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Review article

**FORMING THE NEW EVANGELIST – ARDOR FROM
BEAUTY METHOD IN GOODNESS, SANCTITY AS
TRUTHFUL EXPRESSIONA
REREADING OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
AND JOHN PAUL II**

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Abstract

John Paul II has put the newness of evangelization into proportion with qualities of ardor, method and expression. Evangelization as witness of encountering the risen Lord requires growth in quality and removal of obstacles for the encounter of Christ, the prime-evangelist, with every human person, resulting in the transformation of humanity within, into a new being. This love of Christ encounters man through its own transcendental properties by overriding man's inattentiveness, ignorance and adversity, with all gentleness and respect, within an interpersonal »I-Thou« dialogue. The methodological order by which Hans Urs von Balthasar realigns the transcendentals of Being as Love – beauty, goodness, truth – offers a promising frame and substance for the interpretation of the qualities of New evangelization and those who aspire to practice it. In the encounter with the beauty of the Lord (his Glory) the human person becomes enraptured by it, resulting in religious conversion (*demonstratio religiosa*). Such a person has her ardor ignited, with an ever stronger desire of responding to the call to »come and see« and »come and follow«. Hence commences the central phase, the drama of imitating Christ; by meeting the one that is Good, the ardent evangelist finds and exhibits a method: existing by playing a supporting role to Christ's kenotic love on the stage of the world, thus going through the process of moral conversion

(*demonstratio christiana*) and becoming ever better himself. The final phase of obedience and self-emptying (in continuity with the rapture and the drama), inseparable from a life of prayer, consists in reflecting and expressing the truth lived in a saintly existence, the unique personal form of a true lover of Wisdom, for whom »to die is to gain«. In such a manner, the world which seeks witnesses more than teachers is offered abundant reason to enter an existential encounter with Being as Love in the process of intellectual conversion (*demonstratio catholica*) towards Christ as *universale concretum*.

Keywords: new evangelist, beauty, goodness, truth, von Balthasar, John Paul I

Introduction

Hans Urs von Balthasar might have been one of Saint John Paul II's favourite theologians, or at least that is what some authors would like us to believe.¹ Whatever may be the case, it is hard to argue, that von Balthasar was held in high regard by the holy Pope, or deemed at least a significant (if not admirable) theologian, since he was appointed cardinal in 1988, finally demonstrating filial obedience (a topic he was very fond of writing about) to the Pontiff on this matter, after declining the scarlet privilege twice before.

If one was to compare the life and work of the Polish Pope and the Swiss theologian, common grounds of interest certainly could be found. A keen interest in theatre comes first to mind, taking into account the Pope's pre-seminary youth and von Balthasar's *Theodramatik*. Secondly, both are considered prolific writers in their own respective service to the Church. There is a certain fondness of Johannine theology present in the lives of both men (for example, the moto *Totus Tuus* on one side and the *Community of Saint John* on the other). They also seem to share interests in similar topics, as von Balthasar himself seems to suggest (at least implicitly): the creative power of humble prayer, focus on personal act, strong sense of mission, looking up to Mary as the model of the Church and sainthood, being an ardent witness to the mystery of the Triune God, proper validation of the role of the Spirit in personal sanctification.²

¹ Cf. Aidan NICHOLS, *The Word Has Been Abroad. A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics*, Washington, 1998, XIX.

² Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, Ein Pontifikat im Zeichen Mariens. Zum 100. Geburtstag des hl. Papstes Johannes Paul II., in: Erich Maria FINK- Thomas Maria RIMMEL (ed.), *Kirche heute. Monatszeitschrift für die katholische Kirche im deutschen Sprachraum*, 5 (2020), <https://www.kirche-heute.de/ausgaben/alle-ausgaben/ausgaben-erweiterungen/2020/mai-2020.html#c2101> (Accessed 10.IX.2021); Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, A Commentary

1. New evangelization as the common ground for the encounter of John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar

One of the most important issues that John Paul II took notice of and wrestled with during his long and fruitful pontificate was the challenge and the need for what is now famously called the *New evangelization*. Was the New evangelization a topic of direct interest for von Balthasar? As far as we know, it was not. Yet, upon deeper inspection, there are some themes and motives that strangely coincide, when theological endeavours of both men are compared. For example, in the homily preached during the visit to Nowa Huta in 1979, the Pope proclaimed:

»Wherever the cross is raised up, there arises the sign that the Good News of the salvation of man through Love has already reached that place...With this thought in mind, the first cross was also raised in Mogila, close to Cracow, close to Stara Huta. With that cross we received a sign, that is to say that on the threshold of the new millennium, in these new times, in these new conditions of life, the Gospel is proclaimed once more. A new evangelization has begun, as if it were a question of a second proclamation, even though in reality it is always the same. The cross stands aloft above the world as it turns on its axis.«³

Before becoming John Paul II, Cardinal Wojtyła served in 1974 as the General Rapporteur to the Synod assembled around the challenging theme of evangelization.⁴ Based upon its synodal *Instrumentum laboris* and *Comendationes* Pope Paul VI published *Evangelii nuntiandi*, in the hope of sending a fresh forward impulse, capable of creating within the Church »a new period of evangelization«.⁵ There are some theologians, though, who conclude that the

on John Paul II's *Dominum et vivificantem*, in *Communio: International Catholic Review. Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Karol Wojtyła*, 47 (2020) 4, 839–861.

³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the shrine of the Holy Cross, Mogila*, (9.VI. 1979), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_p Polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

⁴ Cf. Lucas MOREIRA NEVES, O.P. *Evangelii nuntiandi: Paul VI's Pastoral Testament to the Church*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English*, (17. I. 2001), 10, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/evangelii-nuntiandi-paul-vis-pastoral-testament-to-the-church-1983> (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

⁵ Cf. PAUL VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi: apostolic exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI to the episcopate, to the clergy and to all the faithful of the entire world, on evangelization in the modern world*, (8. XII. 1975), no. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

term and the vision of New evangelization has its source in the first half of the 20th century: the liturgical, devotional and intelectual initiatives, eventually united into the *Kerygmatic movement*. Some of the associates were Jean Danie-lou, Henri Lubac and, among others, von Balthasar.⁶

The centrality of the Cross is a theme abundantly present in von Bal-thasar's writings. One needs to look no further than the preface of the *Heart of the World*:

»The very form of the cross, extending out into the four winds, al-ways told the ancient Church that the Cross means solidarity: its outstretched arms would gladly embrace the universe. According to the Didache, the Cross is *semeion epektaseos*, a 'sign of expansion,' and only God himself can have such a wide reach...But God can do this only as a man...And thus it is that he can reach out to the two peoples, represented by the two thieves, and tear down the wall of division (Athanasius). Even in its outward form the Cross is all-inclusive.«⁷

For von Balthasar, without a doubt, the Cross stands at the center of the New Testament, which receives its interpretation from the Resurrection. Who-ever removes the Cross and its interpretation by the New Testament from the center, no longer stands in continuity with the apostolic faith«.⁸

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* John Paul II speaks of *contemplation of the face of Christ* as the great legacy of the Jubilee, urging everyone »to be« before trying »to do«.⁹ Addressing the engagement of new ecclesial movements and com-munities, the Pope stresses the need of »being more«: rediscovering *the beauty* of each one's charism, »re-appropriating« that which already belongs to one's own *being*.¹⁰ It is not difficult to draw paralels here with the grand theme of

⁶ Cf. Scott HAHN, *Evangelizing Catholics. A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization*, Huntington, 2014, 18–21.

⁷ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Heart of the World*, San Francisco, 1979, 13–14.

⁸ Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen*, San Francisco, 2020, 89.

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II. *Novo Millennio Ineunte. Apostolic letter at the close of the Great Jubi-lee of the year 2000*, (6. I. 2001), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

¹⁰ Cf. Stanislaw Card. RYLKO, *The New Evangelization: a question of being and doing. Opening speach at the encounter of representatives from the ecclesial movements and new communities on the theme of evangelization* (25. VI. 2011). Available from: <http://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/rylko/english/new-evangelization-a-question-of-being-and-doing.pdf> (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

von Balthasar's entire trilogy: man as being in the process of becoming an image of God, being molded into Christ by participating in his mission and form of existence.¹¹

John Paul II has, famously, characterized the newness of evangelization today as a certain quality manifested through renewed *ardor, method, and expression*.¹² But what does that mean? Finding someone who offered substantial reflection into the deeper comprehension of these three qualities and their acquiring is a challenge. However, following the lead of Sergio Pintor, we could summarize here that ardor is a manifestation of an ever deeper personal union with Christ, leading to the *conversion* of the heart and awakening the conscience to the Christian vocation: holiness. Evangelization will be new in methods if *every member* of the Church becomes a *protagonist* of the diffusion of the message of Christ. New expressions depend on firm understanding of the *truth* of Christ.¹³

This brings us to, perhaps, the overarching connection between the evangelizing efforts of John Paul II and von Balthasar's *magnum opus*. One of the fundamental principles in biblical hermeneutics is the interpretation of one part of the Scriptures with another one, allowing Revelation, written down by different, Spirit-infused co-authors, to reveal *itself*. Von Balthasar was indeed a *revelation* theologian, preferring *Christology* over cosmology and anthropology as a hermeneutical key.¹⁴ It is also well known that his theological model is a *dialogical* one, based upon the *I-Thou* relation.¹⁵ As an ontological realist, open to *analogical* thinking, von Balthasar, in the proper understanding of Chalcedon, regards Christ as the unique *personification* of the analogy of being.¹⁶ This allows Christians to

¹¹ Cf. Ellero BABINI, Jesus Christ: Form and Norm of Man according to Hans Urs von Balthasar, in: David SCHINDLER (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, San Francisco, 1991. Kindle edition, location 4314.

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the XIX Assembly* of CELAM, Port-au-Prince, (9. III. 198), no. 3, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830309_assemblea-celam.html (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

¹³ Cf. Sergio PINTOR, The Holy Spirit: Protagonist of the New evangelization, in: *Tertium Millennium*. Jubilee 2000 Magazine, (1997) 5, https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01111997_p-72_en.html (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

¹⁴ Cf. Franjo TOPIC, Čovjek pred objavom Boga u misli Hansa Ursa von Balthasara, in: Ivica RAGUŽ (ed.), *Za tragovima Božjim. Teološka traganja Karla Rahnera i Hansa Ursa von Balthasara*. Zbornik radova, Đakovo, 2007, 255–272.

¹⁵ Cf. Gerald O' COLLINS, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology, Toward a new fundamental theology*, Oxford, 2011, 67.

¹⁶ Cf. Anne M. CARPENTER, *Theo-Poetics. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being*, Indiana, 2015, 3 – 61; 144 – 149.

enter into the analogy of love with Him, through Him and in Him, in the mystery of the Eucharist.¹⁷

Having all of this in mind, dare we interpret one theologian's thought with another's, putting them in analogy and dialogue? In the following paragraphs we will try to do so, by interpreting the personal ardor, method, and expression of a new evangelist through the transcendentals of Being: beauty, goodness and truth as found in von Balthasar's trilogy, through which he has tried to rearrange Christian theology by putting beauty first not so much in the sense of category, as in the sense of method. The transcendentals, as von Balthasar realigned them, serve as a platform for his reshaping of theology in a critique of Kantianism, modernism, and liberalism, thus paving the way for the articulation of a new structure of faith as knowing.¹⁸

It is this sequence of *beauty-goodness-truth* as layed out in the *Theological aesthetic*, *Theo-drama* and *Theo-logic* that seem to be in strong correlation with the concept of ardor, method and expression as vital characteristics of the New evangelization. In other words, we propose that ardor of a new evangelist may be sourced by encountering God's Glory. Enraptured by it, he finds his method in conforming his personal freedom to that of Christ by living out a mission. This experience, accompanied by prayer and reflection, results in the evangelist himself becoming an effective expression of truth, by growing in sainthood.

2. Becoming an ardent evangelist – enraptured by the Glory of the Lord

Where does one start to ignite or rekindle evangelical ardor?

Such a person in some measure already has the experience of asking the metaphysical question and performing religious and philosophical thoughts on the state of man – a limited being in a limited world, but with reason open to the unlimited, to all of being. Von Balthasar suggest this is the ground where an encounter with the epiphany of Absolute Being may take place. In other words, man is brought to consciousness of himself only by Love which reveals itself through its beauty. Thus, man realises he exists only in the interpersonal dialogue. In this appearance (*Erscheinung*), man, within his limits, grasps the

¹⁷ Cf. Aidan NICHOLS, *A Key to Balthasar. Hans urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth*, Gran Rapids, 2011, 67–69.

¹⁸ Cf. Oliver DAVIES, The theological aesthetics, in: Edward T. OAKES – David MOSS (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar* Cambridge, 2004, 133.

very essence (*Ding an sich*) of Being that is Love.¹⁹ Christian self-understanding has its origin in the glorification of divine love, for only this love is credible. It shows itself to be *self-giving* and, hence, profoundly beautiful.²⁰ The human response is then oriented towards the greater glory of this Love²¹ To glorify is to exist in Him, in love that hands itself over.²² It is the:

»expropriation of our privacy, our sealed up egoism, of our addiction to the desires that seek to draw everything to ourselves...and therefore as an act of handing over, it is essentially service...first of the self-expropriating love of God, and coming directly from this, service of all those for whose sake God has expropriated himself.«²³

By doing so, the evangelist allows for the subjective elements of his perception to pass more and more into the service of the living resurrected Christ who is Incarnate Beauty.²⁴ As all creatures proceed from God they resemble Him through the transcendentals: beauty, goodness, truth, integrity, existing in continuous *circumincession*.²⁵ Awakened with beauty, moved by it, man develops the innate dynamism to move toward God, who at the same time always precedes with every proceeding of the creature, as He is ever *semper maior*.²⁶ This beauty of God, von Balthasar, according to Scriptures, calls Glory (*kabod, doxa*). It is a *theological* transcendental which exists in an indissoluble *perichoresis* with the philosophical transcendentals of God as Being.²⁷

Indeed, our experience tells us that the object of our love appears not just beautiful but overpoweringly *glorious*, as it was for Paul in front of Damascus. There he was himself enraptured into Christ's beauty. Impressed by his Form, he became a suffering »fool« for Love.²⁸ Experiencing rapture, the observer is seized by beauty. Christ is the Form of this beauty, whose radiance

¹⁹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Resume of My Thought*, in: *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 15 (1988) 4, 468–473.

²⁰ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, San Francisco, 1990, Kindle edition, location 6413.

²¹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Love alone is credible*, San Francisco, 2004, Kindle edition, location 41–42.

²² Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, San Francisco, 1983, 397.

²³ *Ibid.*, 403.

²⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form*, San Francisco, 1982, 178.

²⁵ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Logic, I: The Truth of the World*, San Francisco, 2000, Kindle edition, location 107.

²⁶ Cf. John O' DONNELL SJ, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Collegeville, 1992, 18–35.

²⁷ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the form*, 119.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

breaks through from within the Form, drawing the beholder into itself.²⁹ It is the *depth* and the fullness of Being as Love that is beautiful and perceivable through and in the Form. God acts and is revealed in his depths. In salvation history the aspiring evangelist is thus enabled to observe a genuine self representation on God's part, the unfolding of Himself in the worldly- nature, man, and history.³⁰

The observer is lead into the act of *conversion*: the turning away from self to Christ where true self is found.³¹ Faith becomes an experience of the journey out of ourselves towards *joy*: an eschatological gift that which belongs to the future, but nevertheless already offered, if but a taste of what is to come by the Spirit.³² The final goal is the new evangelist's participation in Christ's Godmanhood. Such God's venturing forth to man (revelation) and man's to God (faith), this double *extasis*, enables the *admirabile commercium* and results in, as Balthasar, puts it, a *conubium* between God and the evangelist in Christ as between Head and Body of new humanity.³³ The Glory of the Lord then ignites the *eros* for »things unseen« but announced in the visibleness and revelation of the Incarnation. This *eros* of faith is a movement which the word »faith« describes only imperfectly, but it does have in it its *Sitz im Leben*.³⁴

This is the aesthetic experience of faith in which, it could be said, the beholder is given eyes of perception, where the light of grace comes to deepen the power of sight. For von Balthasar, seeing and believing are complementary; referring to John Henry Newman he concludes that the one who contemplates the Glory of the Lord experiences a certain convergence of what is evident so that a conclusion emerges as something suddenly seen.³⁵ What God offers man can see, understand, appropriate and live in keeping with his human nature.³⁶ The encounter with Christ necessarily takes place through the subjective evidence and the senses; perceiving the world and Being relies upon seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching the Word of Life, all of which culminates with the placing of the fingers in the wound on the side.³⁷

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115–117.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 227; 522.

³² Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, 19.

³³ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the form*, 125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 175–176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 311–314.

Therefore, where can an aspiring evangelist see the Form in order to transform his life with new ardor? Since the center of Christian faith is the risen Christ, reachable through our grace-enhanced senses (1 John 1: 1–4) as the appearance of the invisible God, then faith is *contemplative*: looking at Jesus, the evangelist sees the Glory of the Father, the radiance of the common trinitarian being that is the super-form³⁸. It draws the subject out beyond himself into the sphere of Christ in whom fullness of divine being exist bodily (1 Col 1:19).³⁹ As Incarnate Love, He is not merely one object of beauty among others, but rather the perfection and measure of all worldly beauty.⁴⁰ In Him there is exceptional integrity, clarity, consonance, harmony and light. Through Him the human person finds order, disposition, proportion and adequate relationality of her essence with the Being.⁴¹

Yet, the divine aesthetic, its trinitary radiance through the glorious Form of the obedient Christ, brings an end to all worldly classical notions of beauty as measure, proportion and harmony.⁴²

This God's beauty can be understood as the *fittingness* of the incarnate Son's actions in the Spirit to the Father's will that radiates the splendor of God's triune love to the world. As such, it renews human imagination and therefore, creative expression and ethical action.⁴³ What we see then, through the Son's *obedience* to the Father and the Father's glorification of the Son is the radiance of their eternal love.⁴⁴ Such Christocentric understanding of beauty includes tragic realities of human existence and has its pinnacle in the Cross, as the most glorious splendour of the aesthetic Form.⁴⁵

The Form and its glorious radiance can be *mediated* through the life of the Church. Through the eucharistic cult, the sacraments. Liturgy should be approached not in auto-referentiality of self-satisfaction which blinds us to Glory, but in *pro-skinesis* of fear and trembling before the Lamb slain since

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 432;480.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 77; 431–432.

⁴¹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, San Francisco, 1989, 385–409.

⁴² Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form*, 460.

⁴³ Cf. Stephen M. GARRETT, God's Beauty-in-Act: An Artful Renewal of Human Imagining, in: *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14 (2012) 4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263754222_God's_Beauty-in-Act_An_Artful_Renewal_of_Human_Imagining (Accessed 10.IX.2021).

⁴⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, 249.

⁴⁵ Cf. Aidan NICHOLS, *A Key to Balthasar*, 1–27.

the beginning of the world.⁴⁶ Aptness to see the beauty of the sacrament is acquired through harmonising (*sich Einstimmen*) one's own existence with the Son's self-depriving of the God-form and choosing the form of humility, the Cross.⁴⁷ Within the context of this divine kenotic love, even death itself becomes »beautiful« and properly intelligible.⁴⁸

Scriptures also serve as a mediator of impressing the Form into the human person.⁴⁹ We participate in the Glory of the Lord through sharing in the archetypal experiences of the Church: the Marian experience, the Apostle's eyewitness, the ecclesial layers (Petrine, Pauline, Jacobine and Johannine)⁵⁰ Form and its radiance can be encountered in the *dogma* of the Church, which should be seen as a mold for her proper *preaching, theology* and *activity* as vehicles of Christoformic radiance.⁵¹ Finally, one should never underestimate the willingness of matter to receive and express the saving signs of grace; the *cosmos*, therefore, with its holy *angels*, serves as a witness to the Glory of the Lord.⁵²

An evangelist involved in such encounters with Glory, effectively participates in the incorporation of the Church and the world into Christological disclosure of the absolute trinitarian Being.⁵³ Enraptured by Beauty, he becomes involved in encountering God in the *neighbour*, finds ways to embody *solidarity* in the Church and incorporates himself into her *nuptiality* towards the Bridegroom.⁵⁴

3. Goodness as a method – becoming a person through mission

How does an evangelist ignited with ardor develop his method of spreading the Good news? God only shows himself to someone, only enraptures him, in order to commission him. Where a thing of beauty is really and radically beheld, *freedom* too is radically opened up and a decision can take place.⁵⁵ For

⁴⁶ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Nova pojašnjenja*, Zagreb, 2006, 97 – 105.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the form*, 253.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Life Out of Death: Meditations on the Paschal Mystery*, San Francisco, 2012, 70–71.

⁴⁹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form*, 530; 531.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 351;554.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 590–601.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 660.

⁵³ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, 432.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 432–484.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theological Dramatic Theory, II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, 377.

God's revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is an action in and upon the world and the world can only respond and hence »understand«, through action.⁵⁶ The central issue in theo-drama is that God has made his own the tragic situation of human existence, right down to its ultimate abysses.⁵⁷ In this play, all spectators must eventually become fellow actors, whether they wish to or not.⁵⁸

An evangelist enraptured by Christ's beauty recognises Him as the perfect man with his peerless drama, the living framework within which every human destiny is acted out; every human destiny is judged by his perfection and saved by his redeeming meaning.⁵⁹ In Christ, man begins to see that God's action really is affected by the world's ambiguity and remains a hidden good that can only be experienced as the truth if we share in performing it, *embodying* it increasingly in the world, thus leading the ambiguities of world theatre beyond themselves to a singleness of meaning that can come only from God.⁶⁰

The personal »idea« of each individual finite freedom lies in the incarnate Son in such a way that each is given a unique participation in the Son's uniqueness.⁶¹ One acquires authentic *personhood*, along with one's eternal destiny, solely from God, who also apportions the strength to reach it.⁶² Only the action itself will reveal who each individual is; and it will not reveal, through successive unveilings, primarily who the individual always was, but rather who he is to become through the action, through decisions and encounters with others.⁶³ Aligning his existence and freedom to the one of Christ, an evangelist (playing a supporting role) participates in the Great drama: creation is embraced within the Trinity.⁶⁴

Overcoming the concept of freedom as an unauthentic and destructive indefiniteness, ultimate human freedom is realised in the freedom of the Son which carries a three-dimensional relation to the Father: thanksgiving, prayer

⁵⁶ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, I: Prolegomena*, San Francisco, 1988, Kindle edition, location 168–170.

⁵⁷ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theological Dramatic Theory, II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, 721.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 798.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1294.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theological Dramatic Theory, I: Prolegomena*, 241–252.

⁶¹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theological Dramatic Theory, II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, 4042.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4970.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, V: The Last Act*, San Francisco, 1998, Kindle edition, location 748.

and filial birth in the Spirit.⁶⁵ The good reveals itself the moment this freedom is bestowed, drawing aside the veil to show that, instead of subordinating goodness to one's own exercise of power, absolute power is identical with absolute self-giving.⁶⁶

Accepting and living his mission, the evangelist begins to realise: humanity is the summation of the cosmos, its vicarious representation, as the tie (*copulatio*) that binds the spiritual and the physical world. This mediatory role is constitutive of man, who through the fragility of his flesh (best seen in death) represents the entire cosmic self-surrender. Nature itself is a sacrificial process, a self oblation that gives itself materially to humanity whose special vocation is to hand it over to the Father. This is fulfilled only in and through Christ and his Mystical Body, the incarnated Chalice of Being that makes itself poor as an expression of His fullness – the death that eucharistically fills up the cosmos with triune life.⁶⁷

4. Finding an effective expression of truth: becoming a saint

Man is not just a perceiver and an actor, but also a thinker, speaker and formulator, expressing and justifying his praxis (mission) in human concepts and words. There can be no Christian praxis (drama) if not guided by *theoria* as its *light* and *norm*.⁶⁸ How does the new evangelist express the truth effectively? He should strive to incorporate metaphysics, poetry and a language abundant with symbol and analogy into »his« Christology, resulting in a theology that is *theo-poetical*.⁶⁹ But beneath all tools, techniques and communicative abilities, lies *identity* as the foundation: being conformed to the person of Christ who *is* the Truth.⁷⁰

An evangelist, immersed in his mission (the drama of two freedoms) perceives this is possible because all that is true in the world »holds together« in Him (Col 1:17) and that the total epiphany, self-surrender, and self-expression of God the Father is the Son.⁷¹ In this conception, truth is personal and is

⁶⁵ Cf. Ivica RAGUŽ, Sloboda kao rez i milost. Trinitarna teologija slobode Hana Ursa von Balthasara, in: *Teološki fragmenti I*, Đakovo, 2016, 13–27.

⁶⁶ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, IV: The Action*, San Francisco, 1994, Kindle edition, location 2193.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Logic, II: Truth of God*, San Francisco, 2004, Kindle edition, location 3098.

⁶⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Logic, I: The Truth of the World*, 298.

⁶⁹ Cf. Anne M. CARPENTER, *Theo-poetics*, 3 – 61; 144. – 149.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Logic, II: Truth of God*, 130.

⁷¹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Epilogue*, San Francisco, 2004, Kindle edition, location 1107–1110.

revealed through an actual existence of self abandon, of being drawn by one's personal *eidon*, the God's Idea of me, of which the archetype is the Logos. The evangelist, therefore, abandons himself personally to Christ who, universally, discloses the truth upon the cosmos in his self abandonment to the Father.⁷²

Receiving the Paul VI award in the presence of John Paul in 1984, von Balthasar stated that the division of theology and sanctity (elevation of knowledge over love; a distorted spirituality) is the greatest catastrophe in the history of the Church.⁷³ An evangelist, therefore, becomes aware that *lovers* are the ones who know most about God; the theologian must listen to them.⁷⁴ The inner reality of love can only be recognized by love; saints *know* by *loving*.⁷⁵ This is the love of Christ, the love of the new and eternal Covenant: love as »heartfelt compassion«, as »kind, receptive openness«, »an attitude of lowliness«, »a meekness that does not defend itself«, »long-suffering patience«, the goal of the entire Old Testament education of man, which sought to conform man inwardly to God.⁷⁶

An aspiring evangelist finds that love as such tolerates no measure; it itself is the measure of all things. The truth is the measure of being, but love is the *measure of truth*, while sin consists in placing the measure of truth above the measure of love. Love, by contrast, delights in receiving the measure of knowledge from the hand of the beloved, revealing truth not just as something grasped from nature, but very much a gift received in *dialogue* and *participation* in *mystery*. One's consciousness, one's self-possession and possession of being, can grow only and precisely to the extent that one breaks out of being in and for oneself in the act of communication, in exchange, and in human and cosmic *sympatheia*. It is through conforming to this Love that the evangelist learns how the light of the Cross makes worldly being intelligible, exposing the worldly dominion of knowledge, technology, and cybernetics as they strive to overpower and suffocate the forces of love within the world.⁷⁷

This is done through the Spirit. The new evangelist, then acknowledges that the Spirit is the true, primary *subject* of theology and that it is the task of the Spirit to incorporate man into the life of God and become the seeing eyes

⁷² Cf. Mark A. McINTOSH, *Christology From Within. Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Notre Dame – Indiana, 2000, 27–29.

⁷³ Georges CHANTRAINE, *Exegesis and Contemplation in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, in: David L. SCHINDLER (ed.) *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 2726.

⁷⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Love alone is credible*, 65.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 634.

⁷⁶ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Love Alone is Credible*, 1162–1165.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1295–1318.

of grace in us.⁷⁸ The human person, therefore, imitates Christ – he grounds his impetus, strength and actions in the Spirit: that anonymous agent of truth and love, always being-for-another, the *pneuma spermatikos* that gathers all creation around Christ.⁷⁹ In the Spirit, the human evangelist becomes an agent of exposing, little by little, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of Christ (Col 2,3) and draws Christians into it.⁸⁰

For such work of the Spirit, *prayer* is instrumental. The evangelist who prays not only stands before the truth and contemplates it *objectively*. He lives by the knowledge that the truth (the Spirit within us) is more interior to us than we are to ourselves; that we have been predestined and chosen in God, in God's authentic truth, prior to the foundation of the world, prior to our own existence, to be his holy, unspotted children.⁸¹

Such a theological existence is filled with wonder and self-giving, and thus finds its mould in the *fiat* of Mary, the daughter of her Son. That is why only saints have a warrant to speak about God, for they have received the Word into every fiber of their being.⁸² This is why von Balthasar considered an adequately developed theological hagiography to be an enormous enrichment of the Church and her teaching.⁸³ He considers an authentic theological existence to be inconceivable without a living relationship with the Virgin-Mother.⁸⁴ This includes acceptance of God's mysterious ways (often unfathomable and unpredictable), failure and the Cross.⁸⁵

This leads the new evangelist to conformity to Christ in the *johannine* manner: living with the Mother is the shortest way to understanding Christian faith and its dogma.⁸⁶ And to a life void of all careerism, driven by the notion that the Church and the world yearn for more love and those who are ready to do work no one else wants, *dissapearing* in the Church while bonding

⁷⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Theo-Logic, III: The Spirit of Truth*, San Francisco, 2005, Kindle edition, location 279.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 207; 373.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁸¹ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Prayer*, San Francisco, 1986, 77–78.

⁸² Cf. David L. SCHINDLER (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 88.

⁸³ Cf. Ivan IVANDA, *Teologija i svetost u djelu Hansa Urša von Balthasara*, in: Ivica RAGUŽ (ed.), *Za tragovima Božjim. Teološka traganja Karla Rahnera i Hansa Urša von Balthasara*, 313–326.

⁸⁴ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Dalla teologia di Dio alla teologia della Chiesa*, in: *Communio* 58 (1981), 15–16.

⁸⁵ Cf. Ivica RAGUŽ, *Hans Urs von Balthasar i Karl Rahner o Blaženoj Djevici Mariji*, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 79 (2009) 4, 813–845.

⁸⁶ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Sestre u duhu. Terezija iz Lisieuxa i Elizabeta iz Dijona*, Brezovica, 2009, 38–39.

its Petrine and its Marian dimension.⁸⁷ Like von Balthasar, not to aspire to be a »professional« theologian for its own purpose, but looking up to the example of saints (like Therese of Lisieux and Elisabeth of Dijon, or saint Ireneus and Maxim the Confessor) to live a fully realised theological existence based upon total selfgiving to the object of one's love.⁸⁸

5. Papal successors of John Paul II and new analogical possibilities

5.1. *An ardent orant, a good shepherd, a holy philosopher – von Balthasar and Benedict XVI in analogous dialogue*

John Paul II is not the only Pope whose thought could be put into analogical and dialogical relations with the theology of von Balthasar in order to find deeper insight into developing the person of an evangelist and a theologian. Pope Benedict XVI continued the work of his predecessor on the New evangelization by establishing The Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and assigning it with specific tasks.⁸⁹ He is also well familiar with von Balthasar's life and work. As a fellow German-speaking cardinal back then, in his panegyric upon von Balthasar's passing, he offered what is probably the most concise and accurate definition of the man, saying: »For me, to live is Christ: this phrase...from the Letter to the Phillipians sums up in a final way his whole journey.«⁹⁰

Ratzinger in his own explorations on the nature and mission of theology reflects upon images often found on the sarcophagi dating back to the 3rd century: the images of a *shepherd*, a *philosopher* (holding the Gospel) and an *orant*, offering yet another insight into the harmony and fusion of action, intellect and contemplation in a moral, ethical and religious conversion.⁹¹ The implication of the early Christian artist is obvious: a philosopher who does not find his reflection on autoreferential and autonomous thinking but instead on an

⁸⁷ Cf. Maximilian GREINER, *The Community of St. John. A Conversation with Cornelia Capol and Martha Gisi*, in: David L. SCHINDLER (ed.), *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 1868.

⁸⁸ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Sestre u Duhu*, 458.

⁸⁹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Ubicumque et semper. Apostolic letter in the form of motu proprio establishing the Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization* (21. IX. 2010), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20100921_ubicumque-et-semper.html (Accessed 10. IX. 2021).

⁹⁰ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Ein Mann der Kirche für die Welt*, in: K. LEHMANN – W. KASPER (eds.) *Hans Urs von Balthasar, Gestalt und Werk*, Cologne, 1989, 353–354.

⁹¹ Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, San Francisco, 1995, 13–70.

encounter with the Word has discovered the true beginning in philosophy. In other words, he *converted*, becoming a Christian philosopher – a theologian. This true beginning is not an *it* but a *Thou*: Christ the Word made flesh. He becomes not only the beginning, but the new *I*, enabling Christians to say »It is no longer I who live«. ⁹²

Pope emeritus also notices:

»Divorce of preaching and teaching is most profoundly opposed to the essence of the biblical message...the proclamation of the faith is also the normative criterion of theology: indeed, this very proclamation is the object of theological reflection...Though not all men can be professional theologians, access to the great fundamental cognitions is open to everyone.« ⁹³

In other words, the new evangelist, even without an official academical pedigree, could still engage in significant theological reflection, and vice versa; such reflection does not exist without proclamation of, may we add, proper ardor, method and expression. A theologian is an evangelist, or he is not a theologian at all. Von Balthasar, however, certainly may have methodologically reordered these three aspects of Christian identity that Ratzinger wrote about. The *orant – contemplative* might have emerged as »first«, ardent in his rapture by the Lord's Glory. Impressed by the Christ – From he would find his supporting role in the Christ-drama and grow in goodness living his *sheperdly mission*. Finally, conformed to Christ in prayer and pastoral work, he would become a *saint – true lover of Wisdom* and its authentic expression.

5.2. *Discovering the Glory of the Lord in the »Joy of the Gospel«*

Three months after elected Pope, Francis published *Evangelii Gaudium*, encouraging the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization. ⁹⁴ We have already mentioned that von Balthasar starts his programatic trilogy noticing that, by seeing the Glory of the Lord, faith becomes an experience of

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium. Apostolic exhortation of the holy father on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world*, (24. XI. 2013), no. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (Accessed 10.IX. 2021), (Hereinafter: EG).

journeying towards *joy* – a taste of what is to come by the Spirit.⁹⁵ Francis starts his programmatic encyclical with *joy* of the encounter with Jesus. Before calling for spirit-filled evangelizers⁹⁶, the Pope notices the contemporary man's inability to hear the voice of God (is this not the absence of saints?), nor feel the quiet joy of his love (is this not the absence of seeing the Form?), nor desire to do good (is this not the absence of the drama of two freedoms)?⁹⁷ Could not a similar analogy be noticed with the Pope's observations on temptations of pastoral workers who experience *spiritual worldliness*, seeking not the Lord's Glory but human glory; *spiritual sloth* and pragmatism while resisting giving themselves over completely to mission and thus ending up in a state of paralysis and acedia; *sterile pessimism* and defeatism leading to relativism, as a fruit of an anxious and self-centred lack of trust in the I-Thou dynamism?⁹⁸ In all this, nevertheless, the Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Although, to some extent, he lived to see it become a central effort of the contemporary Church and its Pontiffs, the New evangelization was not, judging by published works, a topic of direct interest for Hans Urs von Balthasar. Yet, even elementary examination of von Balthasar's work may prove to show that in the last four decades since his passing (1980) there has been a considerable correlation between his theological itinerary and the pastoral itinerary of the Bishop of Rome. In particular, von Balthasar's realigning of the transcendentals of Being in the methodological sequence of *beauty-goodness-truth* offers a deeper insight into the nature of ardor, method and expression as vital characteristics of the New evangelization according to John Paul II. Therefore, future study of the New evangelization, the identity of the Church and each and every one of its members through the prism of von Balthasar's *magnum opus* may turn out to be a very rewarding endeavour.

⁹⁵ Cf. Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant*, 19.

⁹⁶ Cf. EG, 259–261.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80–97.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Sažetak

**FORMIRANJE NOVOG EVANGELIZATORA – ŽAR IZ LJEPOTE,
METODE U DOBROTI, TE SVETOSTI KAO ISTINITOG IZRIČAJA.
PONOVO ČITANJE HANSA URSA VON BALTHASARA I IVANA PAVLA II.**

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Ivan Pavao II stavio je u srazmjer novost evangelizacije sa kvalitetama žara, metode i izraza. Evangelizacija kao svjedočanstvo susreta s osobom uskrslug Gospodina zahtjeva rast u tim kvalitetama i uklanjanje prepreka susretu Krista, primarnog evangelizatora, sa svakom ljudskom osobom, rezultirajući nutarnjom preobrazbom čovječanstva u novo stvorenje. Ova ljubav Kristova susreće čovjeka putem vlastitih transcendentalnih svojstava nadilazeći ljudsku nepažnju, neznanje i otpor, blago i s poštovanjem, kroz međuosobni »Ja-Ti« dijalog. Metodološki poredak kojim Hans Urs von Balthasar preuređuje transcendentale Bitka kao Ljubavi – ljepotu, dobrotu, istinu – nudi obećavajući okvir i sadržaj za tumačenje kvaliteta nove evangelizacije i onih koji teže k tome da je vrše. U susretu sa ljepotom Gospodina (njegovom Slavom) ljudska osoba biva njome ugrabljena, što rezultira religioznim obraćenjem (demonstratio religiosa). Takvoj osobi zapaljen je žar, sa sve snažnijom čežnjom odaziva na poziv »dodi i vidi« i »dodi i slijedi me«. Tako počinje središnja faza, drama nasljedovanja Krista; susrećući Dobroga, ožareni evangelizator nalazi i očituje metodu: postojanje igranjem uloge sporedne onoj Kristove kenotičke ljubavi na pozornici svijeta, prolazeći tako kroz proces moralnog obraćenja (demonstratio christiana) i bivajući tako i sam sve više dobar. Završna faza poslušnosti i samo-ispražnjenja (u kontinuitetu sa ugrabljenošću i dramom), neodvojiva od života u molitvi, sastoji se od promišljanja i izražavanja življene istine putem svetačke egzistencije, jedinstvene osobne forme istinskog ljubitelja Mudrosti, kojemu je »smrt dobitak«. Na ovaj način, svijetu koji traži svjedoke više od učitelja ponuđeni su izdašni razlozi za ulazak u egzistencijalni susret s Bitkom kao Ljubavi u procesu intelektualnog obraćenja (demonstratio catholica) Kristu kao onome koji je universale concretum.

Ključne riječi: novi evangelizator, ljepota, dobrota, istina, von Balthasar, Ivan Pavao II.