

**Razprave**

Izvirni znanstveni članek (1.01)

*Bogoslovni vestnik* 74 (2014) 4, 639—660

UDK: 27-185.5

Besedilo prejeto: 9/2014; sprejeto: 12/2014

*Gregory J. Semeniuk***The Soteriology of Hans Urs von Balthasar**

*Abstract.* This article examines the soteriology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. It was originally chapter one of my dissertation on the subject of Balthasar's biblical theology of sacrifice. In the larger work, I argue that Balthasar appropriates both the cultic and prophetic material of Scripture. My method is to trace Balthasar's theological aesthetics and contemporary biblical exegesis. The larger study advances the understanding of Balthasar's soteriology by showing its relationship to the OT cultic liturgy, on the one hand, and presenting sacrifice as the service rendered to God by humankind in creation. In this article I briefly present Balthasar's soteriology. I presuppose Balthasar's biblical hermeneutic for interpreting the divine and human relationship on the basis of glory. In the revelation of the glory of Christ, the Father communicates his Spirit and Word and empowers humankind's participation in the Trinity. According to Balthasar, the true sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a Trinitarian event of the exchange of mutual self-emptying love between the Father and Son. The Incarnation places Jesus at the center of the drama of sinner's loss of glory, on the one hand; and human being's role in creation as sharer in God's glory, on the other. By common agreement of the persons of the Trinity, the Son is sent on mission to redeem humanity from sin and death. Jesus' sacrifice, inclusive of the sinner's reality, transcends the sinner's 'No', and reveals the Father's glory. Balthasar's soteriology, however, is best understood by humankind's participation in the cosmic liturgy, creation.

*Keywords:* Salvation, sacrifice, priesthood, Balthasar, paschal mystery, atonement

*Povzetek:* **Soteriologija Hansa Ursa von Balthasarja**

Članek obravnava soteriologijo Hansa Ursa von Balthasarja. Izvorno je bil prvo poglavje moje disertacije o Balthasarjevi biblični teologiji žrtvovanja. V svoji disertaciji ugotavljam, da Balthasar sprejema tako kulturni kot preroški material Svetega pisma. Moja metoda je, da raziskujem Balthasarjevo teološko estetiko in sodobno biblično eksegezo. Moja disertacija prispeva k razumevanju Balthasarjeve soteriologije tako, da na eni strani pokaže njen odnos do starozavezne kulturne teologije, na drugi strani pa predstavi žrtvovanje kot način, kako človeštvo v stvarjenju služi Bogu. V tem članku kratko predstavim Balthasarjevo soteriologijo. Predpostavljam Balthasarjevo biblično hermenevtiko za razlago Božjega in človeškega odnosa na osnovi slave. V razodetju Kristusove slave Oče

sporoča svojega Duha in Besedo ter omogoča udeležbo človeštva v Trojici. Po Balthasarjevem mnenju je pravo Kristusovo žrtvovanje trinitaren dogodek izmenjave medsebojne samoizpraznjujoče ljubezni med Očetom in Sinom. Utelešenje na eni strani postavlja Jezusa v središče dramatične grešnikove izgube slave in na drugi strani govori o vlogi človeškega bitja v stvarjenju kot deležnika Božje slave. Po medsebojnem sporazumu oseb v Trojici je Sin poslan, da odreši človeštvo greha in smrti. Jezusova žrtev vključno z grešnikovo resničnostjo presega grešnikov »ne« in razodeva Očetovo slavo. Balthasarjevo soteriologijo pa najbolje razumemo prek udeležbe človeštva v kozmični liturgiji, stvarjenju.

*Ključne besede:* odrešenje, žrtvovanje, duhovništvo, Balthasar, pashalna skrivnost, sprava

According to Balthasar, the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is a sin offering (*Sündopfer*).<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ reconciles humankind with God, by removing sin, restoring God's justice, fulfilling the Father's will, and revealing a way to the Father.<sup>2</sup> Balthasar shows how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ resolves the question of the sinner's hope of salvation given the realities of lost agency and limits for relationship with God (GL 6, 102–103; MP, 12–13). Jesus Christ enacts the drama of the encounter of human and divine freedom, revealing a definitive glory for incorporating sinners into Trinitarian love (GL 7, 304–305; TD 4, 317). Balthasar finds in the OT cultic liturgy of Israel a similar drama being enacted, wherein God's glory confronts sinners and invites them to transcend the limits of sin and death (GL 6, 168; GL 7, 315). Balthasar integrates the liturgical and cultic material from the Bible within a distinctive Christo-Trinitarian rendering of the Paschal Mystery. He reflects in his soteriology the drama of Jesus' approach to the Father, as substitute for sinners, judged, and offered up 'for us' (TD 4, 317). The Paschal Mystery also concerns the saving action of the Father as revealed in the Son, who represents the fullness of the Father's glory in creation (Hebrews 1:3) (TD 4, 317; Birot 1997, 262–265).<sup>3</sup> The glory revealed in Jesus Christ is a participative reality for life in the Trinity (GL 6, 12–14; GL 7, 303; Papanikolau 2003, 50–52).

I propose to present a concise exposition of Balthasar's soteriology. This article is divided into two sections with their proper subsections. The first section develops the true sacrifice from the side of Christology; the second develops that of saving action from the side of Trinitarian theology. In the latter section, I will make explicit Balthasar's use of Trinitarian inversion — a term coined by him in order to account for the common action of the Trinity in the work of salvation (TD 4,

<sup>1</sup> MP, 136-141; GL 7, 34-37, 50, 204-211, 214, 216-218, 223, 230, 390, 397; GL 6, 166, 223, 296-297, 302-305, 391, 397-401, 410-411; Birot, 1997, 264.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford and Anatolios 2005, 741; Daly 2009, 102-109; Hofius 2004, 173; Howsare 2009, 115; Lösel 2004, 166; Nelson 2003, 251-252; Pitstick 2007, 310; Schumacher 1999, 58-59, 69-70; Schwager 1987, 183-200; Waldstein 1984, 23; Young 1975, 11-12, 94-100; Štrukelj 2002; 2004; 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Bible quotes are taken from The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993).

335; Oakes 2005, 289–299; TD 3, 183–185). In his account of the Triduum, Balthasar integrates the Descent into a theology of sacrifice by showing what it meant for one of the Trinity to have suffered the fate of sinner, the abandonment of death in Hell, and the resurrection from the dead (Hunt 1997, 58, 65; Saward 1990, 9). In the last sub-section, Balthasar's soteriology is interpreted as participation in the cosmic liturgy of the renewed creation. Finally, the conclusion discusses how Balthasar's biblical theology both uses and transcends cultic sacrifice by incorporating the prophetic form of sacrifice.

## 1. The True Sacrifice

### 1.1 The Incarnation

In the Christ event, God's Word descended into the covenant relationship (John 1:14–18). God himself would fulfill human freedom and receive it to himself in the person and mission of the Son. *The true sacrifice is God's act of grace in both the openness and obedience of Jesus' freedom that reveals the true human being as sinless and immortal.*<sup>4</sup> Implied in this statement is the doctrine of the Incarnation, at which time the Father's own reality of self-emptying love is brought to expression in the freedom of Jesus. The Incarnation represents the Son's entrance into the 'space' (*Raum*) granted by God to humanity in creation. God's own covenant righteousness, therefore, takes on human form by associating itself substantially in the freedom of the Son. God's justification of the image is the effect of the 'active word' (*dabar*) of God to shape human beings according to the truth of the image. However, the fullness of God's righteousness is represented »in the personal union of the *Logos* with the man Jesus ...« (Nichols 1998, 215). Yet the freedom of Jesus remains open to the justifying word of the Father. The essential openness of the Son's human freedom must be fulfilled by grace. If the saving action is to assist sinners it must work its liberation from within the limits of sin and death. The Incarnation, therefore, is directed to the self-offering of Christ upon the cross (GL 7, 212). In the encounter with the living God at the moment of death Jesus' freedom will be judged and accepted as the Father's own reality.

### 1.2 Jesus as Representative of the Father's Righteousness

In considering the true sacrifice we must consider both the openness and obedience of Jesus' freedom in relationship to the Father. Sacrifice as a response

<sup>4</sup> This statement represents one of six aspects of Balthasar's biblical theology of sacrifice, specifically, no. 4 below. The six features are as follows, (1) Sacrifice is God's act of grace in human freedom occasioned by the human being's obedient response to God's justifying word. (2) Sacrifice is God's act of grace in human freedom, constituting the human being's openness to the encounter with God in the liturgy. (3) The sacrifice of the righteous representative reveals God's glory. (4) The true sacrifice is God's act of grace in both the openness and obedience of Jesus' freedom that reveals the true human being as sinless and immortal. (5) The sacrifice of Christ is a Trinitarian act revealing the Father's glory in the freedom of the Son, granting access to the Spirit. (6) Jesus' sacrifice is God's act of grace in human freedom that fulfills the original covenant.

to God's word realizes the covenant reality, namely, by the mutual giving and receiving of God's self-emptying love (grace). The basis of sacrifice is the giving of God's 'word' (*Wort*) and its 'return' (*Antwort*). This dynamic relationship therefore presumes an openness that has as its source God's own spirit. This exceptional openness is an active dimension of Jesus' personhood as received in the Spirit. Balthasar describes Jesus' freedom as directed to the accomplishment of the Father's word (GL 7, 245; McIntosh 2004, 32). Balthasar describes the Son's openness to the Father as follows:

The unity lies in the transparency of the one sent, who does not his own will, but the will of the one who sent him (Jn 6:38), who does not speak for himself, and accordingly does not seek his own glory, and precisely for this reason is 'true' (7:18), i.e. a word that is transparent to the one who is speaking: 'My teaching is not mine, but the teaching of the one who sent me' (7:16; 14:10. 24). But the synthesis which is before John's eyes comes about in the already present death of Jesus, in his 'being given up', 'falling into the earth', 'being raised up'. Everything points to 'the hour', and is already outlined on this basis. (GL 7, 142)

In the quote above, Balthasar interprets the 'transparence' (*Transparenz*) of Jesus as the one who is 'sent from the Father' (*Gesendete vom Vater*). Jesus' openness establishes his relationship to the Father, and his obedience expresses who the Father is. Implied in this quote is Balthasar's Trinitarian theology based in both the unity of and distinction between the Father and Son. At times Balthasar interprets the Incarnation as the separation of the Son from the Father. Yet the word separation for Balthasar means that Jesus is on mission (Hunt 1997, 60). In the divine economy, according to Mark McIntosh, Jesus' identity in relationship to the Father is lived out in a common Trinitarian mission (McIntosh 2004, 31–32). And Nichols writes, » ... in bearing witness to God as a man, Jesus is what he expressed (God himself) but not whom he expresses (the Father) ... (Nichols 2007, 5).« At the Incarnation the Son assumes a true and integral human freedom that distinguishes him from the Father. Yet the freedom of the Son is lived in unity with the Father on account of the Son's obedience to the Father's word. For Balthasar, the Father's word is identical with both truth and love (GL 6, 54–55; 57–61; GL 7, 225–226; Davies 2004, 134–135). In addition, Jesus' sinlessness allows him to claim a reality that is equal to the Father. Implied in this statement is the divine gift of freedom given to humanity at the time of creation. Hence, the Son enters into the image of man at the Incarnation by the power of the Spirit to occupy and thus reveal the original openness to God's grace.

The word 'synthesis' (*Synthese*) has a soteriological meaning for Balthasar. Its meaning in German is similar to the English, namely, the coming together of parts so as to make a whole. However, Balthasar does not imply the Hegelian dialectic of two partial theses into a new and superior conception. Rather, Balthasar intends synthesis to express God's gift of freedom, on the one hand, and its fulfillment by grace on the other. Hence, God's glory in Jesus Christ is not a new truth but rather its definitive and absolute form (MP, 12–14). The soteriological implications of the synthesis of God's grace in human freedom can mean many different things for Balthasar, for example,

new creation, new covenant, recapitulation, righteousness, and communion.<sup>5</sup> However, the meaning that best fits with the theology of sacrifice is reconciliation with God's righteousness (GL 7, 36). In addition, the synthesis of human freedom with God's righteousness results in the union of will. This reconciliation of human and divine freedom takes place in the already present death of Jesus with respect to the mission which he receives from the Father (TD 5, 251). For the human being, Jesus, it means the fulfillment of his mission as one 'being given up' (*Dahingegebensein*).

It is significant for Balthasar's theology of sacrifice that Jesus' active obedience is the basis of his righteousness (GL 7, 93–94; 160–161; 244–245). According to Balthasar, sacrifice describes the dynamic of freedom that underlies Jesus' representation. It is helpful to recall the dynamic of sacrifice as experienced by the prophets and then to compare the OT prophet to Jesus. My comparison of the representation of the biblical prophet and Jesus will consider three points: the relation to God's word; the impact of God's word upon the representative; and the righteousness embodied by each.

First, the prophet had an experience of God's glory, was 'expropriated' (*expropriert*) by God's spirit, given God's word, and then responded to God's word by obedience. The expropriation by the divine spirit came about through a spiritual death. In the divine action God makes the prophet his 'instrument' (*Werkzeug*) for speaking his word and enacting his righteousness before the people. God's action through the prophet is extended in the prophet's fidelity to his mission. The righteous representatives, however, always pointed to God's word as independent of themselves. In the case of Jesus' righteousness, a similar dynamic of sacrifice is implied with respect to his reverence for the Father (John 4:34; 5:30). We saw above that Jesus' union with the Father involved a 'death' (*Tod*) through the acceptance of his Spirit-led mission. Nichols writes about Jesus' exercise of his human freedom: » ... it is the God-man's allowing the Holy Spirit to mediate to him moment by moment the Father's will.« (Nichols 1998, 151) Jesus' willingness to be led by the Spirit establishes God's incomprehensible freedom as the openness of his human freedom.

Second, the biblical prophet possessed the Spirit to the limits of their openness as determined by sin and death. Jesus in his person represents the Father's word in the immediacy of his own person (Waldstein 1984, 23). Balthasar writes,

But whereas in the case of the prophet, the fulfillment of the Word that is uttered through him lies with God and remains independent of the person of the prophet himself, the claim that Jesus makes, to be the present Word of God in judgment, refuses to permit such a distancing: the future of God, into which Jesus leads the poor and the sinners, must finally lie in him himself. And what other absolute future has a man to offer than his own death? (GL 7, 139)

The biblical prophet spoke of God's 'word' (*Wort*) and its 'fulfillment' (*Erfüllung*) as independent (*unabhängig*) of them and to which all were called to respond.

<sup>5</sup> I have identified the following soteriological themes in Balthasar's writings: new creation (GL 7, 96); new covenant (GL 7, 36); recapitulation (GL 7, 55; 62; 78); righteousness (GL 7, 94; 205); communion (GL 7, 97).

However, Jesus' active obedience in the openness of the Spirit means that 'God's righteous word' (*Gottes gegenwärtiges Richterwort*) abides in him (132).

Third, Jesus' active obedience to the Father's word fulfills God's promise to reveal the final covenant righteousness. According to Israel's experience of the covenant, no one lived the fullness of the righteousness demanded by the covenant relationship. The covenant consisted of two unequal covenant partners, distinct as concerns their freedom, one divine and the other human. Human beings were completely dependent upon God to bring about the fulfillment of covenant righteousness. When we take into account the fact that sin eclipses openness to God's word, the covenant with Israel remained unfulfilled. Only in the new covenant, embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, is it possible to say that God supports both sides of the covenant relationship (34; 84–87). Jesus' living the covenant relationship is equivalent to stating that the Father's own righteousness abides in Jesus' freedom. Balthasar writes, »John [the Gospel-writer] explains Jesus' truth on the grounds of his sinlessness (8.46f.), of his selflessness that seeks only the Father's glory (5.41), of his transparency to the Father, which makes his testimony to the Father and the Father's testimony to him inseparably two-in-one (8.14ff.).« (GL 7, 125) In this quote the essential unity of Jesus with the Father is based in Jesus' 'transparency' (*Transparenz*) and 'self-surrendering' (*Selbslosigkeit*) to the Father. Further, the covenant righteousness of Jesus represents the Father's word. Because Jesus represents in himself the covenant reality (grace) in his freedom, he also is said to fulfill Israel's covenant (128–129).

### 1.3 Jesus' Experience of Time in Relationship to the Father

According to Balthasar, Jesus' life consists in two distinct yet related experiences of the Father's time. First, Christ's humanity allows for the experience of time as receptivity. This marks the first stage of Jesus' life and ministry up to the 'hour'. Second, the 'hour' of the Father's abandonment of Jesus consists in a 'break' (*Umbruch*) (GL 7, 168–170) at which time Jesus becomes the 'one being handed over' (*Dahingebensein*). The question of time becomes esoteric unless it is rooted in Jesus' experience of relating to the Father. David Lauber notes that Balthasar develops his Christology in part on a mystical experience. St. John of the Cross, for example, records his experience of God's absence at which time the object of faith is shrouded in night (Lauber 2004, 105–107). The experience of seeking God nevertheless moves Jesus to seek God by the movement of the heart fired by love. Jesus' experience of time, however, is deeper, more expansive, and more mysterious on account of his Sonship. His experience of the night of abandonment, according to Balthasar, is infinite 'distance' from the Father and corresponding to 'timelessness' (*Zeitlosigkeit*) (GL 7, 224–225).

In the hour Jesus experiences the realm of eternity as both realized fulfillment and definitive end. These two experiences of time by Jesus are aspects of biblical time, namely, eschatological time of fulfillment and apocalyptic time proper to the end of history. On the one hand, eschatological time is the fulfillment of God's promises for history at some time determined by him. This is also related to the

prophetic ministry, namely, to await God's action so as to extend his justice for the renewal of the world. Balthasar writes, »The chronological time of Israel in history is 'filled' with the 'moments' (καιροί) of divine activity and speaking. ...« (GL 7, 164) As a member of Israel, Jesus enters into the immanent expectation of Israel. Indeed, according to the NT, the fulfillment of God's promise for history has been realized in the life of Jesus Christ. Through his representative Jesus Christ, the Father acts and speaks in a definitive way. Eternity too may enter into time as apocalyptic time, corresponding to God's definitive judgment of human freedom. God will act in history so as to bring a final resolution of history and the question of human freedom. Balthasar addresses the 'already' of Jesus' earthly presence with the fulfillment of God's promise to bring the world to perfection. Jesus manifests a radical receptivity to time, as given to him, in the 'chiming of the hours' (*Stundenschlag*) and in God's 'timetable' (*Stundenplan*). Jesus' experience of eternity is marked by obedience within the covenant reality opened up by the Spirit. By actively receiving the Father's grace Jesus' freedom is present to the Father's absolute reality, albeit, in the 'darkness' (*Finsternis*) of God's hiddenness. Balthasar, however, does not pass over earthly time because Jesus' presence in the world as 'light' (*Licht*) associates history with its 'immanent fulfillment' (*Naherwartung*). Balthasar identifies this break in John's theology of the 'hour' with the Father's abandonment of Jesus to the final judgment (Hayes 1990, 34).

In the economy and on mission Jesus represents the Son (departing light) who enters into God's darkness. What takes place inwardly in the 'hour' is the separation of light from darkness as the movement of departing light towards its opposite. Balthasar states that Jesus unites within himself both the fulfillment of time yet also its break, thus revealing in the economy a new action of God, marking the new Age – the opening to a heavenly world. Balthasar's choice of words, 'opening' (*Öffnung*) is meant to refer to the gift of the Spirit, that is, the extension of eternity into the temporal rather than a collapsing of the temporal into the eternal or its converse. Hence, the definitive gift of the Spirit marks the 'new age' (*neuen Äon*), wherein human beings retain their otherness and receive the transcendent object of faith in Jesus Christ.

#### 1.4 Jesus as Substitute: Taking the Place of the Other

The representation of Jesus places him in solidarity with humanity that includes the notion of place-taking or 'substitution' (*Platztausch*). The Incarnation introduces a new kind of place-taking that is representative of all humanity. The *Logos* can represent all humanity because he is the archetype of the true human being. Although Jesus represents the true human being in both his relationship to the Father and to human beings he does so as 'Other'. Balthasar shows that three roles are assigned to Jesus in the sin offering, the roles of righteous representative, victim, and priest (GL 7, 34–35). Implicit in the role of representative is the free acceptance of a God-directed mission to bring about God the Father's saving action. Balthasar understands that essential (divine) self-emptying love grounds Jesus' Sonship as the Father's only begotten Son.

Yet, in the economy Jesus receives the gift of the Father's love as a human being by virtue of his experience of being led by the Spirit and responding to the Father's word (GL 7, 214). Balthasar's theology of mission, based in kenotic love of the Father, accounts for Jesus' personhood in relationship with the Father (McIntosh 2004, 34–35).

Balthasar shows that Jesus also takes upon himself the negative realities implied by his sharing in Israel's history and human freedom. The fullness of that sharing includes Jesus' substitutionary representation of sinners in their 'Godforsakenness' (*Gottverlassenheit*). Balthasar states that this deepest experience of Godforsakenness is predicated on Jesus' profound experience of 'union with God' (*Gottverbundenheit*). According to the inner logic of Balthasar's soteriology, love as desire or eros both encompasses and surpasses all experiences of separation from God's love (Davies 2004, 135). We will see below that the agency in the 'hour' belongs to the Father rather than to sinners. Jesus' place-taking of sinners includes what opposes God in the world, namely, the 'No' of the sinner. Balthasar notes that only 'true intimacy' (*wirkliche Intimität*) embraces the one who is furthest away, yet not by 'supreme power' (*Macht*) but rather by the 'complete powerlessness' (*Ohnmacht*) of radical solidarity. Inwardly the bond of love between the Father and Son, according to Balthasar, is maintained as eros (the Spirit) even though love's object, the Father, remains hidden.

## 1.5 The Dynamic of the True Sacrifice

The dynamic of the true sacrifice is two-fold: the Son glorifies the Father; and the Son's response to the Father's word in the hour will include the sinner in God's love. These two realities of Jesus' sacrifice are one self-communication of the Father's grace. Both dimensions of God's work of grace converge in the person of Jesus. Concerning the second point, the Father will ask Jesus to bring glory into the reality of the sinner's inglorious form of willful separation from God (Romans 3:23). At this point it is important to note that sin is not man's ultimate reality, but the enslavement of his freedom (James 5:20; Revelation 1:18). In the light of God's gift of freedom, sin is an exchange of God's glory for the role of a slave (Romans 1:23; 3:23). Sin also brings divine punishment for sin. Yet, the sinner's punishment is self-inflicted. Sin diminishes human agency and remains as guilt from which only God can deliver humankind.

Balthasar depicts Jesus' self-offering as divine judgment of human freedom. In the Bible, God's wrath is also related to the sinner's experience of alienation from God. In the drama of God's final judgment God's wrath expresses a dimension of God's righteousness. While God can only be righteous, a departure from righteousness by human beings has negative effects that are equated with God's wrath. Implied in the experience of sin is the theme of creation's dissolution in death. Because of the sinner's refusal of God's justifying word, creation ends in futility and with it so does human freedom (GL 6, 216). Despite sin and its consequences, Balthasar concludes that God's justice prevails over the sinner.



In the section above, I focused on Balthasar's soteriology from the perspective of his Christology. The key aspects of his soteriology were sacrifice, solidarity, and substitution. Finally, I showed how sacrifice is related to God's justice.

## 2. Sacrifice as a Trinitarian Act

### 2.1 Trinitarian Grounding of Jesus' Sacrifice

In the section above, I described the sacrifice of Jesus as the Father's act of grace in the freedom of Jesus, specifically, both in his openness of the Spirit and in his 'obedient response' to the Father's word. The true sacrifice of Christ was interpreted within a Trinitarian perspective and as God's glory encountering sinners. Another feature of Balthasar's biblical theology of sacrifice brings us to the Trinitarian grounding of the Christ event. *The sacrifice of Jesus is a Trinitarian act revealing the Father's glory in the freedom of the Son, granting access to the Spirit.* The sacrifice of Christ is not a new reality as concerns the person of Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son of the Father. Rather, the sacrifice of Jesus presumes an original Trinitarian event of the immanent Trinity. According to Balthasar, the original event of the kenotic self-yielding and self-giving love is lived among the persons of the Trinity (GL 7, 225; Nichols 1990, 7–8). Anne Hunt writes,

Hence, in von Balthasar's theology the inner-trinitarian 'event' of self-giving and self-emptying love is the condition of the possibility of divine activity in kenotic events *ad extra*, containing within itself all the modalities of love—such as *kenosis*, abandonment, suffering, death, and descent—that appear in creation in the course of salvation history. This means that the kenotic form of Jesus Christ in the paschal mystery is not new or foreign to God but is, in fact, thoroughly consistent with this eternal supra-temporal 'event' of triune love. It is, indeed, the created form of what is always already in God. We meet this affirmation repeatedly in von Balthasar's work: all forms of *kenosis ad extra* are contained within the primal *kenosis ad intra*. The Father's generation of the Son represents the first *kenosis* and underpins all other forms of *kenosis*. It manifests the utter self-giving (*Selbsthingabe*) of the Father to the Son, a self-yielding surrender of divine being. The Son's self-giving to the Father in his death on a cross is already contained within this eternal procession: it is a modality of the Son's procession. The trinitarian processions are thus understood already to involve an interpersonal dynamic interaction within the godhead, the different modalities of which are then expressed in the economy—particularly in the paschal mystery when the separation of Father and Son is most extreme. (Hunt 1997, 61)

According to Balthasar's theology of sacrifice, the Christ event is also a Trinitarian event of the immanent Trinity. Jesus does not abandon his Trinitarian life during the time of his mission. The relationship of the Father and Son continues within the economy. Yet, in the economy the Trinitarian reality becomes incarnate in the hu-

man being, Jesus of Nazareth. The Trinitarian reality therefore is hidden within the human being. It is Jesus' mission to make the Father known to humankind. Further, Balthasar interprets the sacrifice of Christ from the reality of the sin offering. The sacrifice of Christ as a sin offering includes the Son's bearing of sin, his condemnation as a sinner, and his experience of Hell. The sin offering, however, concludes with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the gift of the Spirit for the expiation of sin. In addition, the sin offering of Jesus extends over the entire Triduum into the realm of eternity where Jesus meets with his final abandonment by the Father.<sup>6</sup> At the completion of the Triduum, the resurrection of Jesus from among the dead is the Father's acceptance of Jesus as his own Word. The resurrection from death also marks the Son's return to the Father after completing his mission.

## 2.2 Trinitarian Inversion

By virtue of a 'Trinitarian inversion' (*trinitarischen Inversion*) the incarnate Son represents the life of the immanent Trinity in the economy of salvation (TD 4, 335). Balthasar defines Trinitarian inversion as follows:

What we have termed 'inversion' is ultimately the projection of the immanent Trinity onto the 'economic' plane, whereby the Son's 'correspondence' to the Father is articulated as 'obedience'. (TD 3, 191)

In the economy Jesus lives the self-emptying love that is the Trinitarian reality in his 'being-given-up' (*Hingabe*) and his active ascent to the Father's word (GL 7, 142). Balthasar presents the freedom of Jesus in such a way that the gift of freedom remains sinless as 'he who is handed-over' (*Preisgegebenseins*) by the Father (MP, 108, 107–112; GL 7, 225; TD 4, 326–327). The passive and active dimensions of Jesus' freedom are grounded, furthermore, within the Father's kenotic act of sending the Son on mission. The Father's sending of the Son creates, so to speak, the empty space for the Son's freedom. Yet, the Father's kenotic sending of the Son leaves the Father open to the Son's return from his mission. Significantly the Father's kenotic sending of the Son is his surrendering his own divinity to the Son. In the mission of the Son from the Father we anticipate the Son's own kenotic response, especially, at the time of the self-offering of the cross. In Balthasar's work, the *kenosis* of the Incarnation and that of the Son's mission in the self-offering of the cross describe a single trajectory (Saward 1990, 7–8). Hence, Jesus' mission represents the self-emptying love of the Father. Jesus' Spirit-inspired obedience to the Father's word enacts the Father's righteousness in the freedom of the Son. It is a righteousness that is itself transparent, and thus devoid of the self-glory that comes from grasping at divinity (Philippians 2:2–11) (GL 7, 98, 147).

In addition, Balthasar's assessment of Jesus' freedom admits to a simultaneous separation and unity. Here again, the immanent Trinity sets the parameters for Jesus' obedient response to the Father's word. Chapp writes,

<sup>6</sup> The Triduum marks the period of three days: Good Friday (the self-offering of Jesus upon the cross); Holy Saturday (the Descent into Hell); Easter Sunday (the resurrection from the dead).

The trinitarian *hypostases* bear within their reciprocity both an infinite distance and opposition, and an infinite intimacy and presence to one another. The single divine nature is, therefore, 'subsistent' in an utterly non-static, non-univocal manner: God is 'One' as a dynamic relationship where infinite 'distance' coincides with infinite communion. (Chapp 2004, 18)

In the economy, the separation in unity is the freedom by which Jesus relates to the Father and to humankind. Within this Trinitarian reality of separation and unity, the Father will place upon Jesus the 'sins of the world' (*Sünden der Welt*) and the ultimate punishment for sin, namely, the punishment of death. Jesus' 'being-given-over' on mission includes for Balthasar all the possible ways of expressing love, even unto suffering, abandonment, and death (O'Hanlon 2007, 26–29). These realities of Jesus' human freedom and existence are not merely entered into by Jesus on the basis of his solidarity with sinners (GL 7, 222–225; Birot 1997, 273). Balthasar proposes a deeper and more complete identification of Jesus with sinners, the kind found in the Pauline text: »For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.« (2 Corinthians 5:21) (GL 7, 149; 204–205; 208; 284; 298; 301; 363; 396; 443; 509)

### 2.3 The Sin Offering as a Trinitarian Act

When the hour approaches, Jesus is asked by the Father to take upon himself the sins of the world. In the Tradition the beatific vision guaranteed Jesus' union with the Father as Son. Because Jesus' freedom was worked out according to the human and divine natures and in one divine hypostasis, Jesus could suffer abandonment as a human being and yet, he could also enjoy the consolation of the beatific vision (Pitstick 2007, 179–182). In a provocative interpretation, Balthasar states that Jesus does not enter the 'hour' with the beatific vision. Balthasar writes,

... the deepest experience of abandonment by God, which is to be vicariously real in the Passion, presupposes an equally deep experience of being united to God and of life derived from the Father – an experience that the Son must have had, not only in Heaven, but also as a man, even if this does not mean that his spirit must already enjoy a perpetual *visio beatifica*. Only one who has known the genuine intimacy of love, can be genuinely abandoned (not merely lonely). (GL 7, 216; MP, 122)

Balthasar tries to balance the Tradition of Jesus' union with the Father, as expressed in the beatific vision, and his abandonment of the Son by the Father. In the German, the balance of union and abandonment is expressed as 'the experience of being God-forsaken' (*Erfahrung der Gottverlassenheit*) and of being 'God-united' (*Erfahrung der Gottverbundenheit*). Balthasar's use of '*Erfahrung*' indicates his preference for the experiential, understood ontologically as spirit-filled openness and active obedience in the absence of the Father. Rather than working out a theology of sacrifice within the divine and human natures, Balthasar opts to ground his theology in Jesus' freedom and within the Trinitarian relationships. (GL 7, 212)

The omission of the beatific vision allows Balthasar to attribute a separation or 'distance' between the Father and Son. This, however, is not a denial by Balthasar of Jesus' divinity. He situates Jesus' person and mission within the *materia* of Trinitarian life. The unity in separation does not reduce or eliminate Jesus' divinity (Williams 2004, 140–143). Hunt writes, »His [Jesus'] obedience is constitutive of his identity as the Son, expressive of his divine sonship and freedom.« (Hunt 1997, 66) For Balthasar, the divinity of the Son lies in his obedience to the Father precisely as 'being-handed-over' and the one who actively bears the sins of the world. The Passion, Cross, and Descent are conceived from the side of the sinner's reality. For Balthasar, the Son's own reality represents the 'form' (*Gestalt*) and 'content' (*Gehalt*) of the sinner's death without the beatific vision. The Father's word nevertheless makes its claim upon Jesus from the side of the image (Jesus' freedom), for Jesus is 'being-handed-over'. Hence, the question of union with the Father lies in Balthasar's Trinitarian rendering of infinite love.

Jesus is the one being handed over by the Father and his 'abandonment' (*Verlassenheit*) is also divine judgment of the sinner. The Father's representative, Jesus, is also handed over to the sinner's total passivity of death. The existential act of surrender, to a degree, addresses what Balthasar means by the self-offering of the cross. However, Balthasar considers sacrifice to be a Trinitarian act of self-emptying love that involves all the persons of the Trinity. Balthasar writes,

It is therefore preferable to be guided by some of Bulgakov's fundamental ideas..., and to take the 'selflessness' of the divine persons, as of pure relations in love within the Godhead, as the basis of everything: this selflessness is the basis of a first form of kenosis, that lies in creation (especially in the creation of man who is free), for the creator here gives up a part of his freedom to the creature, in the act of creating; but this he can dare to do only in virtue of his foreseeing and taking into account the second and truest kenosis, that of the Cross, in which he makes good the uttermost consequences of creation's freedom, and goes beyond them. In this, kenosis — as the surrender of the 'form of God' — becomes the decisive act of the love of the Son, who translates his being begotten by the Father (and in this, his dependence on him) into the expressive form of creaturely obedience; but the whole Trinity remains involved in this act, the Father by sending out the Son and abandoning him on the Cross, and the Spirit by uniting them now only in the expressive form of the separation. (GL 7, 213–214)

Balthasar speaks of two kenoses of the Trinity *ad extra*, namely, that of 'creation' (*Schöpfung*) and of the 'cross' (*Kreuz*). Balthasar explicitly acknowledges the Creator's involvement in creation, especially in bestowing the gift of human freedom. There is an implied narrative of creation's loss of glory through sin. In the creation of human freedom, God risks his own self-gift and commits to the second *kenosis* of the cross. Balthasar suggests that the free and *ekstatic* love of the Trinity also includes the agreement concerning the plan for redeeming fallen humanity (Saward 1990, 7–9). The two kenoses, that of creation and the cross, involve the Father because of the sending of the Son on mission and his 'abandonment' (*Ver-*

*lassenheit*), express the sojourn of the Son to the »uttermost consequences« of creaturely freedom. The making »good of the uttermost consequences of creation's freedom« concerns the Incarnation and the mission to liberate human freedom. Jesus consents to the Father's command in the hour, characterized by timelessness and the Father's word serves as a definitive act of judgment of Jesus' freedom. The righteousness of Jesus, however, points back to the Father as the one who begets the Son by bestowing the gift of his self-emptying love upon the Son. In his mission, Jesus translated the Father's own self-emptying love »into the expressive form (*Ausdrucksform*) of creaturely obedience.« In the hour the Son freely serves as representative of sinners and bears their sin away. The Son's encounter with sin means he also 'goes beyond' (überholt) the sinner's 'No' by an act of divine and infinite freedom. Jesus, as representative of the Father, enters into the experience of the 'No' of the sinner, yet surpasses it by an act of ever-greater love.

The sacrifice of Jesus is an act of the Trinity *ad extra*. It is the nature of the Father to be ever-greater love, and Balthasar shows that the Trinity, represented by Jesus on mission, reveals this ever-greater love in the economy. For the Son to be totally defined by his obedience, Jesus must be infinitely open to the Father's will as 'one-being-handed-over'. At the climax of the mission, the Father's begetting of the Son in eternity is revealed in the economy by Jesus' »surrender of the 'form of God'« (*Preisgabe der »Gottgestalt«*) or his act of love of for the Father upon the cross. Balthasar writes that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is an 'act of the entire Trinity' (*Akt der ganzen Trinität*). The fullness of Trinitarian love is therefore revealed in the Father who first 'sends out' (*Aussendende*) the Son and 'abandons' (*Verlassende*) the Son. The Son, according to Balthasar, is the 'expressive form' of true human freedom as 'the one being-given-over'. The Spirit acts as the 'bond' (*Einigende*) of the expressive form of 'separation' (*Trennung*). (TD 4, 324–325; Saward 1990, 55–58; Nichols 2000, 165–167)

The Father's abandonment of the Son and the Son's completion of his mission brings about a change in the Godhead. Both the Son's assent 'to be the one sent' (*Aussendende*) and the Son's glorification of the Father, inclusive of his abandonment into death, affect the 'heart of the Father' (*Herz des Vaters*) (GL 7, 35). Gerard O'Hanlon shows that Balthasar advances the Tradition as concerns divine immutability (O'Hanlon 2007, 132–133). Hunt also writes, »The kenotic aspect of the divine being, although highly significant, is only one aspect of the glory of God's love, which also manifests itself in such aspects as joy, increase, and wonderment.« (Hunt 1997, 79; O'Hanlon 2007, 120) God's love, as revealed in the Trinitarian event of the Triduum, surpasses a limited appraisal of *kenosis* as loss or the self-denial of suffering. According to Balthasar, divine immutability is preserved in the sacrifice of Christ because the Trinity is *ekstatic* love shared among the persons. For the Godhead, as a Trinity of persons in relationship, is always unchangeable love expressed as self-emptying and self-yielding love (Papanikolaou 2003, 51). However, in the economy Jesus represents the love of the Trinity on mission. The Father's act of grace in the creaturely freedom of Jesus reveals the Spirit of self-emptying love and reveals the Word, Jesus Christ, as its expression. Hence, the Trinitarian act of Jesus' sacrifice is

both the Father's offer of self-emptying love and his final word.

## 2.4 Triduum Paschale

The person of Christ helps us to distinguish the true sacrifice of Christ from sacrifice in the OT. Without going into detail about sacrifice in the OT, the essential difference consists in whether or not the object of mediation occupies the 'midpoint' (*Mitte*). The midpoint, according to Balthasar, is the revelation of God's glory in the Christ event (GL 7, 86). At the end of GL 6, Balthasar presents Christ as living the midpoint and in doing so, fulfilling Israel's history (GL 6, 403–404).<sup>7</sup> The fulfillment of covenant righteousness, as we saw, takes place at the midpoint, that is, at the abandonment of Jesus in Hell. In addition, implied in the midpoint is the Triduum of the Paschal Mystery: Jesus' death on the cross (Good Friday); Jesus' experience of Hell (Holy Saturday); and his Resurrection (Easter Sunday) (Oakes 1994, 282). Living the midpoint implies Jesus' surrender of self-glory unto the reality of the sinner's final alienation in death. Balthasar writes, »The midpoint of the event of the go-between is to be found in his death ... to recognize that the one who died could fulfil his role as an individual rising from death.« (GL 7, 35) Balthasar identifies two events, the cross and resurrection that converge upon the one midpoint of death, occupied by the 'go-between' (*Mittler*). It is significant for the theology of sacrifice that the midpoint is a Trinitarian act. Sacrifice is God's act of justice at the two converging midpoints: (a) the Father's act of grace in the freedom of Jesus at the time of death; and, (b) the Father's act of grace at the time of the resurrection. Christ, as representative of the Father, unites in himself immanent and transcendent righteousness. Hence, the true sacrifice of Christ reveals both an immanent and transcendent righteousness for the justification of the sinner.

Balthasar identifies the center of the saving action at Jesus' experience of death in the abandonment of Hell. Oakes writes, »*Balthasar develops his theology of the Trinity out of his conviction of what it meant for Jesus to become cursed for our sake and experience the condemnation of the Father in hell*« (Oakes 1994, 282 [italics in the original]). The mystery of Holy Saturday further illuminates the Trinitarian event, the glorification of the Son by the Father through the resurrection. What is exchanged between the Father and Son, as we will see, is the Spirit of mutual love between them. The resurrection of the Son therefore is the Father's glorification of the Son by the gift of the Spirit.

Balthasar has recourse to both the active and passive realities of Jesus' freedom in order to address sacrifice as a sin offering. Balthasar writes, »The true subject who acts on the Cross is therefore God, and the instrument he employs is sin.« (GL 7, 209) The Father's 'instrument' of salvation is sin. In the hour the Father acts in Jesus *sub contrario*, expressly, in the hiddenness of the image. Jesus' role in his self-offering of the cross is twofold: (a) to represent the sinner before God; and, (b) to

<sup>7</sup> The entire section, Argumentum Ex Prophetia, marks the transition from the OT volume, GL 6, to the NT volume, GL 7. In this section, Balthasar articulates the principles of his biblical hermeneutic.

represent God's hidden glory as judgment of sin. The first movement, up to and including the cross, and prior to death, involves Jesus as the active subject. Jesus remains active in his acceptance of the Father's will for him even as he is laden with sin. The Father then judges Jesus, who acts as a substitute for the sinner. The cross is thus the Father's final judgment of sin. Balthasar plays off these two realities in the person of Jesus, as 'form' (*Gestalt*) and 'formlessness' (*Gestaltlose*). Under the burden of sin, Jesus' active obedience retains its righteousness as the 'Christ form' (*Gestalt Christi*). The Father speaks his 'No' to sin in his representative thus revealing mercy for the sinner. In the Crucified One, the sinner by faith perceives the Christ form as his own truth. Hence even from the cross the glory of God is discerned as mercy for the sinner (GL 7, 83–84; TD 3, 184–185; MP, 136–140).

After the 'first death' upon the cross, Christ enters into the 'second death' with his time in Hell (1 Peter 3:18–20) (GL 7, 228–235; MP, 168–176). For Balthasar, Hell is a Christological reality that comes to be with the death of Christ. In the event of the cross, the *descensus* into Hell is the second movement. Balthasar's theology of the Descent maintains the relationship between the Incarnation and Holy Saturday. Alyssa Pitstick writes, »The intra-Trinitarian kenosis of the procession continues and is imaged in the Son's 'deposit' of the divine attributes with the Father in order to become man. The divine kenosis reaches its supreme economic expression in the Son's sacrifice of His humanity in His being dead.« (Pitstick 2007, 142) With the Incarnation, the Son surrenders his divinity, allowing himself to be sent. The Son enters human history in the form of a human being; and now he surrenders all claims to divinity out of obedience and love of the Father (GL 7, 214). Christ bears the consequences of sin and takes sin within himself as the 'second death.' Balthasar writes,

In this deeper sense (not in a psychological sense), he is *inter mortuos liber*, 'free among the dead' (Ps 87.6 LXX). He is bound, in powerlessness: but this is due to his own free obedience, the only obedience that deserves to be called 'the obedience of a corpse' in the theological sense. Thereby, with the removal of the whole superstructure of the Incarnation, the eternal will of the Son within the Trinity to obedience is exposed, as the substructure that is the basis of the entire event of the Incarnation: and this is set face-to-face with the hidden substructure of sinful existence, exposed in Sheol, as the state of separation from God, the 'loss of his glory'.

Now it is precisely this face-to-face confrontation between the 'naked' God and 'naked' sin that shows that Jesus' solidarity even with the utter lostness of sinners presupposes the uniqueness of his condition: the 'inclusive quality' of his being with the dead rests on something 'exclusive' that he alone possesses (GL 7, 231).

In Hell, according to Balthasar, Christ contemplates the object that is the reality of sin. Balthasar follows Nicholas of Cusa's theology of Hell as the *visio mortis* (GL 7, 232; MP, 170–171). Balthasar writes, »This contemplative and objective (passive) moment is what distinguishes Holy Saturday from the subjective and

active experience of suffering in the Passion.« (GL 7, 172) In death, Jesus contemplates in his passivity the formlessness proper to the sinner's reality. However, Balthasar wishes to communicate Jesus' liberation from sin as the prelude to the rebirth out from death. The »removal of the superstructure« of the Incarnation serves as a prelude to the transformation of Jesus' humanity at the resurrection (GL 7, 214).

Two soteriological realities are indicated by Christ's contemplation of sin, namely, liberation and solidarity. First, for Christ to contemplate 'pure sin' (*Sünde an sich*) also means that the sin he bore is now separated from him. The first reality of liberation requires the support of another passage: »... in this *visio (secundae) mortis* the whole fruit of the redeeming Cross was seen together. That is to say, sin in its 'pure state' separated from man, 'sin in itself' in the whole formless, chaotic momentum of its reality, was seen by Jesus ...« (GL 7, 233) Hunt states that Balthasar reifies sin in his soteriology because sin has real effects on human freedom (Hunt 1997, 72–74). For Jesus Christ to contemplate pure sin is to be liberated from the burden of sin because it is 'separated' (*getrennte*) from him. The hidden reality, the Spirit, underlies the bearing away of sin. The uniqueness of the event consists in eros, the union of will based in mutual love. The Son's one desire (eros) is to be the 'one-being-given-over' totally to the Father. In the experience of abandonment the Son is free, understood theologically, for he exists before the Father as 'person' (Papanikolaou 2003, 47–52).

Secondly, Hell has soteriological significance because it represents the passivity of Christ, who enters the content of the sinner's alienation from God (MP, 176–180). Balthasar emphasizes the divine powerlessness of Jesus' solidarity (*Solidarischwerden*) by citing his 'obedience of a corpse' (*Kadavergehorsam*) (GL 7, 231). His abandonment by the Father is complete, introducing him to the reality of the sinner and the loss of glory (Romans 3:23). Here also the Son remains obedient to the Father. For the abandoned sinner, Christ is 'uniquely' trustworthy and disposed to the sinner's alienation from God. Although Jesus Christ knows the sinner's experience, the 'uniqueness' (*Einmaligkeit*) of his abandonment extends to the outmost bounds of Hell. Because Jesus has freely entered Hell, he has co-knowledge »even with the utter lostness (*Verlorenheit*) of sinners« (GL 7, 231). Jesus Christ, as the abandoned one, is unique in this because he alone can be with the dead in utter abandonment. Thus, his descent into Hell shows his love for the sinner. In contrast to the sinner, Jesus' formlessness represents the infinite openness that he is before the Father (GL 7, 228–235; Hunt 1997, 72–74).

In this second movement of the cross, Balthasar retains the Trinitarian focus. Christ's active obedience brings him to the outer reaches of the sinner's alienation from God. Formlessness for Christ does not enclose him upon himself, but rather it describes his openness to the infinite love that is the Spirit. The Spirit's power fills the 'distance' (infinite openness) of Jesus' passive state with new life. In other words, the passivity of Christ in solidarity with the sinner is the photographic negative of his radical openness to the Father's love. Christ's openness, therefore, leaves open the possibility for the Father's action of the resurrection.



(GL 7, 251–255; 291; Hunt 1997, 74–76; TD 4, 335–336)

The resurrection, according to Balthasar, consists in the Father's act of 'seeing' (*Sehens*) the Son. As we saw above, the metaphor of divine 'seeing' is indicative of the Spirit as the infinite *ekstatic* self-emptying love that unites the Father and Son (GL 7, 287). The Spirit, as the mutual love of Father and Son, both marks the 'distance' of the Father and Son and confirms that the Son is truly of the Father. Balthasar writes, »By making space for the Father, the Son becomes his Word in the exactness of the one who only reproduces what has been said to him. ... And the act of making space (*Raumgeben*) can itself be seen as the love for the Father.« (291) The quote does not explicitly deal with the resurrection. Balthasar is writing about Jesus' way of revealing the Father in his ministry by his acts of obedience to the Father's word. It is in the experience of the 'second death' in Hell that Jesus is said to represent the extreme 'distance' before the Father. The resurrection validates Jesus' claim of Sonship and confirms the fullness of the Father's love that animated Jesus' mission. At the extreme distance from the Father represented by his death in Hell, the Son represents the infinite openness »by his making space (*Raumgeben*) for the Father« (291).

The resurrection also reveals the transfigured humanity of Jesus as expressive of the Father's infinite love for the Son. Pitstick shows that the Father's action in the Son pertains to the union of will rather than what is given (Pitstick 2007, 108). The Father's self-emptying love as the Spirit sees into the Son and the Son's infinite openness is his obedient response. In other words, the Father's word of self-emptying love is spoken to Jesus. Having heard the Father's word (*Wort*), Jesus responds (*Antwort*) and is snatched out of death. It is a completely unexpected event, one of surprise, novelty, and delight. At the close of the hiatus in Hell, and in the passivity of Jesus' abandonment, the Spirit as self-emptying love restores Jesus to life. Jesus in his openness to the Father receives the life-giving word of the Spirit. Here also the obedience of Jesus is present: »he allows the Father to raise him from the dead.« (Hunt 1997, 77) Jesus obediently responds to the Father's word within the formlessness (*Gestaltlose*) of death. Hence, the formlessness of infinite love establishes the Christ form as infinite and incomprehensible love. The Christ form as the formlessness of incomprehensible love shatters all other forms. These are the lesser forms by which human beings know themselves to exist. In human existence these lesser forms of glory bind human beings, preventing them from assimilating the Father's love. The Father's acceptance of Jesus Christ, therefore, reveals a new righteousness that serves as the 'justification' (*Rechtfertigung*) of the sinner (Yeago 2005, 91–92; Hunt 1997, 77).

The resurrection is also the fulfillment of the 'sin offering' (*Sündopfer*). In solidarity with humankind, Jesus indeed has entered the death or 'lostness of sinners' (*Verlorenheit der Sünder*). His resurrected life reveals the other side of the one saving action of the cross, specifically, God's mercy for the sinner. There are two sides to the event of the cross: the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross and the Son's return to the Father. The Trinitarian act encompasses both sides of the cross, namely, the side of the self-offering and the other side of the resurrection. In the

sacrifice of Jesus, the Trinitarian act takes place in history. However, the economic Trinity is grounded in the immanent Trinity. The resurrection, as the other side of the cross, manifests the glorified humanity of Jesus in its transcendent end. The Father's act of grace in the freedom of Jesus reveals the formlessness of Jesus' fulfilled freedom as the glorified Son. The resurrection is the Father's glorification of his Son, Jesus, revealing the Christ form. The Father validates Jesus' claim of divine Sonship and reveals the Son as his definitive Word.

At the time of his exultation, Jesus takes his co-knowledge of the sinner's reality into heaven. According to Balthasar, the sacrifice of Christ as a Trinitarian event brings a change in the Godhead. Balthasar writes,

The change that takes place at Easter is as abrupt as it is organic. The extreme distance between Father and Son, which is endured as a result of the Son's taking on of sin, changes into the most profound intimacy; but it always *was* such because the distance was a work of trinitarian, loving obedience, and in this obedience Father and Son were always one in a reciprocal relationship in the Spirit. (TD 4, 361–362)

Balthasar describes the change in God as an event of self-communication in love. God takes responsibility for humankind's loss of glory due to sin, assimilates the experience of abandonment, and by love transcends it. Balthasar writes, »... he [God] makes good the uttermost consequences of creation's freedom, and goes beyond them.« (GL 7, 214) O'Hanlon explicitly states that Balthasar's theology of God accounts for the Trinitarian event of the Paschal Mystery by recourse to a theology of divine immutability that accounts for surprise, newness, surrender, as dimensions of love shared by the Persons of the Trinity. Further investigation into divine immutability is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The nature of the Trinitarian event consists in the exchange of self-emptying love between the Father and Son (214–215).

The Father assigns Jesus the role of both Lord and Judge (233). On the one hand, the Father's gift of self-emptying love returns to Jesus' humanity an active role before the Father and with respect to human beings. On the other hand, the Christ form as Spirit sent from both the Father and Son becomes the justification of the sinner. Henceforth the sinner is never alone, even in his rejection of God. Balthasar writes, »...just as the love of God in creation and election is unfathomable, so is sin, the hate of the world (John 15:25). But the abyss of the unfathomable love has entered the abyss of the meaningless hatred and hidden itself there.« (210) The dynamic implied is dialectic, the encounter of human and divine freedom. This encounter is saving for sinners. The 'world's hatred' (*Haß der Welt*) of God, although 'unfathomable' (*grundlos*), has been assumed into the 'abyss' (*Abgrund*) of divine Trinitarian love. Jesus, according to Balthasar, has taken upon himself and into himself the content of the 'sinners' alienation' (*grundlos Haß*). Jesus assures humanity that even in death sinners encounter the Father's love (Hunt 1997, 70–71).

## 2.5 Salvation as the Participation in the Cosmic Liturgy

Balthasar's theology of sacrifice, although inclusive of the sinner's reality, also transcends sin and death. The Christ form as the Father's definitive glory in the Son is the key soteriological reality. The emphasis for Balthasar, according to Nichols, falls on Jesus' rebirth. »Balthasar accepts St. Thomas's thesis that Jesus Christ's mission in this world is simply the prolongation under created conditions of his eternal generation.« Nichols 2007, 150; Seward 1990, 115–118) The Father's act of grace in the freedom of the abandoned Son is a spontaneous and unexpected gracious act of the Son's regeneration.

We come to a further feature of Balthasar's biblical theology of sacrifice: *Jesus' sacrifice is God's act of grace in human freedom that fulfills the original covenant of creation*. The Father's glorification of the Son marks the fulfillment of the 'cosmic liturgy' (*Kosmische Liturgie*) as intended by the original covenant of 'creation' (*Schöpfung*). Balthasar writes, »The 'cosmic liturgy' was basically nothing other than the act whereby the created 'Thou' gave back all glory to the absolute 'I'.« (GL 6, 144) The fulfillment of the cosmic liturgy places Jesus at the center of God's saving action in creation (GL 7, 214).

The operative term for the relationship between God and humankind, according to Balthasar, is the original covenant. For Balthasar, the sacrifice of Christ fulfills the original covenant by revealing the Father's self-emptying love in the Son's freedom (Turek 2001, 55). Sacrifice according to the logic of the original covenant depends on a two-fold grace, (a) the openness of the image of God and, (b) the perfection of the image by grace (GL 6, 16; GL 7, 14–15; Scola 1991, 46). In the self-offering of Christ, the truth of the image was revealed as openness to the Father. Jesus' sacrifice was a return of the self-emptying love he had received from the Father. Further, the Son's self-surrender revealed the Spirit as the mutual self-emptying and self-giving that is the Son as the reflection of the Father (Dickens 2004, 144). In the fulfillment of the original covenant by the sacrifice of Christ, creation finds its reason for being within the mutual self-giving and self-emptying of the immanent Trinity (GL 7, 152; Balthasar 2004, 86–87; Štrukelj 2004).

## 3. Conclusion

In Hebrews the sacrifice of Jesus fulfills Israel's liturgy under the NT covenant (Nelson 2003, 251–252). However, Balthasar also sees that Jesus' sacrifice fulfills the cosmic liturgy of creation. The author of Hebrews also explicitly acknowledges Jesus Christ's place in creation:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these the last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. (Heb. 1:1–3)

Balthasar emphasizes the radically new reality of the transformed creation as revealed in the glory of the Son. Balthasar holds to the objective reality of Jesus' glorified humanity as having restored beauty to creation. Balthasar ascribes to the glory of Christ a *rectitudo* or 'beauty' that reveals an original justice proper to the image. Only in the new creation is original justice revealed to be human openness to God's own self-emptying love.

Balthasar's soteriology takes seriously the reality of sin and death, showing how Christ's sacrifice removes sin. Israel's cultic sacrifice equally provided for a sin offering and the removal of sins. In Christ a definitive sin offering under the new covenant allows for human beings to approach God in confidence. Balthasar's theology of sacrifice, however, includes the prophetic form of Israel's sacrifice whereby the emphasis changes to freedom. Balthasar retains the relationship between sacrifice and justice. Balthasar nevertheless avoids the limits of cultic sacrifice and the problematic of gift giving, merit, and payment for sins. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ includes sinners, incorporates them into the life of the Trinity, and leaves them free. In the new creation remade in the glory of Jesus Christ, faith's object is revealed for participation in the life of the Trinity.

Although Balthasar is noted for his conservative theology, he breaks new ground concerning his Christo-Trinitarian soteriology. The original contribution of his theology of sacrifice concerns the integration of a passive Descent of Christ into Sheol – what the OT considered as the realm of the dead (MP, 148–149; Oakes 1994, 237–241). Lösel writes, »Sacrifice becomes an existential act of loving surrender to the Other.« (Lösel 2004, 166) Balthasar's soteriology adopts as its center the experiential reality of what it meant for Jesus to have died and to have been risen from Hell. Balthasar's soteriology follows his Trinitarian theology. Balthasar casts the saving action within the experience of what it meant for one of the Trinity to have entered human existence by way of the Incarnation, suffered on the cross and experienced death, and finally, rising from the dead.

## Abbreviations

- MP** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1990. *Mysterium Paschale*.
- GL 6** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1991. *The Glory of the Lord*. Vol. 6, *The Old Covenant*.
- GL 7** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1989. *The Glory of the Lord*. Vol. 7, *The New Covenant*.
- TD 3** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1992. *Theo-Drama*. Vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person of Christ*.
- TD 4** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1994. *Theo-Drama*. Vol. 4, *The Action*.
- TD 5** – Balthasar, Hans Urs von. 1998. *Theo-Drama*. Vol. 5, *The Last Act*.

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