theology correctly if by “theology” they mean an objective neutral study of facts
 - i. Because theology has to do with divine and human action
 - ii. ***By developing a “theodramatic theory” von Balthasar hopes to find a mode of theologizing that retains the vibrancy of action***
- d. On the stage the drama of existence becomes explicit so we may view it
 - i. Theoretical drama reveals to us the character of existence with its interplay of relationships
 - ii. Spectators becomes immersed in it
 - iii. *In “theo-drama” revealed by Christ we actually are immersed in it even though God is always primary actor and even though “the involvement of man in the divine action is part of God’s action not a precondition of it”*
 - iv. **The key to what God does is that it is good**
 - v. God’s action in the world reveals God’s own inner life
 - vi. *Does the death of the Son of God have an analogous relation to inner-Trinitarian life?*
- e. The outcome of the divine action does not remain concealed
 - i. Victory of God stands assured though precisely what it will look like remains a mystery
 - ii. God’s victory is for us
 - iii. We must appropriate it by sharing in the dramatic performance of self-surrendering love
 - iv. God will accomplish this resolution because God chose to insert our drama into his own infinite drama of self-surrendering love
- f. One of the valuable things about theatrical drama is it conditions us to understand human life as a “role” within a larger and coherent totality - a role whose meaning comes from above rather than being given by the self
 - i. The full meaning of the action (higher authorial level) is not a static level where nothing happens and which relativizes all events beneath and external to it

- ii. *The dramatic question of human life comes to a head in Christ's cry from the cross*
 - iii. *The divine action culminates in the resurrection of Jesus*
 - iv. *This dramatic action reflects the inner-divine drama itself*
- 8. Nine inadequate proposals for replacing neo-scholastic theology
 - a. Von Balthasar associates his approach with other efforts to renew theology in decades prior to original publication of his book in 1983
 - i. All involve a similar diagnosis of shortcomings of theology coming down to us through the centuries
 - ii. Problem with received theology = *became stuck fast on sandbank of rationalist abstraction*
 - iii. Von Balthasar examines nine solutions that contemporary theology put forward
 - b. Theology in light of "event"
 - i. *God is event, the event of Christ seizes us, everything is located in the "now" of God's saving event*
 - ii. Address Schweitzerian apocalyptic readings that deny the "event" ever materialized
 - iii. "There is something timeless and context-less in this concentration on the pure event, does not do justice to genuinely historical nature of biblical revelation"
 - c. Organizing theology in terms of "history"
 - i. Each historical moment has its own criteria for authentic proclamation and life
 - ii. Christian doctrine must be reinterpreted even reversed to meet needs of the present
 - iii. *Fails to do justice to what Christ definitively brings - to the distinctiveness of his life death resurrection*
 - 1. And to time of the church distinctively marked by what Jesus brought
 - 2. *Without this - would be no criteria for interpreting "authenticity" of any historical moment*
 - d. Raising "orthopraxy" above "orthodoxy"
 - i. (Rw - sounds like Phyllis Tickle)
 - ii. Christian practice rather than subtleties of doctrine

- iii. *Abbreviates Christianity to an ethics or guide to human endeavor*
- iv. God's transcendent action in Christ goes missing
- v. ***Christian action becomes deracinated because it is faith in God and his action in Christ that must govern Christian action***
- e. "Dialogue"
 - i. Grants its importance
 - ii. **Much dialogue is not genuine**
 - iii. Genuine dialogue requires both seeking the true and the good
 - iv. Christ acts on cross at point where all dialogue failed
- f. "Political theology"
 - i. Christianity is political in sense of "public" and relativizes the state
 - ii. Requires bringing faith in Christ into public + political life on side of justice and peace
 - iii. Consummation of God's kingdom will be gift not achievement
 - iv. *What is decisive is not this-worldly approximation to Kingdom but separation of eons made clear in death + resurrection of Christ*
- g. The future
 - i. Christianity looks to coming eschatological future
 - ii. But not in manner in which Israel looked to coming of Messiah
 - iii. *Utopian and revolutionary schemes find a place*
 - iv. Better approach in retrieval of "apocalyptic" thinking which recognizes history is locus of drama between heaven and earth
- h. "Function and "role"
 - i. Functionalism
 - 1. French structuralist theories
 - a. Contingencies of history can be understood when we grasp their underlying structures
 - b. Too often rests in extreme form of neo-Kantianism
 - c. Yet such analysis exhibit "matrix of suprasubjective social relationships that forms the totality in which each plays part or function

- d. Helps desacralize social phenomena
- e. *But cannot appreciate the governing presence of the incarnate Word in church or validate truly sacral character of roles in the church*

ii. Role

- 1. Whether we find our identity in social roles
- 2. Without these we would be at a loss but social roles cannot fit all we are
- 3. *We are more than interchangeable parts filling roles for society*
- 4. "Role" finds expression in theories of reincarnation
- 5. ***Christian theo-drama alone through the figure of Christ can resolve this problem of uniting role and identity***

i. Problem of evil

i. Early Christian theology

- 1. Angelic and human sin

ii. Now appears to modern thinkers as intrinsic to the world

- 1. A god who is evil or incompetent
- 2. History seems to be spiraling toward extinction
- 3. *The result serves theo-dramatic theology*
- 4. Confrontation between divine and human freedom has reached a unique intensity
- 5. Contest has moved to the center of the problem of existence
- 6. *Question of whether God has limited his freedom or power - or what we learn from incarnate Son's "Godforesakenness" on the cross*

9. Hegel and the solution: Theo-drama

- a. Von Balthasar engages Hegel as *opponent* of employment of drama in theology given the limitations of drama - which Christianity overcomes
 - i. Hegel's view of drama touches nerve of our endeavor and we must feel weight of his critique
 - ii. For Hegel highest point of art consists in drama

- iii. Focuses on Hegel's treatment of Greek (epic) drama
 1. Focus on God entering the world
 2. Hegel thinks Greek comedy followed to its limit dissolves art
 3. *For Hegel dissolution of Greek epic serves rise of Christianity*
 4. The drama of Christ affirms subjectivity in god
 5. Key idea Hegel draws = God died and has identified himself in love with his own contradiction or negation - which achieves resolution through outpouring of Spirit
 - a. Reveals unity of finite + infinite spirit
 - b. For Hegel Christianity is now the absolute drama - the truth of tragedy and comedy
- b. Hegel thinks religion alone can arrive at this resolution
 - i. By which Hegel means "universal history of Spirit"
 - ii. Once Christianity is known to be "*image of the absolute history of Spirit*" it becomes apparent "Christianity is not only coextensive but identical with the human (which is the manifestation of the divine)"
- c. Von Balthasar rightly observes critically Hegel "fits the Christian approach into an all-inclusive history of the human spirit: Christianity had to make appearance at this *particular* point in the development"
 - i. Hegel treats Christianity reductively
 - ii. Christ could not accomplish anything absolute spirit was not accomplishing on its own
 - iii. Hegel's view of Christianity lacks real active power of Jesus on behalf of all men
 1. Which in turn grounds active real power of exalted Christ to give men inner participation in his universal mission
- d. Emphasizes against Hegel that "the Lord who works is a person and remains this particular person after his Resurrection"
 - i. Process of absolute spirit realizing itself does not subsume/sublate sacrificial moment of Christ
 - ii. Hegel cannot perceive how Christ is personally alive and active

- iii. There are points of contact between “participation in universal mission of Christ” and identity between accomplishment of the aim of whole action and resolution of inner subjectivities of characters
 - 1. Only if aim of whole action is self-surrender (in love)
- e. Von Balthasar also praises Hegel
 - i. “No thinker before him more profoundly experienced and pondered Christian revelation in dramatic categories”
 - ii. *Sees his work as building upon Hegel while critiquing his limitations*
 - iii. Hegel’s dialectic of spirit’s unfolding comes from dramatic flow of Old + New Testaments
 - 1. Utterances + counter-utterances of Old and synthesis of the New -> fundamental dialectic rhythms
 - iv. For Hegel existence means absolute spirit’s giving birth to itself in object world, submitting to its opposite, rising in glorious reconciliation
- f. Von Balthasar resonates with Hegel’s view tragedy shows the Absolute at play with itself; in the Christ-event will be seen to be a play in all earnest
 - i. Agrees that both tragedy and the Passion have the same basic nature: they are act - reality is action not theory
 - ii. *Does not share Hegel’s view of “Absolute” or “Christ-event”*
 - iii. Hegel has distorted Christ and the Trinity
 - iv. (several points of criticism)
 - v. God’s and Christ’s actions are not *merely* dramatic but *analogously* dramatic
 - vi. Greek tragedy is impersonal
 - vii. Passion + resurrection are profoundly personal
 - viii. Rejects “total World Spirit” integrating all spirit
 - ix. *The Christian person has risen above all these powers even above pure spirits that are angelic powers* (115)**
- g. Critiques Hegel’s view romantic drama could in part mirror real Christian existence
 - i. The key is *Hegel has no notion of a living Lord*

- ii. *Jesus Christ who personally and freely give the Christian a genuine mission by enabling his to share charismatically in his saving act*
- iii. Absent the free Christ there can be no Christian existence or drama
- iv. *Hegel's emphasis on centrality of inner subjectivity for romantic drama signals that Hegel's use of romantic drama will not work for anything but spiritualized and privatized Christianity*
- h. Hegel's view = period of romantic drama has come to an end
 - i. Yes drama is in decline
 - ii. Implicates Hegel in this decline
 - iii. Also implicates neo-scholasticism
 - iv. Personalist Christology has dwindled to nothing and no longer a lived reality
 - v. *A living personalist Christology would preserve us from Hegelian dialectic, from the universal, impersonal, dialectical law of "die and become" (Rw - ???) (116)*
- i. Von Balthasar **identifies five issues central for project of his Theo-Drama**
 - i. Hegel's impact is evident even when he differs from Hegel
- j. The meaning of "mission"
 - i. The Christian must enter into and become one with the mission Christ gives him or her
 - ii. *Christian subjectivity centers on mission - is oriented to the whole world*
- k. Von Balthasar describes distinction between "substantial" nature of the whole Church and the individual's vocation
 - i. ???
- l. Universality and particularity of each Christian mission which results in conflicts and collisions between Christians and with non-Christians
 - i. The mission of a particular Christian may embody spirit of an epoch or spirit of a continent
 - ii. *Christian concerns will interact with wider spirit of the time*
- m. Fourth issue draws upon Hegel

- i. “If every mission is a participation in the whole mission of Christ (which Hegel admits) the drama of each Christian life can be a kind of reflection of the mission of Christ (which with regard to the romantic drama Hegel failed to see)”
 - ii. *Hegel in his own way sees individual subjectivity as reflecting Christ’s mission (his sacrifice or self-surrender) which is crowned by his rising in the Spirit*
- n. Whether the drama in the world reflects an intradivine drama and whether God’s involvement with the world risks making God into an impersonal “all-embracing dimension”
 - i. Relationship between economic and immanent Trinity
 - ii. For Hegel they “coincide”
 - iii. Von Balthasar raises question of divine *kenosis*
 - iv. ***What is at stake = whether Hegel is correct God contains what contradicts God even while also containing the Holy Spirit as resolution and reconciliation of all things***
- o. Takes up Hegel’s suggestion drama has reached an end beyond which it cannot go given the limitations of art vis-a-vis “religion”
 - i. Hegel’s description of tragedy as divine essence differentiating itself into conflict of infinite and finite ending in resolution or reconciliation that reveals the unity of infinite and finite
 - ii. Hegel assumes existence of “absolute (divine) idea of ethics” that can no longer be assumed today
 - iii. Generally approves his view that in traffic drama “identity” has to “reconstitute itself through (loving) self-sacrifice of its distinctiveness”
 - iv. His dialectic reflects Jewish “duality” between mortal + divine - overcome in Christ
 - 1. *The distinctive individual appearing on the stage to take into himself by dying on the Cross the destiny of the world’s guilt so that transfigured he can bring both back to the unity of the ethical*
 - 2. (Rw - why is that the goal???)
- p. Von Balthasar rejects impersonal character Hegel gives to “phenomenon of Christ” and to “unity of the ethical”

- i. Bemoans that Christian framework sustaining his insights largely lost in German intellectual culture
- ii. Hegel's view of tragedy is richer + suppler than that of later thinkers
 - 1. (Rw - reference/comparison to Marxism)
- q. Hegel deserves credit for perceiving no dramatic action possible without framework of absolute meaning (119)
 - i. Dramatic action requires a political framework
 - ii. Absurdity freedom revolt cannot ground truly dramatic action since they become boring or self-contradictory if held up as absolute meaning
 - iii. *Von Balthasar argues that positing an absolute meaning is still possible***
 - iv. Surveys effects produced upon drama by Marxist optimism and Holocaust-generated despair
 - v. *The individual and his question are mowed down because there is no real future for the individual***
 - 1. Looks to Thornton Wilder and Bertolt Brecht
 - 2. Without the dramatic place of the individual the significance of community of persons cannot be upheld
 - 3. *The framework of absolute meaning von Balthasar defends is Christian one in which humans exist in a tragic or paradoxical condition fallen and mortal but desiring everlasting communion with God - a desire art can point to but not fulfill*

10. Christianity and drama

- a. Theater in pagan world had great drama but also lewd + cruel entertainment
 - i. Platon condemned actions + nature of the gods in drama
 - ii. Examples of conflict between church and theater
 - iii. Perhaps actor embodies dangerous temptation which is possibility of not being ourselves
 - iv. Medieval development of church-sanctioned mystery plays
- b. "Hegel is right: the depth at which in Christianity the theological-dramatic plot thickens cannot be shown on the stage nor

can the decisive consequences of this event - transformation of world's whole condition, hidden advent of the New Aeon"

- i. Since God's action for us is a theo-drama there are valid dramatic ways of exhibiting this
- ii. Four points in favor of Christian drama
 1. When we see Christian theatrical drama we become more aware what Christ does is "for us"
 - a. We gain sense of Christ's dramatic contact with and presence to his people
 - b. And sense of eschatological character of our actions even now
 2. Christian drama underscores history of salvation and whole history of the world have center in the Eucharist
 - a. *When we perceive things properly we find everything revolves around wedding banquet of the Lamb*
 3. Christian theatrical drama highlights our sharing in mission of the Lord often in situations of suffering
 4. The absolute truth + goodness of God upheld by the church is needed for drama to proceed
 - a. Atheists set up plays against shadow of the church
 - b. The tragic drama of Christianity provides the deepest ground of all
- iii. In opposition to Hegel but drawing on him von Balthasar argues *revelation is the ultimate precondition on the basis of which existence (and drama) can experience genuine tragedy - and not a tragedy which dissolves in meaninglessness*
 1. The critical difference consists in ***whether revelation flows from personal freedom of God***
- iv. Would a theo-drama find itself cut off from Christian tradition
 1. That drama is not alien to theology
 2. Divine revelation has dramatic form and theological tradition of answering objections has dramatic form
 3. And existential contemplation one finds in monastic and mystical theology

4. The alienation from drama happens *when exegesis goes its own way and becomes scientific so that dogmatics increasingly becomes a textbook - monologue of answers without searching or questioning*
 5. **What is needed is an answer with real dramatic roots in contemporary questions and in scriptures since these roots allow the Holy Spirit to work with freshness in theological pondering**
- v. Von Balthasar explores relationship between natural and supernatural dramas of reality
1. Natural drama grounded in creation + made visible in myth
 - a. Tension between finite and infinite freedom
 2. Warns against reduction of God's freedom
 3. On basis of creation we conclude neither "God's existence is identical with his initiative on the world's behalf, as idealism maintains" nor "absolute source of all dramatic interplay between God and the world is the mystery of that life in God which is shred by divine life-centers (Persons)"
 - a. *The latter cannot be justified by reasoning upward from exigencies of the spirit (as Hegel does)*
 - b. It's true but not in impersonal way Hegel understands
- vi. Von Balthasar suggests central task of remainder of the book = sort out distinction between natural and supernatural (rejected by Hegel) without denying Hegel's insights
1. *Meaning of finite existence and action (relating to existence and action of the Absolute or Infinite) will be central question in light of creation and of Christ*
 2. **Bears upon meaning and fulfillment of human "I"**
 3. Second question = does God who transcends the finite action risk himself by entering into action?

- a. *What is meant by “God’s history”, his kenosis, the death of the Son of God? What is relation between economic and immanent Trinity in all this? (122)*
- vii. To understand these questions one must grasp the concerns motivating them
1. Von Balthasar concerned by portraits of triune God that seem to make God less interesting than human history (God as static + boring)
 2. God as only the Unmoved
 3. Associates this with neo-scholastic textbooks
 4. But recognizes danger of trying to make God interesting in a way that produces a mythology absorbing God into the world and makes him a warring party of world process
 5. (Rw - so contra process theology?)
 6. In Hegel the two extremes (?) meet
 - a. Hegel presents both impersonal absolute spirit and absolute spirit who is subsumed into the world process
 - b. Hegel = example of reductive gnosticism
 7. ***Von Balthasar aims to produce a theo-dramatic theory that avoids pitfalls of Hegel while doing justice to his insistence we cannot reasonably worship a God who is too abstract or static to be God of history***

11. Dramatic resources: from the Greeks to modern drama

- a. Second section of *Prolegomena* “Dramatic resources”
 - i. Information about history + development of theater
- b. In Homer’s epics the gods appear as spectators and participants in human drama
 - i. In Stoic philosophy noble actions as a “play”
 - ii. Paul as dramatic spectacle to world for sake of the world (1 Corinthians 4:9)
 - iii. *The true God is good (Plato)*
 - iv. Human beings as puppets of God engages in morally serious dramatic imitation (Plato, *Laws*)

- v. In Hellenistic thinkers reflection on connection between our “I” and roles we have been given to play
 - 1. A divine gift of participation
- vi. Marcus Aurelius’ imagery of the stage to describe human life
 - 1. Death is departing the stage
 - 2. Permanent ending of role one has been graciously given
- c. Plato sets forth myth of souls choosing what states of life into which they wish to be born (*Republic*)
 - i. Suited to one’s state of soul
 - ii. One may play the role well or badly depending on moral choices
 - iii. World’s diversity in terms of goodness of having diverse characters in a play (Plotinus)
 - iv. Soul has freedom to act out her role well or badly to rise toward spirit or decline toward matter
 - 1. Role is given by God
 - 2. God does not let actors take over the play (Plotinus)
- d. Themes of God watching his people and of instance of divine punishment constituting a spectacle whose purpose is warning the world can be found in scripture (124-125)
 - i. Eschatological literature
 - 1. *The victims who were a spectacle in the world will triumphantly look upon their oppressors*
- e. Scripture as a “play” by which to educate people toward knowledge of God and his plan (Marximus the Confessor)
 - i. Life as playing role God gave us (Clement of Alexandria)
 - ii. Dramatic tension between allegiance to city of God and allegiance to city of man (Augustine)
 - iii. World filled with dramatic disguise (Luther)
 - iv. World filled with human folly in which God participates by undergoing the folly of the Cross (Erasmus)
- f. Theme of world stage with God as author
 - i. Expressed in dramatists and poets
 - 1. Especially Pedro Calderón de la Barca
 - a. *Great Theater of the World*

- i. Scenes where a king lays aside his royal power
 - ii. At stake is fulfillment of the “I” the identification and attainment of person’s true identity
 - g. Enlightenment turns away from God and attempts to ground the “I” autonomously
 - i. Tension all actors must be filled with absolute Spirit while absolute Spirit arises only through sum of freedom and action of finite spirits (Schelling inspired by Hegel)
 - ii. Idealist philosophy *eliminates distinction between the “I” and God and becomes an intoxicated or progressive deification of the “I” or replaced God with the “I” or subordinates the empirical “I” to an egoless Absolute*
 - iii. **We are back to problems found in Hegel and von Balthasar’s critique**
 - h. Answer appears in Christian understanding of “mission” a God-given role or vocation that reconciles finite freedom and destiny with infinite freedom through service and thus through self-surrendering love
 - i. This does not seem possible to prominent late 19th century dramatists
 - ii. Caught up in problem epitomized by Goethe’s *Faust* and Hegel’s problem
 - 1. *The “I” has to imagine itself to be a mirroring of the Whole or identical with it - result of endangering individual freedom and subjectivity* (126)
 - 2. *Ibsen shows that absolute egoism in its upward thrust toward glory of the infinite leads to isolation guilt madness suicide*
 - a. Ibsen does not see way out because God and Christ are not an option
 - i. Reemergence of Christian principle in early 20th century Austrian dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal
 - i. Later work

1. Exhibits the christological principle as underpinning the unutterable brokenness of the here-and-now
 2. His 20th century opposites are George Bernard Shaw and Luigi Pirandello
 3. *In this survey of modern drama the path taken by Hegel leads because of his impossible conflation of finite and infinite spirit to dramatic disaster*
- j. Von Balthasar concludes this survey with four themes characterizing the “theater of the world” whose examples are Calderón and Hofmannsthal for whom theater can truly illuminate human creaturely existence
- i. Such theater emphasizes the finitude of characters (despite their freedom) while making clear the meaning of the play goes beyond what characters know and constitutes an eternal meaning
 - ii. Role and “I” of the character are related by not identical
 1. The role shapes the character’s “I”
 - iii. Theater of the world gives a voice to “divine Director” who possesses absolute reason of global responsibility for the play while recognizing the actors are not puppet but have freedom to play role well or poorly
 1. *Can they thwart purposes of the director?*
 - iv. Content of theater of world focuses on human person who bear responsibility for actions but cannot perceive unified meaning toward which all actions tend under the director’s guidance
 1. *How to recognize the will of the director*
 2. Clue consistently comes from **character in a lowly role**
 - a. At issue is difference between self-seeking power and self-surrendering love
12. Author, director, actor, spectator
- a. Second section of his examination of “Dramatic resources” titled “Elements of the dramatic”
 - i. How theater springs from existence and is characterized by it

- ii. *Existence itself must give rise to “faith” its tentative projects will somewhere meet with a seeing, a solution that will satisfy* (128)
- iii. *Good theater reminds us not only we wish for goal or solution in light of which our life has meaning but we experience a difference between our “I” and roles we play in society and our mind*
- iv. When theater becomes practical in sense of trying to impose a worldview as though dramatist were embodiment of providence then theater overreaches
 - 1. (Rw - ???)
- v. *What drama can best do is remind us of our freedom and challenge us to live in a way that fulfills us*
- b. With regard to author von Balthasar is interested in issue of relationship of infinite freedom and finite freedom
 - i. ***How unity of the action is achieved through conflicts and collision of various “often antinomian” characters without making them puppets and therefore lifeless***
 - 1. Hegel insisted the author or dramatist must profound breadth of spirit
 - 2. Von Balthasar focuses on creative tension between allowing characters to develop in their own way and guiding their interplay from position of ultimate superiority
 - a. Has in view question of a free God who is in and above his creatures (129)
 - b. The dramatist must not overlook total movement of the play and need for just and fitting solution***
- c. Without actors dramatist’s vision could not come to fruition
 - i. Actor must breathe life into role he was given
 - 1. A mediating role - mediates or represents the dramatist’s character to the audience
 - 2. The key = *disponibilité* pouring oneself into it completely
 - 3. Actor’s sense of self can become fluid

4. In the actor's *disponibilité* a clue to life of Christ (Gabriel Marcel)
 - a. Fully expresses the mission given him by the Father and constitutes a humbling facilitating representation of the divine
- ii. Director takes responsibility for play's performance
 1. Making it present here and now by guiding the oft-fractional ensemble of actors
 2. Analogously has in mind work of Holy Spirit
 3. Director entirely at service of actors
 - a. But in a way often involving conflict and collision with them
 4. ***Success of the director comes out invisibly to the spectators***
- iii. The presentation of a play, the audience, the horizon of meaning in which plays function
 1. The audience's "two-fold need to see and surrender ourselves to something transcending and giving meaning to limited horizon of everyday life" (Hegel)
 2. Link to cultic participation (130)
 - a. When we are dealing with a play falling within context of theater of the world
 - b. Absent God a play can score points but cannot introduce anything that exhibits true human fulfillment
 - i. Because it assumes human persons are headed into abyss of impersonal extinction
 3. Distinguishes horizon of fate and that of providence
 4. *He makes explicit the Trinitarian connection he is working toward*
 - a. ***God the Father who sends him remains in background as real "spectator" before whom "great theater of the world" is performed***

b. Since Father and Son are one this role on God's part cannot be separated from entering in action on the stage

i. God's entering the action is so explosive and rich theatrical drama cannot adequately display it

c. This happens (human tendency to reduce the mystery?) happens in Hegel for whom "whole horizon is incorporated into the subject - into total subject of the World Spirit resulting in conflation of presentation audience horizon"

13. Time, death, happiness, tragedy, judgement

a. Von Balthasar reflects on way theological drama expresses our experience of time

i. "Thrill of a play in which eternal destiny of man is set forth without finite time-span"

ii. Each moment is pregnant with the future

iii. This works only when dramatist includes "vertical" or transcendent dimension allowing events to be viewed from divine perspective

iv. Dramatic situation only exists where one finds two dimensions

1. Social dimension of variety of humans involved in changing dynamics from collisions and conflicts

2. Dimension of totality of human life and question of whether individual action or totality of human life has enduring meaning

a. Within these two dimensions the vocation or mission of individual characters can have real dramatic tension

b. This mission or vocation finds itself pressed by threat of death

i. Final moment =

1. Man's ultimate humiliation

2. Something most precious and noble if he accepts it as total offering and final form of his existence

ii. Key = act of self-surrender

1. Death can illuminate the life on lived
2. If not then alienation takes over
- iii. Dramatic sense of immanence of death
 1. Borderline between life and eternal realm of death, atoning death, relationship of death and love, meaning of death on behalf of another, unmaking and death of kings, relation of death to ongoing sequence of generations
- iv. *Gives ample evidence of lively state of drama through mid 20th century*
- c. Explores way in which theatrical drama treats elusiveness of absolute Good
 - i. In comedy
 1. Can achieve relative happiness although tenuous
 - ii. In tragedy
 1. Striving toward the good can lead to “total witness of life” wherein person freely dies for sake of the good
 - iii. Theatrical drama elps us see man finds himself in thicket of relative goods and values and tries (with aid of internal compass) to find way to the Absolute
 - iv. Humans have conflicting motivations
 - v. In modern plays the divine realm is at least a realm of futility that testifies to futility of existence
- d. Various definitions of tragedy
 - i. Some allow for ultimate reconciliation
 - ii. Others insist nothing is tragedy unless conflict remains unresolved
 - iii. ***Question is whether Christianity can contain real tragedy***
 1. Father’s abandonment of Jesus on the cross “underpins everything that can be termed ‘tragic’
 2. This overarching Christian reality goes way beyond problems of the mere opposition of human and divine freedoms
 - a. Within God’s eternal history is every contradiction to God (Hegel)

- e. Could what is “tragic” consist in a doomed person’s noble and self-transcending action - even if action happens within Godless and meaningless frame? (133)
 - i. Von Balthasar admires + approves such
 - ii. But this requires real existence of transcendence
 - iii. Cannot be expiation of personal guilt
- f. Reason Christianity does not obliterate tragedy is God - entering into world’s contradiction - does so freely and lovingly as utter gift rather than impersonal resolution or reconciliation that would subsume all tragedy
 - i. *In man’s humiliation he needs again to encounter the mystery of the mighty God whose love was not able to answer his Son when he cried out for him due to an incomprehensible but ever-present guilt in relationship between heaven and earth*
 - ii. ***God does not subsume tragedy but enters into it personally and with love*** (134)
- g. Among German idealists and those influenced by them we find claim tragedy and comedy “rest on contradiction within subject between the finite and infinite”
 - i. Existence is a “tragi-comedy”
 - 1. Denied by Soren Kierkegaard
 - 2. Eugène Ionesco finds world so tragic as to be a farce
 - ii. *By affirming the ethical but rejecting the metaphysical tragi-comedy hovers between despising and accusing God and accepting the world has hidden meaning*
 - 1. Found either in God or in structure of the world
 - 2. Distinction between comedy and tragedy needs not be sharpe
- h. In addition to problem of absolute Good not seeming credible or real there is also problem of how theatrical drama contains truthful judgment about goodness or badness of actions (134)
 - i. In tragedy some aspect of justice must be at sake
 - ii. In a different way in comedy
 - iii. *But how can fallible human judgment make decision in name of absolute justice in the name of the Good?*

1. Treatment of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*
 - a. But also themes of pardon mercy indulgence grace
2. Von Balthasar highlights *Measure for Measure* as Christian mystery play
 - a. Guilty and innocent judged together so all might receive mercy
 - b. Tragedy and comedy come together along Christian lines
3. ***Christianity cannot be satisfied with tragedy or comedy but must allow for world of both that ends by attaining "highest good" through costly forgiveness***

14. Psychology and sociology

- a. Third and final section of *Prolegomena* = "Transition: from role to mission"
 - i. Relationship of "I" to roles we play
 - ii. How willing our self can arrive at true self given we are never satisfied or quenches in our yearnings
 - iii. *Each of us must seek our own true "I"***
 - iv. Are we chance production of ancestors' fortuitous sexual encounters?
 1. What is the ground of this?
 - v. We are souls and know ourselves by knowing our souls' dynamic structure and origin (Plato and especially Plotinus)
 - vi. Von Balthasar turns to Stoics particularly Epictetus
 1. Reflect upon our God-given freedom and limiting roles
 2. The good that perfects humans coincides with ethical good (Epictetus)
 - vii. But rejects their soul-body dualism and pantheistic cosmology and denial of personal life after death
- b. Importance of accepting self's limits
 - i. Contributions made by modern psychology
 1. Freud, Jung, Alfred Adler
 2. Rejects much of Freud but takes seriously his portrait of human plight

3. Jung seeks to recover for “I” the mythic symbols expressing unconscious realm on which the “I” rests
 - a. Sets “self” against “ego” and “persona” against “role”
 - i. (Rw - ???)
 - b. Focus on “self” leads him to bypass the whole dialogical plane
- c. Jung also argued the archetypal divine - horizon of “self” - must include masculine and feminine and both light and darkness
 - i. Realization of “self” individualizes the unique person (in profound loneliness exemplified by Christ) while also making him/her an incarnation of that totality into which he transcended himself and to which he has surrendered
 - ii. Jung like Freud emphasizes *limitation*
- d. Adler contrasts poles of personality and community and emphasizes integrative role of mother’s love as well as significance of purposeful action
 - i. Risk = possibility the person dissolves into his/her roles
 1. Adler’s man must *accept his limits* and become one with social role
 2. **This reduces the human person who is always more than social roles**
- e. Von Balthasar mentions Hegel in final section and credits Hegel for recognizing alienation of our “I” from social roles
 - i. This insight influenced 20th century sociology
 - ii. Mentions Émile Durkheim and William James and turns to Ralf Dahrendorf and opponents
 1. Considers Kantian and Hegelian anthropologies at odds
 - iii. Also treats George Mead, early Jürgen Habermas, T W Adorno, others
 - iv. At issue is observed dichotomy between “I” and changing social roles that leads to denying stable identity of “I” (Adorno)
- f. Von Balthasar gives attention to early thought of sociologist Peter Berger

- i. In cultures governed by “myth” the god who gives the stable name (identity) to the person
- ii. *When society is highest reality that individuals produce society and society produces individuals (138)*
- iii. Primary socialization through one’s mother
- iv. Then secondary socialization (roles)
- v. *Social roles imprison a person yet accepting these roles gives us a sense of freedom*
- vi. Can lay aside and transform their meanings of create new roles
- vii. Von Balthasar ***concludes Berger and other sociologists cannot anchor the personal uniqueness and self-transcending dignity of individual humans***

15. Role as alienation and attempts at mediation

- a. “Role as alienation”
 - i. Begins with *Neoplatonists*
 - ii. (Stoics see humans as anchored in a divine order)
 - iii. Neoplatonists see humans striving urgently toward reunion with impersonal God
 - 1. Plotinus
 - iv. ***At stake = whether the creature, eternally known by the Creator, is less in itself than in the Creator and therefore stands in alienated condition until it is again subsumed into the Creator***
 - v. Von Balthasar reviews the “divine ideas” tradition
 - vi. Reviews debate whether “agent intellect” is solely one (from God)
 - vii. *Aquinas was not yet in a position to lead the battle for the Christian dignity of the individual to a triumphant conclusion*
- b. After Aquinas, Meister Eckhard moves in opposition direction
 - i. We must empty ourselves of everything that might belong to us as distinct creatures in order to be fully unity to divine Son and to share in his divine knowing and willing
 - 1. Urges moving “beyond” divine Persons to their wondrous “ground”

2. The “I” is alienation at its core (even if Eckhard tries to temper this)
 3. *Eckhard advancing along path toward German idealism*
 4. ***“We encounter the same tendency to dissolve the empirical personal ‘I’ in the ‘essential’ the ‘ideal’”***
(140)
 5. German idealism in fact alienates the personal “I”
- c. Von Balthasar treats Fichte and Schelling as predecessors to Hegel
- i. Concentrates on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*
 - ii. For Hegel ***the absolute law of our human spirit is divine***
 1. Apparent through Christianity which shows how “God” becomes man to overcome all contradiction to “God” (or absolute spirit)
 2. *Key = stripping oneself of everything particular and transcending particularity by embracing absolute spirit*
 3. “The normative is the ‘generalized individual’”
 4. To be integrated into “generalized individual” = achieve surrender of one’s individual “I” to become part of the “We”
 5. *This is what “spirit” consists in*
- d. Summarizes Hegel’s steps in *Phenomenology of Spirit* from sense perception to awareness that to know consciousness we must go behind the finite modes (finite thinking, reasoning)
- i. Von Balthasar = *when we do this we discover “consciousness is life and desire” and “it experiences the self-subsistence of its object which is another ‘self’”* (141)
 - ii. Conflict =
 1. We must see in God all that contradicts “God” above all death and non-being
 2. Individuality must be willing to die to allow absolute spirit, absolute freedom to stand forth
 - a. **“master/slave” dialectic**

- b. Slave surrenders to and serves the master // finite consciousness surrenders to and serves infinite consciousness
 - c. ***The infinite is present in finite rather than transcendent to the finite (as opposed to orthodox Christianity)***
 - d. Source of reconciliation is always infinite spirit
- e. Hegel explains this dynamic in Christian terms
 - i. “The death of God represented (in death of Christ) as form of reconciliation and self-revelation of infinite spirit is *the form of inner self-reconciliation, not for ‘unhappy’ consciousness, but for consciousness that realized itself as spirit*”
 - ii. ***The individual point of view (finitude) is completely surrendered and overcome***
 - iii. One’s conscience cannot be taken as ultimate (side of particularity)
 - iv. ***What is needed is to focus on reconciliation of finite and infinite that is achieved by absolute spirit***
- f. **The individual person is completely obliterated in Hegel’s thought** (von Balthasar)
 - i. Death of individual = noble sacrifice for sake of absolute spirit and “no personalizing vocation is imparted to the individual” (142) (unlike Christianity)
 - ii. The “sacrifice” symbolized by Christ = shattering of all individuality
 - iii. *In its sacrifice for sake of the whole the “I” as such is not sustained*
 - 1. “I” belongs to alienation (so Hegel)
 - 2. *His vision of absolute spirit lacks real interpersonal communion*
- g. How do we understand the “I” in relation to God?
 - i. Roles are needed given human creaturely limitations
 - 1. Such limitations are often taken as ruling our possibility of transcendence

- ii. Human desire for infinite but many hold that a particular role/identity alienates humans from the infinite
 - 1. “Attempts at Mediation”
 - a. Focuses on pre- and post-Christian thought
 - b. King as “I”
 - c. Mediating role that unites king with god he serves and represents
 - d. King struggles against forces of chaos
 - e. King as son and image of God
- iii. Ancient and modern peoples
 - 1. “Genius” also represents god
 - 2. *Daimon*
 - a. “Genius” was god who functioned like guardian angel
 - b. German romantics
 - i. “Genius” ~ spirit possessed by great artists that enables them to advance development of human spirit
 - ii. Potentially represents the Holy Spirit
- h. Von Balthasar commends late 19th early 20th century Georg Simmel’s defense of personal individuality against German idealism and modern technological civilization
 - i. Anticipated von Balthasar’s Theo-Logic
 - 1. Conceives “subject-object relationship” as “intimate reciprocal influence based on their continual coming-forth from life’s ground” (143)
 - 2. Von Balthasar critiques Simmel strongly despite valuing his intentions
 - a. Warns against “God as absolute reciprocity of the things in the world” and his view of soul’s immortality
 - b. In rejecting orthodox Christianity Simmel takes position strongly influenced by Hegel’s notion of God’s history played out in the world

- i. Final attempt at “mediation” - at uniting but not conflating God and individual “I” who seeks God
 - i. ***“I-Thou” theology of Ferdinand Ebner, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Franz Rosenzweig***
 - ii. They show link between God and personal “I” - ground of “I” in its limited roles comes only from divine revelation from divine “Thou” (144)
 - iii. *Only through the ‘name’ God uses to address individual human being is he validly and definitively distinct from every other human being*
 - iv. *Only the divine “Thou” can raise up and sustain rather than limiting or conflicting with personal human “I”*
 - v. (Rw - how does this relate to work of Robert Barron?)
 - vi. Divine “Thou” must come to us freely
- j. More than Buber the hero of this part is Rosenzweig
 - i. We find our “I” in response to God’s summoning and our “I” is receptive to God’s commandment which gives us the mission of love
 - ii. ***Ebner (only Christian among these) has final word***
 - 1. ***Everything depends upon faith in the crucified Christ who cannot be idealized as spirit or known solely as Thou who commands or even as Spirit-filled Word but is suffering incarnate love***
 - iii. **Here in the crucified Christ’s absolute self-surrender in love we find the divine “Thou” who bestows upon us our “I”, our mission of self-surrender in him for the sake of the world**
- k. Von Balthasar ends his *Prolegomena* with “Concluding Remarks”
 - i. “Who am I?”
 - 1. Attempted to move from “role” to “mission”
 - 2. Only God can give this mission
 - 3. The name truly personalized the individual by giving the individual life an enduring place in relation to God
 - a. Becomes “partner” with God hence “theo-drama” is possible
 - ii. From Theodor Haecker

1. Draws insight only Christ perfectly embodies this mission so his identity is same as his role
- iii. From Aquinas
 1. Christ's mission = intradivine procession of the Son
 - a. Mission of obedience to the Father and is suffering out of love
 - b. Through same Spirit Christ enables those who share in him by faith and love to embody a mission to "close tragic breach between personal and role"
 - c. Individual and social are perfectly reconciled
- l. Concludes "it follows that if obedient to his mission a person goes out into the world that is not only ungodly but hostile to God he will be led to experience Godforsakenness"
 - i. Concluding question = *how this highest reality of earthly existence points to existence in God*
 - ii. How tragic and Godforsaken death of the Crucified has meaning in relation to God for whom peaceful reconciliation eternally reigns

16. Conclusion

- a. Von Balthasar's *Prolegomena* does not place us in direct contact with everything in additional four volumes of *Theo-Drama*
 - i. He takes seriously task of setting forth "dramatic resources" that (understood analogously) provide basis for theo-dramatic theology
 - ii. Shows way theo-dramatic theology fulfills goals of other forms of theology seeking to supersede neo-scholastic model
 - iii. Meaning of tragedy and comedy
 - iv. How German idealism, modern psychology and sociology construe "I", "self" given multiple roles we play
 - v. Existential despair in Freud or Ionesco
 1. Result of modern dissolution of frame of "world stage" for lack of divine Author
- b. Yet he intends for *Prolegomena* to relate intimately to rest of *Theo-Drama*
 - i. Sets up ground of human identity, human "I"

- ii. *Given by the triune God*
- iii. Comes in Christ's revelation of Father through his self-surrender in love for us on the cross
 1. In self-surrender Christ is abandoned by God the Father (Matthew 27:46)
 2. ***Christ the innocent Son takes our sin upon himself in dying for our sin***
 3. Manifests "highest reality of earthly existence" which is self-surrender in love
 - a. Yet an experience of God-forsakenness
- iv. **how?**
- c. Von Balthasar has in mind Hegelian critique of Hegel
 - i. *Hegel depersonalizes what is personal all the way down*
 - ii. Turns Christianity into story of dialectical emergence of absolute spirit and must never be reduced this way
 - iii. Von Balthasar stands against Hegel
- d. Yet draws crucially upon Hegel
 - i. His critique is Hegelian
 1. Hegel describes need for identity in a good play between individual subjectivities of the characters and aim of the whole action
 - a. If aim is unity with triune God the individual subjectivities in their diverse desires can be brought together fully
 - b. Self-surrender fits goal of whole dramatic action - grounded in divine Persons themselves
 2. Devotes volume two of *Theo-Drama* to collision between infinite and finite freedom
 - a. Triune God contains in himself all otherness, contradictions, alienations, distances
 - b. ***God is caught up in earthshaking events of human history at whose heart is Godforsakenness of incarnate Son in his utter self-surrender in love***

- c. **The Son is the expression of the whole Trinity**
and he is this because Father pours himself out
 - d. Father not enclosed in himself
 - e. Pours himself out to beget a divine Person who is radically other while radically the same
 - f. *As the bond of unity that they breathe forth the Holy Spirit is the resolution of this otherness*
 - g. ***If Cross = pinnacle of the human drama we can be sure the generative and spirative Trinitarian life (expressing humble self-surrendering that allows the other to be and be other) has no rival for dramatic goodness***
- e. First part of *Prolegomena* von Balthasar sketches varieties of ways in which post-Vatican II theologians try to move beyond neo-scholasticism
 - i. We see his goals more clearly
 - ii. Historicity and political-liberationist theologies took center stage after Council
 - iii. Dogma was relativized
 - iv. Purpose of Church as orthopraxy
 - v. Relationship between orthodoxy and pastoral orthopraxy put in question
 - vi. *Dialogue came to be seen as path by which orthodoxy would lay down its weapons, humble itself, discover true orthopraxy of love and tolerance*
 - vii. In all this God's Word looked like highly fallible human word
- f. Von Balthasar presents his theo-dramatic theology as corrective to this anthropocentric and historicity theology
 - i. Incorporates dramatic action for which praxis-centered theologies call
 - ii. Deepens dramatic action theologically by *rooting it in self-surrendering love of Christ which reveals depths of Father's self-surrendering love*

- iii. **Dogma and praxis are reunited in the mission of self-surrendering love expressing the intra-divine processions**
- iv. History is reclaimed as place of collision between infinite and fallen finite freedom
- v. Triune God “risks” everything in self-surrendering love, allowing otherness to be
- vi. The theo-drama involves radical self-surrender in love
 - 1. Dogmatic basis fo distinctive Christian praxis and distinctive Christian identity becomes apparent again
 - 2. ***Radical self-surrender in love is not what we sinners want to do***
- g. Hegel urges we submit and surrender to dialectical law of life, death, resurrection by which finite + infinite spirit are reconciled in unity of absolute spirit
 - i. Such is far too impersonal, immanentist (absolute spirit is not transcendent), too predictable for actual drama
 - 1. (Rw - predictable???)
 - ii. Working with Hegelian themes (see bottom 148) von Balthasar offers Hegelian critique of Hegel and retrieves fundamental dogma and praxis of Christianity
- h. Main point = ***God the Trinity is extraordinarily good***
 - i. God is triune self-surrendering love, encompassing and allowing otherness, willing to surrender himself freely out of love for us creatures who are sinners
 - ii. This is not only something God designs to do in his goodness but = *free Trinitarian goodness God in fact is*
 - iii. ***In freely surrendering ourselves, configured to Christ, we becomes who are we meant to be through intimate and deifying participation in the divine goodness***