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## Balthasar, the Ignatian Theologian

Of all the figures from the history of the church that Balthasar studied (and they are legion), few have played as determinative a role in shaping his thought than St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).<sup>1</sup> Balthasar was, according to Henri de Lubac, a “fervent disciple” of St. Ignatius for most of his adult life, maintaining his “spiritual association” with Ignatius even when he left the Society of Jesus in 1950. Throughout his life, Balthasar maintained private vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience at the Benedictine Abbey of Maria Laach “under the guidance of Ignatius.”<sup>2</sup>

All secondary scholarship on Balthasar acknowledges the importance of Ignatius for Balthasar’s theological and priestly formation. The present chapter goes a bit further by suggesting that Balthasar articulates his own mission as a theologian in Ignatian terms. Ignatius and Ignatian spirituality provide a useful hermeneutic for interpreting Balthasar’s theology of the saints. This chapter highlights

1. See Jacques Servais, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Continuing Youthfulness of the *Exercises*,” in *Communio*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1994), 331–43. See also, Jacques Servais, *Théologie des Exercices spirituels: H.U. von Balthasar interprète saint Ignace* (Bruxelle: Culture et vérité, 1996).

2. Werner Löser, “The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” lecture at Boston College, January 28, 1999.

the Ignatian flavor of Balthasar's theology of the saints, arguing that Ignatius provides a helpful lens for interpreting the intersection between Balthasar's metaphysics and his spirituality in his account of truth.<sup>3</sup>

### Balthasar's Ignatian Conversion

That he should become a Jesuit surprised even Balthasar himself. His decision to enter the Order came in 1927, shortly before he completed his doctoral dissertation. Seemingly on a whim, Balthasar attended an Ignatian retreat lead by Fr. Friedrich Kronseder at Whylen, not far from Basel. He would later recall this life-altering event:

Even now, thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far from Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck as by lightning. . . . And yet it was neither theology nor the priesthood which then came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve, you will be taken into service. You have no plans to make, you are just a little stone in a mosaic which has long been ready. All I needed to do was "leave everything and follow", without making plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was to stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note here at the outset that Balthasar's conversion arose from an attitude of receptivity. Balthasar characterizes his conversion as the response to a call and not the result of a personal ambition to join the Jesuits. He simply heard, responded to, and obeyed the voice that called him. As Henrici points out, Balthasar compared his conversion to that of Levi the tax collector and St. Paul: men "to whom Christ's call went out in a totally unmistakable way, not because of their merits but because of their ignorance."<sup>5</sup> Balthasar's responsibility

3. Ignatius himself was deeply influenced by the saints whom he read about in *Legenda aurea* by the Dominican priest Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298). Ignatius was probably familiar with the Spanish translation of this work, *Flos sanctorum* ("Flowering of the Saints"). Ignatius was most taken by the accounts of St. Francis and St. Dominic. The distinctively Ignatian approach to the discernment of spirits took root as he meditated on these saints.

4. Quoted in Henrici, "A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life" in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1991), 11. Note the role of passivity in Balthasar's narration. This passivity will play an important role in Balthasar's theology of the saints.

in the face of his call was simply “to surrender myself . . . to put myself entirely at the disposal of God.”<sup>6</sup> Receptivity and obedience serve as the chief cornerstones of Balthasar’s appropriation of Ignatius, and so it is unsurprising that we see these themes at play in the dynamics of Balthasar’s own life.<sup>7</sup>

Balthasar entered the novitiate of the Jesuits in 1929, shortly after completing his doctoral studies. Though my concern in this chapter is primarily Balthasar’s relationship with Ignatius, it seems appropriate to highlight briefly Balthasar’s conflicted relationship with the Jesuit order. Though Balthasar left the Jesuits in 1950 to form the Community of St. John with Adrienne von Speyr, he continued to consider the order as “his most dear and self-evident home.”<sup>8</sup> But, like any home, Balthasar’s relationship with the Jesuits was not an easy one. He underwent six years of training; two years of philosophical training at Pullach, and four years of theological education at Fourvière. Balthasar’s dismay during these years is well-known. As he grimly describes it:

My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation. . . . I could have lashed out with the fury of a Samson. I felt like tearing down, with Samson’s strength, the whole temple and burying myself beneath the rubble.<sup>9</sup>

But this time also challenged and formed his character to align more closely to the spirit of Ignatius. The quote continues:

But it was like this because, despite my sense of vocation, I wanted to carry out my own plans, and was living in a state of unbounded indignation.

5. Ibid.

6. Balthasar, *Pourquoi je me suis fait prêtre*. Témoignages recueillis par Jorge et Ramón sans Vila, ed. San Centre Diocésain de Documentation (Tournai, 1961), 22.

7. What this signifies above all else is that Balthasar’s project, insofar as it drinks from an Ignatian well, remains incomplete unless it is brought to fruit in the actuality of human life. Balthasar, brilliant though he was, never stops insisting that genius too must be characterized by obedient discipleship.

8. There is an undercurrent of irony in what follows. Balthasar makes much of obedience as a key characteristic of the saints, but his split from Jesuits arose in a conflict of obedience between what he believed to be God’s calling and the demands of his superiors.

9. Quoted in Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroads, 2002), 2.

## LOVE ITSELF IS UNDERSTANDING

I told almost no one about this. Przywara understood everything; I did not have to say anything. Otherwise, there was no one who could have understood me. I wrote the “Apocalypse” [his doctoral dissertation] with a dogged determination, resolved, whatever the cost, to rebuild the world from its foundations. It really took Basel, especially the all-soothing goodness of the commentary on St. John to lead my aggressive will into true indifference.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, it was at Fourvière under the direction of Henri de Lubac that Balthasar discovered the patristic and medieval writers, finding in them the true “glory of theology” that had been lost in the ugly and arid manuals of his neo-scholastic training.<sup>11</sup>

Balthasar also discovered theology’s glory in works of French Catholic literature—most notably Claudel, Bernanos, and Péguy. These men, though neither philosophers nor theologians, captured a fuller picture of Christian truth than Balthasar had seen in his formal training. They presented theology in a way that resonated with Balthasar’s Ignatian soul: their poetry captured what Balthasar will later call an existential theology—the meeting place of theological and doctrinal speculation with the living reality of the Christian faith.<sup>12</sup>

In 1939, Balthasar was offered a choice for the next stage of his life. He was offered a professorship at the Gregorian University in Rome—a notable and impressive position. But he was also offered a student chaplaincy at Basel. Balthasar opted to become a chaplain. According to Henrici, and quite important for our portrayal of Balthasar, his decision reveals that “pastoral work was closer to his heart than lecturing.”<sup>13</sup> Balthasar unquestionably would have succeeded with a brilliant career at the Gregorian, but that he opted instead for chaplaincy shows that Balthasar saw himself called to direct pastoral, rather than academic, work. That Balthasar is today almost exclusively

10. Adrienne von Speyr, *Erde und Himmel. Ein Tagebuch. Zweiter Teil II: Die Zeit dergrosser! Diktate*, ed. and with an introduction by Hans Urs von Balthasar (Einsiedeln: JohannesVerlag, 975), 195ff.

11. In one delightful anecdote, Balthasar reportedly read through the complete works of Augustine while sitting in lectures. He could concentrate on the words of the Bishop of Hippo more easily because he had plugged his ears to drown out the droning of his teachers.

12. As we shall see in the next chapter, “speculation” and “life” are the two components of Balthasar’s vision of “Christian truth.” Bringing these two together is the task of the saint. That these artists can embody this holism, despite not being canonical saints, will be explored in chapter 8.

13. Henrici, 14.

the territory of academic interest misses this central characteristic of his entire life. We will return to this Ignatian character of Balthasar's life at the end of this chapter. We must examine the way Balthasar interprets Ignatius before we can consider what it means to call Balthasar an Ignatian theologian.

### Balthasar's Interpretation of Ignatius

The heart of St. Ignatius' thought and spirituality is doubtless his *Spiritual Exercises*, begun in 1522 and published in 1548. The *Exercises* are neither a treatise on the spiritual life nor an explicitly dogmatic theology, though Balthasar argues quite ardently that they are implicitly dogmatic. They are, rather, a thirty-day exercise in contemplation, an extended meditation that endeavors to conform, and unite, the retreatant with Christ. Over the course of four weeks, the retreatant is guided through a process of purgation from sin, virtuous illumination in imitation of Christ, and the unitive practices that habituate one to Christ by sharing his suffering and joys. Each of the disciplines associated with the weeks serve to realize the purpose of human existence: "Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls."<sup>14</sup>

The opening of the *Exercises* lead to the common interpretation that the retreat is primarily an ascetic discipline, focused on overcoming one's passions and reordering one's life to holiness. The *Exercises* were written to "conquer oneself through any affection that is disordered." The ascetic interpretation ran into a number of challenges, both internal to the Order and external, especially from the Dominicans and Carmelites. The Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange was especially critical of the Jesuits for being an active—rather than contemplative—Order.

Eventually, the Jesuits of Balthasar's time moved away from a strictly ascetic interpretation of the *Exercises* and a more mystical

14. See the opening of the First Week, chapter 23, in Ignatius of Loyola, "The Spiritual Exercises," in *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 130.

approach began to emerge. Father Albert Steger is one of those chiefly associated with the mystical interpretation of the *Exercises*.<sup>15</sup> Steger played a formative role in the spirituality and theology of Balthasar and Karl Rahner. He taught at Pullach and was Balthasar's mentor upon the latter's return to Pullach in 1939.

Steger's interpretation of the *Exercises* was formative for Rahner, but Balthasar saw certain limitations in the mystical interpretation. For Balthasar, a purely mystical interpretation of the *Exercises* would reduce them to a vaguely Neoplatonic imitation. They would become a form of meditation on the world, on nature, and on God. And though meditation is by no means a bad thing, it does neglect the distinctly Ignatian emphasis on action, freedom, and obedience. Instead of an ascetic or mystical interpretation, Balthasar develops what we might call a "dramatic" interpretation. According to Werner Löser,

A dramatic theology understands the whole of reality as a great and serious drama that, thanks to God's action, culminates in the heavenly Jerusalem. And every human person is called to play his or her unique, inalienable part. The point of the Ignatian *Exercises* is to help people discover their role and make it their own. They do this by letting themselves be called, letting themselves be sent.<sup>16</sup>

For Balthasar, it is the *Contemplation to Attain Love* that provides a sketch of the whole of Ignatian spirituality.<sup>17</sup> Balthasar's Ignatius is focused less on a moral perfection through *askesis* or mystical union with the divine, but rather on the contemplative *traditio* of handing oneself over to God. Ignatian contemplation is the action of living *within* God's activity in the world by means of prayer and love. Through this kind of divine living, God illumines one's understanding and orders one's life. But these mystical and ascetic graces occur within one's life of openness and receptivity before God. This is the heart, not only of

15. Cf. Steger, "Primat der göttlichen Gnadenführung im geistlichen Leben nach dem Ignatius von Loyola," *Geist und Leben* 21 (1948), 94–108.

16. Werner Löser, "The Ignatia *Exercises* in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schinder (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 117.

17. *Ibid.*, 130.

Balthasar's reading of Ignatius, but also of his own theology of the saints.

Balthasar believes that the “purpose and foundation” of the *Exercises* and the four points of the *Contemplation* tie Ignatius to some broader philosophical and theological concerns of modernity. Ignatius' importance, therefore, is not limited to the realm of spirituality. There is a significant metaphysical injunction latent in the *Exercises* and the *Contemplation*, namely, in the Prayer of *Examen*, to “find God in all things.”<sup>18</sup> The goal of *Examen* is to recollect your day and identify the presence of God within it.<sup>19</sup> According to Balthasar, this contemplative practice is inherently metaphysical, insofar as it is an existential form of the cosmic question of the God–world relationship. The retreatant prays her personal prayer within the cosmic, christic drama of God's presence in the world. Thus, the spirituality of the prayer is also a form of metaphysical inquiry, a foray into the truth of the world as it stands in relation to God.

The four points of the *Contemplation* highlight the metaphysical drama in which the retreatant finds herself.<sup>20</sup> There is a certain

18. See *Exercises*, chapters 233, and 235. See also his *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, III.1.26: “Further, [members of the society] should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things” in *ibid.*, 292. This phrase, however, does not seem to belong properly to Ignatius himself.

19. The five steps of *examen* are as follows: 1) recall that you are in the presence of God; 2) look at your day with gratitude; 3) ask for guidance in contemplation from the Holy Spirit; 4) review your day in the light of God's presence, both your failings and successes in loving and serving God; 5) reconcile and resolve. Note here how the *sanctity* of one's life is tied to the *missional* dimension of one's existence—to know and serve God by loving him. In Balthasar's interpretation, this call to know and to serve is both existential and metaphysical, as we shall see throughout the following pages.

20. The four points of the *Contemplation* are as follows:

1) to call into memory the benefits received of creation, redemption and special gifts, by considering with great commitment what a great thing God our Lord has done for me and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and consequently how much the same Lord desires to give Himself to me, limited only by how much He can in accordance with His divine condescension. And then to think back on myself, and consider with much good reason and justice what I from my side by virtue of debt must offer and give to His Divine Majesty, namely everything I have, and myself with it, just like one who offers, with great generosity: Take to yourself, Lord, and receive all my freedom, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given it to me; to you, Lord, I return it. It's all yours. Dispose entirely according to your will; give me your love and grace, that's enough for me. (Exx 234)

2) to consider how God is dwelling in creatures: bestowing in the elements existence, in plants growing life, in animals sensory feeling, in human beings conscious awareness. And so too in me: how He is giving me existence, animating me through and through, awakening senses for me, and giving conscious awareness—how He, so to speak, is making a temple of me, since I am created to an image and likeness of His Divine Majesty. And once more to think of myself, in the way said in

aesthetic element at play, especially in the first two points. The retreatant must look back at her world and see it, not according to her natural vision, but with the eyes of faith.<sup>21</sup> More significantly, though, this contemplative vision—“finding God in all things”—also involves offering up the world to God. To see the world in this way is to return the world to its source in divine love. This is done through prayer. We could see this as an Ignatian riff on Aquinas’ understanding of *sacra doctrina*: as seeing God and all things as they relate to God, and then, offering them up as such. For Balthasar, this is contemplative prayer.<sup>22</sup> It is, moreover, the Ignatian form of genuine knowledge of truth: the receptive, self-offering of all things in love to God.

There is a particular anthropology at work in the *Contemplation* that is important for Balthasar’s theology of the saints. The second point of the *Contemplation* places the retreatant in a cosmos. She is not isolated or alienated from the world around her; to be human is to be a cosmic figure. Moreover, she is a doxological figure: she is made as a temple when heaven and earth meet. We will see this Ignatian emphasis on doxology in Balthasar’s use of the term “adoration” [*Anbetung*] at critical junctures in his *Theo-Logic*. From this point, Balthasar develops a meta-anthropology: a doctrine in which humanity is the summit of the natural realm and the avenue for the cosmos’ elevation to God. The ontological status of humanity is also its mission: humanity is *from*

the first point, or in another way if I feel this to be the better. And let it happen in the same way with each of the following points. (Exx 235)

3) to consider how God exerts Himself and takes pains for my sake in all created things in the world, that is, He behaves as one who undertakes strenuous work. So in the skies, elements, plants, fruits, herds, etc., by giving and conserving their existence, giving them growth and sensory life, etc. Then to think back upon myself. (Exx 236)

4) to look at how everything good and all gifts come down from above—so as also my limited power from the highest and infinite above; and so too our justice, goodness, piety, mercy and so on, as the rays come down from the sun, from the source the water, and so on. Then finally to look back into myself in the way said. To finish with a colloquy and an Our Father. (Exx 237)

21. Löser, 122.

22. As Löser puts it, “In this second variation on his theme, Ignatius expresses the embeddedness of the self in the cosmos, and the inclusion of the cosmos in the self. God’s self-gift is not directed just towards the individual, but towards the whole of reality, of which nevertheless the individual is a part. Moreover, it touches not just the person’s deepest interiority, but their whole self at every level. Conversely, the person’s handing themselves over to God is not a purely interior, unworldly affair; it involves the whole range of the personality. Nothing is to be held back. The very cosmos needs to be brought into the movement of self-giving. The person of prayer returns everything to God, their Lord: their freedom, their memory, all that they have and possess” (124).



above, but *for* below. Humanity's vocation is to stand in the heart of the God-world relation, representing God to the world and the world to God. Ignatius' cosmic positioning of humanity means that the human is a "metaphysical Janus," with one face looking toward heaven and one looking back to earth. This is what makes her a naturally contemplative creature. Beholding the light of God also illuminates her understanding of all Being; knowledge of God issues in knowledge of the world. Balthasar's Ignatian, sacramental metaphysics turns on this point.

A corrupted form of this idea is possible, however. When God becomes the *means* by which man achieves knowledge of Being, then God is no longer the *goal* of knowing, but only the instrument. "When this happens, man becomes the measure of all things, theology becomes anthropology."<sup>23</sup> Balthasar sees this as the chief temptation of modernity, especially in forms of liberalism and Idealism.<sup>24</sup> He sees this temptation at work even in some medieval thinkers who struggle to find the balance between the *eros* of knowledge and the *agape* of the descent of revelation. This problem is especially pronounced in mystical figures such as Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), whom Balthasar sees as being more concerned with the human's divine knowing than with the union of love that comes through the descent of the *Logos* in the economy of history.<sup>25</sup>

Ignatius' major contribution to theology is the balance he strikes between *eros* and *agape*. The erotic longing for salvation and blessedness that is the destiny of humanity arises only after the prior descent of God, to which the only proper response is praise and loyal service. Ignatius envisions blessedness not as a contemplative escape from worldly concerns, but as "right living"—that is, living in harmony within the "descending line" of Incarnation and Cross. "Ignatius clearly gave first place to the theology and anthropology that think in terms of descending *agape*, and he gave the subordinate place to the theology

23. See Balthasar's introduction to Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley and Anna Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 9–10.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Cf. Cyril O'Regan, "Balthasar and Eckhart: Theological Principles and Catholicity," in *The Thomist*, vol. 60, no. 2 (1996), 203–39.

and anthropology of *eros*.”<sup>26</sup> What is significant is that Ignatius does not remove the erotic epistemological and metaphysical elements from spirituality, but integrates them within the larger, descending movement of divine love.<sup>27</sup> The proper way of living within the reality of *agape* is by living “in praise, reverence and service and [by letting] [oneself] be sent, at the same time, with Jesus into serving others.”<sup>28</sup> Living truthfully in the reality of Christ involves the active response to the call of Christ to a particular mission that participates in Christ’s own mission of love. This is Balthasar’s understanding of the theological task of the *Exercises*. It is also the heart of Balthasar’s theology of the saints.

The *Exercises* accomplish this task by meditating on the “call of Christ” as the prior “deed word” to which the Christian is called to respond.<sup>29</sup> This response involves the Christian’s obedient receptivity to the call from Christ. This obedience may manifest itself in one of two states of life. The first is the state of the commandments: the obedience of regular, non-religious life. The model for this state of

26. Löser, 11.

27. According to Balthasar, Ignatius attempts “to reach a balance between the biblical glorification of God and the blessedness of God in antiquity. Ignatius is distinct from this balance inasmuch as he pinpoints ‘praise, reverence and service as the goal of creation,’ even in the final sentence of the ‘foundation’ according to which one must choose with indifference, ‘lo que mas nos conduce para el fin que somos criados’ (that which brings us most to the goal for which we were created). Only in a short final phrase and as if by the way does he mention that one thereby ‘saves one’s soul’ and reaches salvation. It must also be noted that Ignatius demands from the beginning the transcending of all selfish strivings for the sake of reaching that indifference which is the presupposition of pure praise and pure reverent service, and that this effort throughout the *Exercises* has as its aim that I make what God has chosen for me my own choice (no. 135), and thus that I choose ‘praise, reverence, and service’ from ‘generous’ love of God as the goal of my life. For this reason he can juxtapose and mention in one breath, almost by the way, ‘amor y alabanza’ (no. 15), ‘amor y servir’ (no. 233), ‘en todo amor y servir’ (no. 363). Just as the Psalmist who praises and serves God has the *Shema*, the main commandment, in his ear, so in Ignatius, throughout the *Exercises*, the love of God is present in a hidden and nevertheless effective way, in such a way, however, that he thinks and especially acts always for God and his glory (for all forms of prayer and choice in the *Exercises* are in an eminent sense action, which becomes clear already from the comparison with the bodily exercise in the first preliminary remark). Love finally emerges thematically in the ‘meditation for obtaining love’ (Nos. 230–237) while the concept of ‘blessedness’ still remains unmentioned; this concept need not be mentioned, because the entire blessedness of the person clearly lies already in the *Suscipe* (no. 234) which answers God’s abounding love. If one has given all one’s own to God, because one returns what one has received, what more can one ask for? ‘Give me your grace and your love and that is enough for me.’” “Homo creatus est,” in *ET* 5, 23–24.

28. Löser, 11.

29. See Balthasar’s lengthy commentary on this point in the *Exercises* in his *Christlicher Stand* (Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1977).

obedience is Jesus's obedience to his parents—his fulfillment of the fifth commandment. The second state of obedience is what Balthasar calls “the perfection of the Gospel.” It is the obedient surrender to the will of the Father. It is the obedience to being sent on a particular mission. The core event of the *Exercises* is thus a christic one, “the self-abandonment to God's call, in choosing God's choice.”<sup>30</sup> The heart of the *Exercises* is choosing to share in the kenotic obedience of Christ. By developing this theology of choice, Ignatius surpasses the medieval ascending “ladder of perfection” that attempts to attain to God apart from God's call. Instead, Ignatius posits a theology of spiritual *response* as an “ever-actual event of freedom and love.” It is the freedom that chooses to love in response to love.

The proper disposition of the creature in this “theology of choice” is what Ignatius labels *indiferencia*: disponibility or self-abandonment.<sup>31</sup> Balthasar uses the language of receptivity to capture this idea. For Ignatius, *indiferencia* is not pure passivity, but rather, an “active indifference” to receive *and* to obey, to be sent into mission.<sup>32</sup> For Ignatius, this abandonment is not, as it was for some medieval writers (Meister Eckhart, again), an absolute emptiness that results in transcending everything creaturely in order to be immediately present to God. It is rather an active cooperation with God. What Ignatius posits is an *analogia libertatis* in the God–world relation. Balthasar argues that

[i]t is absolutely decisive that Ignatius, when he followed out the idea of indifference in all its Christian radicality, did not take over its

30. Löser, 5. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, V–VI for a reprise of the ancient distinction between commandments and evangelical counsels: “In all the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshipping God the Father in spirit and truth. These souls follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be made worthy of being partakers in His glory. Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hopes and works through charity” (*Lumen Gentium*, V.41).

31. See Balthasar's summary of Ignatian *indiferencia* in his essay “Drei Formen der Gelassenheit” in *ET*, 31–37.

32. This active indifference involves what Ignatius labels the *applicatio sensuum* (the use of the senses) in meditation (this is itself an aspect of the *Lectio Divina* tradition, especially the practice of *meditatio*). The role of the senses in the *Exercises* “intends to familiarize the person (who is going through the *Exercises* and choosing) in all layers of his being with the character of Jesus Christ, so that the choice can concretely orient itself by Jesus Christ.” There is thus a distinctly aesthetic dimension to the *Exercises*.

metaphysical formulation by the Germans, especially Eckhart. Even when it is thought and lived without any subtraction, Christian indifference does not imply the hylomorphic schema of antiquity: form (God) and matter (creature). In this way, indifference need not be practiced in the direction of the annihilation of the creature's own being and will, a direction that, with more or less strength, has been given to spirituality from Eckhart to Fenelon, hidden monotheist, not to say oriental-pantheist parameters. By contrast, the true mystery of God, namely, "God in all", "I live, yet not I, Christ lives in me", may be sought as God's universal causality in the creature's active cooperation—in indifference, abandonment, and service. This cooperation cannot remain in the condition of indifference as mere "letting it happen"; rather, God's particular will, which is actively to be grasped and realized, must also actively be sought. For this reason, indifference, which stands at the end of Rhineland mysticism, stands at the beginning in Ignatius and heightens itself in the Second Week of the Exercises through the central event of the "choice." In the analogy of freedom between God and the creature, *man chooses what God our Lord gives us to choose*; he freely and spontaneously consents to the particular choice that has been made for us in God's eternal freedom.<sup>33</sup>

This freedom is the freedom of obedience and love. Ignatius thus represents for Balthasar the saintly rhythm of gift and receptivity, call and response, vocation and obedience. These rhythms occur as the ascending love of the saints responds to the prior descending love of God. Ignatius moves the question of the God-world relationship from a strictly metaphysical, speculative domain, toward spiritual interpretation via an analogy of freedom. This Ignatian *analogia libertatis* marks a reinterpretation of the questions of Western metaphysics and the emergence of metaphysics of freedom in which receptivity, obedience, and mission make present the truth of Being unveiled as love. We will make much of this Ignatian revolution in what follows.

### **Ignatian Metaphysics**

Balthasar believes that Ignatian spirituality is inherently metaphysical. But he sees more in Ignatian metaphysics than a fascinating theoretical

33. *GL* 5, 102. Emphasis added.

vision. He sees a charismatic theology of revelation capable of offering an “unsurpassed answer to all the problems of our age that terrify Christians.”<sup>34</sup> As we shall see in Chapter three, Balthasar saw the metaphysical and intellectual malaise of modernity as the result of “spiritual pathologies”—breakdowns in the God–world relation.<sup>35</sup>

This was not a popular interpretation of Ignatius in Balthasar’s day. In his article “*Exerzitien und Theologie*,” Balthasar laments the dualism among his fellow Jesuits between a “theoretical philosophy and theology with a specifically pre-Ignatian form . . . and an Ignatian pastoral method.”<sup>36</sup> In what I take to be a melancholy tone, Balthasar says, “A great number of Jesuits, by the way, are Thomists, either of the old or newer form.”<sup>37</sup> Balthasar laments that the “riches of teaching”—dogmatic and metaphysical—found in Ignatius remained undiscovered by his Order, and by Catholic theology in general.

This neglect is partially explained by the fact that the *Exercises* were predominantly interpreted ascetically.<sup>38</sup> According to Balthasar, this ghettoization of Ignatius to the world of devotion and practical spirituality missed two fundamental things. First, it makes a general category error by assuming that a “practical” guide cannot also bear theoretical weight. As we shall see, Balthasar refuses to draw a hard-and-fast line between the “practical” and the “theoretical/speculative,” or the “spiritual” and the “theological.” Second, such neglect misses that the *Exercises* express an entire theological and metaphysical vision which ignores the common dichotomy of “contemplative” and “active;” “spiritual” and “dogmatic;” “practical” and “theoretical.” In fact, one of Ignatius’ chief gifts to the church is his distinctively Catholic metaphysic. As we shall see, Balthasar uses this

34. *My Life: In Retrospect*, 21.

35. Cf. Kevin Mongrain, “Poetics and Doxology: Von Balthasar on Poetic Resistance to Modernity’s Turn to the Subject,” in *Pro Ecclesia*. vol. 16. no. 4, 385.

36. Quoted in Löser, 106.

37. *Ibid.*

38. “The flood of literature on the *Exercises* remains almost entirely stuck in pastoral and ascetic aspects; only few had the idea that the *Exercises* must contain decisive pointers and points of departure for theoretical theology as well. Suarez attempted in his time to construct a sort of theological spirituality of the Society; most recently Erich Przywara has undertaken the same synthesis in his monumental work, *Deus semper maior: Theologie der Exerzitien...*,” *ibid.*

Ignatian metaphysic to counter the emerging “secular” metaphysics of modernity. Since the current book argues that it is this Ignatian metaphysic that shapes Balthasar’s own work, it is important to give at least a cursory summary of it here at the outset. We shall fill in more details as this book proceeds.

The most sustained attention Ignatius receives in Balthasar’s Trilogy comes in the fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord*.<sup>39</sup> As we shall see in chapter three, Balthasar sees a spiritual malaise at the heart of modernity. This malaise is the result of the ghettoization of the saints to the realm of subjective devotion. He sees a tragic conflation of metaphysical nominalism and mystical subjectivism fragment the unity of Christian truth. This imperils Christian metaphysics and results, Balthasar claims, in the idolatrous speculations of Idealist philosophy.

It is in the context of this spiritual and metaphysical fragmentation that Balthasar develops his “metaphysics of the saints” through the figures of Tauler, Suso, the Rhineland mystics, and especially, Ignatius of Loyola. Balthasar identifies Ignatius as one in whom a metaphysics of divine glory is maintained, both theologically and spiritually. The “metaphysics of the saints” is the idea that the Christian relates to God in such a way that the relation is mediated through the cosmos that God creates. A saintly metaphysic reads the world as the sacramental display of God’s glory. For Ignatius specifically, it means “finding God in all things.”<sup>40</sup>

Ignatius’ injunction to find God in all things ties him, Balthasar claims, to the sacramental metaphysics of the ancient Christians, especially Dionysius the Areopagite. Both Ignatius and Dionysius believe that knowledge of God (and therefore, union with God) is mediated through a series of “sacred veils” that disclose the divine. The final meditation of the Ignatian *Exercises* echoes the Dionysian

39. Volume 2.2 of *Herrlichkeit*.

40. This is at least how Balthasar interprets this doctrine in *GL*. In his essay, “Finding God in All Things,” Balthasar interprets this injunction in terms of mission and obedience: “If we are the fruit of God’s own deed of love, then it is only by doing love’s work that we can ‘find him in all things’” (*ET* 5, 462).

metaphysic where creation is seen as a theophany.<sup>41</sup> The *Exercises*, for Balthasar, involve a performance of metaphysical understanding: of seeing God immanently present in created things.

Ignatius' metaphysic turns on four main theological claims. First, that God is creator. Such a claim makes Christianity a *de facto* metaphysical religion. From the opening claim of Genesis 1, the God-world relationship is thrust to the center of Christian teaching. One cannot rightly speak of the world in a non-theological way. For Balthasar, to speak of the world at all is, at least implicitly, to speak of God.

Second, God is the indweller of creation. Divine transcendence does not remove God absolutely from the world, but instead, divine otherness allows God's closeness and proximity to his creation. God is present in all things: "in being as the source of being, in life as the source of life, in sense as the archetypal sense, in thinking and willing spirit as primordial Spirit."<sup>42</sup> There is for Ignatius, as for Balthasar, no such thing as *natura pura*, a nature that is *absolutely* closed off to God. Instead, God is ever-present in the world; or, perhaps better, the world is present, enfolded, embraced, within the divine life.

Third, God is present in the world as the "one who labors" on the world's behalf. Ignatius' God is neither uninvolved nor disinterested. For Ignatius, as for Balthasar, creation is a divine action in which creating and sustaining are of a piece. One knows God in creation, not only as the source and the goal (*principium et finis*) of creation, but also, as the vital, dynamic, sustaining presence within it.

Finally, God is the Father of lights who in his creative indwelling shines forth in creation. Here, we hear an echo of Balthasar's account of theological aesthetics as luminosity and splendor.<sup>43</sup> Ignatius' God wills to be known through the world. All spiritual subjects are therefore illuminated and illuminating.

What Balthasar sees Ignatius offering to modernity is a way of re-

41. Balthasar derives this interpretation of the *Exercises* from Przywara's own theological interpretation. Cf. *Deus Semper Maior*, 369–407.

42. *GL* 5, 109.

43. *GL* 1, 20.

theologizing the cosmos, freeing it from totalizing philosophical vision. According to Werner Löser, “Ignatius is decisively important in the attempt to find a correct mediation between Western metaphysics and Christian theology inasmuch as Ignatius freed theology and anthropology again from the embrace of philosophy, not by abandoning philosophy, but by inserting it into the primarily theological overall picture.”<sup>44</sup> Here, we see Balthasar’s riff on the “mystical” interpretation of the *Exercises*.

Yet, as we’ve stated, Balthasar does not want to reduce Ignatius to either an ascetic or a mystical interpretation, nor to an exclusively intellectualist interpretation. Balthasar’s interpretation of Ignatius is also dramatic, bringing metaphysics together with human action, whether that action is belief, service, or discipline. Ignatian metaphysics, Balthasar avers, is a dramatic metaphysics.

Drama requires an actor. Balthasar thus insists that Ignatian metaphysics cannot be understood apart from a specific form of life. Ontology must correspond with anthropology. A distinctively Christian metaphysics yields a distinctively Christian form of life. For Balthasar, following Ignatius’ lead, this form of life is that of the saint.

According to Balthasar, Ignatius’ anthropology hangs on the practice of *indiferencia*. Ignatian indifference is continuous with the Christian tradition of abandonment, though Balthasar insists that Ignatius resists some of the metaphysical formulations behind late medieval theories of abandonment, especially those of Meister Eckhart.<sup>45</sup>

Ignatian *indiferencia* is not the annihilation of a person’s being and will; it is not absolute passivity. According to Balthasar, the Christian life is active rather than passive. Or, perhaps better: it is an active passivity, willed openness, receptive obedience—being at the disposal of God’s grace.<sup>46</sup> In Balthasar’s interpretation of Ignatius, to be truly human is to have your will utterly handed over to God. But unlike the

44. Werner Löser, “The Ignatius Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 103–20.

45. *GL* 5, 104. Eckhart features prominently in Balthasar’s genealogy of modernity, which we will explore in Chapter three.

46. *Ibid.*, 105.