

Encountering Adrienne Von Speyr

As Adrienne von Speyr was driving home from her medical practice in Basel, Switzerland, one day in 1942, she suddenly saw a bright light in front of her car.¹ Someone shouted from the sidewalk, “Is something burning in that car?” At that moment in the car, she heard a voice say to her, “*Tu vivras au ciel et sur la terre* [You will live in heaven and on earth].”² For the rest of her life, von Speyr had a flood of mystical experiences from the open heaven. The heavenly world of the Trinity rushed into her earthly life. At the same time, she devoted herself to living in the professional world as a doctor and in the intimacy of her family life as a wife and mother. These words from heaven spoken to her summarize in a sentence her life and mission. As both a doctor and mystic, she truly lived in heaven and on earth.

The twentieth-century pontiff John Paul II (1920–2005) saw in von Speyr this double life of being in heaven and on earth. Speaking at the scholarly conference in honor of her, John Paul II said that von Speyr was someone who rooted her social-professional vocation in her life in God.³ He thought she was an example of the teaching that “the only thing that God urgently wants from you is to go out of yourself and to let God be God in you.”⁴ John

1. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 183–84.

2. *Ibid.*, 183.

3. John Paul II, “Ansprache des Heiligen Vaters,” in *Adrienne von Speyr und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten des Römischen Symposiums 27.–29. September 1985*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Georges Chantraine, and Angelo Scola (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986), 181–82. After her death, John Paul II made a request to Hans Urs von Balthasar that there needed to be a scholarly conference in honor of von Speyr. Von Balthasar carried this out, and the Holy Father addressed the conference, which was attended by several hundred people. On this, see von Balthasar’s presentation at the conference, “Einleitung,” in *Kirchliche Sendung*, 12–16. See also Georges Chantraine, “Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume, The Wojtyła Years*, ed. Peter Gareffa (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 256–57.

Paul II reflected, “One could think that the mystic separates himself from the created world and thereby forsakes his brother.”⁵ On the contrary, John Paul II continued, “the mystic is completely near him, namely there, in God, where he can truly reach him.”⁶ By being immersed in heaven, the Christian can be more available to others on earth.

The twentieth-century poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) was fascinated by one of von Speyr’s written works. He said of her commentary on the prologue to the Gospel of John, “Adrienne von Speyr’s book does not lend itself to any classification that I can think of.”⁷ It is not a book of dogmatic theology or scholarly exegesis; it is not a book of skeptical theology or strict meditation. It is beyond classification, and thus, when one reads von Speyr, “there is nothing to do but to submit oneself to it; if the reader emerges without having been crushed by it, he will find himself strengthened and exhilarated by a new experience of Christian sensibility.”⁸ We can only assume that Eliot had this strengthening, exhilarating experience of reading her mysticism.

Another twentieth-century figure who was deeply influenced by von Speyr is the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Of his twenty-seven years of close collaboration with von Speyr as her confessor and spiritual director, he said, “On the whole I received far more from her, theologically, than she from me.”⁹ While it would be impossible to assess the exact proportions of how much von Balthasar and von Speyr influenced each other, he was convinced that those in a position to judge will agree with him about the value of her works and “thank God with me that he has granted such graces to the Church in our time.”¹⁰ However, during von Speyr’s life, there was general indifference to her work. Only now, thanks to the work of von Balthasar and many others, readers of Christian spirituality are learning more about this doctor and mystic and in Eliot’s words, they are letting themselves be crushed in order to find strength and exhilaration.

What did John Paul II, T. S. Eliot, and Hans Urs von Balthasar see in the doctor and mystic Adrienne von Speyr? As I hope to illustrate in this book, they saw an overwhelming vision of the gate of heaven cast open, revealing

4. John Paul II, “Ansprache,” 181.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. T. S. Eliot, “Review on dust jacket of *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel*,” by Adrienne von Speyr, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Collins, 1953).

8. Ibid.

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981), 13.

10. Ibid., 13–14.

the dynamic inner life of the Trinity. My conviction is that these twentieth-century figures saw in Adrienne von Speyr a Trinitarian mysticism that they could not ignore and that we, in the twenty-first century, should not either. She has something profound to say about the Trinity. Most who begin to read and study von Speyr usually do not know much about her life and works. This introductory chapter will give a firm foundation for this study. After offering an overview of the book, I will provide a short biography of her life as a doctor and mystic, an introduction to her works and style, and a history of research on her thought.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In this book, I attempt to gather what von Speyr says about the Trinity, integrate her many insights into central themes, and interpret their significance in light of Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology. Since von Speyr is so thoroughly Trinitarian in her mysticism, this book is a study that must be done in order to receive the many gifts given in von Speyr's mysticism.

My central thesis is that according to the Trinitarian mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr, heaven opens to the Trinity and reveals the original image of the eternal, immanent relations of triune love. Heaven is opened by the Father in the mission of the Son to be the incarnate Word of obedience, and together they have sent the Holy Spirit to be like a religious rule accompanying the obedience of the Son and the disciple. The now-opened heaven reveals the Trinity as the original source of the sacraments and prayer who inserts the church into the heavenly, inner love of the Trinity.

To argue this thesis after this overview, chapters 2 and 3 will focus on Adrienne von Speyr's theory and experience of Trinitarian mysticism. Using her two-volume work on subjective and objective mysticism, *Das Wort und die Mystik (Word and Mysticism)*, these chapters provide the functioning methodology for my book. By defining mysticism theologically (as opposed to philosophically or psychologically), I argue that mysticism is essentially linked to the Christian revelation of the Trinity. Through a theological analysis of Scripture and tradition, I argue for the necessity of seeing mysticism as a crucial element in the drama of redemption. This analysis culminates with the linking of mysticism with the Son's vision and nonvision of the Father during the crucifixion, descent, and resurrection. After having established a theory of interpreting Trinitarian mysticism with its relation to the drama of redemption, I offer a detailed analysis of one of von Speyr's own mystical visions of the Trinity as a union of three spherical lights.

With the previous chapters' analysis of the epistemological, subjective aspects of the mystic, chapters 4 through 10 present a detailed synthesis and analysis of the ontological, objective aspects of von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism. In chapter 4, I present the mystic's experience of God as an experience of the immanent Trinity through the economic revelation of the Trinity. It is a vision of the always-greater God who is beyond all boundaries and comprehension. Nevertheless, since the triune God has revealed himself in the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit, it is possible to understand the immanent Trinitarian life through these missions.

Through the doctrine of analogy as a way to authentically speak about God in himself, I synthesize in chapter 5 von Speyr's mysticism of the immanent Trinity as a love theology in which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father with the Holy Spirit as their mutual love. The fullness of the Trinitarian exchange of love desires the insertion of creation and the human person into their inner life of love. This insertion is accomplished in the economic missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, which are the focus of the next chapters.

In chapters 6 and 7, I analyze von Speyr's understanding of the economic sending of the Son. I first establish von Speyr's Ignatian understanding of the relationship of the obedience and mission as the central theological notions for interpreting the economic manifestations of the immanent Trinity. Next, I examine the Son's obedience and forsakenness in the three days of the passion and how these three days draw the boldest contours, from the human perspective, of the triune Persons. The Son's mission of obedience, which meant his death and descent, receives from the Father the response of love through the Easter resurrection. The Son's mission of obedience accomplishes the finally valid confession of human disobedience and returns humanity to its original state of obedience.

For von Speyr, the Holy Spirit's economic mission of obedience, which is the focus of chapter 8, can be understood as a religious rule over and in the Son and the disciple. Both the Son's breathing of the Spirit on the cross and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost reveal the economic mission of the Holy Spirit as the one sent by the Father and the Son. The church thus sees the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son whose mission is the inclusion of the church into the Trinity. Similarly, von Speyr understands the descent of the Holy Spirit as an insertion of the church into the triune life of love. Born from the Son on the cross, the church exists in the Trinity and imitates the obedience of the persons of the Trinity to each other.

Since the ecclesial life is lived from within the Trinitarian exchange, I present in chapters 9 and 10 how von Speyr comprehends the sacraments and prayer as having their origin in the Trinity. As the Son and the Holy Spirit's gift to the church, each sacrament manifests the inner relations of the three Persons in the one divine nature. Following the previous chapter, prayer too finds its origin in the Father and Son's relation of love in the Holy Spirit. The inner life of Trinitarian prayer and von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism afford a summing up of von Speyr's penetrating vision of the open heaven.

Choosing from among the many things to assess and evaluate in von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism, I assess in chapter 11, the final chapter, the difficult challenges and promising future of the theological study of Adrienne von Speyr.¹¹ While there seem to be uncomfortable aspects of von Speyr's mysticism, the growing popular and scholarly encounter with her writings attests to the objectively valid place for the theological study of von Speyr. In conclusion, I present my study as an example of a constructive relationship between theology and mysticism. I argue along with von Balthasar that "Adrienne von Speyr has brought mysticism back from the clandestine existence into which . . . it had been exiled . . . and returned it the center of salvation history."¹² The fruitfulness allowed by her mysticism should affect authentic development in our understanding of Christian theology's ultimate concern: "God who in his essence is Trinity."¹³

It must be asked, what is at stake for this book? There are four main reasons that this study of von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism should be done. The first is that von Speyr articulately illuminates the Christian understanding of the Trinity in which she presents a dynamic interaction of the triune Persons while holding on to the essential oneness of God. Her understanding of the full revelation of the Trinity found in the passion of the Son is particularly attractive and perhaps overpowering. The Son gives himself on Holy Thursday in the Eucharist in an attitude of obedience to the Father. Led to the redemptive cross, he completely abandons himself, crying out to the Father and, in his last breath, gives up the Holy Spirit to the Father. Descending into hell with the dead, the Son remains united with the Father and Holy Spirit, but the union is stretched to the breaking point, which expands the Trinitarian relations for humanity's insertion into them. In the Father's love for the Son, he raises his Son on the

11. Von Speyr's favorite number, eleven, stands for Ignatius. See von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 82–85. Von Speyr's marvelously detailed numerology can be found in her book *Der Fischernetz: Nachlassband II* and also *Ignatiana: Nachlassband XI*.

12. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 89.

13. Von Speyr, *Jo I*, 27.

third day, and the Son breathes forth the Holy Spirit onto the church, which gathers the Christian into the mutual love of the triune Persons.

Second, von Speyr's Trinitarian vision profoundly influenced Hans Urs von Balthasar. Even though he is one of the foremost theologians of the twentieth century, he said, "The greater part of so much of what I have written is a translation of what is present in more immediate, less technical fashion in the powerful work of Adrienne von Speyr."¹⁴ A proper understanding of von Balthasar, from his theology of Holy Saturday to his understanding of the Trinitarian missions, must not ignore the substantial influence—theological and spiritual—of von Speyr.

Third, von Speyr's life, fully immersed in heaven coupled with a full engagement with the secular world, should attract Christian theology. The deep theological thought and mystical experience of von Speyr is echoed by a deep engagement in the secular world, especially toward the sick. As a laywoman, doctor, wife, and mother, she is an example of generous response to the Christian call for a fruitful interaction of contemplation and action. While her writings are not strict, scholarly theology, I think we will see a no-less-fruitful articulation of the Trinity here than in many scholarly works on the Trinity, as important as they are.

Fourth, while my intent is always to encourage the reading of von Speyr directly, one will quickly grasp that the profound things she says about the Trinity are scattered throughout her many volumes. There is a need then to gather together all she says about the Trinity into one comprehensive, scholarly work. Von Speyr's immediate mystical visions can serve Trinitarian theology better by being mediated through synthesis and analysis.

Another important question is who would be vitally interested in this study. I can think of many different people, but four groups in particular will be interested in this work. First, as already mentioned, von Balthasar scholars will need to integrate von Speyr's influence into their studies. This influence is strongest on von Balthasar's Trinitarian theology, his Holy Saturday theology, and his Mariology. I will primarily offer the first two, but von Speyr's Mariology will be present, too.¹⁵

14. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect*, trans. Brian McNeil, Kenneth Batinovich, John Seward, and Kelly Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius / Communio, 1993), 105.

15. For the interaction of von Balthasar and von Speyr's Mariology, see Johann Roten, "The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler, 65–86 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991).

Second, theologians and historians interested in mysticism will find in von Speyr a developed theory of mysticism in its subjective and objective aspects. While it is not a complete, systematic account, von Speyr's reflections on mysticism and her own mystical experiences will intrigue the contemporary study of Catholic Christian mysticism. I think von Speyr will be seen as one of the foremost Christian mystics of the twentieth century.

Third, Trinitarian theologians will want to wrestle with von Speyr's visions of the Trinity because she articulates a dynamic love theology of the triune Persons. Von Speyr is so thoroughly Trinitarian in all theological topics that it will challenge and deepen the desire for a robust Trinitarian theology of all theological loci.

Finally, just as von Speyr is thoroughly Trinitarian in all her writings, she is also thoroughly scriptural in her approach, which will interest Bible scholars, especially those involved in a theological reading of the Bible. All of von Speyr's works, particularly the many commentaries on Scripture, provide a deep theological reading of Scripture that, as she insists, takes every word as having theological import for the church.

Anyone reading von Speyr will gain much insight by reading this book. If you are new to von Speyr, you will also find this book an excellent entry point into her thought. This theological study of von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism is essential, especially since there is much at stake and many are interested in this work. Since von Speyr is relatively unknown and her work is crucially tied up with her life, I will first lay a foundation for that study by presenting an essential biography of her life as a doctor and mystic.

II. DOCTOR AND MYSTIC: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ADRIENNE VON SPEYR (1902–1967)

Von Speyr's life and mission confirm what was spoken to her that day in 1942, when she heard the voice say, "You will live in heaven and on earth." Two aspects of von Speyr's life capture her mission: her roles as a doctor and a mystic. The former she pursued with the hardest effort, and the latter she received as sheer grace. As John Paul II said of her, it is as if the more deeply she was taken into heaven, the more available she was to others.

Much of von Speyr's life story revolves around Basel, Switzerland. This city, like much of Switzerland, captivated many great European figures of late-medieval and modern periods, including Erasmus of Rotterdam, Hans Holbein the Younger, Jacob Burckhardt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Jung, Karl Barth, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.¹⁶ Basel (Basle or Bâle) has its history tied to the ancient Roman settlement Augusta Raurica, which is a few miles up the Rhine.

Basel is Switzerland's northernmost wedge, thrusting up into the French and German border along the Rhine. The city is now a modern trade center for European continental trade fairs.¹⁷ Basel still has a strong sense of its Christian history, expressed by its many medieval and Gothic churches, the distinguished theological faculty at the University of Basel, and its Fasnacht festival, which is the largest Swiss carnival. Von Speyr grew up in French Switzerland, but just before her father died, he wanted to move the entire family to Basel. After his death, von Speyr moved to Basel to attend its *Gymnasium* and medical school. When she graduated from medical school, she opened her first general medical practice in Basel. She is buried in this city, where her secular institute, the Johannesgemeinschaft, though small, continues to thrive.

A. FROM CHILDHOOD TO CONVERSION: "POUR AUJOURD'HUI IL N'Y A QU'UN MOT, UN SEUL: MERCI"

Adrienne von Speyr was born September 20, 1902, in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, to her German-Swiss father, Theodor von Speyr, and her French-Swiss mother, Laure Girard. Her father grew up in Basel and moved to La Chaux-de-Fonds, where he had his medical practice as an ophthalmologist. From her father, von Speyr would receive a great passion for being a medical doctor.¹⁸ Her mother came from a family of successful watchmakers and jewelers in Geneva and Neuchâtel. Adrienne von Speyr's family lived in La Chaux-de-Fonds, which is on the far western edge of French Switzerland and high in the Jura Mountains.¹⁹ Since her father was a well-respected doctor, the family lived quite comfortably; von Speyr remembers a caring governess and

16. Dieter Fahrni, *An Outline History of Switzerland: From the Origins to the Present Day*, trans. the Pro Helvetia (Zurich: Pro Helvetia, 1997).

17. Werner Kaegi, Adrienne von Speyr's second husband, said of Basel that the original law of this city was not so much manufacturing, but "commerce and transit, the buying, reselling, and shipping of goods over long distances linking Italy with the Netherlands, the markets of Champagne with Spain and Germany, Nuremberg with Paris." Quoted in Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study of Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 39.

18. In this biography and throughout the book, I will refer to Adrienne von Speyr as 'von Speyr.' Even though she took the surnames of her first and second husbands, she was published under her maiden name. While it is also common to use her name Adrienne, I have chosen to use the more common, English academic practice of using her surname. On pronouncing her "Speyr," one can say "spair," "spire," or "schpair," depending on whether one is speaking English, German, or Swiss, respectively.

19. Given the great beauty of the Juras and the other beautiful cities in the canton of Neuchâtel, it is unfortunately a drab, grid-plan city. It is still the Swiss center for watch making and collecting. The architect Charles Edouard Jeanneret or Le Corbusier (1887–1965) was born here and has marked the city with his high-rise, concrete International Style.

a large playroom.²⁰ As the second oldest, she enjoyed growing up with her three siblings—Hélène, the oldest; Wilhelm, second youngest; and Theodor, the youngest. As much affection as she had for her father, she did not, however, have a good relationship with her mother. Therefore, her favorite thing to do as a child was to leave her home and retreat to her grandmother's old country farmhouse, which had a large, lovely garden.²¹ Grandmother's house meant paradise, and it was there that, she writes, "I learned, while still very young, about silence and recollection."²² Often, she would spend whole hours with her nose to the window, watching the snow fall: "The snow fell solemnly, enlarging the silence; it came straight down from heaven, bringing an inexplicable mystery."²³ The best things were the silence and the quiet loving presence of her grandmother.²⁴

Her first mystical experience happened on Christmas Eve in 1908 while it was snowing. Six-year-old von Speyr and her aunt were walking on an errand to pick up her sister, Hélène, for the family Christmas party. When they came to the end of a street, the rue Jaquet-Droz, von Speyr said to her aunt, "You could go up the usual way by the rue de l'Arsenal and I will make a little detour by the steps at the end."²⁵ As she went on her own up the steps, a short, old man with a slight limp came down the steps toward her.²⁶ He took her hand gently and said to her, "I thought you would come with me: don't you want to?"²⁷ With reservation, she said, "No, sir, but Merry Christmas."²⁸ He looked sad and let go of her hand. Adrienne walked on her way and thought that, though she knew she had to say no, she would have liked to say yes. When her mother found out about the encounter, she became livid. In von Speyr's later years and after numerous mystical encounters with this same short, old man with a slight limp, she recognized him as St. Ignatius of Loyola.

When von Speyr could go to school, she would have great joy in learning. But from an early age, she experienced severe illness. In 1911, she contracted

20. Von Speyr, *ML*, 13.

21. *Ibid.*, 15–18, 339–57.

22. *Ibid.*, 15.

23. *Ibid.*, 16.

24. Her grandmother died on Christmas in 1913. Von Speyr recalls that it was snowing on that day. Von Speyr, *ML*, 17.

25. *Ibid.*, 26. This account is also in von Speyr, *GJ*.

26. "An extreme poverty and, at the same time, something very simple, very touching, radiated from him. If I had had to guess what his profession in life had been, I would have said at first: he is a poor man." Von Speyr, *ML*, 26 n. 1.

27. *Ibid.*, 26.

28. *Ibid.*

scarlet fever and began to have severe back pain from spondylitis. She also suffered appendicitis that became so serious that it was decided she would have an appendectomy at the hospital in Basel. Her conversations with her father and brother made her realize, “I understood perfectly what was being asked of me: nothing but trust for a thing judged necessary” and that “in order to be a doctor, I really needed to learn just a little about what it is to suffer.”²⁹ Even in her youth, she learned what obedience and suffering meant. She must trustingly obey what was asked of her, and if she wanted to help others as a doctor, she would have to know in herself their suffering.³⁰

After her operations, she returned to school in the *Lycée* (similar to the German *Progymnasium*). She had religion class once a week and conversations with the pastor afterward. In Switzerland, there were two Reformed traditions; one was the National Church, and the other Independent, which was much smaller. Von Speyr was raised in the Independent Reformed Church. She grew up always wanting to learn more about Catholics, but this was always frustrated.³¹ She remembered that when her religion classes would talk about the gospel, she would say that the verses meant something else or, especially, something more than what the pastor explained. The pastor would often interrupt her, “That’s Catholic! Where did you get that? Who is putting these ideas into your head?”³² But she would reply that she did not know any Catholics and that all she still wanted to do was know more about God and how to serve him.

In November 1917, von Speyr had her second significant mystical experience.³³ Early in the morning, she was woken up by a golden light that filled the wall beside her bed, and she saw an image of the Virgin Mary,

29. *Ibid.*, 77.

30. After her operation, a pastor came to see her, asking if she would like to talk. She found herself stating forthrightly, “I’m not a Protestant. You needn’t trouble yourself about me.” When her parents found out about it, on the train ride home from Basel, her mother said with complete dissatisfaction, “This child will end up being a Catholic, you will see. She truly does enough stupid things to need to go to Confession.” Perplexed, Von Speyr then asked her father, “Can a person become a Catholic?” Yes, he replied. Then she asked, “What is going to Confession?” Telling your sins, he answered. “I know that,” she said, “but still, why do I need to go to Confession?” Her father said he did not know. But it became clear to her that people do need to go to Confession. See von Speyr, *ML*, 78–81; see also von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 169–79.

31. In elementary school, there was Carlo, who was a Catholic, and she wanted to ask him about Catholicism, but he said, “Mama has forbidden me to talk about things like that because we’re living in a lost country now, but when we are home in Italy, I will tell you everything; you shall come with me.” Von Speyr, *ML*, 37.

32. *Ibid.*, 102.

surrounded by several other people and angels.³⁴ The whole image was alive with movement. She looked at the living image for a long time and prayed without words as she thought that never had she seen anything so beautiful. The background around Mary faded little by little so that the face and hands became more distinct and alive. She remembers not being afraid but filled with an intense, sweet joy. Not for an instant did she think anything was unreal about the vision. Rather, it was all concrete and natural. When the image of Mary disappeared, she knelt beside her bed and prayed until she had to go to school. She did not tell anyone about it except her close friend at that time, Madeleine, and eventually von Balthasar during her preparations for baptism into the Catholic Church, which would be twenty-three years after the vision. The memory of the vision remained clear to her: “It accompanied me like a wonderful mystery.”³⁵

Three months later, her father died.³⁶ On a Friday morning in 1918, her father had stayed home from work with terrible pain in his left shoulder and arm, perhaps a heart attack. That evening, after von Speyr had come home from school, she slipped into her father’s bedroom. He said to her in a voice quite changed, “Good evening, my little one.” She had not thought this could be the day of her father’s death, yet she said to him, “Thank you for everything, Papa.”³⁷ He replied, “Thank you for everything, my little one. Life is not easy for you, but stay as you are.” She once again said, very softly, “Thank you for everything.” She stayed up that whole night praying, and the next morning she was told he had died.

Many things changed for her family after her father’s death. They lost much of their income and had to move from their large house to a three-room apartment on the main street, rue Léopold-Robert. By this time, she was in the La Chau-de-Fonds *Gymnasium* and studying many subjects, especially languages—French, German, Italian, English, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew—as well as the natural sciences and a lot of mathematics.³⁸ She was also in charge of

33. She did have other mystical experiences besides the encounter with St. Ignatius and this vision of Mary. She mentions that an “angel” would appear and teach her things about God and heaven, but it is difficult to understand what she means, since she seldom discusses it.

34. Von Speyr, *ML*, 142–43.

35. Von Speyr, *ML*, 143. Later in her life, after she became a Catholic, she had other visions of Mary. See, for example, *EH*, 222, 355, 673, 937, 949, 1885 (the numbers refer to the diary entries in the three volumes of her diary *Erde und Himmel*) and also von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 49.

36. Von Speyr, *ML*, 145–55.

37. *Ibid.*, 150.

38. *Ibid.*, 155–56.

many family duties, including all of the housecleaning. The stress and fatigue overwhelmed her, and she fell ill with pulmonary tuberculosis.³⁹ She was sent to the tuberculosis hospital, L'Esperance, in Leysin, Switzerland, which is high in the dry, clean air of the Alps. She spent about two years there. She learned Russian from the many immigrants who had settled in the area. At the hospital, she would quietly help the other tuberculosis patients when she was strong, and she would be helped when she was weak. From this experience, she grew in a maturity of spirit beyond her age. A friend said to her, "If you were Catholic, you would need a very good priest; you are made for obedience."⁴⁰ She had not thought about becoming Catholic, but while in Leysin, she went into her first Catholic church, which was quite near the tuberculosis hospital.⁴¹ The small, dark church had an atmosphere of prayer, and she felt that one could kneel there. An old woman in front of the church was kneeling. Von Speyr felt a kind of communion with her while becoming more attentive to the dancing red lamp next to the tabernacle.

When she became stronger, she was sent to other places to recover and be with family. After her full recovery, she was sent back to school, but this time it was to the *gymnasium* in Basel. She writes, "In a most vital way, Basel embodied my homeland for me. My father had always spoken to me of his ancestral city with great affection, which is the main reason I was so happy to return to Basel."⁴² After her intense studies, she knew she desperately wanted to advance to medical school and become a doctor. In 1923, she began medical school in Basel, where she was one of the very few women students. With her hard work, she quickly rose to the top of the class. She knew she wanted to be a doctor in order to help others and bring them the presence of God. During her semester breaks, she would take long bicycle tours, and while doing her long treks through Switzerland, she would remember her vision of Mary and begin to pray tentatively for Mary's intercession. Near the end of her medical studies, in summer of 1929, her friends organized a plot to match her with a young widower, Emil Dürr, who had two small sons. She resisted at first, but their love for each other soon grew, and they married. He was a kind husband, a noteworthy scholar, and chair of the history department at the University of Basel. He contributed much to the study of Jacob Burckhardt.⁴³ In 1930, von

39. *Ibid.*, 158.

40. *Ibid.*, 166.

41. *Ibid.*, 181–82.

42. *Ibid.*, 200.

43. See, for example, Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 103, 103 n. 44. He also collected Burckhardt's works for publishing. One example is Jacob Burckhardt, *Historische Fragmente*, ed. Emil

Speyr completed her medical studies, and in the following year, she opened her own medical practice in Basel near the Mittlere Brücke over the Rhine.⁴⁴ She was now finally living her great dream; she was a doctor.

Von Speyr was devoted to her medical practice, sometimes seeing as many as sixty to eighty patients a day. She always wanted to concentrate on treating the poor and unwed mothers. Convinced about the sanctity of all life, she would save mothers from having abortions. She truly demonstrated the Christian possibility of actively working in a secular profession while still having a strong life of prayer.⁴⁵ She saw her medical practice as a place of physical and spiritual healing in which she knew that caring for the body also meant caring for the soul.⁴⁶

In 1934, von Speyr's happy family life came to a crashing halt with the sudden death of her husband. After his death, she sank into a depression that brought her close to suicide, which she had also experienced at the death of her father. At that time, through friends, she learned that "one must never take one's own life, life is worth living because God is the one who gave it, and since it is worth living, it is worth being offered to God even if as a thing of which one had simply had enough."⁴⁷ At her dying husband's bedside, she remembers trying to pray the Our Father (or the Lord's Prayer) repeatedly, but the words "Thy will be done" stuck in her throat. If it was God's will to take her husband, she could not pray for that.⁴⁸

A couple of years later, in 1936, von Speyr married Werner Kaegi, who was an assistant professor at the University of Basel under Dürr. Kaegi took over as chair of the history department and, like Dürr, contributed much to the study of Jacob Burckhardt.⁴⁹ They were happy together and had a lively, open home

Dürr (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1929), trans. by Harry Zohn as *Judgments on History and Historians* (Boston: Beacon, 1958).

44. Adrienne von Speyr, *Die Geburt der alten Erstgebärenden an der Basler geburtshilflichen Klinik 1917–1928*, MD diss. at the Universität Basel, published by Basel: B. Schwabe & Co., 1931. During her medical studies, many important episodes in her life occurred. For example, there was the boycotting of a professor's classes because he blatantly neglected a patient, who died because of the professor's neglect. Another incident was the sudden death of a professor, Dr. Holz, whom she greatly admired and whose death brought her back to the pain of her father's death. Also, during her first marriage, she had three miscarriages.

45. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 246.

46. There is evidence, which I have not been able to corroborate, of miraculous physical cures of von Speyr's patients, but she would always insist that the most important were the spiritual healings that happened to those under her care. See von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 126 n. 1.

47. Von Speyr, *ML*, 158.

48. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 31; von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 57.

filled with people coming and going.⁵⁰ The sorrow, however, of losing her first husband and the inability to pray the Our Father stayed with her.

For several years, von Speyr had been looking for a Catholic priest to talk about Catholicism, but she never really was able to find one. In the spring of 1940, Hans Urs von Balthasar was assigned as a student chaplain to the University of Basel. He had heard of the Kaegis and wanted to meet them.⁵¹ A friend made the arrangements, and after von Speyr had returned from the hospital, having recovered from a severe heart attack, von Speyr and von Balthasar went for a walk along a terrace overlooking the Rhine.⁵² They began speaking about French Catholic poets, Paul Claudel and Charles Péguy, whom von Balthasar was translating, when von Speyr gathered up the courage and said that she would like to become a Catholic, too. They started to speak about her prayer life and how difficult she found praying the Our Father. Von Balthasar then showed her that this prayer is not about what we want and are able to do ourselves. Rather, “we offer him our willingness to let what *he* does take over our lives and move us anywhere at will.”⁵³ He also taught her the simply repetitive, unself-conscious way of praying the Our Father.⁵⁴ Immediately, she recovered her prayer life and was carried away by a flood of prayer as if a dam had burst.⁵⁵ When von Balthasar began instructing her to prepare her for baptism, he said she learned everything as if she already knew it but was only looking for him to affirm it.

Von Speyr was baptized on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 1940, and was confirmed a few days later. On the day of her baptism, she wrote in her diary, “*Pour aujourd’hui il n’y a qu’un mot, un seul: merci* [For today there is nothing but the one word, one alone: thank you].”⁵⁶ She understood that

49. See, for example, Kaegi’s definitive biography of Burckhardt: Werner Kaegi, *Jacob Burckhardt: Eine Biographie*, 7 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1947–82). For more on Kaegi’s work on Burckhardt, see Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, 39, 204, 215, 239, 298, 338, 363, 370, 443, 456 n. 10, 471 n. 15, 519 n. 129, 527 n. 31, and 537 n. 24.

50. Cornelia Capol (director of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr Archives and one of the initial members of the Johannesgemeinschaft), in an interview with the author, March 8, 2006, Basel, Switzerland.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 31.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 57–58.

55. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 31.

56. In her diary on the night before her conversion, she wrote, “Midnight is already long past; the fire is slowly dying in the fireplace and you [she is speaking poetically to herself] remember that friends and later your husband as well chattered familiarly with you—not only with your soul—but with you in

her baptism was a dying and rising that only God could accomplish. All that she could do was to say thank you to God. Though many friends and family were shocked by her conversion, her relationships were strengthened in the following years. She also had the reconciliation with her mother for which she had prayed for a long time.⁵⁷ Through von Balthasar, she became friends with many significant Catholics, including Hugo Rahner, Erich Przywara, Henri de Lubac, Reinhold Schneider, Annette Kolb, and Gabriel Marcel. For her part, von Speyr encouraged von Balthasar to have a deep engagement with Karl Barth, and she would pray intensely for them during their dialogues.⁵⁸

B. FROM CONVERSION TO DEATH: "QUE C'EST BEAU DE MOURIR!"

After von Speyr's conversion, new graces in prayer and many mystical experiences took her by storm. A few months after her baptism, in the spring of 1941, a remarkable set of mystical visions began, which terrified von Speyr. The first was the appearance of an angel, who stood by her bedside one night and said most earnestly, "Now it shall soon begin."⁵⁹ The following nights, the angel asked for her consent to all that God was planning for her.

She did not want these mystical experiences, and in the beginning, it was difficult for her to bring together her life as a doctor and her mystical visions.⁶⁰ Von Balthasar would try to convince her that she was experiencing nothing abnormal, but something quite constant throughout Christian tradition.⁶¹ She would eventually find a way to interweave the two existences together.

The first mystical visions were an introduction to the heavenly world through the appearances of saints and angels. In 1941, during the first Holy Week after her conversion, she began to have mystical experiences of Christ's passion, which would continue for the rest of her life during Holy Week and would always end dramatically on Holy Saturday.⁶² The experiences were not

comfortable armchairs; now they are all gone; you have gotten up once more because it seemed to you that you must not give too many of these hours to sleep. . . . But go and pray awhile; you have to give thanks for so much." See von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 119.

57. *Ibid.*, 32.

58. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 101.

59. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 34.

60. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 58.

61. Von Balthasar writes that von Speyr "fought against the idea of being a mystic. . . . She had to be taught that even 'unworthy people' in the Church may receive apparitions. She replied that 'the apparitions she had were not visions at all, just simple reality. . . . It truly was actuality, ordinary reality, and by comparison the other kind (earthly reality) was almost unreal.' . . . Under no circumstances did she want to be confused with a saint." See von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 59 n. 13.

62. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 35–37.

visions of the historical scenes of the Passion Narratives, like those of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, but more intense, interior experiences of Christ's sufferings, especially the experiences of forsakenness from the Father and his descent into hell.

The second Holy Week after her conversion, she received the exterior stigmatization. She revealed this only to von Balthasar, although others knew. She was very embarrassed by the wounds in her hands. Frau Cornelia Capol, who was one of the first members of the secular institute, said she did not know of it until after von Speyr's death, although she remembers that von Speyr would often carry handkerchiefs or bandages in her hands.⁶³ In later years, the wounds grew less visible except during Holy Week.⁶⁴ Above all, in her "passion" mysticism, she thought she had to surrender herself completely without introspection so that what God wanted to reveal would be received in its fullest objectivity.⁶⁵

Beginning more formally in 1944, von Speyr would dictate to von Balthasar what she was experiencing in her visions and contemplations. She soon became adept at dictating and getting von Balthasar to understand what she was seeing, so he could transcribe in shorthand without much difficulty. Almost daily, they would go into a quiet room, and she would open her French Louis Segond Bible, close her eyes, and begin to speak in a quiet, objective tone.⁶⁶ These sessions would happen in the afternoon for only about a half hour.

While there was regularity to these dictations, there would be dictations of more remarkable visions. On August 9, 1945, von Speyr and von Balthasar were in Estavayer-le-Lac on the Lac-de-Neuchâtel (in German Neuenburgersee), where von Balthasar was giving the *Spiritual Exercises* to the founding members of the secular institute the Johannesgemeinschaft (Community of St. John). Von Speyr was feeling quite anxious that evening and asked to speak with von Balthasar.⁶⁷ She told him that a terrible thunderstorm was suddenly beginning and there was much lightning, thunder, hail, and an earthquake, but she could not understand it. She would step out onto the veranda and see, at the same

63. Cornelia Capol, interview, March 8, 2006.

64. She says in her own reflections that there is no such thing as psychosomatic stigmata. One cannot will the stigmata under the power of one's own psyche. She asks humorously whether, if Jesus had blond hair, she could make her own hair blond through the power of her soul. One can certainly produce a sense of bodily pain, but when one has the stigmata, the pain is so great that it cannot be produced by one's own thinking. Von Speyr, *SM*, 219.

65. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 61.

66. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 37.

67. *Ibid.*, 90–94.

time, a tranquil, blue sky but also a horizon filled with cataclysmic weather. Von Balthasar said, “She was caught in a strange tension for she saw simultaneously the earthly, evening sky, which was quite calm, and the other, totally agitated landscape which she was experiencing interiorly. Then she suddenly saw heaven opened.”⁶⁸ She saw a woman with twelve stars around her head, wrapped in fire, and standing on a globe. The woman was pregnant and crying out so loudly. Von Speyr asked why von Balthasar could not hear the cry and insisted that he help her because now there was a dragon threatening the woman. Von Balthasar picked up a New Testament and began to read Revelation 12. She asked him what it could be. He replied that it was the Apocalypse. She said she had never read it. She had tried once but could not get beyond the first chapter—it was too vast and incomprehensible. Nevertheless, von Speyr insisted that this woman must be helped.⁶⁹ Von Balthasar asked if he could write these things down, and beginning that day and the following, von Speyr gave her commentary on the book of Revelation.⁷⁰ She would see the apocalyptic images directly before her and recite the corresponding text without having read it beforehand.⁷¹ Von Balthasar attested, “I can answer for one thing: what Adrienne, without knowing the scriptural text, had seen portrayed in the minutest detail and had then interpreted was not subjective imagination.”⁷² For her, the gate of heaven had opened, and she believed she was seeing heaven while on earth.⁷³

In the midst of von Speyr’s mystical experiences and her spiritual relationship with her confessor, and in the midst of the chaotic, eschatological Europe of the 1940s, she believed that God was asking her to found a religious community that would serve the world in a quiet, contemplative and thus loving way. With von Balthasar, she founded the secular institute the Johannesgemeinschaft, which they originally intended to be under the Jesuits but in the end founded independently from the order and placed under the diocesan bishop.⁷⁴ As early as March 30, 1941, von Speyr began to consider the possibility of a new religious community.⁷⁵ She sketched a rule based on

68. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

69. *Ibid.*, 93.

70. Von Speyr, *Ap.*

71. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 93.

72. *Ibid.*

73. The interpretation of these mystical experiences and their relationship to Christian revelation will be discussed in the next chapter.

74. Von Balthasar was committed to this community. His superiors did not agree, and this caused von Balthasar to leave the Jesuits. In his later years, he and the Jesuits did have a reconciliation.

75. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 47.

the evangelical counsels (obedience, poverty, chastity) but to be lived out in the secular world. She gathered a few women students on December 8, 1943, and they met in a residence hall chapel for a celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.⁷⁶ After the celebration, they all spoke about the new community. Frau Cornelia Capol remembers the anxiety of committing to this new community, but also the great joy of beginning something quite wonderful.⁷⁷ They prayed Ignatius's prayer, "Take, Lord, Receive" (called the *Suscipe*), and promised to spend time each day in meditation.⁷⁸

In May 1944, von Speyr began the dictations of her greatest and longest work, a commentary on the Gospel of John. On August 5, in Estavayer-le-Lac at an old Dominican convent, the real foundation of the community began with the *Spiritual Exercises* given by von Balthasar. This was the time that von Speyr had her vision of the Apocalypse. In the following years, she began a dictation of a commentary on the Gospel of Mark to the women's branch of the community. It was the only dictation given to others besides von Balthasar.⁷⁹ They found a house for the women's branch in Basel. Soon afterward, they began the foundations for the men's branch and the priests' branch. In its final form, there are three branches—one for priests and two for laypeople, one for women and the other for men.⁸⁰ Their rule and directives for the community state, "Our community in all its branches must try to learn from St. John the loving contemplation of the depths of God's Word. This living contemplation takes place in personal prayer, which, through attentive listening to the Lord, attains increasingly Catholic proportions and is the prerequisite for all fruitful apostolic activity. But it also takes place in the work—of priests in their teaching and preaching, but also of the laity—of helping defend and develop a theology which is Catholic (Trinitarian) in an all-inclusive sense."⁸¹ The important thing above all is disappearing into the church. They understand themselves not as an institution within the institution of the church. Rather, they want to disappear into the church to serve the church. They are to be the Johannine love, in union with Marian assent and in obedience to the Petrine office, serving the world with the love of Christ. In this way, they seek to live out the Ignatian principles

76. *Ibid.*, 53–54. All through the planning of the community, von Speyr had many visions of Mary holding a child. This child, von Speyr thought, represented the community.

77. Cornelia Capol, interview, March 8, 2006.

78. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 54.

79. Von Speyr, *Mk*.

80. Frau Capol spoke about plans for an outer circle of married couples and families that would surround the three branches to help strengthen each other. Cornelia Capol, interview, March 8, 2006.

81. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 125.

laid out in the “Contemplation to Attain Love of God” in the *Spiritual Exercises* while always praying the *Suscipe*.⁸²

Von Balthasar asked von Speyr in 1947 what she thought were the greatest mysteries of her life.⁸³ She told him that there were three great graces. First, she thought, was the great mystery of childhood and youth. She felt that there was a preparation for something great, especially with the vision of the Mother of God and the feeling of being a companion with her after the vision. Mary taught her an assent to God even at an early age to do whatever God wanted. The second great grace was the endless search for God. She was given a deep unrest that something was not right and that God is different from what she was being taught and what she was thirsting for in contemplation. Finally, the third great grace was the conversion and the graces it contained. The decisive moment of her conversion occurred when von Balthasar taught her how to pray the Our Father, when she learned that what was actually being prayed for was the counting not on one’s own ability but on God’s grace. This was the great grace of the elimination of self, which was the true preparation for the sacraments of baptism, confession, and Eucharist.

In her final years, von Speyr’s health deteriorated, and she experienced overwhelming suffering. She had a whole life’s worth of suffering in her childhood, but in the later years, her death was “a dying in the slowest of all slow motion.”⁸⁴ In 1940, she had a severe heart attack and always had a weak heart from it. She also developed a serious case of diabetes and had aggravating arthritis. In 1964, she started to lose her sight as well as the feeling in her feet.⁸⁵ The “passions” during the Holy Weeks became quite severe and left her exhausted for weeks afterward. She still had an iron will and would try going up and down stairs to do work on the first floor while her bedroom was on the second. She would need to be carried back upstairs. With great sorrow, she had to give up her medical practice. The doctor now became a patient. The final months were particularly torturous, but she bore all of it “with great equanimity, always concerned about the others.”⁸⁶

82. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies of the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), §§ 230–37.

83. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 155–58.

84. *Ibid.*, 45.

85. All the more interesting is this prayer from her: “With my eyes I see everything humanly. Lord, make me blind, so that I will be forced to entrust everything to Your eyes.” Adrienne von Speyr, *Lumina and New Lumina*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008), 45.

86. *Ibid.*, 46.

One of the last things she said was, “*Que c’est beau de mourir!* [How beautiful it is to die].”⁸⁷ For after death, God alone is ahead of us. Before she lost consciousness, she gave thanks for everything, much as at the death of her father. Von Speyr died on September 17, 1967, on the Feast of St. Hildegard von Bingen, with whom she had a deep affinity because she was also a doctor and a mystic.⁸⁸ She was buried in Basel on September 20, her sixty-fifth birthday. The tombstone carved for her grave symbolizes the Trinity, which is truly the center of her mysticism.

C. HER WORKS AND STYLE

After her conversion, Adrienne von Speyr wrote or dictated fifty-four works (sixty-three volumes) of spiritual writings, which are quite extensive in their view of theology, spirituality, and mysticism. A view of the whole horizon of her works and her style will be vital to the purpose of this book, because no work of hers is isolated. Each small work has a place in the whole of her vision. Each theme is directly related to all the others, and at the center of the whole is the Trinity.⁸⁹ From the ambitious scriptural commentaries to her thematic works on Mary and prayer, from her mysticism on Holy Saturday to her depth of thinking on the Christian states of life, the center of the whole horizon is the Trinity.

When we read von Speyr’s works, we must keep in mind the whole horizon of her works, which is the Trinity. Additionally, we must also remember two other things. First, these works were mostly dictated, so they should be not so much read as heard audibly. Their logical structure is less linear and more like a conversation circling around a topic. While there is an organization to the interior of the works, it is the organization of a conversation—picking up a previous point and playing with it then moving effortlessly to another point and playing with that. Second, her works are dictated out of her own contemplation, and they will best be read in an atmosphere of meditation. What seems like a simply constructed sentence, which is still quite appealing, must be pondered in order to realize the depth of the insight.

In 1947, von Balthasar set up the Johannes Verlag originally as a publishing house for von Speyr’s works, beginning with her commentary on John.⁹⁰ He edited all of her works, which entailed mostly editing her grammar.⁹¹

87. *Ibid.*

88. See, for example, von Speyr, *Ah*, 73–76, 283–84; von Speyr, *SM*, 38–39, 275–76.

89. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 95.

As a French-Swiss, von Speyr never mastered the Swiss dialect of German (*Schwyzerdütsch*). Rather, she spoke the Swiss Standard German, which she learned in school. While von Speyr planned most of her works, some are collections assembled by von Balthasar around a theme. The titles and major headings in the works are usually hers, but the subheads tend to be from von Balthasar.⁹² Outside of von Balthasar's editing, there is her translation of Therese's *Story of a Soul*, which von Speyr translated from the French to the German.⁹³ Other works include her doctoral dissertation for her medical degree and her book *Christiane: Briefe über Liebe und Ehe* (*Christiane: Letters about Love and Marriage*), which is a collection of her encouraging letters to Christiane and others about love and marriage.⁹⁴

To help introduce von Speyr and provide background, I will give a very brief overview of her works. At the top of all of them must be her scriptural commentaries, especially her four-volume commentary on the Gospel of John (*Johannes I–IV*).⁹⁵ This must be seen as her central work because she addresses all of her major themes and most of her minor themes while commenting extensively on each verse of the Gospel. Just as the Gospel is thoroughly Trinitarian, so is her commentary. Just under this commentary on John, in terms of significance, is her commentary on Revelation (*Die Apokalypse*) and the Gospel of Mark (*Markus*).⁹⁶ Von Speyr closely shares in the Johannine charism of contemplative love and Trinitarian depth. The commentary on Mark was given to the first members of the Johannesgemeinschaft and is much like a

90. The Johannes Verlag was originally in Einsiedeln, Switzerland from 1947 to 1987. From 1987 to 1989, it was in Trier, Germany. Since 1989, it is now in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, and is called Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln. In the bibliography, I will note the publishing house's city that corresponds to the date of publication.

91. For a fuller report of his role in the dictations, see von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 56–63.

92. Von Balthasar, "Vorwort," in von Speyr, *G*, 7–8.

93. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Geschichte eine Seele*, trans. Adrienne von Speyr (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1947). It was a popular German edition until the critical French edition superseded all French editions and translations; see von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 59.

94. Adrienne von Speyr, *Christiane: Briefe über Liebe und Ehe* (Lucerne: Stocker, 1947).

95. Von Speyr, *Jo I–IV*. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Word Becomes Flesh: Meditations on John 1–5*, trans. Lucia Wiedenhöfer and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994); *The Discourses of Controversy: Meditations on John 6–12*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993); *The Farewell Discourses: Meditations on John 13–17*, trans. E. A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987); *The Birth of the Church: Meditations on John 18–21*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

96. Von Speyr, *Ap and Mk*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Mark: Meditations for a Community*, trans. Michelle K. Borras (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

spiritual companion to the secular institute's rule.⁹⁷ Her commentaries on the passion of the Gospel of Matthew (*Passion nach Matthäus*) is spiritually rich in its desire to go to the interior of Christ's suffering, which is also characteristic of her work written at the same time, *Passion von Innen (Passion from Within)*.⁹⁸ Von Speyr has some separate volumes dealing with parts of the Gospels: the parables of the Lord (*Gleichnisse des Herrn*), the Sermon on the Mount (*Die Bergpredigt*), and three women in the Gospels (*Drei Frauen und der Herr*).⁹⁹ There are, of course, her commentaries on many of Paul's letters, including Ephesians (*Der Epheserbrief*), Colossians (*Der Kolosserbrief*), First Corinthians (*Korinther I*), Philippians (*Der Philipperbrief*), and Romans 8 on the victory of love (*Der Sieg der Liebe*).¹⁰⁰ All of these grasp the cosmic scope of Paul's vision. She focuses everything unrelentingly on Christ in order to open all of creation to the Trinity. Von Speyr also has a two-volume commentary on the Catholic Epistles (*Die Katholische Briefe I–II*), which she sees as a deep theology of mission.¹⁰¹ She does not neglect the Old Testament. There are her commentaries on the prophets and their missions (*Elija, Isaias, Die Sendung der Propheten*), who have so thoroughly let the Word of God overtake their subjectivity.¹⁰² And she has commentaries on the other books like Job (*Job*), Genesis (*Die Schöpfung*), Song of Songs (*Das Hohelied*), and a few Psalms (*Achtzehn Psalmen*).¹⁰³

Her theology and mysticism are worked out primarily through her commentaries on Scripture. Even in her other books, she is usually interpreting a scriptural passage. For her, every word of every verse is important. She believed consistently that every word of Scripture contains the full word of God, though some words more explicitly, and every word must be read in light of the whole, which is the Word of God, the Son of the Father in the Holy Spirit. She read the Scriptures in a canonical and narrative way, but above all,

97. Cornelia Capol, interview, March 8, 2006.

98. Von Speyr, *MP* and *Pa*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Passion From Within*, trans. Lucia Wiedenhöver (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

99. Von Speyr, *Gl, Bp*, and *3F*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Three Women and the Lord*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

100. Von Speyr, *Ep, K, 1 K, Ph*, and *SL*. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996); *The Letter to the Colossians*, trans. Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998); *The Victory of Love: A Meditation on Romans 8*, trans. Lucia Wiedenhöver (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

101. Von Speyr, *Ka I–II*.

102. Von Speyr, *E, Is, and P*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Elijah*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990) and *The Mission of the Prophets*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).

103. Von Speyr, *J, Sc, Hl*, and *Ps*.

she read them theologically. In other words, she read the text in the Holy Spirit and from within the heart of the church in order to learn more about God and God's whole drama of redemption.¹⁰⁴

Under the many Scripture commentaries are von Speyr's major thematic works. The first is clearly *Magd des Herrn* (Handmaid of the Lord), which so thoroughly characterizes the assent at the annunciation as the definition of all aspects of Mary's life, from her immaculate conception to her coronation.¹⁰⁵ This book together with *Maria in der Erlösung* (Mary in the Redemption) places Mary's graced *fiat mihi* (be it done unto me) as humanity's perfect cooperation with the Trinity's work of redemption.¹⁰⁶ Closely following *Magd des Herrn* is her intense work on Confession (*Die Beichte*).¹⁰⁷ In this book, von Speyr places the sacrament of confession directly in the inner life of the Trinity as the Son relates to the Father in an attitude of confession. There are two other major thematic works. The first is *Die Welt des Gebetes* (*The World of Prayer*), which sets prayer within the Trinitarian world and is complemented by two smaller works on prayer, *Das Licht und die Bilder: Elemente der Kontemplation* (*Light and Image: Elements of Contemplation*) and *Gebetserfahrung* (*The Experience of Prayer*).¹⁰⁸ The other major work, *Christlicher Stand* (*The Christian State of Life*), is a sustained meditation on the choice of one's state in life in relation to the evangelical counsels.¹⁰⁹ In addition, I could also put here her autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben* (*From My Life*), which begins from her childhood and ends in the midst of her medical studies. It was written with an eye toward her late conversion and baptism in the Catholic Church.

Next are all of the minor thematic works. There is the remarkable work on God the Father's Countenance (*Das Angesicht des Vaters*).¹¹⁰ Two books are

104. Reading the Scripture theologically means God is his own exegete. Von Balthasar thinks that what God has written for us must be interpreted in him. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "God Is His Own Exegete," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 4 (1986): 280–87.

105. Von Speyr, *MH*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord*, trans. E. A. Nelson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985).

106. Von Speyr, *ME*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Mary in the Redemption*, trans. Helena M. Tomko (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

107. Von Speyr, *Be*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Confession*, trans. Douglas Stott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985).

108. Von Speyr, *W*, *LB*, and *Ge*. Adrienne von Speyr, *The World of Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985) and *Light and Images: Elements of Contemplation*, trans. David C. Schindler Jr. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

109. Von Speyr, *St*. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

on obedience as a complete availability to the will of the Father: *Das Buch vom Gehorasam (The Book of Obedience)* and *Bereitschaft: Dimensionen Christlichen Gehorams (Readiness: Dimensions of Christian Obedience)*.¹¹¹ There is a work on the boundlessness of God and how Christians can speak about God: *Der Grezenlose Gott (The Boundless God)*.¹¹² The book *Die Pforten des Ewigen Lebens (The Gate of Eternal Life)* characterizes eternal life as an open gate to the inner life of the Trinity, which is an important theme throughout the whole of this book.¹¹³ In *Über die Liebe (About Love)*, God as love means the Trinity is the perichoretic exchange of love.¹¹⁴ Two books give her understanding of the human encounter with God (*Der Mensch vor Gott*) and the decision to follow the Lord's call as a disciple (*Sie Folgten Seinem Ruf*).¹¹⁵ She gives several meditations on the Christian view of the right relationship between a doctor and patient in *Arzt und Patient*.¹¹⁶ Two works occupy her focus on the sacraments: *Kreuzeswort und Sakrament (Word of the Cross and Sacrament)* and *Die Heilige Messe (The Holy Mass)*.¹¹⁷ She has a beautiful meditation on mystery of Christian death (*Das Geheimnis des Todes*).¹¹⁸ There are also a few collections of short sayings arranged by theme like *Das Themenheft (Booklet of Themes)* and *Lumina und Neue Lumina (Light and New Light)*.¹¹⁹ The largest collection is *Kostet und Seht (Taste and See)*, which was arranged by von Balthasar after von Speyr's death as summary of her major thinking.¹²⁰ Finally, there is a collection

110. Von Speyr, A. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Countenance of the Father*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997).

111. Von Speyr, G and B, which can also be found in von Speyr, I.

112. Von Speyr, GG. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Boundless God*, trans. Helena Tomko (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

113. Von Speyr, Pf. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Gates of Eternal Life*, trans. Corona Sharp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983).

114. Von Speyr, L.

115. Von Speyr, M and F. Adrienne von Speyr, *Man Before God*, trans. Nicholas Healy and David C. Schindler, Jr. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009) and *They Followed His Call: Vocation and Asceticism*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

116. Von Speyr, AuP.

117. Von Speyr, Kw and HM. Adrienne von Speyr, *Cross: Word and Sacrament*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983) and *The Holy Mass*, trans. Helena Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).

118. Von Speyr, T. Adrienne von Speyr, *The Mystery of Death*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

119. Von Speyr, Th and LN. Adrienne von Speyr, *Lumina and New Lumina* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

120. Von Speyr, KS.

of her prayers, *Bei Gott und bei den Menschen: Gebete (With God and With Men: Prayers)*, which includes her spiritual commentary on the prayers of heaven found in the last chapters of Revelation.¹²¹

After von Speyr's death, von Balthasar assembled a twelve-volume work called *Die Nachlassbände (The Posthumous Volumes)*. Since it was published posthumously with a very limited printing run, some of the volumes are difficult to attain. Nevertheless, the posthumous volumes can no longer be ignored in studies on von Speyr, since they offer some of the most extraordinary insights into theology and the church.

The first volume, in two parts, *Das Allerheiligen Buch I-II (Book of All Saints)*, is a book on the interior prayer lives and dispositions toward God of 256 different people, mostly canonized and beatified saints in the Catholic Church, but also historically important, noncanonized figures, like Mozart or even Goethe.¹²² The next volume, *Das Fischernetz (The Fisher's Net)*, is an interpretation of the Johannine number 153 (John 21:11) and its relation to prime numbers symbolically representing the saints.¹²³ *Kreuz und Hölle I-II (Cross and Hell)* make up volumes 3 and 4 of the posthumous works and is von Speyr's mystical "passion" accounts dictated and in diary form from 1941 to 1965.¹²⁴ *Das Wort und die Mystik I-II (Word and Mysticism)* on subjective mysticism (*Subjektive Mystik*) and objective mysticism (*Objektive Mystik*) are volumes 5 and 6 and offer von Speyr's own theory of mysticism, which will be very important for this book.¹²⁵ The seventh volume is an autobiography, *Das Geheimnis der Jugend (The Mystery of Youth)*, which is von Speyr's return to her childhood but told in a childlike consciousness of herself appropriate to the age being narrated.¹²⁶ The next three volumes are her diaries, *Das Erde und Himmel I-III (Earth and Heaven)*, which collect her spiritual and prayer life.¹²⁷ The book *Ignatiana* is rich with reflections on St. Ignatius of Loyola's works and mission.¹²⁸ The final volume of the posthumous works, *Theologie der Geschlechter (Theology of the Sexes)*, has profound parallels to John Paul II's theology of the body,

121. Von Speyr, *GM*. Adrienne von Speyr, *With God and With Men: Prayers*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

122. Von Speyr, *Ah*. Adrienne von Speyr, *Book of All Saints*, trans. David C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008)

123. Von Speyr, *Fn*.

124. Von Speyr, *KH I-II*, which are the most difficult volumes obtain.

125. Von Speyr, *SM* and *OM*.

126. Von Speyr, *GJ*.

127. Von Speyr, *EH I-III*.

128. Von Speyr, *I*.

particularly the focus on the constitutive aspects of masculinity and femininity, as well as the bridal relationship between Christ and the church.¹²⁹

After giving a sense of the whole horizon of her works, it would be appropriate to articulate four characteristics of her style. Her writings are certainly not systematic. Instead, they are written from her experiences of vision and contemplation.¹³⁰

The first characteristic style in von Speyr's writings is how they are thoroughly Trinitarian. For her, the Trinity must not be understood in an inert state. In her mysticism, the Trinity "is motion, charged energy, pouring out, happening, exchange . . . it is the highest form of life, eternal life."¹³¹ Von Speyr enters into the living, dynamic exchange of the Trinity in pure act. Nothing about the Trinity is a static gathering of dust. The Trinity is full perichoretic movement. The sun looks like an inert globe, but when one looks closer, it is a perpetual nuclear fusion of atoms crashing together and bursting out solar flares that could engulf hundreds of earths. This dynamic, fiery Trinity is God for von Speyr.

A second characteristic of Von Speyr's style is that it is overwhelmingly Marian. The Virgin's *fiat mihi* to God is her greatest act because it is her humblest. Her assent gathers the fullness of the grace of her life and is the archetype of humanity's relation to God. Mary's love expresses itself in nothing but the word she receives, "be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Mary places everything at the service of the Father's will: "Every breath, every movement, every prayer of the Mother of God is given full meaning by her Yes."¹³² This attitude permeates von Speyr's own mysticism.¹³³ Von Speyr only wants her mysticism to be a pure, maidenly service to the Father's will for the sake of the church.

The third characteristic of von Speyr's style is its deeply Johannine character. Everything begins in loving contemplation of the Lord. Consequently, von Speyr, like John, would want to be hidden behind the all-consuming mission of the Lord. She wants to disappear behind the Lord's purposes. John Paul II saw this in von Speyr. He said, "She had a predilection for 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' and saw him as the last and the most profound interpreter of Jesus, of the love of the Father for the world, of the role of the

129. Von Speyr, *TG*.

130. Von Balthasar calls her style an "experiential dogmatics." Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 85.

131. Von Speyr, *W*, 67.

132. Von Speyr, *MH*, 7.

133. It is, as von Balthasar says, "a radically anti-psychological, theological, salvation-historical mysticism." Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 53.

Holy Spirit as perfect introducer to the full light of the revelation of the Father and of the Son.”¹³⁴ Her Johannine spirit desired always to incarnate in the loving service to the Lord and to the church, while also serving Peter obediently. John is loving contemplation at the service of decisive, meaningful action.

Lastly, von Speyr relates so strongly to the Ignatian characteristics of obedience. She wants to teach only what has its origin in God alone. Probably, von Speyr’s favorite spiritual writings were Ignatius’ letters and autobiography. She writes, “With St. Ignatius I am somehow so related in my way of thinking that not the slightest misunderstanding occurs. . . . It is characteristic of him to point constantly to God.”¹³⁵ In her mysticism, von Speyr would like to point to God as origin by letting herself be disposed to do whatever God asks.

III. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Von Speyr has left many fruitful writings and theological insights that are waiting to be picked by theologians and the church. Much research and interpretation waits to be done, but we already have some good first interpretations available. In this section, I will examine two aspects of the history of research on von Speyr’s writings. The first examines the complex relationship between von Balthasar and von Speyr. I understand von Balthasar, who accomplished many diverse projects, to be really the first interpreter of von Speyr’s mysticism. He is a magisterial theologian in his own right, but he has also truly grasped the significance of von Speyr’s charism and mission for theology and the church. The second aspect of the history of research is the other interpreters of von Speyr’s writings. The scholarly work already done reveals the promising research ahead.

A. “OUR TASK”: ADRIENNE VON SPEYR AND HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

Understanding the relationship of von Speyr and von Balthasar will enable an understanding of what this book offers. Something decisive happened for both of them when they met in 1940. For von Speyr, it meant baptism in the Catholic Church and having a wise confessor and spiritual director for the rest of her life. But what did their meeting in 1940 mean for von Balthasar? To answer this question, it is best to hear von Balthasar speak in his own words.

Hans Urs von Balthasar insists quite strongly that all his work before 1940, substantial in its own right, was preparation for his encounter with Adrienne von Speyr. He writes, “Without these pioneers [de Lubac, Przywara, Daniélou,

134. John Paul II, “Ansprache,” in *Kirchliche Sendung*, 181–82.

135. Von Speyr, as quoted in von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 181.

Claudel, Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor], I would have been incapable of understanding and communicating, with any reasonable degree of competence, the dictated works of Adrienne von Speyr in the exactness of their insights and the almost immeasurable variety of their theological opinion.”¹³⁶ His theological, philosophical, and literary work prepared him for translating what he was learning from von Speyr’s mysticism. He is explicit about the task of translation: “All I attempted to do was gather it up and embed it in space, such as the theology of the Fathers, that of the Middle Ages and the modern age.”¹³⁷ He continues, “My contribution consisted in providing a comprehensive theological horizon, so that all that was new and valid in her thought would not be watered down or falsified, but be given space to unfold.”¹³⁸ He thinks his contribution was to hear von Speyr’s mystical dictations with the ear of the living tradition in order to gather it and embed it in the horizon of the Christian tradition. He is adamant on this point that, “through my literary, philosophical and theological education a means was provided for assimilating the fullness of her theological insights and giving them appropriate expression.”¹³⁹ His education before 1940 provided the necessary background for his mission of assimilating von Speyr’s mysticism and communicating that to the church.¹⁴⁰

While their intellectual relationship is complex, von Balthasar is clear that “on the whole, I received far more from her, theologically, than she from me, though, of course, the exact proportion can never be calculated.”¹⁴¹ He was her confessor, spiritual director, friend, and editor, who strove to bring his “way of looking at Christian revelation into conformity with hers.”¹⁴² His work after her death became even more focused on her: “Today, after her death, her work appears far more important than mine.” He goes further: “The publication of her still unpublished writings [he is referring to *Die Nachlassbände*] takes precedence over all personal work of my own.”¹⁴³ In thinking about the future

136. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 39.

137. Von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*, trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 88.

138. *Ibid.*

139. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 44.

140. There seems to be a common occurrence in the Christian tradition of a pairing of a mystic with a theologian/confessor, e.g., Margaret Mary Alacoque and Claude de la Columbière, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and even John and Peter. It relates to Paul’s understanding of tongues as a charism and the need for an accompanying interpretation of tongues as a charism (1 Cor 14). See my article, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr’s Ecclesial Relationship,” *New Blackfriars* 94 (2013): 50–63.

141. Von Balthasar, *First Glance*, 13.

142. *Ibid.*

after his own death, von Balthasar wrote the book *Unser Auftrag: Bericht und Entwurf* (*Our Task: A Report and a Plan*), which has “one chief aim: to prevent any attempt being made after my death to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr.”¹⁴⁴ He wanted clearly to leave instructions for interpreters of his work that they cannot separate it from von Speyr’s work and mission. Von Balthasar has many decisive influences for his expansive theological vision and work. But in 1955, reflecting on his work, he writes, “Still more decisive is the link to the work (still mostly unpublished) of Adrienne von Speyr, which I have seen come into being since 1940 and which I am gradually editing for publication. It corresponds in themes and tone to those of my own books.”¹⁴⁵ He truly believes that she is decisive for him and that their work and missions converge: “Her work and mine are neither psychologically nor philologically to be separated: two halves of a single whole, which has as its center a unique foundation.”¹⁴⁶ What is most decisive for his theological work since 1940 was Adrienne von Speyr, and any study of von Balthasar’s works after 1940 will need to make room for what von Balthasar himself insists.¹⁴⁷ We see clearly the quite insistent standpoint von Balthasar is taking of his relationship to von Speyr.

He has, of course, done much on his own, but theologians studying von Balthasar must also understand him as the first interpreter of Adrienne von Speyr. There is much mutual influence between these two. Their work, especially the Johannesgemeinschaft, was truly a joint task. The reverberations in their relationship are so intense that the original voice and the echo are too hard to discern, much like being in the Badlands of South Dakota and trying to discern where the original noise came from as it bounces back and forth throughout the cavernous ranges.

Much work remains to be done on this decisive relationship in both von Balthasar and von Speyr studies.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the point must be accepted that 1940 was decisive for both von Speyr and von Balthasar. This book on von Speyr also attempts to do what von Balthasar did. It realizes the great insights of

143. Ibid.

144. Von Balthasar, *Our Task*, 13.

145. Von Balthasar, *My Work*, 19.

146. Ibid. 89. The foundation he is speaking of is their cofounded secular institute, the Johannesgemeinschaft.

147. See von Balthasar, *My Work*, 105.

148. One could follow my website, www.vonspeyr.net, to learn about what is new in von Speyr studies.

von Speyr's mysticism and tries to synthesize and translate them for the service of Trinitarian theology and the church.

B. OTHER INTERPRETERS OF VON SPEYR'S TASK

After von Balthasar, a few other scholars have engaged von Speyr's writings. The first and so far most extensive work is that of Barbara Albrecht. In 1972–1973, she wrote a two-volume work that introduces von Speyr's thought as a theology of catholicity.¹⁴⁹ The first volume is an anthology of texts from the works of von Speyr, organized under topic headings. It is much like von Balthasar's anthology, *Kostet und Seht*. The second volume is the best attempt to summarize very briefly what von Speyr has written about many theological topics. The book serves as a good German introduction to the breadth of von Speyr's works, but because of this, the depth of synthesis and analysis is lacking. Albrecht's work is a good beginning introduction for further study, which is what she intended it to be.

Two academic conferences have been held on Adrienne von Speyr. In 1985, the first conference, as Pope John Paul II desired, was on von Speyr and her ecclesial mission.¹⁵⁰ The pope thought von Speyr's spirituality would aid the church to better incarnate the evangelical and ecclesial life in the contemporary world.¹⁵¹ The conference was held by the Instituto di studi per la transizione (Institute of Transition Study). Von Balthasar, of course, gave the introduction, insisting that von Speyr's mission is vitally linked to the present needs of the church's mission.¹⁵² Three presentations were given on aspects of von Speyr's personality: belonging obediently to the church, poverty as enriching, and her adaptability and humor.¹⁵³ A short report was given about the Johannesgemeinschaft.¹⁵⁴ There were short presentations on different aspects of her teachings: the Trinity and prayer, the relation of Christ and the

149. Barbara Albrecht, *Eine Theologie des Katholischen: Einführung in das Werk Adrienne von Speyrs*, 2 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972–73).

150. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Georges Chantraine, and Angelo Scola, eds., *Adrienne von Speyr und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung: Akten des Römischen Symposiums 27.–29. September 1985* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986).

151. John Paul II, "Ansprache," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 182.

152. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Einleitung," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 12–16.

153. Patrick Catry, "Spuren Gottes," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 19–35; a Jesuit [Jacques Servais, SJ], "Arm um zu bereichern," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 36–39; Jean Léonard, "Geschmeidigkeit und Humor," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 40–46.

154. A member, "Kurze Darstellung der Johannesgemeinschaft," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 49–57.

church, virginity, Mary and availability, theological anthropology, the mission of being a woman, and two presentations on Holy Saturday.¹⁵⁵ There were also two presentations on how to read von Speyr's works.¹⁵⁶

In 2002, the next conference, which was shorter, focused on von Speyr's spiritual theology and commemorated the one-hundredth anniversary of her birth. It was organized by Alois Haas, the past president of the Hans Urs von Balthasar Archives.¹⁵⁷ Haas's presentation gave a nice introduction to von Speyr's two-volume posthumous work, *Das Wort und die Mystik I–II*.¹⁵⁸ Marc Ouellet's presentation grappled with her theology of Holy Saturday.¹⁵⁹ Pierangelo Sequeri gave an interpretation of the theological significance of von Speyr's mysticism.¹⁶⁰ The final full presentation, by Georg Bätzing, provided a synthesis of von Speyr's thoughts on purification.¹⁶¹

Additionally, von Speyr's mysticism has also occasionally been discussed at conferences on von Balthasar.¹⁶²

155. Antonio Sicari, "Trinität und Gebet," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 61–73; Georges Chantraine, "Das Verhältnis von Christus zur Kirche als Urbild für Ehe und Jungfräulichkeit," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 74–89; Godfried Danneels, "Maria, Bereitschaft und Beichthaltung," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 90–105; Benedetto Testa, "Der Mensch vor Gott," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 106–20; Ludmila Grygiel, "Die Sendung der Frau nach Adrienne von Speyr," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 121–27; Wilhelm Maas, "Das Geheimnis des Karsamstags," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 128–37; Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theologie des Abstiegs zur Hölle," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 138–46.

156. Marc Ouellet, "Zwei Arten die Schrift zu deuten," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 149–57; Joseph Fessio, "Wie liest man Adrienne von Speyr?," in von Balthasar et al., *Kirchliche Sendung*, 158–70.

157. Hans Urs von Balthasar Stiftung, ed., *Adrienne von Speyr und Ihre Spirituelle Theologie: Die Referate am Symposium zu Ihrem 100. Geburtstag 12.–13. September 2002 in Freiburg im Breisgau* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2002).

158. Alois Haas, "Adrienne von Speyr's Typologie der Mystik," von Balthasar, ed., *Ihre Spirituelle Theologie*, 9–30.

159. Marc Ouellet, "Adrienne von Speyr et le Samedi Saint de la théologie," von Balthasar, ed., *Ihre Spirituelle Theologie*, 31–56.

160. Pierangelo Sequeri, "La fede ecclesiale come grazia per l'altro: Il rilievo teologico della mistica di Adrienne von Speyr," von Balthasar, ed., *Ihre Spirituelle Theologie*, 57–64.

161. Georg Bätzing, "Damit Gott im Menschen wachse: Der Gedanke der Läuterung bei Adrienne von Speyr," von Balthasar, ed., *Ihre Spirituelle Theologie*, 65–82.

162. See, for example, Jacques Servais, "Ressourcement de la vie spirituelle aujourd'hui sous la conduite d'Adrienne von Speyr et de Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Vermittlung als Auftrag: Vorträge am Symposium zum 90. Geburtstag von Hans Urs von Balthasar 27. – 29. September 1995 in Fribourg (Schweiz)*, ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar Stiftung (Freiburg im Breisgau: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1995), 71–92.

Another important scholar of von Balthasar and von Speyr is Jacques Servais, SJ, who has directed three dissertations on von Speyr and is the rector of the Casa Balthasar in Rome. Servais has written quite a few articles on von Speyr and encourages others to study her.¹⁶³ In English, he defended von Speyr in the *New Oxford Review*.¹⁶⁴ Anne Barbeau Gardiner is doubtful about von Speyr and her book *The Passion from Within*, particularly her views on the Eucharist, Holy Saturday, and the visibility of the Catholic Church. Servais defends von Speyr by showing that Gardiner has missed the metaphorical, mystical character of von Speyr's language. She also failed to read von Speyr's other books in which von Speyr is also clearly orthodox. Above all, she missed the contextual thrust of the text by not engaging it on its true level. Rather than questioning von Speyr's Catholic orthodoxy to which she was deeply committed, reading her means engaging her on a theological and spiritual level like that of *questiones disputatae* (disputed question). This exchange between Gardiner and Servais proves the point that we must be careful in our approach to von Speyr. She must be engaged in a constructive way with both the tradition and what God desires to speak to the church in this age.

A few scholars have constructively engaged von Speyr's thoughts through their dissertations. There have been a few, of which three were written under Jacques Servais. One was written under Marc Ouellet and my own under Raymond Gawronski, SJ.¹⁶⁵ The first dissertation in 1998 by J. Schiettecatte in French was on the Johannine attitude of loving availability in von Speyr's writings and other contemporary exegesis.¹⁶⁶ In 1999, there were two

163. For example, Jacques Servais, "La Dottrina teologico-spirituale della Preghiera secondo Adrienne von Speyr," in *I Quattro Universi di Discorso: Atti del Congresso internazionale Orationis Millennium*, June 24–30, 2000, at the Cura di Giuseppe de Gennaro, L'Aquila (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), 357–81; "Per una Valutazione dell'influsso di Adrienne von Speyr su Hans Urs von Balthasar," presented at the XIV Colloquio Internazionale di Teologia, May 25–26, 2000, in *Rivista Teologica di Lugano* 6 (2001): 67–88; "La Confession, Sacrament du Père de Miséricorde selon Adrienne von Speyr," *Communio: Revue Catholique Internationale* 23–24 (1998–99): 103–18; "The Ressourcement of Contemporary Spirituality under the Guidance of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996): 300–21; and "Adrienne von Speyr, l'inspiratrice méconnue," *France catholique* 2328 (November 8, 1991): 17–18.

164. See Anne Barbeau Gardiner, "The Dubious Adrienne von Speyr," *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 31–36; Jacques Servais, "A Response from Jacques Servais," *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 36–42; and Anne Barbeau Gardiner, "Anne Barbeau Gardiner Answers Jacques Servais," *New Oxford Review* (September 2002): 42–45.

165. Matthew L. Sutton, "The Gate of Heaven Opens to the Trinity: The Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr" (PhD diss., Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, 2007). Justin Matro, one of the dissertators on Adrienne von Speyr, was on the dissertation board.

dissertations directed by Servais in English. William Schmitt wrote on von Speyr's significant thoughts on the sacrament of confession as a following of Christ that links this sacrament to Christ's work of redemption for us.¹⁶⁷ Justin Matro's dissertation focuses on von Speyr's understanding of Christian suffering as participation in the Son's forsakenness on the cross and his descent into hell.¹⁶⁸ Inspired by von Speyr's reading of Revelation 12 and the woman in the desert, Matro argues that Christian perfection in this life is not a gradual, systematic ascent that necessarily leads to mystical union. Rather, it is a descent leading to forsakenness that imitates the obedience of Christ and places the Christian as one who co-suffers with the Son in order to be one with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Blaise Berg wrote his dissertation on von Speyr's contribution to the theological spirituality of marriage and family life.¹⁶⁹ The most recent dissertation was completed by Lois M. Miles at the University of Aberdeen called "Obedience of a Corpse: The Key to the Holy Saturday Writings of Adrienne von Speyr," which interprets the Son's self-emptying (*kenosis*) through Ignatius' prayer called the *Suscipe*; Miles has expertly and gracefully traced the Ignatian elements in von Speyr's theology.¹⁷⁰ Other studies in English are excitingly in preparation.¹⁷¹

Other scholars have published various minor works on different aspects of von Speyr's mysticism. Michele Schumacher is one of the principal scholars writing on Adrienne von Speyr.¹⁷² Schumacher provides many insights into von Speyr's theological anthropology and its compatibility with John Paul

166. J. Schiettecatte, "Disponibilité aimante: L'attitude d'amour johannique chez Adrienne von Speyr à la lumière de l'exégèse contemporaine" (STD diss., Teresianum Pontifical University, Rome, 1998).

167. William Schmidt, "The Sacrament of Confession as *Sequela Christi* in the Writings of Adrienne von Speyr" (STD diss., Lateran Pontifical University, John Paul II Institute of Studies on Marriage and Family, Rome, 1999).

168. Justin Matro, "Christian Suffering in the Spiritual Writings of Adrienne von Speyr" (STD diss., Gregorian Pontifical University, Rome, 1999).

169. Blaise Berg, "Christian Marriage according to Adrienne von Speyr" (STD diss., Lateran Pontifical University, John Paul II Institute of Studies on Marriage and Family, Rome, 2003).

170. Lois M. Miles, "Obedience of a Corpse: The Key to the Holy Saturday Writings of Adrienne von Speyr," (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, Scotland, 2013).

171. I created and write a website to help promote the theological study of Adrienne von Speyr at <http://vonspeyr.net>.

172. Michele Schumacher, "Ecclesial Existence: Person and Community in the Anthropological Theology of Adrienne von Speyr," *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 359–85; "A Speyrian Anthropology: The Expansion of Human Liberty to the 'Measure' of the Divine," in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007), 315–52; "A Speyrian Theology of the Body," in *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, ed. Donald Calloway (Stockbridge, MA: Marian, 2005); and "Leben in der Begenung der

It's theology of the body. In his dissertation, Schmitt has traced some minor works done on von Speyr's thoughts on confession by Thierry de Roucy, R. Fisichella, Aidan Nichols, Georges Chantraine, and Martin Tiator.¹⁷³ Thierry de Roucy is an interesting case in that his study of von Speyr, among a few others, provided the spirituality for his founding the ecclesial movement *Points-Coeur* (in English, they call themselves Heart's Home).¹⁷⁴ Marc Ouellet also did a chapter on von Speyr's theological mission in his dissertation on von Balthasar's anthropology.¹⁷⁵ Paola Ricci Sindoni compares two twentieth-century philosophers (Edith Stein and Simone Weil) with the mystical prayer of Adrienne von Speyr.¹⁷⁶ Sindoni also has a book that presents von Speyr's life and writings as a fully immersed theological existence.¹⁷⁷ Johann Roten and Juan Sara have articles that link von Balthasar and von Speyr on their Mariology and theology of Holy Saturday, respectively.¹⁷⁸ Gérard Rémy reflects on the centrality of the dark night for von Speyr's mysticism.¹⁷⁹ There are also two

Gaben: Die Existentielle Theologie Adriennes von Speyr," *International Katholische Zeitschrift: Communio* 6 (203): 601–14.

173. Thierry de Roucy, *Jésus, les chrétiens et la confession: Essai sur le fondement christologique de la confession* (Chiry-Ourscamp: Éditions du Serviteur, 1995); R. Fisichella, "Adrienne von Speyr: Un esempio di teologia mai scritta," in *Laici Teologi: Atti del colloquio teologi laici nelle chiese cristiane: Facoltà teologica di Sicilia 24–26 aprile 1987*, ed. C. Militello and C. Valenziano (Palermo, Italy: EDI Oftes, 1988), 242–52; Aidan Nichols, "Adrienne von Speyr and the Mystery of Atonement," *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992): 542–53; Georges Chantraine, "Penitenza e Pentimento: Loro Fondamento," *La Rivista del Clero Italiano* 64 (1983): 386–95; and Martin Tiator, *Beichte—Gottes Liebesgeschenk: Zur Pastoral des vergessenen Sakraments* (Trier: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1988).

174. One can find out more about Thierry de Roucy and *Points-Coeur* at <http://france.pointscoeur.org>. For full transparency, I am a member of their Fraternity of St. Maximilian Kolbe <http://usa.heartshome.org/Fraternity-St-Maximilian-Kolbe.html>.

175. Marc Ouellet, "Adrienne von Speyr et sa mission théologique," in "L'existence comme mission: L'antropologie théologique de Hans Urs von Balthasar" (STD diss., Gregorian Pontifical University, 1983).

176. Paola Ricci Sindoni, *Filosofia e Preghiera Mistica nel Novecento: Edith Stein, Simone Weil e Adrienne von Speyr* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 1997).

177. Paola Ricci Sindoni, *Adrienne von Speyr: Storia di una esistenza teologica* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996).

178. Johann Roten, "The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler, 65–86 (San Francisco: Communio Books and Ignatius, 1991); Juan Sara, "*Descensus ad infero*, Dawn of Hope: Aspects of the Theology of Holy Saturday in the Trilogy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Love Alone Is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as an Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, ed. David L. Schindler (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 20942. Juan Sara is also translating von Speyr's works into Spanish.

short papers on von Speyr's thoughts on St. Joseph.¹⁸⁰ Much is still to be done in studies on von Speyr.¹⁸¹ It is my hope that by reflecting on her Trinitarian mysticism, this book will attempt to continue the good scholarship begun by von Balthasar and the other interpreters.

IV. CONCLUSION

When engaging in a Trinitarian theology, especially Trinitarian mysticism, the best word to characterize it might be “attempt” (*Versuch*), which was a favorite word of von Speyr's.¹⁸² In this introductory chapter, the overview of the book, short biography, and history of research prepare us to make the attempt into von Speyr's mystical vision of the Trinity. Augustine gives a good warning about this attempt. In his own work on the Trinity, he wrote, “For nowhere else is the error more dangerous, the search more laborious, and the results more rewarding.”¹⁸³ My labors gathered in this book will, I hope, be rewarding to your understanding of von Speyr's vision of the Trinity. Her beautiful vision is filled with the dynamism of the three Persons in God whose love alone is credible to the world.

Three great figures of the twentieth century—John Paul II, T. S. Eliot, and Hans Urs von Balthasar—were struck by von Speyr's powerful work. The twenty-first century could be struck by it, too. If we read her works, we will deeply benefit from her vision of the Trinity. When we enter into her Trinitarian mysticism, there is something of what T. S. Eliot sees when he writes:

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage.¹⁸⁴

179. Gérard Rémy, “Le merveilleux et la nuit divine: Un aspect de l'expérience mystique d'Adrienne von Speyr,” in *Faut-il croire au merveilleux? Actes du colloque de Metz*, ed. Patrick Dondelinger (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2003), 103–34.

180. Doug McManaman, “St. Joseph, Death, and Life within the Church,” *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 38 (1990): 225–34; Stefan Hartmann, “Der Hl. Josef in den spirituellen Schriften der Adrienne von Speyr (1902–1967),” presented at the 9. *symposium international de Joséphologie*, Oberhaid, Germany, September 25–October 2, 2005.

181. For example, a critical edition of a bibliography of and on Adrienne von Speyr is being assembled.

182. Von Balthasar, *First Glimpse*, 53.

183. Augustine, *The Trinity [De Trinitate]*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 1.5.

We could say that, in von Speyr's Trinitarian mysticism, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have received a sudden shaft of sunlight that sounds like children playing in the foliage.