
**BELONGING TO CHRIST AND BELONGING
TO THE CHURCH: THE STORY OF EVERY
CHRISTIAN. AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTION
ON THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the sacrament of baptism in three perspectives. First it shows how baptism is incorporated in the historical existence of a Christian and constitutes the foundational event not only of the history of the human person in general, but of the history of salvation of every human person. The second perspective develops the soteriological character of baptism. In light of Christ's salutary work seen within the so called "soteriological arch" (H. U. von Balthasar) the scope of transformation of the human subject is shown. The third part perceives the human subject incorporated by the Holy Spirit in the whole of the Church which is sacramentally ordered. The conclusion summarizes the basic theses of the paper.

Key words

Christian anthropology, History, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Sacramental order, H. U. von Balthasar

The Church is linked with the general history of salvation. To belong to Christ means to integrate one's life story into the history of salvation. On Catholic understanding, this is linked with the life of the Church. We will now reflect on how to conceive this "belonging to Christ".

We will proceed in three steps: (1) we begin with a short reflection from Christian anthropology, (2) continue with a short passage from soteriology and reflect on (3) an essential characteristic of the Church, which is the fundamentally sacramental nature of its existence. These three aspects will allow us to perceive the situation of the human being incorporated in the Church by baptism in adequate depth.

1. The human being as a being created for transformation: The historical feature of human existence

When reflecting on the human being's incorporation in the Church and participation in Christ's life, we need to employ a concept of human open to this act and able not only to take note of it, but also to truly grasp it. The complexity of human existence seems to be best expressed by conceiving of humans as persons.¹ At present, "person" is an established legal category which denotes humans as holders of rights, freedoms, so that they can make decisions concerning themselves and society and competently enter social events. In the field of Christian anthropology, deriving from theological legacy and attentive to thinkers of existential philosophy and personalism, we speak of person in connection with the proper definition of human.²

The human being in her entirety is epitomized by her life story. It is therefore necessary to grasp the temporal character of existence, that is, to grasp its spiritual profile. In fact, time is not a purely objective value, it is of subject-objective nature. It therefore belongs to the realm of spirit to grasp time as well as to express existence into time.³

All forms of human existence conserving the essential holistic character of life contain tensions that are imbedded in human existence by creation: the tension between body and soul, between the male and female version of humanity, between the individual and community, between transient time and eternity, and ultimately the tension

¹ "The person cannot be reduced to an individual and on the other hand it is not only something that is added to the body-soul-spirit complex. It is a compact whole, gathering around his subject, bearer, and around its principle of life. It is precisely this character, basic for the task of a human being, what is expressed by the term *hypostasis*." Pavel Evdokimov. *Žena a spása světa* [Woman and the Salvation of the World]. Olomouc: Refugium 2011, p. 56.

² "A human spiritual subject is theologically constituted as person in a unique calling and mission, but at the same time she is deprivatized and socialized, so that she becomes bearer of social space. Theological persons are not delimited against one another in the same sense as natural spiritual subjects so as to constitute monads of a kind – the scope of a theological person is rather determined by her calling and mission. To what extent this potential scope is actualized depends on how actively she grasps her mission and carries it out." Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theodramatik II/2*. Freiburg i. B.: Johannes Verlag 1998, p. 249.

³ Armido Rizzi. *Il problema del senso e il tempo. Tempo, festa, preghiera*. Assisi: Cittadella Editrice 2006.

between the natural progress of life and its supernatural character derived from its relationship to God.⁴

To understand the historical feature of existence related to the spiritual character of being we need a certain mental tool, a method that will enable us to enter the non-trivial structure of time. The method can be introduced coherently and comprehensively, though in a somewhat simplified manner, as follows.⁵

The point of departure is a human being who grasps herself in time in the form of an *incident* many times within her lifetime (der Vorfall, das Vorkommnis, der Fall). Even though this is already a valuable, spiritually grasped being, its passing quality is prominent, so that if only this form existed life might be understood merely as *vanity* (ματαιότης). In between individual incidents, an *event* (das Ereignis) occurs in life. The measure of involvement of the human spirit is greater here, so that a person either expects an event or remembers it. In general, it is typical of an event that it *orients* human life: it takes on gravity, so that the form of an *event* acquires a more elaborate and festive form.⁶ Of course, human life only becomes meaningful when it is grasped in its intrinsic unity and completeness. The incidental character is thus stabilized and grasped in events to the extent that one can speak of a *story* (das Geschick, das Geschichte).⁷ A story orients human life on the basis of events. That is why one meeting can become a crucial moment in one's life, which one also likes to speak about. However, human life is far too complicated and complex to be oriented by a single (purely worldly) event. A narrative which allows one to discover an event concealing the transcendental character that human life needs so much thus becomes a battlefield, on which the depth and quality of

⁴ Angelo Scola – Gilfredo Marengo – Javier Prades López. *La persona umana. Antropologia teologica*. Milano: Jaca Book 2000, especially the part “Le polarità antropologiche”, pp. 152–181.

⁵ An inspiring article by Elmar Salmann. “Ormai solo un Dio ci può salvare. Introduzione ad una visione speculativa del tempo.” In idem, *Presenza di Spirito. Il cristianesimo come gesto e pensiero*. Padova: Messaggero di S. Antonio 2000, pp. 172–192.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theodramatik I*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1973, “Das Ereignishafte” and “Das Geschichtliche”, pp. 24–29.

⁷ It is a very attractive topic in which the spiritual nature of being is reflected in the spiritual activity of narration: a story must be narrated and retrospectively participates in the constitution of time. At present this comprises a broad spectrum of spiritual studies analysing human speech and memory in close connection to human spiritual identity. E.g. Paul Ricoeur. *Čas a vyprávění* [Time and Narrative] I–III. Praha: Oikúmené 2000–2007.

life conceived in time is determined. It cannot consist merely in re-telling an event or episode; word acquires new weight or meaning; it no longer merely refers, but performs life by narration. The narrative is to function as the *prologue* and *epilogue* of an integrated life story. This includes the issue of word as *myth*: insofar as the function of a word is not only to refer to facts or lead to specific acts but to guide towards the transcendent framework, it becomes a myth: “we mean neither the taking over of mythological figures for expressing Christian contents in Christian Europe, nor the retrospective embedding of Christian contents in ancient mythology, but the seriousness of Hölderline who experiences enormous cosmic forces and experiences and expresses them as an immediate magnificent manifestation of the gods.”⁸ If we can then grasp a human story so that it disposes of a narrative which *completely* and *without residue* explains life, we are dealing with *history* (die Geschichte, or die Historie). A human being may understand her life as a story but lapse into pure narrativity; this happens when the narrative as prologue and epilogue of a life story is *privatized*. Insofar as the human shares her *prologue and epilogue* with others, her story becomes a history belonging to the wider experience of a group or nation: a part of history. Sagas and national myths had and still have the task of grasping the broad story of the life of a human community; this includes the very interesting issues of historiography and legends,⁹ which are not purely factographic, but always have the function of *prologue* and *epilogue*.

According to von Balthasar, something special appears in Christianity: the Word became flesh (John 1:14), God became human, a divine event (das Geschehnis) entered human events (Ereignisse): divine time (aeternitas) entered created time (tempus) from the very heart of the Holy Trinity in the form of an entirely particular time (καρπός). The divine ingression or intervention in the time of the world did not occur once and for all, in both the Old and the New Testaments it is also of progressive character, although the close interrelation of divine and worldly time was perfectly fulfilled in the stories, events and history of Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth. In his “narration”, which summarizes all the narration of events witnessing to meeting God or

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theologik II*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1985, p. 233.

⁹ We should not omit the richness of wisdom literature and the many fairytales of our culture. They constitute an interpretative key to understanding and processing existentially tuned situations intended to speak about good and evil in the world.

God's intervention in time, the power to form stories in time is also present.

Von Balthasar reflects on the path of "narration",¹⁰ which in the cultural world of ancient Greece relies on a non-topical encounter with God, and labels such narration the "path of appearance". This path leads to distinguishing between the world and God (the world of ideas). Eventually the soul, as an active constituent of spiritual existence, overcomes the world, separates itself from it and reaches God. Von Balthasar finds the "path of tragic struggle" as a figure of the prologue and epilogue of the life story in German mythology, where the figure of the meaning of life is to fight at the verge of life and death, prove oneself as a hero and enter the hall of ancestors. The third path of "narration" is the biblical Christian one, which is based on love. The Christian path is specific in that "the event of salvation by means of which the human enters the saving relationship with God takes place within *history*; this means that God does not send a message, word or gesture to the human being from a distance, but that he uses the human in his essential uncertainty, fragility and imperfection as speech, in which he enunciates the word in its saving entirety."¹¹ History is then understood as *christologische Synthesis*, i.e., as stories of the world inhering and explicated in the Christ event. Although these can be grounded in the events of any nation, they nonetheless find holistic meaning and purpose in the story and history of Christ, which carries Christ's time and is indivisibly linked with the time and story of the Church.

The narration of the Church, which is thus grounded in the narration of Christ – the Gospel, takes the form of a story which is ultimately not based on the pre-Christian mythos, but on *prophetic word*. It is precisely *prophecy*, not only as predicting the future but as interpretation of events in light of God's word, what becomes the essential element of biblical *narration* in all of its forms (historical, wisdom and prophetic). Prophecies (cf. 2 Pt 1:16.19–21) and God's saving interventions in the stories of the chosen nation gave rise to protology and eschatology in Old Testament times, which served as an interpretative key to events and stories, i.e., to temporal existence. Old Testament protology

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Das Ganze im Fragment. Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie*. 2nd ed. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1990, pp. 63–74, 74–82.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

(Gen 1–11) and eschatology (numerous apocalyptic passages throughout the Scripture) are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the new (novissimus) Adam, who linked his time and story not only with the story of Israel, but with the Church sent to “all the world to proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15).

To conclude, based on the first approach to the human being one can make several fundamental statements about the human being as person. 1) Time, into which human life is distributed, constitutes the basic dimension of human existence in which the human being qualifies as person. Here the human story takes place which must not only be lived through, but also understood as a story against the background of the point of departure and the goal. The human being is thus a created person, who is of a principally progressive character. 2) Christianity brings nothing new to human nature, it reinterprets it in an entirely new way. Christian protology and eschatology, deriving from prophetic word and finding its full form in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, appointed Christ in the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:4), conceives the human being as a created person, who is an earthly being created to find itself in its transcendence – as a heavenly being. 3) The transformation, which is essentially grounded in the human being, is not trivial. It requires such a course of life that preserves the possibility of free choice for the human; that is why the human often appears to be a paradoxical being, somehow unable to rid herself of her constant incompleteness and incomprehensible complexity when fulfilling her life story. The meaning of human life can be grasped precisely by means of life story and in the completeness of a human being’s history one can also understand the transformation for which humans are created. Human transformation is closely related to the history of salvation, which is ultimately grounded in the story of Christ and enables even such transformation that was susceptible to essential failure: transformation of the sinner into a heavenly being.

2. Belonging to Christ: A soteriological conception of the historical form of human existence

The story of a fulfilled human life means, as mentioned before, attaining transcendence and definitive transformation. What is at stake is not merely accomplishing human life according to the basic transcendental determinations, though that also; the factual course of life is

important as well. We know that human life in the world is immersed in numerous *necessary* relations and processes; nonetheless, it also generates a sphere where processes not only proceed necessarily but issue from some sort of free determination. Can human life be grasped in this dual determination at all? That is what cognition is for: to cognize processes in their universal necessity. *Moreover*, humans also know that such knowledge facilitates an active approach to life and they can freely intervene in the course of events in the world. Cognition enables humans to be inspired, which leads to *free* cultivation of activity, to the full deployment of the spiritual forces of *the will*. Thus humans can relate cognition to will and *recognize* that they are not only indifferent static observers, but that they have *set out* on a journey of happiness and salvation. But is that always the case?

No, it is not. There is no guarantee that the order of necessity will *always* be followed by a process governed by the principle of freedom. H. U. von Balthasar states that the horizon in which the order of necessity and the order of freedom are resolved – i.e., eschatology not only in the sense of a doctrine of the last things, but also as the ultimate framework of human freedom in the world – has a pre-Christian solution: the *magic form* in which freedom allows itself to be controlled in order to *necessarily* control the course of events of the world and human life itself. There follows a solution in the form of *idealism*: all provisional must be brought to cognition, to $\theta\epsilon\omega\pi\acute{\alpha}$ – speculation. Thus it is possible to introduce the order of freedom of the cognizing spirit into the order of necessity, which disappears in transience. We know that Hegel’s system of the spirit encountered fundamental rejection in further generations, although it remained more or less the same: Not cognition but will achieves its goals by overcoming all obstacles (Nietzsche). That is why next to idealism a fundamentally *pragmatic* view of how the order of necessity relates to the order of freedom can be posited: everything can be overcome by a human act. The last solution takes a *cosmic* form: the spirit fully becomes part of the world order and human freedom is overarched by the *cosmos* – the order of the world.¹²

However, both pre-Christian and post-Christian solutions suffer from a fundamental deficiency: they lose the sense for the *reality* of

¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Eschatologie in unserer Zeit. Die letzten Dinge des Menschen und das Christentum*. Freiburg i. B.: Johannes Verlag 2005, pp. 11–19.

human freedom. Christianity proposes a solution in which the order of necessity is followed by a process governed by the principle of *liberated* freedom. It is the *principle of grace* which becomes the warrant of free processes; when freedom has failed, grace manifests itself as *salutary* and carrying the order of freedom.

As already mentioned above, von Balthasar conceives the Christian path of life fulfilment not only as a path of cognition or contemplation of divine world, not only as a brave-tragic fight conceived in the Germanic fashion, but first and foremost as a path of love. Out of love God becomes human and assumes a historical form, including time. He came to fulfil time in the Johannian *hour*,¹³ in which he died and brought salvation, which became effective through Christ's resurrection.¹⁴ The hour is a full-fledged temporal determination of the world, in which not only the event of Jesus' crucifixion takes place (*ereignet*), but also the Father's plan of salvation is done (*geschieht*) and completed. From the moment of the *hour*, the *time of the world* (*Weltzeit*), the *time of Christ* (*die Zeit Christi*) and the *time of the Church* (*die Zeit der Kirche*) are interconnected.¹⁵

2.1 The comprehensive form of salvation

An important content of every religious system is solving the fundamental deficiency of life, overcoming evil and sin. The Judeo-Christian tradition offers numerous soteriological approaches. The term "soteriological arch" denotes a conception interconnecting all important soteriological conceptions that have evolved in the history of salvation and are implicitly present in the Holy Scripture.

In his *Theodramatik* von Balthasar presents a comprehensive treatment of soteriology, starting with an important presupposition: "God's glory, revealed in the world through Christ, is not a static reality that may be indifferently observed. God's glory makes itself known by joining in the fight, in which it wins as well as loses, and requires the one who wants to know it to get involved in a similar way. Revelation

¹³ John 2:4; 4:21.25; 5:25.28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23.27; 13:1; 16:2.4.21.25.32; 17:1; 19:27.

¹⁴ Cf. Marcello Bordonni. *Gesù di Nazaret Signore e Cristo. Saggio di cristologia sistematica 3*. Freiburg i. B. – Roma: Herder – Università Lateranense 1986, esp. pp. 49–75.

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Herrlichkeit III*. 2nd ed. Trier: Johannes Verlag 1988, pp. 150–186.

is a battlefield.”¹⁶ Salvation, in which God’s true face is revealed, has the characteristics of a deed. The nature of actively conceived salvation cannot be grasped by any one formula, several “soteriological wholes” are necessary.¹⁷ These wholes are already present in the Holy Scripture and can be observed as they gradually, often randomly and interruptedly, definitely not systematically, evolved in the history of theology.

The Swiss theologian finds five “soteriological wholes” in the Holy Scripture and labels them as follows. 1. God the Father gives the Son for the salvation of the world. 2. The sinner and God exchange places (*Platztausch; admirabile commercium*). 3. Redemption, liberation of man (Loskauf, Er-lösung) from evil and sin. 4. Introduction into divine, Trinitarian life. 5. The whole of salvation shows that everything took place on the initiative of God’s love.¹⁸

It turns out that it was not always easy to keep the “soteriological arch” complete. Von Balthasar appreciates the efforts of numerous theologians and spiritual authors to explicate the topic of the world’s salvation in Christ, learns from their works and – beside the “motifs” or “soteriological wholes” mentioned above – tries to sketch a basic *soteriological outline*, iter, which he calls *dramatic soteriology*.

2.2 Dramatic soteriology

H. U. von Balthasar presents dramatic soteriology¹⁹ as a gradual development of the mystery of salvation in four moments. First the relationship between the event of the cross and the mystery of the Holy Trinity must be determined. Then attention focuses on the Crucified who as God and man comes to liberate human freedom. The soteriological outline continues with the Resurrected who through the Spirit brings humans new life, present and preserved in the Church. We will now examine the individual moments in more detail.

¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Theodramatik III. Die Handlung*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1980, p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 225.

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 221ff. 295.

¹⁹ Cf. Prokop Brož. Dramatická soteriologie v díle H. U. von Balthasara [Dramatic Soteriology in the Work of H. U. von Balthasar]. *Verba Theologica* 19/1 (2011), pp. 31–45.

2.2.1 *The Cross and the Holy Trinity*

The point of departure of dramatic soteriology is the course of events of the Cross against the background of the life of the Holy Trinity, which can only be grasped and conceived in faith. This is “the hour” (cf. John 17:1) which the Son enters in full accord with the Father’s will.

The event of the Cross belongs to the life of the Holy Trinity, which needs to be grasped in its mystery of a single divine nature and three divine persons. When von Balthasar refers to Rahner’s *Grundaxiom*²⁰ concerning the economic and immanent Trinity, he notes that Rahner has especially the economic Trinity in mind. On the other hand, J. Moltmann in the Hegelian tradition conceives Trinity as “an eschatological process deriving from Christ’s cross, open to man on earth”.²¹ However, von Balthasar mentions one other author, Sergey Bulgakov, who introduces the event of the Cross into the life of the Trinity by means of so called intra-divine kenosis which permeates its entire being and consists in the fact that in generating the Son the Father imparts his entire divinity to the Son:²² he does not share it with his Son, he gives him all that is his: “All yours are mine” (John 17:10).²³ Here we encounter a difference between divine and human nature: the process-based character of reality cannot be applied to divine nature, while it can be applied to human nature. If these two natures are united in the Son,²⁴ then we get to the fundamental meaning of the theodramatic approach: some things are given in the drama, some must gradually be filled out. What is given is the Father’s intention to save the world; it is up to the Son to fulfil his *mission* by his will and deed. The intention is from the very beginning of dramatic character: “The Trinitarian drama lasts eternally: The Father has never been

²⁰ “Die ökonomische Trinität ist die immanente Trinität und umgekehrt.” Karl Rahner. “Bemerkungen zum dogmatischen Traktat ‘De Trinitate’”. *Schriften zur Theologie. Band IV*. 4th ed. Einsiedeln – Zürich – Köln: Benziger 1964, pp. 105–136, at p. 115 (also in *MySa 2*, 327f.).

²¹ Jürgen Moltmann. *Der gekreuzigte Gott*. München: Kaiser Verlag 1972, p. 236.

²² Sergey Bulgakov. *Beránek Boží (O Boholidství)* [The Lamb of God (On Divine-humanity)]. Olomouc: Refugium 2011, pp. 153, 163.

²³ “[...] die Selbstaussprache des Vaters in der Zeugung des Sohnes als eine erste, alles unterfassende innergöttliche ‘Kenose’ bezeichnen, da der Vater sich darin restlos seiner Gottheit enteignet und sie dem Sohn übereignet: er ‘teilt’ sie nicht ‘mit’ dem Sohn, sondern ‘teilt’ dem Sohn alles Seine ‘mit’: ‘Alles Deinige ist mein’ (John 17,10).” Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theodramatik III*, p. 300.

²⁴ The four adverbs of the Chalcedonian Definition: *inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*. *DeH 302*.

without the Son, the Father and the Son have never been without the Spirit. All that is temporal happens in such a way that it is enclaspd by what happens eternally.”²⁵

To understand the historical salutary *mission of the Son*, von Balthasar introduces the category of *Trinitarian inversion*. At the moment of the incarnation there occurs an inversion in the order of the divine persons (*taxis trinitaria*). By kenosis and in full obedience to the Spirit the Son becomes man and in full submission to the Father’s will he fulfils his mission to save the world. After the resurrection the Son returns between the Father and the Spirit again.²⁶

The absolutely supreme life of God’s nature united itself to creation. Not only did homologation of the divine in the world take place; creation, which is still united with God by covenant, has become the bearer of the mystery of the Cross and is indivisibly linked with the Eucharist.

If the world is a hospitable place for divine indwelling, as creature it retains a mystery. God created the world “selflessly” (gratuitously) and through this gratuitousness he created “freedom in the world”. That is why there is the principle of “acting through oneself” in creation, not just “according to something” or “depending on something”. The principle of freedom is part of “God’s image in man”, but it is linked with a certain “god-lessness” (*Gottlosigkeit*), insofar as God creates a world which is different, which *differs* from God. This principle of divine freedom is fully shared within the Most Holy Trinity.

The situation of creation after original sin is different. By *covenant* the Lord God came to renew the principle of freedom which does not end in itself – *in Gottlosigkeit*, but is fulfilled in complete submission to God. Unconditional submission to the will and power of God the Father is brought about in the *Eucharist*, which represents the *new and eternal covenant*.

2.2.2 *The Crucified and sin*

The second moment of dramatic soteriology focuses on the *mission* of the Son, in which God *really* meets humans *as human*. At the same

²⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theodramatik III*, p. 304. “Das trinitarische Drama hat ewiges Dauern [...] alles Zeithafte ereignet sich im Umgriff des ewigen Geschehens.”

²⁶ Von Balthasar mentions the Trinitarian inversion both in the context of *Theodramatik*, cf. *Theodramatik. II/2*. 2nd ed. Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1998, pp. 167–174. 472–479, and in the context of *Theologik*, cf. *Theologik III*. Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag 1987, p. 187.

time he grants humans complete freedom, which enables them to approach this encounter even in their *sinful*, non-liberated freedom. The Son does so in order to *share* the root of human non-freedom and, by removing sin in his own body, remove sin from the lives of humans. The second moment of dramatic soteriology conceives the work of the Son meeting the sinner in three steps: it specifies the work of the Son who as holy and sinless *meets* the sinner – this is the motif of vicariousness. The topic is approached by means of the figure of the *inebriating cup*. The thereby effected relationship of the Son of God to the sinner is further mediated in the Church.

The motif of vicariousness (*Stellvertretung, substitutio vicaria*) is now perceived as *admirabile commercium* in the work of redemption: the Son died to sin for us in order that each of us may also be dead to sin.

The cup of staggering (*Taumelkelch*) is a figure which since the times of the prophets (Isa 51:17,22; Jer 13:13; 25:15–17,27ff; Ezek 23:32–34; Hab 2:15–16; Zech 12:2; Ps 79:10) has represented God's anger. God will never identify himself with sin and evil; the utmost – extreme – form in which he expresses his *relation* to the sinner is *anger*: he loves the human, he hates the sin. An important image here is the *lamb*: in him the Father's anger is "reconciled" and at the same time the image is an expression of the Father's love for the Son. The Son bears the "hopelessness", the "loss of grace", "reprobation", and at the same time "at the end of absolute ruin there is forgiveness".²⁷ Thus in the Son the cup of reprobation becomes *the cup of forgiveness and the Father's merciful love*.

How can this significant moment of salvation be conceived so as to transform humans-sinners into free children in the Father's house? The second moment of dramatic soteriology also includes the presence of the whole within which the comprehensive form of the sinner's salvation will evolve, the whole on which the Son can *modo terreno* rely as he relies on the Father's will.

According to von Balthasar the figure of Virgin Mary belongs here in her whole salutary significance. She represents humanity which is not only "autonomous", i.e., enjoys "the Creator's gratuitousness" with

²⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Theodramatik III*, p. 325: "Am Ende der (als unendlich erlebten) Nacht bricht urschöpferisch das Licht auf, am Ende der absoluten Vergeblichkeit die Vergebung."

which he lets the creature be in her freedom, but she also *already* responds with complete openness and loyal submission (Hingabe) to God: Mary is perceived as a “representative of a loyal, God-affirming human race”. Thereby she epitomizes all humanity which responds to God with *faith*, starting from Abraham. For this reason all the attributes linking her with the salutary work of the Son apply to Mary: immaculate conception, divine motherhood, perpetual virginity, assumption. And insofar as she is not *purely autonomous* but principally open to all relations, she also becomes the Mother of the Church within the *Son’s work*, i.e., the counterpart to the Son as the *Church-bride*.

2.2.3 Resurrection, the Spirit and life in God

The third moment of dramatic soteriology is represented by the figure of the Resurrected, who is conceived as the climax of the whole work of salvation: the world is thus, thanks to the drama of crucifixion and resurrection, drawn into the work of the Holy Trinity. The immanent Trinity is a prerequisite enabling the “eternal holy distance between the Son and the Father to be in the Spirit the foundation in which the godless distance (Distanz) of the sin of the world can be drawn into the work of the economic Trinity, in order to be corrected and finally overcome in it. The drama between God and the world takes place in time, in acts of the particular events of Christ and their consequences and cannot be reduced to philosophical, timeless abstract principles.”²⁸

The economic form of the Trinity is consummated in the resurrection, where the sovereign freedom of Christ who gives the Spirit in fullness is finally confirmed. The Spirit, who is now immediately united to the redeemed creation, consummates all of the creation’s striving for freedom: “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17), “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4).

With Christ’s resurrection a “symbolic universe”²⁹ opens up, which includes the Spirit of Christ, being born of God, and baptism. Where does this birth take place? If it is to have a real foundation and not take place purely symbolistically, it must be in the sacramental order

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 337.

²⁹ Cf. Bruno Forte. *La Parola della fede. Introduzione alla Simbolica ecclesiale*, Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo 1996, pp. 49–56.

of the *Church*. It is in the Church that the soteriologically *tuned* work takes place: *freedom is liberated here*, i.e., it is released from dependence on various powers hostile to God, so that it can walk the path of divinization (θεοποίησις) by following Christ in the rhythm of death and resurrection.

Nonetheless, this victory has some fundamentally theodramatic features, since it is of eschatological nature. The one who is liberated in this way is *dangerously exposed* (gefährliche Entblössung): he can be unambiguously recognized by the one who is still active in the world as the Tempter. “The eschatological gradation of freedom and exposure to evil within the victory already achieved constitutes the core of the problem of theology of history.”⁵⁰

This fundamentally dramatic freedom is understood as *grace*, conceived in relationship to God as being a child of God or being born of God. On the one hand, grace represents autonomy (αὐτεξουσιον), which, however, never coils back on itself but creates space for others in grateful devotion and loyalty. To be oneself and at the same time to renounce oneself completely in love: this is the true *final* freedom. This freedom cannot be merely a morally (with difficulty) attained goal which turns life into unbearable equilibristics; it has to be a safe *foundation of active life*. In God’s grace human freedom becomes such a foundation, out of which we are free and at the same time liberated for living out of God’s love. Grace as *power* does not mix human nature with divine nature; a human, characterized by human nature, is *actualized in such a way* that she participates in divine nature. She can accomplish this by fully participating *not* in some *abstract* divine essence, but in the *work which God came to initiate in his power* and has called humans to participate in.⁵¹

The resurrected Christ, by the weight of his whole salutary work which has entered the time plane by the *Son’s mission*, invites and guides people to the path of discipleship. Through grace – the Spirit is particular grace and God’s love – a human person is drawn into the

⁵⁰ Hans Urs. von Balthasar. *Theodramatik III*, p. 344.

⁵¹ Human freedom can only be fully developed against the interactive horizon of infinite divine freedom. In the *Theodramatik II/1*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1976, pp. 170–288, von Balthasar analyses finite freedom in relation to infinite freedom and in the last section defines this relationship in terms of grace. “Sein in der Gnade’ ist für das Geschöpf dort gegeben, wo der Grundakt der Selbstverdankung zugleich zum Ursprung und zum Ziel hin vollzogen wird” (p. 286).

entire work of redemption: her life is determined ἐν Χριστῷ. She now both participates in the work of the earthly, historical Jesus and is in faith united with Christ who recapitulates all earthly things in his resurrection. The Christian experiences death and life, darkness as well as light; she is crucified with Christ and at the same time rises to life with him: these are the basic *existential determinants* of life understood as discipleship. The intrinsic unity of this paradoxical form of life can only be attained in *grace*, i.e., in the Holy Spirit. One also needs to know that these existential determinants are not purely individual, that grace constitutes a community of participation in Christ's suffering and resurrection with both individual and social features. Progressive self-transcendence, in which the individual extends beyond herself to community, earthly being to heavenly being, being in itself extends beyond itself to gratuitous self-sacrifice, has a fully particular form, lived in Mary, in her complete submission to God. She totally hands herself over to God, so that her life can become the source of one further transcendence: it is not merely integrated in itself but "bears fruit".

2.2.4 *The Church and the Paschal mystery*

In the last section of "dramatic soteriology" the three previous ones culminate: The work of the Holy Trinity linked with the cross brought about the sinner's redemption in Christ's crucifixion. Of course, the work of salvation continues in Christ's resurrection, which is still one work common to all the persons of the Trinity. The Spirit thus enters the dynamics of salvation, individually awarded to and effective in every man. It now remains to be shown how the salutary work endures and is effective in history until the end of times.

Christ himself – in the Son's mission – linked the salutary work with the Church as the place where the memorial of the paschal mystery is preserved in the Eucharist. It is first of all a *work issuing from God's initiative and will remain such*, even when the human answer is crippled in its faith. The Eucharist is first of all built on the unfailling (indefectibilis) foundation of the Church. The dramatic feature of the Eucharist points to the *historical suffering*, in the form of which God revealed himself in his saving love (even the resurrected Christ has scars): this suffering is therefore concealed in the Holy Trinity and it is preserved in the Holy Spirit as well as "ad extra", i.e., in the Church and the world.

The event of the Cross and historical celebration of the Eucharist is now linked by the *memoria*⁵² in which the Holy Spirit cherishes and preserves the work of redemption. This memorial also receives a historical *ceremonial form* as *oblatio* and *sacrificium*. The full historical form of the memorial of Christ's suffering includes the hierarchy. In Balthasar's conception the hierarchic order of the Church is complemented by its "Marian" form. Just as Christ was accompanied by Mary to his death, so the "Marian" Church will constitute the basic context in which it will be possible to have an effective hierarchy.⁵³ Hierarchy is a gift of the Holy Spirit and its purpose is to gather God's people by the power of the same Spirit, not just by the weight of a generally conceived institution, and to guide them on the way to the Father.

Finally, participation in the Son's work of redemption not only brings about individual salvation; it also constitutes the space of *common salvation*, i.e., it affects every individual in her *capacity to common work*.

If in the *power of God's grace* a human can bear the fruits of this grace (*fructa, dona*), within the common harvest the same "fruit of grace" is called *meritum*. It is a fruit of human freedom which is not determined merely by the integrity and holiness of an individual, but also by the integrity and holiness of the whole community. An individual as a member of the communion of saints can bear fruit in the form of *meritum* (merit) which, however, is not initiated by the one who mediated the *meritum* but by the one who asked for it (*intercessio*); or the saint can offer this gift *secundum amicitiae proportionem* (St. Thomas Aquinas) to the sinner and God – precisely because it is *meritum* – will give it to him. It is a *treasure of grace*, unlimited in time

⁵² The term "memoriale" is fundamental in dramatic soteriology. Von Balthasar also touches on the issue in the paper "Die Messe, ein Opfer der Kirche?" published in Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Spiritus Creator. Skizzen zur Theologie III*. 3rd ed. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1999, pp. 166–317, especially the part "Ein gesamtbiblischer Weg", pp. 185–192. For a systematic treatment of the concept of memorial, cf. Burkhard Neunheuser – Achille M. Triacca. *Memoriale*. In Domenico Sartore – Achille M. Triacca – Carlo Cibien. *Liturgia*. Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo 2001, pp. 1165–1180.

⁵³ Von Balthasar meditates on the Church as Petrine and Marian in the wider framework of the so-called Christological constellation of the mystery of the Church. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Der antirömische Affekt. Wie lässt sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren?* 2nd ed. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1989, especially chapter II of the part "Vom Mysterium der Kirche", pp. 111–256. Von Balthasar also discusses the Marian character of the Church in the paper "Die marianische Prägung der Kirche". In Joseph Ratzinger – Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Maria. Kirche im Ursprung*. 4th ed. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1997, pp. 112–130.

and space. Thus the communion of saints is first of all a place where God dwells, grace brings fruit and the Church as a whole is grounded. At the same time the communion of saints is a place from where salvation spreads to the world by means of the *dramatics* of the Eucharist. It therefore pertains to the identity of the Church as communion of saints that through it as carrier of the paschal mystery the salutary work of God's is accomplished across time and space.

2.3 The transformed subject

To conclude the second part of this paper it will be useful to summarize its basic intention. A human being will fulfil her life if she transcends herself without destroying herself. This cannot take place in merely mental referring (romantic or idealistic); it must be dramatically acted out. The one who transcends the human being without destroying her must therefore enter the human story: God. The process by which God's intervention in the life of the human sinner can be described is called salvation and it is described in detail in so called dramatic soteriology. For the human as particular person this process, in which Christ enters her life story as Saviour, presents a vital turning point: "Growing into Christ means new birth for the human [...] he is internally transformed. Christ's power streams into his soul as a new source of life."³⁴ When Joseph Ratzinger comments on St. Paul's claim from the letter to the Galatians "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20), he says: "This sentence concludes a small spiritual biography which Paul had sketched for his readers – not to boast, but to clarify the message he had been charged to spread with reference to his life story connected with Christ and the Church. Such defence of his path leads him from the outside more and more to the inside: at first he explains the external events of his vocation, then he suddenly moves to the aforementioned sentence in which an internal event leading to the foundation of the whole story in which everything that happened took place is suddenly fully manifest. This internal event is fully personal and at the same time fully objective and expresses the essence of Christianity."³⁵ The Pope Benedict XVI is speaking here, as he was later to repeat several times, of "a change of the subject: The

³⁴ Edith Stein. *Was ist der Mensch? Theologische Anthropologie*. Freiburg i. B.: Herder (ESGS 15) 2005, p. 75.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger. *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie. Versuche zu ihrer Ortsbestimmung im Disput der Gegenwart*. Freiburg i. B.: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln 1993, p. 43f.

human I is no more an autonomous subject resting only in itself. It is wrung from itself, liberated and incorporated in a new subject.”⁵⁶

3. Belonging to the Church: incorporation in the mystical body of the Church

How and where is founded human existence which retains its historical features and at the same time is drawn into the work of salvation initiated by Christ? In our reflection we will now pause at the reality of baptism and the ecclesial context of human history, which inseparably belong together. The essence of baptism is stated by St. Paul: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). This is a unique event which – precisely as an event having its genuine valence in the sacramental order – does not remain a mere incident or an important happening among others, but since it takes place in the sacramental order it incorporates and hierarchizes the *entire* human existence. It then has the following three characteristics: 1. Baptism is an application of Christ’s power so that it affects *our life as a whole*. 2. It takes the form of an *event*, but nonetheless belongs to both *protology* and *eschatology* of our life. 3. It belongs to human life where it takes a *sacred form*.

The *sacramental* form of baptism can meet these requirements. “Sacrament” means not only a ritual form, it is a fully specific form of “symbol”, which has an unambiguous “res”. It can only be achieved in a specific context, the body of the Church. In this part we will therefore attempt to meditate on the dynamics available to the Church.

3.1 The Holy Spirit and the Church

The Church needs to be understood within the article of faith on the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to understand the Church quite well; the Church is born in the mystery of the Word Incarnate when it is *universalized* by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ That is why

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ “First, it must be shown from where the individual historical existence of Christ can become so universalized that it becomes the *immediate norm* of every historical-individual existence. The event of universalization is in a special way an act of the *Holy Spirit*.” Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theologie der Geschichte. Ein Grundriss. Neue Fassung*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1957, p. 61.

the earthly or pre-Easter story of Jesus Christ is as important for the Church as the post-Easter events. In the continuity of the event of the Incarnation and Resurrection is set the essence of the Church, which is of created nature and at the same time it is – in the historical event of the Redemption – fundamentally related by the Holy Spirit to God's essence, to the Holy Trinity.

The work of the Holy Spirit needs to be understood within God's universal will to save the world which, as creation, has unfortunately entered the path of ruin and destruction. This is the intention which God the Father in his sovereign will, implements in connection with the Son in the Spirit: the work of the Trinity *ad extra* is fully in harmony with the Trinity's life *ad intra*. When we follow the Son's work, which is never separated from operation of the Spirit and the Father's will, we speak about soteriology (the work of salvation). When we observe the activity of the Holy Spirit, we follow up on the Son's work by observing the application of the Son's deed on a universal scale.³⁸ The Church becomes the place not of completed holiness, but of dynamic fulfilment of the plan of salvation *for the whole world*. No wonder that in a Church open to the world the rhythm *to and from the world* will always be present, in which Christ's work of *justification* and *sanctification* will be applied with the goal of achieving freedom of the Spirit.³⁹

The Church can never identify with a single society, with a single earthly community or cultural type; within particular communities and cultures it will always point out their limits and weaknesses. However, this is only a negative definition of the Church. What does its positive determination consist in? As said above, it is the mystery of the Incarnation, in which the humanity in the Son's person is assumed by divinity. Therefore, the Church is principally given in Christ as *assumed* by God, while the Spirit is still carrying the work of assuming sin-afflicted humanity into effect. Thus the form of the Church is determined by the Son and the Spirit: Christ is the head of the Church who determines the fundamental principle of Church edification, while the

³⁸ "The universality of the Son's work corresponds to the universality of the Spirit who according to the prophecy fulfilled at the Pentecost will be 'poured out on all flesh'" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theologik III*, p. 234.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 238–252.

Spirit – as gift, freedom, and testimony⁴⁰ – is the principle of *gradual*, i.e., historical formation of the Church.

To understand the internal dynamics of the Church as a spiritual formation one can make use of the legacy of the Enlightenment and philosophical systems issuing from it. The Holy Spirit within the Church must then be perceived in the dynamics of *objective* and *subjective* spirit. The objective form of the spirit, which manifests itself in the Church as the human element and in which the Holy Spirit comes to operate, includes Tradition, Scripture and office, proclamation of the Gospel closely linked to liturgy, the sacraments in general, Church law, and theology. Following the objective unfolding of spirit one then needs to consider its subjective unfolding. The spirit need not slip into subjectivism; quite on the contrary, it ought to give the integrated form of the Church an internally subjective dimension. Thus at the subjective level the Holy Spirit causes internal refinement of the Church in prayer, forgiveness, experience of the Holy Spirit, discernment of spirits, and testimony of life.⁴¹

The universalization of the work of salvation as real, historically particular application of God's grace (the work of the Holy Spirit) does not take place only by purely "intrinsic" paths (subjective private religion), nor purely by "faith" (fideism), nor is it possible to rely on purely external structures of the Church (rationalistic reduction to objectivism) or its cultural manifestations (artistic reduction). The Holy Spirit maximally valorizes the full humanity of the Son who came to purify the spiritual rhythm and dynamics of human nature and fully integrate it in the work of salvation.

3.2 Born to salvation and holiness: the sacramental order

Order means an objectively structured, organized, not merely random relation of the individual elements within a whole, actively it means production of the whole. Order can be conceived ontologically,

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 207–233.

⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 234–382. Application of the objective and subjective aspect as two dialectic, mutually non-substituting moments of spiritual reality can also be observed in the first part of Balthasar's *Trilogy*, when he elaborates the basic cognitive tool of theological aesthetics: he examines *subjective evidence* (light of faith, experience of faith) in relation to *objective evidence* (what is the form of revelation, Christ as the centre of revelation, how this form is objectively mediated, testimony and eschatological reduction). Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Herrlichkeit I*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1961.

logically, ethically, socially, and theologically.⁴² The sacramental order is an ordering grounded in the encounter of divine and human freedom; if human freedom is enslaved and divine freedom commits itself right up to the complete enslavement of the cross, this order becomes supremely dramatic.⁴³ That is why theologians speak in this context of *the form of fire*: when Christ completed his work, he sent down the Spirit on the Church in the form of fire (Acts 2:3.19). Thereby all creation is brought to its supernatural form, i.e., brought to the point where it is to be transformed in order to be able to participate in redeemed eternity.

This is a very special order of being which on the one hand must fully correspond to the created natural order, while on the other hand it is fully linked to the dynamics transcending the natural order – grace.⁴⁴ The Swiss theologian von Balthasar starts from the mystery of the natural relationship of man and woman in order to disclose and highlight the references to the supernatural mystery of the Church which it conceals. There are three such lines in which the Church can be viewed as bride in relationship to her bridegroom.⁴⁵ 1) The bride as subject. The Church is not a mere collective, it certainly cannot be hypostatized, to some extent it has no parallel. Its subject is alive by being addressed by Christ’s Trinitarian consciousness. 2) The bride as body. The real corporeity of the Church as bride is posited by Christ, who does not destroy corporeity in its natural form but establishes it in its supernatural form. In fact, it is the Spirit who preserves the validity of all corporeal, but the corporeal is definitively set in the Lord’s sacrament and conceived in faith. Corporeity thus becomes

⁴² Arno Anzenbacher. “Ordnung”. In *LThK*³, col. 112f.

⁴³ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Theodramatik III*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Kurt Koch has attempted to receive von Balthasar’s conception of the Church in his paper “Kirche als bräutliche Ikone der Trinität”, in H. U. von Balthasar–Stiftung (ed.), *Wer ist die Kirche? Die Referate am Symposium zum 10. Todesjahr von H. U. von Balthasar*, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1999, pp. 9–31. He called it “personal and Trinitarian ecclesiology” and it would be organized along the following lines: 1. Somatic and personal ecclesiology: Body and bride of Christ; 2. Spousal ecclesiology: Mary as the Church at the beginning; 3. Marian and Petrine ecclesiology: life of faith and institutional structure; 4. Communion ecclesiology: Church authority as ministry of love; 5. Pro-existential ecclesiology: the Church as representative of the human race; 6. Trinitarian ecclesiology: the mystery of the Church as bride and the Trinitarian God.

⁴⁵ The last passage of the famous paper “Wer ist die Kirche?” In Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Sponsa Verbi. Skizzen zur Theologie II*. 2nd ed. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1971, pp. 148–202, is called “Trinität, Menschwerdung, Kirche”.

virginal through the Spirit and thereby opens up to the path of new fertility. 3) The bride as complementary to the bridegroom. There is a very special relationship between the Church as bride and Christ as bridegroom: this relationship is by no means hypostatized; it remains a dynamic (κατὰ σῆμασις) personal submission of the bride to the bridegroom. Only in this way can the Church as bride find herself in Christ: she is so *humble* (never without her bridegroom) and at the same time *magnificent – glorious* (herrlich): she has become the glory of her bridegroom. If sin is present in the Church, humbleness assumes the dramatic form of *humiliation* and glorification crosses the abyss of *death*. This is why the Church as *immaculate* in its corporeity is characterized by the Lamb's *blood*.

The sacramental order is not some sterile, blameless ordering, it is ordained to bringing *fruits*; it is the order of the one who is *Vivificator*. The emblem of the sacramental order is a *child*. Corporeity and love in their rich phenomenology (from creation to generation) are the foundation of *begetting and bearing a child*. There is an analogous relation between the natural and sacramental order: the natural order brings life through procedures and processes of human nature; the sacramental order brings to new life through procedures that are supernatural. If natural generation presupposes (at least biologically) mature personalities, the Church only becomes mother in the process of the seed fallen into soil (i.e., in the cross, resurrection and ascension).⁴⁶ If eros (ἔρως), which represents the spiritual movement of man and woman towards mutual identification, is an important element in human reproduction, but we can only speak of it if both partners are present, in generation to eternal life the Spirit comes not by the power of eros, but out of real love (ἀγάπη), perhaps especially where it is unexpected (Lk 1:29). Natural life originating from the hands of the Creator is therefore presupposed, while acts of the sacramental order bring the created order to fulfilment by grace – *gratia*. The relation between the natural and the supernatural order is thus the basic texture of the sacramental order. Mary, her femininity as both virginity and motherhood *full of grace* can only be understood within its framework.

Within the sacramental order it is then possible to reflect on a particular, historical form of the Church, which von Balthasar views within the so called *Christological constellation*. This constellation is not just

⁴⁶ Von Balthasar. *Sponsa Verbi*, p. 201.

a one-directional perspective from the Law to grace, from archetype to fulfilment; there are particular historical events and persons who can in grace constitute ever new combinations and further possibilities for realisation. When von Balthasar wants to be maximally brief, he states that “the following stand in important theological closeness [to Christ]: the Baptist, his mother, the Twelve, among whom there is Peter on the one hand, further John, and finally the ‘one untimely born’, Paul. (James, the brother of the Lord, is mentioned later in different context.)”⁴⁷

Within the rich Christological constellation von Balthasar does not view the Church merely as a place which is spoiled and without the prospect of fruits (cf. Mk 11:12–14, 20–22) and must be continually cultivated and fertilized; he sees the Church as an *already maturing fruit*.⁴⁸ In order for the Church to be perceived in this way, it must comprise the following three elements: *anima ecclesiastica*, fruits of the holy mass, and the fertility of self-sacrificing body. 1. Von Balthasar adopts an idea of Origen’s⁴⁹ when he speaks of *anima ecclesiastica*; it means that the *consciousness of the individual is ecclesified* to the extent that each individual accords with the whole Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*). This happens when from a privately conceived consciousness the human being is first estranged from her sinful “I” and returned to herself within the sacred ecclesial “we”. Within this *anima ecclesiastica*, which manifests individual as well as socio-personal characteristics, one can speak of *bringing the fruits of grace*. 2. The second important *topos* of the Church’s fertility are the individual sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is precisely the Eucharist as *memoria passionis Christi* that is the permanent source of the Church’s new life.⁵⁰ Von Balthasar analyzes the anatomy of Eucharistic fertility against the background of the passage about washing the feet (John 13:3–17). Christ bows in humility before Peter in order to ground the fertility of the Church forgiving sins in his own and Peter’s humiliation. 3. The Church preserves her fertility by drawing on the source of the mystery of God’s love.

⁴⁷ Von Balthasar. *Der antirömische Affekt*, pp. 115f.

⁴⁸ On this see Stephan Ackermann. *Kirche als Person. Zur ekklesiologischen Relevanz des personal-symbolischen Verständnisses der Kirche*. Würzburg: Echter Verlag 2011, pp. 14–21, 108–110, 259–270.

⁴⁹ Origen. *Homiliae in Cant.* 1,10.

⁵⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Spiritus Creator*, pp. 166–218.

Conclusion

When Nicodemus came to see Christ at night, he sensed that he was meeting a unique personality who opened up the mystery of life in a completely new way. He addressed Christ quite shyly, merely stating the extraordinary deeds he could observe the Master doing. Jesus moved straight to the core of the matter: "Unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus tries to understand Christ's words. In light of the birth of human life he tried to imagine another birth. What did he achieve? He destroyed the idea of the unique character of a human being's arrival to the world and trivialized the moment of natural birth. Not to lessen the depth of natural birth and at the same time view life in an even deeper perspective: that is the aim of reflecting on baptism. How can we assume such new perspective?

Baptism is one of the initiation sacraments which integrates the human being in the natural movements of human life and at the same time provides a new dynamics enabling the human being to closely link human life with divine life. The text has attempted to view this new perspective, the course of life and light with which baptism is linked, from three different viewpoints.

1. First I tried to grasp the *real* dynamics of humanly natural life in its historical form. Indeed, not every conception of life is suitable to adequately show the richness of baptism. One must not lose the particular flow of life and grasp it as life story with both protological and eschatological anchoring.

2. If human life is to be sufficiently anchored, it must find answer to the fundamental deficiency that can be observed in the life of an individual as well as the whole human race. It is not easy to preserve the dignity and greatness of human life grounded in freedom when it embarks on self-destructive movements and ends in the loss and destruction of not only dignity, but of freedom as such. In order to preserve its unique nature, life needs to be set in a soteriological framework. The second part of our reflection attempted to sketch the so called dramatic soteriology, i.e., the doctrine of salvation, in which human life must be carefully anchored. The basic span of the salutary framework is determined by the secret of the Holy Trinity and the salutary work of Christ's cross. In it, the reality of sin and the story of the sinner finding her own foundation in liberated freedom can be set. On closer examination it becomes manifest that the Holy Spirit is at

work here and in intimate union with Christ brings about a change of perspective – from the old one to the new. The human being is thus set in a new order – the order of resurrected life, which is at the historical level inseparably linked with the life of the Church. These are the four basic axes of dramatic soteriology.

3. The last part of the paper focused on the form of the Church, the new order. Baptism can only be conceived as an anonymous, totally concealed and almost unconscious reality because the adequate context of baptism – i.e., the Church – is not portrayed in sufficient detail. But if the Church receives adequate space in its visible – though symbolic and sacramental – expression, the sacramental order will stop being a purely ritual reality, inner life will acquire an external expression and will be able to lend appropriate brightness and radiance to simple natural life. “For God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). This brightness and radiance, aroused and born by the joy of the resurrected Jesus, are not exhausted at the purely aesthetic level and lead the human being to transformation: in thoughts, inner life, acts – to total *fundamental transformation*. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to human measures. [...] If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:16f). We can therefore summarize: Baptism arouses, sustains and brings to completion the lifelong process of *fundamental transformation of the human being*, which is supported by God’s initiative and leads to God.

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ABSTRAKT

PROKOP BROŽ

**Patřit Kristu a patřit do církve: příběh každého křesťana.
Ekleziologická reflexe nad svátostí křtu**

Článek pojednává o svátosti křtu ve trojí perspektivě. Nejprve ukazuje, jak se křest začleňuje do dějinné existence křesťana a vytváří základní událost nejen obecně dějin lidské osoby, ale dějin spásy každé lidské osoby. Druhá perspektiva rozvádí soteriologický rys křtu. Ve světle Kristova spásného díla, nahlédnutého v rámci tzv. soteriologického oblouku (H. U. von Balthasar) je ukázán dosah proměny lidského subjektu. Třetí část nahlíží lidský subjekt Duchem svatým začleněný do celku církve, jež je uspořádána jako svátostný řád. Závěr shrnuje základní teze článku.

Klíčová slova

křesťanská antropologie, dějiny, soteriologie, ekleziologie, svátostný řád, H. U. von Balthasar