

The Faith-Culture Dialogue:

Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Von Balthasar

Bevil Bramwell OMI

Franciscan University

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner stand as two of the giants in the Catholic theology of the last century. While they differ over Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian, they agree on much of the practical theology of inculturation. My proposal is that the difference can be traced back to their differing starting points—very simply, Rahner centered on the notion of the 'self-realization' of the human being and his transcendental horizon, while von Balthasar focused on the Trinitarian free creation and redemption that brings a new form into the world in the Incarnation and leads creation to its ultimate fruitfulness in giving glory to God. Then I would further propose that von Balthasar offers an additional theoretical differentiation which permits a real critique of the notion of the anonymous Christian. Lastly, the article examines the insights of the two authors on the Faith-Culture Dialogue and the fruitfulness of Christian existence.

I. THE BASIC ASSERTION

At the end of *The Glory of the Lord* series, von Balthasar wrote:

we are drawn into the sphere of the glory between the Father and Son, as this glory has appeared in Jesus Christ. It is the grace and the work of the Holy Spirit that gives us this new home: he makes the life of love well up not in front of us nor above us but in us and thereby empowers us to 'glorify' through our life the glory that has been given to us as our own."¹

Since the analysis of this process involves the rest of the article, I want to let it stand on its own because even at this level of reflection, the basic difference between von Balthasar and Rahner can be illustrated. By contrast Rahner, in a structurally comparable statement, says that:

the really ultimate thing is that [the Christian] accepts himself just as he is, and does this without making anything an idol, without leaving anything out, and without closing himself to the totality of what in the ultimate depths of reality is inescapably imposed on man as his task."²

So for von Balthasar the Christian is drawn into the life of the Trinity and Rahner offers us a theology of self-realization. Both comments will need to be suitably qualified but at least the differing starting points have been identified.

My point is that the authors' fundamental theologies differ not simply in method (crudely expressed as "from above" and "from below" respectively) but also in terms of content. The initially

confusing part is that their practical theologies overlap a good deal. Their theories of inculturation come to remarkably similar conclusions. Their practical theologies have enormous similarities because of the nature of practical theology itself. It comes from contemplating the world, it is "an analysis of the present worked out in theological terms"³ and as a result its results are not dictated by a particular philosophy. The faithful theologian can still come to conclusions compatible with other theologians provided he or she is aware of the 'signs of the times.'⁴

This is not to say that there are not some fundamental problems with Rahner's work.⁵ Von Balthasar saw Rahner's understanding of the self-realization of the Christian as more of a quantitative change than a qualitative one. (See Footnote 52.) The suggested difference might be expressed by one of von Balthasar's chapter titles, namely the difference between "coming near and conversion."⁶ Conversion has a radicalness to it which has a number of implications for the inculturation of the faith. Drawing on von Balthasar again: "Conversion is not the "complementing" of something already possessed but rather a total "turning around" in which what is fragmentary is left behind; it will be found again but only within the totality, on the far side of a hiatus."⁷ The terms 'totality' and 'form' (see below) will offer us a profound grasp of the complex process of

inculturation. But before using this information, we need to turn to the term 'culture' itself.

II. CULTURE

Both theologians see a transcendent horizon to human culture. Von Balthasar most dramatically says: "Culture spans the arch between earth and heaven and therefore between the spiritual soul and the body."⁸ For him it is the product of human activity (originating in the soul and coming to external expression) but measured by the two poles of earth and heaven and when something can be measured it has form. Traditionally, form is a quality of being and has radiance, integrity and proportion.⁹ Using the example of the artist, von Balthasar speaks of the form created as representing the creative idea, either individually or collectively.¹⁰ So that cultural forms in the world are expressions of the world-spirit, the spiritual search of mankind. These expressions use the 'materials' of the world to produce art, architecture, literature etc. They are historically limited and "these works all remain as something inspired inside the terms of history, insofar as they appear in history they remain under the judgement of the more comprehensive "world spirit" that gives to them a relative transcendence over their own, narrow, personal horizon."¹¹

Karl Rahner identifies the same global, historical nature of

culture and its source in human expression.¹² The human being is in a constant process of self-interpretation (an aspect of self-realization) and "it takes place in the whole history of man . . . in what we call simply the history of culture, of society of the state, of art, of religion and of the external, technical and economic mastery of nature."¹³ This is the first point to be criticized by von Balthasar. He argues that due to the roots of Rahner's philosophy in Heidegger's work, Rahner has human beings caught in an "ineluctable self-explication of Being."¹⁴

I want to propose that von Balthasar's retrieval of the metaphysical notion of 'form' makes a higher order analysis possible and shifts the analysis of the experience of revelation more in the direction of the nature of the experienced object of revelation. Rahner is well aware of the historical mediation of freedom but it is difficult to identify the exact nature of the concrete historical categoricals in his work.¹⁵ On the one hand, "a history of revelation does indeed need a historical, categorical mediation," but on the other hand, "this mediation does not necessarily and everywhere have to make this transcendental experience explicit."¹⁶ This I think *implies*—and the mere use of the word suggests the actual problem—that this mediation does therefore have to be explicit and thematic *somewhere* in history. The closest he gets to the nature of this categorical mediation is that it is the result of the

intercommunication of spiritual subjects since they have to have historically concrete existence.¹⁷ According to von Balthasar, "Heidegger [and so by implication Rahner] offers us no information regarding the underivability of the interrelation between essential form and Being."¹⁸

For von Balthasar, religion (and here we have the objective form once again) is inescapably part of culture and Christianity poses a unique challenge to culture. The Incarnation is the making present of the 'form' of God—the Word of God or the Wisdom of God—in the world. So "it is a gift of the Father to the Son, a gift which the Son then returns to the Father and which is transfigured by the Holy Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son."¹⁹ The presence of the mystery of Trinitarian love in Jesus Christ presents us with the fulfillment of every previous historical form "shattering of all intrawordly fulfillments."²⁰ The reason for the 'shattering' is that this particular human form of Jesus Christ is God's complete Word to the world.²¹ Then all other forms found in cultures are fragmentary and provisional. As a result, the world spirit is forever "surrounded by the normativity of the incarnational tendency of the Holy Spirit."²² The culture that seeks meaning will be inevitably be religious and the Holy Spirit will generate forms that express the fullness of truth and love namely the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the institution of the

Church in that culture. In addition von Balthasar's recovery of 'form' gives us an insight into the true nature of revelation itself and of human being.

Both authors also agree that cultures are religious before the specific challenge of Jesus Christ. The word 'God' exists in all cultures even those that claim to be atheist.²³ Atheism is still a stance vis-vis God. Furthermore, for Rahner, the word 'god' "creates us because it makes us men."²⁴ This is so much more than saying simply that human beings are oriented towards God. There is an apriori structuring of the human reality (*qua* human reality) as openness to God which becomes the space of our own self-realization. Of course this self-realization is mediated by the world and in history.²⁵

In addition, this new horizon 'grasped in faith' is essential to the full grasping of being human.²⁶ For Rahner human experience can be grasped more fully only "when we achieve a knowledge of its true nature and its implications at the explicitly conscious level."²⁷ Von Balthasar comes to similar conclusions.²⁸ He also offers a useful emphasis on the character of the mediation just mentioned—because God has become man, and "has made use of the whole range of the world's tensions to reveal its still wider range."²⁹ The Christian has a whole new possibility of finding God through the manifold mediations of the world. In christological terms, in the Incarnation, the world has

received God.³⁰

III. The Anonymous Christian

The two writers clash over the nature of the historical encounter with this new phenomenon of Christianity. Specifically, von Balthasar rejects Rahner's notion of 'anonymous Christianity'—"I see a *contradiction* in the term 'anonymous Christian.'"³¹ (Emphasis added.) For Von Balthasar one component of Christian existence is being a conscious subject who "freely affirms and accepts the election, vocation and mission."³² However Rahner is precisely trying to formulate a way of dealing with the situation of *non-Christians*—for whom the theory of the 'baptism of desire' had already been coined—and his simplest expression of this attempt lies with the notion of *anonymous Christianity*. He defines paganism as "the absence of any sufficient historical encounter with Christianity which would have enough historical power to render Christianity present in this pagan society."³³ Whence the *anonymity*. He has highlighted the historical and formal character of Christianity but leaves vague the exact nature of the form of the encounter.

Moving forward with the argument: for Rahner, the insufficiency of the experience of the anonymous Christian does contain "elements of a natural knowledge of God, elements

moreover mixed up with human depravity [and] also the supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ."³⁴ The gratuitous gift—at least as offer—is what he calls the 'supernatural existential.' Then if this grace "accompanies [the pagan's] consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively" then this is what Rahner would call a kind of 'anonymous' Christianity.³⁵ This is a partial concrete historical realization of the supernatural existential and its form is unclear.³⁶

Oddly enough, the same incompleteness with respect to the grace of Christ and the same admixture of the products of original and personal sin appear in von Balthasar's description of the one who is not a Christian.³⁷ He would also not deny that Christ died for such a person. Von Balthasar's emphasis however is that "over against the pagan and Jewish versions, the Christian perspective is the only world-affirming worldview in *the comprehensive and realistic sense.*"³⁸ (Emphasis added.) The latter sense of 'comprehensiveness and realism' lies in the nature of the creature.³⁹ For him, being a creature of God means that "man's nature, actuating itself as spirit, is essentially a search, a setting out for the absolute, the prototype."⁴⁰ Here the more defined (more scriptural!) relation of image to exemplar, gives us a glimpse into the interior of the form of

Christian revelation and the Christian openness to the fullness of meaning.

Now both he and Rahner see the necessity of God's grace to make experience and knowledge of God possible, but von Balthasar argues that his theology renders the notion of the 'supernatural existential' superfluous. Here I must side with Rahner and say that the argument descends in my judgement to the level of saying 'this lexicon is better than that lexicon.' I would suggest the difference lies in the understanding of the relation between concrete forms and the grasping of those forms as concrete realizations of the supernatural existential. Clearly von Balthasar is able to pursue this relation in much more depth through the use of the *imago*. He is ultimately reaching for the most crucial affirmation, that "nature is totally encompassed by grace," and this nature images the God of grace and will come to its fulfillment through the action of the God of grace.⁴¹ Ironically, I believe that this is what Rahner is trying to affirm through the notion of the supernatural existential! If he had pursued the aspect of 'self' in his understanding of grace as God's *self*-communication, I think that he would have come to the same conclusion as von Balthasar.

The additional depth offered by von Balthasar's theology is also due to the correlative of 'form' and that is *wonder*. Human beings are not simply in an 'ineluctable' search for self-

explication, instead they contemplate. Human beings wonder at the forms of Being. (See below.)

The inquiry has so far pointed us toward the essential element of historical encounter, the historical form, and its companion concept of mediation. We have the fundamental concepts for a reflection on culture as it is confronted by the faithful Christian. Also von Balthasar has raised the character of the encounter between Creator and creature from being 'an existence borne by God' (Rahner's term)⁴² to being "the image reflect[ing] on its prototype."⁴³ Although the personal nature of the encounter can be teased out of Rahner's formulation in the chapter "Man in the presence of Absolute Mystery,"⁴⁴ von Balthasar has retained the notion of the human being as image and can use it as a sustained element of his theological argument in the theology of culture that follows. It will be in the force of its application that this line of argument will be seen to be simply more powerful than Rahner's.

Rahner was concerned with the explanation of the experience of God to modern man. He considers that Christianity has its "most fundamental and universal threat from this difficulty."⁴⁵ I believe that the answer lies in conversion and not simple intellectual analysis. Von Balthasar's key point is the priority of the actualization of existence.⁴⁶ However Rahner is not always equally clear, in one article he does say quite firmly: "a purely

metaphysical knowledge of God can never replace faith."⁴⁷ The actualization of Christian existence starts with Jesus Christ.

IV. "JESUS CHRIST IS A FORM."⁴⁸

Form as retrieved by von Balthasar has parallels and differences with Rahner's term 'horizon.' We will approach the issue in two stages, firstly a brief survey of the consequences of the Christ-form for von Balthasar and its parallels in Rahner and then secondly a brief look at the technical aspects of the terms.

To start with, von Balthasar proposes that the claim, death and resurrection of Christ give a form that first, does *not* merely stand over against other forms in the world "that abut and mutually exclude on another."⁴⁹ Human cultures do this. Instead, the presence of the Christ-form in the Holy Spirit shows the inherent limitations of the forms generated by the world-spirit and the intrinsic limitations of cultures.

Then the *positive* sense of the form of Christ is that it is the overflowing of all previous forms of existence.⁵⁰ This and the "shattering of all intraworldly fulfillments" mentioned earlier show the positivity of the Christ-event and the consequent justification and judgement of all worldly forms in Christ.⁵¹ Rahner's Christ is the absolute savior, but more specifically for us, Christ is the "climax of God's self-

communication to the world . . . and the acceptance of this self-communication by the savior."⁵² Rahner makes much of the fact that God had already made man from the *dust* of the earth. God has created a dialogue-partner from within his creation itself.⁵³ This dialogue reaches its fullness in the hypostatic union.

In addition, this self-communication is the "most radical culmination of man's essence."⁵⁴ Rahner's formulation of the hypostatic union makes it clear that where the infinite horizon was the experience of being "grounded in ineffable mystery,"⁵⁵ and human beings "can experience [their own] ultimate, essential being only in history"⁵⁶ where they encounter this union. But importantly, as Rahner notes: God's grace is not waiting on the specific proclamation of the word to begin acting instead "it prepares the heart for this word by every experience of existence which takes place in the life of man."⁵⁷ This means that God's grace is active secretly in every human culture preparing the way for the full expression of the Word. Von Balthasar has no quarrel here.

The soteriologies of the two theologians overlap sufficiently that they do not present an obstacle to the further reflection on faith and culture even though it is not possible to entirely reconcile the theoretical aspects of them. We are limited by the differences between the Kantian focus on a priori conditions (Rahner) and the pre-Enlightenment interest in form

(von Balthasar). The key to both theologies is the historical encounter with the qualifications mentioned above.

The place of this encounter is the Church. The Church is the way in which "faith, hope and love, God's definitive revelation (his Self-Communication in Rahner's terms) in Christ remains present for the world as reality and truth."⁵⁸ We encounter the *form* of Christ in the Church. More precisely it is where we receive our new form—the beginning of the New Creation—as we join the Church.

V. THE FAITH-CULTURE ENCOUNTER

Karl Rahner's starting point is that the Church and culture coexist. Catholicism is open in the sense of making a higher horizon of meaning in Christ present to the culture. The Church accepts the given structure of its existence and responds to it.⁵⁹ Rahner and von Balthasar agree that the Church is not to reinstate Christendom.⁶⁰ Instead it lives in *tension* with the world. This tension arises in the way the Church came about and from the nature of its structure. The 'easy' models of a return to Christendom or a withdrawal into a ghetto are simply not the Christian mode of response to the world. Von Balthasar's more detailed treatment of the issue identifies the pluralistic structure of society and notes that the two spheres (Church and culture) are not simply going to become one.⁶¹

Furthermore, the Christian has to *live out in practice* the new relationship of the world.⁶² By spending time in both spheres, prayer and work in the world, the Christian can begin to bridge the two spheres. Within this division of time, work can in some sense be an act of worship and at the same time avoid the situation developing where one's work alone becomes worship. The Christian lives as a missionary to the 'other sphere.' The Christian is elected, called and sent in Christ.⁶³ For both writers, this conclusion is at once scriptural and metaphysical as the realization of the following of Christ by the Christian.⁶⁴ The Christian is missionary precisely in order to realize his/her existence as a Christian.⁶⁵

In a subtle addition, Rahner explains that the Christian bridging of the two spheres—Church and world—means that the 'man of today' is in fact much more than a 'man of today.' Any human being faces the fact that "man precisely as he is today and man as such cannot be simply equated."⁶⁶ The 'human' has a vast complexity that transcends the purely genetic analysis. "It is simply a characteristic of the mysteries of a finite existence that every part of it is different from every other and yet cannot exist without the other and remains dependent on it."⁶⁷ The parallels with the integrity and proportion of a form are evident!

Also the Christian has to face his or her existence

precisely as it occurs. Von Balthasar offers two substantial volumes on this point.⁶⁸ These are studies in 'clerical' and 'lay' styles of theology. Without hoping to do justice to these two works, let me at least sketch the project. Von Balthasar is aware that "these theologies and world-pictures . . . are reflected rays of the glory and have in this capacity also illuminated and shaped Christian culture throughout the centuries."⁶⁹ The glory mentioned here is the glory of God irradiating the world in love and bringing it into the position of being able to glorify God in the persons of the individual theologians. The two volumes then arise because 'clerics'—in von Balthasar's estimation—raise questions that are within the properly ecclesiastical project while the 'laity' theologize about the world and have become very creative in expressing their theology.⁷⁰ In fact he is of the opinion that 'lay' theologies are now the most creative and the most responsive to the world. Nevertheless, in both cases, their theologies are expressions of their lives within their historical and cultural contexts.

To just take one case, Dante's work grew within his culture and yet it shaped it at the same time. Von Balthasar quotes Dante from the *Monarchia*: "I want to demonstrate truths that no one else has dared attempt. For what kind of contribution would it be if a man were merely to prove once again a theorem of Euclid or to demonstrate for a second time the nature of happiness"⁷¹ Dante

worked in Italian and his *Divine Comedy* is the first great work in that language. His work is not only literary but also theological in that it renders God glory. As understood by von Balthasar this means: "Whoever truly wishes to be a Christian must keep his psychological experience open and allow it to be determined to the very last by the experience of eternal realities."⁷² Yet the Christian is reflecting on his historical situation and commenting on it within the much larger horizon of the plan of salvation.

The Christian's 'facing of his or her situation' can also be said to have a 'momentum' (to borrow a term from von Balthasar)⁷³ of its own. This derives from the life of Christ, whose own momentum is the Word spoken into the world by the Father, that brings the Church into being and sends Christians out into the world. The Church has a mission and it is to inculturate the faith, a movement which started with the Incarnation.

Inculturation "break[s] open the complacent earthly forms, putting them in touch with a Catholic universality."⁷⁴ Rahner injects a noteworthy caution here and that is that there is "a positive mutual relationship between faith and culture."⁷⁵ There is a positivity of the *saeculum* especially since historically the secular world finds its roots in Christianity.⁷⁶ By contrast the humanists, spend their time at a distance from Christianity and "this prevents them from actual positive engagement."⁷⁷

Given that Rahner's comments come from a brief two page essay⁷⁸ one has to look to von Balthasar for more details of the nature of the engagement. His view is very Pauline. St. Paul established communities and then moved on. Yet the communities stayed in their respective cultures and did not close themselves off. This is reminiscent of Rahner's view that some features of secular society have a kind of legitimacy. They are 'legitimate sons' and so have a legitimate existence even while remaining distinct from Christianity.⁷⁹ Von Balthasar is less sanguine since for him Christianity is continuously challenging any earthly forms. In his view "amalgams are formed between Christianity and secular culture; at times this produces marvelous cathedrals of art, of philosophy and of piety, yet it is not clear whether these are a pure expression of the Gospel."⁸⁰ It is the specific judgment of the Christian community— which may take a long time—that will lead to the conclusion whether something is congruent with the Gospel or not.

This lack of optimism in von Balthasar occurs again in judging the values of cultures that are not in a direct encounter with Christianity. For him, there is a problem with Rahner's theory of the 'searching Christologies' hidden within non-Christian cultures. In Rahner's view, "the searching "memory" of all faith is directed towards the Absolute Savior."⁸¹ Von Balthasar emphasizes more strongly the high possibility of

failure of the search by a non-Christian culture so that it never reaches full blown explicit faith in Jesus Christ.⁸²

Lastly, the faith culture dialogue mainly involves the Laity.⁸³ The laity live out their lives in the secular society. To develop what this could mean, von Balthasar says that "the *Christian artist* [is] the archetype of the layman."⁸⁴ (Emphasis added!) It is an interesting metaphor which combines the cultural and the religious. It is the human entity who bridges the divide between the two areas of human endeavor. The Christian artist is guided by a formed Christian conscience. The human artist reshapes the world as an expression of one's self in Christ, analogous to the divine Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. The Word takes up the world that was created through it as its image. The Christian contemplates Christ and brings the world closer to imaging the prototype—who alone can truly give glory to God—by his or her graced actions. This is the essence of the fruitfulness of the Christian life.

VI. "FRUITFULNESS FROM THE DESERT"

This title borrowed from von Balthasar⁸⁵ refers to the fruitfulness of creation under redemption in Christ. We can use it to refer to the specific effect of the encounter between Christianity and culture in the work of the two theologians under consideration. The communion with God "empowers us to 'glorify'

through our life the glory that has been given to us as our own."⁸⁶ This glorification is "assimilation and return of the gift."⁸⁷ It is the self-transcending entry into the expanding 'form of Christ' through the Holy Spirit and thus an entry into his eternal sacrifice to the Father.

To start with this process involves loving contemplation. Von Balthasar notes that "the superiority of contemplation to action . . . is one of the inalienable bases not only of classical culture, but of western culture, indeed of any human culture at all."⁸⁸ If the Incarnation itself involved God creating a material existence to express Himself, then the Christian has the duty of shaping his existence according to the dictates of Christ.⁸⁹ The dynamic of contemplation is openness and disponibility to the other and so at this point von Balthasar introduces the theme of the 'love of neighbor.' "The adventure of losing self will not be worthwhile if I do not meet God in my brother."⁹⁰ Similarly, Karl Rahner devoted an entire article to explaining the identity of love of neighbor and love of God.⁹¹ Love has the character of opening up situations to their fullest and most positive possibilities. So loving actions have a way bringing human beings closer to the wholeness that they are already encountering in Christ. The image is being reshaped by contemplating the prototype—the New Man—in the power of the Spirit.⁹²

But the life of the Christian does not stop there, there is also the 'construction of the earthly city' itself. So after contemplation comes loving action. At this point both authors make much of the lives of the saints. The saints are the ones who have shown what is possible through the power of the Spirit. The reason that the saints are so significant theologically, according to Karl Rahner, is that they are expressions that cannot be predicted through an application of a theology of essences, instead they are "experienced in the encounter with the historical."⁹³ Again without pursuing it, he has reached for the notion of 'form.' Saints in a particular culture show what the members of a culture can become as they are informed by Christ and they model the following of Christ—who is the Incarnate Word "through whom all things came to be." (Jn 1:2)— in the particular culture.⁹⁴ When von Balthasar examines the work of St. John of the Cross, in his volume on 'lay styles' of theology, he sums John's contribution as follows: regarding his mystical poetry he says: "There is no doubt about it: the reformer of Carmel responds to the negation of the Protestant reformers with beauty; to the dialectical destructive Word with the constructive poetic Word."⁹⁵ The Christian has witnessed to the prototype in the form of life he is creating within his historical situation.

One problem confronted by the Christian is the 'obscuring of God' in modern culture. Von Balthasar argues that the source of

the problem is the change of the relationship of human beings to the material world. Instead of creation being contemplated, it has been given a kind of "technical instrumentality," where a meaning is imposed on the world.⁹⁶ And as a result, metaphysics, the arts and the intellectual sciences are being forced to follow the methods of the natural sciences, instead of starting from contemplation.

As if formulating the Christian answer to the problem, Rahner examines one of the arts, poetry, and argues that someone who utters poetic words, must himself (herself) be ready (1) to hear the words that make the silent mystery present, (2) he must specifically be able to use words which "aim at the whole man."⁹⁷ (3) Thirdly, the poet must proclaim words that unite, "they call to the origin and gather all into the unifying center of the heart."⁹⁸ (4) Fourth, the poet must see the mystery in the word. Interestingly enough, these four points can be analyzed to show that Rahner has once again—almost accidentally—had to reach for the characteristics of a form to explain what happens. And furthermore he has identified the dialogical quality of poetry, a quality that mimics the relation between the image and the prototype. Although in the case of the poet, the word-form has its prototype in the culture. The poet is a 'spokesperson,' in a sense, for the culture, even when reacting against it!

This particular nature of poetry that brings about

wholeness through whole forms in a dialogue, means that "Christianity must defend human culture and the poetic word."⁹⁹ Rahner's reason for this defense is that the center of Christianity is the defense of the human. The four points just mentioned are the structure through which the grace of Christ within the human being hears the Word addressed to the human being. This hearing depends on the structure by which the human hears the poetic word. Defending the latter guarantees the possibility of the former.

In this practical reflection on poetry Rahner is much more clear on the Christological foundations than he is in his more abstract works such as *Foundations of Christian Faith*. The characteristics of poetry also point back to the characteristics of a form since they point to radiance, integrity and proportion. Authentic poetry then lies in words that have a real form just as the Incarnate Word has form.

As with the poet so with the scientist, the Christ-event is not separate from the sphere that is of interest to science. Rahner and von Balthasar tackle this question differently. For Rahner the sciences exist because of the nature of concupiscence and its resulting fragmentation of human knowledge.¹⁰⁰ But despite the fragmentation of human knowledge, human beings have the "task and obligation of working asymptotically toward such a unity."¹⁰¹ By contrast, von Balthasar simply summarizes the work of

Bonaventure in the *Reductio Artium ad Theologiam*.¹⁰² Bonaventure apparently understood Christ as the fulfillment of all of the branches of knowledge. There is much more detail but even the latter statement is sufficient to show the radical difference between the two authors. When Rahner treats the sciences and their relation to Theology, it is from the practical direction that theology is always challenging any science that wishes to make itself absolute. The Christological foundations for this argument are not examined.¹⁰³ Bonaventure simply starts with the Incarnation.

VII. CONCLUSION

There is much more to the field of the fruitfulness of the Christian encounter with culture to be found in the work of the two authors. But these points suffice to show the broad assertion of this paper that while they differ in their fundamental theologies and yet their practical theologies do overlap. Von Balthasar's theology of form is capable of a highly differentiated analysis of the experience of revelation and the human response; much more so than the simple description of experience in terms of the transcendental horizon.

1. Hans Urs von Balthasar *The Glory of the Lord VII: A Theological Aesthetics: Theology: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 389. This series will be referred to by the abbreviation GL followed by the volume number.

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2. Karl Rahner *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych, (London: Darton, Logman and Todd, 1978), 402. This volume will be referred to by the abbreviation FCF.
 3. Karl Rahner *Theological Investigations X Writings of 1965 - 67, 2*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroads, Seabury Press, 1977), 351. This series will be referred to by the abbreviation TI followed by the volume number.
 4. "Theology is a theology that can be genuinely preached only to the extent that it succeeds in establishing contact with the total secular self-understanding which man has in a particular epoch . . . an in allowing itself to be enriched by its language and even more so in the very matter of theology itself." *FCF*, 7
 5. A critique of his epistemology can be found in Patrick J. Burke "Conceptual Thought in Rahner," *Gregorianum* v75 n1 1994
 6. Hans Urs von Balthasar *Theodrama Theological Dramatic Theory III. Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 421. This series will be referred to by the abbreviation TD followed by the volume number.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Hans Urs von Balthasar *Explorations in Theology II: Spouse of the Word, "Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism."* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 361. This series will be referred to by the abbreviation ET followed by the volume number.
 9. Qualities of form: in his analysis of Aquinas' aesthetics, von Balthasar identifies "the circumscription of the beautiful, through such allusive concepts as *integritas . . . proportio . . . claritas . . .*" *GL IV*, 411.
 10. Cf. the section entitled "On the Pre-Understanding of Form" in "The Christian Form," *ET IV: Spirit and Institution*, trans. Edward T. Oakes S.J., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 44ff., but especially 60.
 11. *ET IV*, 60.
 12. Karl Rahner *Grace in Freedom* (London, Herder and Herder, 1968), 70.
 13. *FCF*, 153.
 14. *GL V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al (1991), 622.
 15. This may be connected with claim by Burke that Rahner has collapsed the Thomistic theory of knowledge and the phantasm plays a diminished role in Rahner's theory of knowledge. Cf. Patrick J. Burke "Conceptual Thought in Rahner," *Gregorianum* v75 n1 1994. Here I am relying on Burke's analysis being correct!
 16. *FCF*, 152.
 17. He does understand God is not present in the finite but does ground the

experience of the infinite through the finite. (*FCF*, 84) Further, he does not confuse 'natural' religion and 'supernatural' religion. (*FCF*, 85) They are qualitatively different. Furthermore there can be categoricals that point to "the transcendental presence of God." (*FCF*, 85) My question to von Balthasar how different is this explicit nature of the categoricals from your statement that "our subjective ability to experience finds the reason and justification for its existence in an experienceable object." *GL I*, 429.

18. *GL V*, 621

19. *GL I*, 506.

20. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 54.

21. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 52.

22. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 61.

23. *FCF*, 44ff.

24. *FCF*, 50.

25. *FCF*, 37.

26. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

27. Karl Rahner "The Experience of God Today" *TI XI Confrontations I*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 152.

28. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar "Characteristics of Christianity," *ETI : The Word made Flesh* trans. A.V. Littledale et al, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 173ff. N.B. "Religion rests on a primal awareness not other wise open to being questioned, that the changeable and mortal existence subjugated to faith cannot be explained from itself." *The Claim to Catholicity ET IV*, 87.

29. Hans Urs von Balthasar "The Characteristics of Christianity" *ET I*, 176. Cf. Karl Rahner's statement that "the Incarnation appears as the necessary and permanent beginning of the divinization of the world as a whole." *FCF*, 181.

30. *FCF*, 191.

31. Hans Urs von Balthasar *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good*, trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 39. He is not alone. See Paul F. Knitter *No other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions American Society of Missiology Series No: 7* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985) 128ff. But as Luzbetak concludes "today most catholic theologians accept some form of the theory." Louis J. Luzbetak S.V.D. *The Church and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 125.

32. Hans Urs von Balthasar *Theodrama Theological Dramatic Theory III. Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 263.

33. "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions" *TI V*, 121. See also

"Church, Churches and Religions." *TI X*, 30ff.

34. *TI V*, 121.

35. Cf. *TI V*, 131.

36. *FCF*, 126ff.

37. See The Church of Jews and Gentiles *TD III*, 419.

38. "The Claim to Catholicity" *ET IV*, 103.

39. *TD III*, 415.

40. *TD III*, 416.

41. *TD III*, 417.

42. *FCF*, 80.

43. *TD III*, 417.

44. *FCF*, 44ff.

45. *FCF*, 83.

46. *FCF*, 294.

47. Karl Rahner "Anonymous and Explicit Faith," *TI XVI Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 53.

48. Hans Urs von Balthasar "The Christian Form" *ET IV*, 53.

49. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 41.

50. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 54. Note that Rahner uses the term 'provisional' in the same situation. *FCF* 155.

51. "The Christian Form," *ET IV*, 55.

52. *FCF*, 195. Von Balthasar critiques Rahner in a section called "Excursus: The Soteriology of Karl Rahner" *TD IV*, 273 - 284. He argues that Rahner has disposed of the representative nature of Christ. (276) Representation for von Balthasar follows from the nature of human nature itself: "Since we share a world with others, there is in every human subject a formal inclusion of all the other subjects. . . . The a priori of the 'we' is the anthropological point of departure for christological representation." (*TD II*, 408.) But it would seem to me that this quotation at least makes von Balthasar's accusation less plausible. Rahner does go so far as to speak of the unity of humanity and its solidarity and then "the Incarnation appears as the necessary and permanent beginning of the divinization of the whole." (*FCF*, 181)

53. Karl Rahner *TI XVII: Jesus, Man and the Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 73.

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54. *FCF*, 218.
55. *FCF*, 42.
56. *FCF*, 298.
57. Karl Rahner "Poetry and the Christian" *Theological Investigations IV: More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 358. Cf. Robert J. Schreiter *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986)
58. Karl Rahner *Theology of Pastoral Action* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 26.
59. Karl Rahner *Grace in Freedom*, 81.
60. Karl Rahner "Transformations in the Church and in Secular Society," *TI XVII*, 167ff. The mind of the Church is no longer the mind of the society. But the Church is in a sense defined by the secular society around it. This society is marked by sin a quite a different way from the way in which the Church can legitimately said to be marked by sin in its members. This society is also pluralistic—the pluralism has provoked a more pluralistic theology in the Church itself.
61. Hans Urs von Balthasar "Secular Piety" *TE III*, 357.
62. "Secular Piety" *TE III*, 357.
63. *TD III*, 268.
64. "In really religious acts, man does not only fulfil what is most truly his own, his spiritual-personal and grace endowed individuality; through these acts he also acquires a decisive significance in the salvation of others." Karl Rahner *The Christian Commitment* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 89.
65. Much more could be said here about the realization of existence in the *Theodrama* of Hans Urs von Balthasar.
66. Karl Rahner "The Man of Today and Religion" *Theological Investigations VI, Concerning Vatican Council II*, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 4.
67. "Man of today and Religion", *TI VI*, 4.
68. Hans Urs von Balthasar *The Glory of the Lord II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth et al (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984); *The Glory of the Lord III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth et al (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1986).
69. *GL II*, 13.
70. *GL II*, 15.
71. *GL III*, 10.

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72. *GL III*, 51.
73. "Momentum of Time" *GL VII*, 162ff; "Momentum of the Cross" *GL VII*, 202ff.
74. *TD IV*, 465.
75. *Grace in Freedom*, 70.
76. *Grace in Freedom*, 79 This caution is also borne by his argument in foundations about the Christian as the one "who accepts without reservations the whole of concrete human life . . . without making anything an idol . . . and without closing himself to the totality of what in the ultimate depths of reality is inescapably imposed upon man as his task." *FCF*, 402.
77. *Grace in Freedom*, 79.
78. "The Christian Character of the Secularized Ethos." *Grace in Freedom*, 78ff.
79. *Grace in Freedom*, 79.
80. *TD IV*, 465. See also H. Richard Niebuhr "Christ against Culture" in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951)
81. *FCF*, 318.
82. *TD IV*, 422.
83. "Transformations in the Church and Secular Society," *TI XVII*, 178.
84. "The Layman and the Church" *ET II*, 327.
85. *TD IV*, 464.
86. *GL VII*, 389.
87. *GL VII*, 389.
88. Hans Urs von Balthasar "Action and Contemplation," *ET I*, 229.
89. Hans Urs von Balthasar "The Council of the Holy Spirit," *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 250.
90. Hans Urs von Balthasar *The God Question and Modern Man* (New York : Seabury Press, 1967), 143. Cf. Louis J. Luzbetak SVD "Dedication to the Needs of Others" *The Church and Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 4ff.
91. Karl Rahner "Reflections on the Love of neighbor and the Love of God" *TI VI*, 231ff.
92. See also "Christianity and the New Man" *TI V*, 134ff.
93. Karl Rahner "The Church of the Saints" *Theological Investigations III* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967), 99.

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94. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar "Laying down one's life for the brethren." *TE III*, 311.
95. *GL III*, 120.
96. "Encountering God in Today's world" *ET III*, 302.
97. Karl Rahner "Poetry and the Christian" *TI IV: More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 360.
98. "Poetry and the Christian," *TI IV*, 361.
99. "Poetry and the Christian," *TI IV*, 364.
100. Although Rahner does not give a source for this effect of concupiscence, there is enough of a foundation to be found in von Balthasar's chapter "From Original State to final State," in his *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 67ff.
101. "Natural Science and Theology" *TI XIX*, 18.
102. *TL II*, 178ff.
103. Karl Rahner "Theology Today," *TI XXI Science and Theology*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 63